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The Culture Club

By Brittney Carnell

The Culture Club was a small, social women's club located in Huntsville, Alabama. The primary function of this women's organization was to bring together influential or well-connected women in a social atmosphere to discuss issues pertinent to American society at specific points in time, as well as issues that directly impacted their lives and experiences within the greater Huntsville area. Mrs. Lucie Deloney Dillard, a longtime resident of Huntsville whose family was one of the first pioneer families in the area, founded the Culture Club 1911.¹ Twelve local women attended the inaugural meeting at the East Randolph Street home of Mrs. Dillard.² The Huntsville women's Culture Club has existed for over 100 years and celebrated its centennial in 2011. Throughout the years, including around the time of the Huntsville Culture Club's establishment, other similar women's club existed across Alabama, as well as the nation. The Official Register and Directory of Women's Clubs in America for the year 1913 shows that across the state of Alabama alone, there were 1,900 women with standing membership in

¹History of the Huntsville Culture Club, talk given by Mrs. Doris O'Neal, president, on Radio Station WFIX, December 31, 1968, Scrapbook 3, 81-1, box 1, scrapbooks 1911-1970, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

²History of the Culture Club of Huntsville, Alabama, 1911-1931, written by Ruth Sykes Ford, scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., scrapbooks 1911-1970, Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

seventy eight different women's clubs.³ This directory also shows that the Culture Club was the only women's organization in existence in Huntsville at the time, with only one other listed "Culture Club" existing in Birmingham, therefore making the Huntsville women's Culture Club unique in the city of Huntsville. The purpose of this research is to critically examine the documents, programs, yearbooks, and letters pertaining to the Huntsville women's Culture Club to identify specific factors that contributed to the club's longevity, examine how the club changed over time, and propose possible explanations for this change.

The annual yearbooks and scrapbooks of the Culture Club extensively documented the women's activities and the majority of the information used for this research was derived from these primary sources. Annual yearbooks which list club members, officers, program committee members, meeting dates, and discussion topics were first created for the 1912-1913 year, one year after the club's establishment. These yearbooks, along with associated scrapbooks, letters, photographs, written club histories, and newspaper articles provide deep insight into the club's ideals and the activities of its members. The yearbooks examined demonstrate a consecutive timeline between the years 1912-1985 with few gaps.⁴ Scrapbooks were also made for the Culture Club by later members in an apparent effort

³Helen Winslow, ed., *Official Register of Women's Clubs in America*, (Massachusetts: 1913), accessed April 15, 2015,

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=uUKMAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA34>, page 33.

⁴Yearbooks 1912-Present, 81-1, box 4, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al, Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

to preserve their unique club history. These scrapbooks contain Culture Club yearbooks as well as photographs, letters, newspaper articles, and club histories. There are no dates of creation or names listed on the scrapbooks, however, on November 17, 1947, President J. B. Clopton “suggested the compiling of a scrap book for the club, the matter to be decided at a later meeting.”⁵ The matter was in fact decided at a later meeting, and a news article dated December 4, 1947 states that “Mrs. Clopton appointed Mrs. E. T. Terry and Mrs. J. Byrne a committee, to compile the club scrap book.”⁶ These six scrapbooks do not list the dates that they were created but changes in the club over time are evident. The first three scrapbooks were very simplistic, with only Yearbooks and newspaper articles included. The final three scrapbooks, which documented the years 1970-1980, differ significantly. These later scrapbooks included a more decorative element of photographs, stickers, and magazine cutouts.⁷ Therefore, change over time can be seen both through examination of Culture Club yearbook programs for each year, but also by

⁵Newspaper article from November 17, 1947, scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, Scrapbooks 1911-1970, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

⁶Newspaper article from December 4, 1947, scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, Scrapbooks 1911-1970, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

⁷Scrapbooks 1-3, 81-1, box 1, scrapbooks 1911-1970, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

Also included scrapbooks 4-6, 81-1, box 2, scrapbooks 1970-1977, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

how later members chose to document the past in scrapbook form.

Each Culture Club yearbook outlines the program for each individual meeting during the course of one year from October until May. The physical characteristics of the yearbooks are all fairly similar, regardless of the year in which they were created. Included yearbook information tends to be similar from year to year as well, with membership rosters, lists of officers and various committee members, the Constitution, Bylaws, meeting dates, and program topics. A motto also appears at the beginning of each yearbook, though the actual motto itself differs from year to year. It appears as though one individual or a small group of individuals was responsible for typing the yearbooks for the first years of the club's existence, and examination of multiple yearbooks for the same year often shows slight errors in typing, misspellings of member names, variances in abbreviations, etc. Additionally, the inclusion of "America the Beautiful" was a tradition that began in 1926, and was included in each yearbook until 1956. Each yearbook cover from 1912-1955 featured primarily text and, rarely, simplistic images, and hand-drawn cover images first appeared on the 1955-1956 Yearbook. The format for the Yearbooks from the years 1912-1950 appears to be relatively similar, with the printed meeting date, a specified hostess, a Roll Call, a listed program topic or general category of discussion, as well as previously assigned subjects that different members presented for that particular meeting. Mrs. J. S. Andrade introduced a Club Collect in 1931, which was included in each yearbook thereafter. This Club Collect lends insight to the values of the club that many of the women deemed important, and reads:

“Keep us, O God, from pettiness, Let us be large in thought, in word and deed. Let us be done with faultfinding, and leave off self-seeking, May we put away all pretense and meet each other face to face. Without self pity and without prejudice, and always generous. Let us take time for all things, Make us grow calm, serene, gentle. Teach us to put into action our better impulses, Straightforward and unafraid. Grant that we may realize that it is the little things That create differences, that in the big things of life we are one. And may we strive to touch and know the great woman’s heart of us all. And, O, Lord God, let us forget not to be kind.”⁸

Interestingly, it is sometimes possible to make an informed decision about whom a yearbook once belonged to. For example, in the 1942-1943 yearbook, there are handwritten notes stating “dues paid” next names on the membership list in the back of the yearbook for this year. This makes it highly possible that this particular yearbook once belonged to Mrs. E. T. Terry, the Treasurer for that year who would have been responsible for collecting dues.⁹ The first Culture Club yearbook was for the year

⁸Club Collect, Yearbook for 1931-1932, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-Present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives. Background information regarding Club Collect from handwritten notes in Scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, scrapbooks 1911-1970, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

⁹1942-1943 Yearbook, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

1912-1913. Meetings during this year each included a discussion of current events, with program themes consisting of topic such as poetry, women, and literature, and assisting members presenting book reviews for discussion along with other related topics.¹⁰ The first appearance of the long-lasting “Roll Call” began the following year, in 1913. Each Roll Call at the first meeting of the year always appears to involve discussion any summer vacations, which was appropriate considering how well-traveled these women appeared to be, as demonstrated by various program topics over the years in which certain women were assigned to speak specifically about their international travel experiences.¹¹

The purpose of the Culture Club, in the words of 1980s member Ruth Sykes Ford, “has always been purely for the enrichment of the mind and the pleasure of its members.”¹² The first appearance of the club’s written Constitution and Bylaws can be seen in the 1915-1916 yearbook, where Article II states that “the object of the Club is a broader culture in order to render a larger service.”¹³ The members of the club were expected

¹⁰1912-1913 Yearbook, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

¹¹Range of yearbooks, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

¹²History of the Culture Club of Huntsville, Alabama, 1911-1931, written by Ruth Sykes Ford, scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., scrapbooks 1911-1970, Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

¹³1915-1916 Yearbook, 81-1, box 1, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

to adhere to strict rules regarding membership, dues, and programming. For example, annual dues of \$2.00 were due on or before the first club meeting, with this rate decreasing to the \$1.00 rate that existed until 1968.¹⁴ These dues were initially used to defray the cost of the yearbooks, with additional money being put toward gifts for sick or “shut-in” club members, memorial books for members who had passed away, and annual charity projects such as providing food and gifts for a needy family each Christmas.¹⁵ Members were also responsible for providing monetary assistance to any representative member that would travel to the Alabama Federation of Women’s Clubs annual conferences around the state. Additional monetary mentions in the Bylaws involved fines of twenty-five cents for unexplained absences from club meetings, and fifty-cent fines for failure to fulfill any assigned duties on the program.¹⁶ Members were expected to be at every club meeting, and four consecutive absences resulted in losing their membership.¹⁷

¹⁴History of the Culture Club of Huntsville, Alabama, 1911-1931, written by Ruth Sykes Ford, scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., scrapbooks 1911-1970, Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

¹⁵History of the Culture Club of Huntsville, Alabama, 1911-1931, written by Ruth Sykes Ford, scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., scrapbooks 1911-1970, Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

¹⁶1915-1916 Yearbook, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

¹⁷1915-1916 Yearbook, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

Membership in the Culture Club of Huntsville, Alabama was relatively difficult to attain. This was most likely due to the limited membership positions and the long periods the women retained their membership. Membership was limited to only twenty-five women at any given time, and gaining acceptance into this prestigious women's club was a lengthy process. Any potential member that gained a vote of membership from three current members was then presented to the five-person Membership Committee for approval. Each of the five members of the Membership Committee had to grant their approval, at which point the potential member was presented to the whole club once again. Three negative votes was considered "sufficient to reject the name of any applicant," as stated in the Constitution.¹⁸ In other words, gaining membership into this tight-knit club was a very involved process, and members often held their positions for many years at a time, which made vacancies rather uncommon. Of the twenty members, six held additional positions on the Officer Committee. This Committee consisted of President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Critic, and Director, with the positions of Critic and Director fluctuating in their existence over the years. A Program Committee was also established according to the Bylaws of the 1915-1916 year, and consisted of three members to be appointed by the club President, with one member being from the previous year's Program Committee, most likely to help with continuity and effectiveness from year to

¹⁸1915-1916 Yearbook, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

year.¹⁹ Examination of approximately forty years of Culture Club yearbooks shows that Officers were typically elected at the last meeting of the year by popular vote, as evidenced by statements in the majority of program descriptions for the last meeting of each year.

Individuals tended to hold membership for many years at a time. Because gaining a position in this club was a lengthy process, many women most likely chose to continue their membership once it was granted. This also shows that the women more than likely approved of the club's activities and their continued interest resulted in membership stability over time. One individual in particular, Mrs. I. B. Wyatt, maintained active membership with the club for over fifty years from its establishment until 1964 when she was converted to an Honorary Member. Numerous members converted their active membership to such titles over the years, most likely due to old age or failing health. Therefore, it is apparent that the women valued their membership and tried to uphold their duties until old age or failing health rendered them incapable of attending the regularly scheduled club meetings. There also appears to be a trend in Officer positions, with many members working their way up the ranks from year to year until attaining the presidency. The founder of the Culture Club, Mrs. Lucie D. Dillard, served as the first president and was documented as such in the 1912-1913 yearbook.²⁰ Her reign as president did not last long, however. It appears that no woman served as club

¹⁹1915-1916 Yearbook, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

²⁰1912-1913 Yearbook, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

president for more than two consecutive terms from 1912 until at least 1950, though many women did serve multiple non-consecutive terms. Mrs. Thomas Dark served as the club's President during both the 1934-1935 and 1935-1936 years, and would later go on to serve another two consecutive terms in the 1945-1946 and 1946-1947 years. She would even go on to serve yet again in the year 1949-1950. Though there is no mention in the Culture Club's yearbooks of a specific rule regarding officer term lengths, research on president terms from 1912-1950 demonstrates that no women served more than two consecutive terms as president at a time.²¹

The Culture Club met according to a very strict schedule, which appears to stay the same throughout the club's existence and likely contributed to the longevity of membership and the club's overall existence through time. Between October and May, the women met "every second and fourth Thursday afternoon at 3 o'clock at the homes of its members."²² The hostess of each meeting, according to the yearbook program descriptions for each date, was always the member in whose home the meeting was held. The hostess was responsible for providing refreshments and overseeing the program for that day, with two to four other members presenting previously assigned programming topics. It appears as though the meetings adhered to a strict cycle as well, as demonstrated by the trend that one of the members that had been responsible for presenting part of the program for a meeting would become the next

²¹Range of yearbooks, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

²²1915-1916 Yearbook, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

meeting's hostess, and oversee that next meeting at her own home. Meetings were reserved for active club members only, and the club only "opens its doors to guests twice a year, on Health Day and Education Day," during which time local doctors and educators served as guest speakers to the Club on topics pertinent to the greater Huntsville area.²³

The Culture Club yearbooks each contain information regarding meeting dates, meeting locations, and discussion topics; other research reveals the community activities these women took part in outside of these meetings that directly impacted Huntsville. The women were actively involved in "taking papers and magazines to rest rooms, helping...in welfare work at Boogertown, helping with an 'opportunity school' on Church Street, which was set up for adult education by the mills in that area."²⁴ Later, a newspaper article from December 18, 1947 stated that some of the activities these women took part in also included collecting magazines for hospitalized veterans at the Huntsville Arsenal hospital.²⁵ Perhaps the most notable activity that these women involved themselves in was a community-wide art exhibit, as

²³History of the Culture Club of Huntsville, Alabama, 1911-1931, written by Ruth Sykes Ford, scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., scrapbooks 1911-1970, Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

²⁴History of the Culture Club of Huntsville, Alabama, 1911-1931, written by Ruth Sykes Ford, scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., scrapbooks 1911-1970, Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

²⁵Newspaper article from December 18, 1947, scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, scrapbooks 1911-1970, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

evidenced in a newspaper article from May 20, 1948. This article shows that many Culture Club members organized a local art exhibit, with “hopes to have a permanent place for the display of works of art, for both white and colored...”²⁶ This event was a huge success for the club, and over 1,000 people attended. The Culture Club hosted this event, which was sponsored by the Madison County Arts Association. Interestingly, the Madison County Arts Association was the forerunner to the Arts Council, Inc., and many Culture Club members and officers served as charter members to this organization, with Mrs. J. B. Clopton serving as the first Arts Council, Inc. president.²⁷ Further, the Culture Club also appeared to work with other notable women’s organizations at times. For example, a newspaper article from November 1, 1947 stated that the members were invited to attend an event hosted by the Whitesburg Drive Garden Club, another well-known and long-lasting women’s organization in Huntsville.²⁸ Whether these women also held membership in other community organizations is not determined through the scope of the present research. The members were aware of the work of other local clubs, however, and the Huntsville Culture Club regularly sent a representative to a conference of the Alabama

²⁶Newspaper article from May 20, 1948, scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, scrapbooks 1911-1970, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

²⁷Scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, scrapbooks 1911-1970, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

²⁸Newspaper article from November 1, 1947, scrapbook 1, 81-1, box 1, scrapbooks 1911-1970, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

Federation of Women's Clubs.²⁹ This Federation was first established in 1895, with annual meetings held in various locations across the state. The first meeting held in Huntsville was the Twenty-fourth Annual and First Biennial Meeting in 1919.³⁰ The first woman from the Huntsville Culture Club to hold a leadership position within the Federation was Culture Club founder, Mrs. Charles Dillard (Lucie), who served as a District Chairman of the First District in 1921.³¹ During this same year, Mrs. Charles Dillard was also the Club Extension Committee representative for the First District, as well as a Board Member of the Home Economics Committee.³² The First District encompassed women's clubs in Colbert, Cullman, Franklin, Jackson, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, Madison, Marshall, Morgan, and Tuscumbia counties. More specifically, it included the cities of Albany-Decatur, Athens, Bridgeport, Florence, Guntersville, Hartselle, Huntsville, Russellville,

²⁹Culture Club Constitution and Bylaws, various yearbooks, 81-1, box 1, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

³⁰*Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs: Yearbook 1921*, page 3, accessed April 10, 2015, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=MzowAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA3>.

³¹*Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs: Yearbook 1921*, page 4, accessed April 10, 2015, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=MzowAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA4>.

³²*Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs: Yearbook 1921*, pages 5-6, accessed April 10, 2015, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=MzowAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA5>.

Scottsboro, and Tuscumbia.³³ As part of her duties as District Chairman that year, Mrs. Charles D. Dillard compiled a financial report for her district, which stated that for the 1920 year, the women's clubs in the First District contributed \$5,532 for civics, philanthropy, health, and education.³⁴ This does not mean that the Huntsville Culture Club collected the entire amount, but they contributed to this amount along with the other nineteen women's clubs in the First District for that year.

In addition to regularly scheduled meetings and involvement in local civic activities and projects, the women of the Culture Club also hosted an Annual Banquet that served as a celebratory event for their work the past year and as the final social event the women would partake in until the next year's meetings began in October. This banquet occurred at the end of the meeting year for most years between 1930 and 1942. The abrupt stop of the lavish Annual Banquet, which was typically held in a private room at the Russel Erskine hotel, could be a result of the war that was engulfing society at that time. The banquets resumed in 1956, and appeared to continue most years until 1963. Each Annual Banquet was worthy of its own news article each year, and each article began with a description of the lavish floral arrangements and decorations, and also listed the members in attendance as well as any information regarding the

³³ *Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs: Yearbook 1921*, page 57, accessed April 10, 2015, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=MzowAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA57>.

³⁴ *Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs: Yearbook 1921*, page 60, accessed April 10, 2015, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=MzowAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA60>.

program or activities for the night. It is interesting to note that research shows that these banquets appeared to be closed to the general public and were limited in attendance to members only, though each Annual Banquet was granted a small news article in the local paper. Prior to the Annual Banquet, there was a mention of an Annual Picnic in the yearbook for the year 1918-1919, though this event did not appear to continue thereafter.

The women of the Culture Club formed a very tight-knit society that was most likely representative of the upper social class in Huntsville and allowed the women to have a social outlet to discuss important national and local events with women similar to themselves. The Culture Club yearbooks from the years 1912-1918 listed the exact streets where the members lived, though no house numbers were listed. Their street names ceased to be listed in yearbooks after 1918, and telephone numbers first appeared alongside the members' names in 1948. By examining the list of street names of these early members' homes, it is evident that these women were most likely of a high status, with homes on the now-historic Twickenham and Old Town streets of Randolph, Holmes, McClung, Clinton, Eustis, Ward, and White.³⁵ Additionally, while there is no evidence to support this claim, it can be reasonably assumed that these women were involved in each others' lives outside of the confines of the Culture Club; the closeness of their homes within Twickenham, their social status, and their careers demonstrate that this could be a reality. While many of the members' occupations are unknown without further research, it is known that a

³⁵1915-1916 Yearbook, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

few of them taught at local schools. These included Miss Jessie Hopper (member from 1939-1951, 1955-1956, and 1957-1960), Mrs. J. E. Roberts (member from 1955-1956, 1961-1965, and 1970-1976), Miss Lottie Lamberson (member from 1939-1951, 1955-1956, 1957-1960, and 1961-1964), Mrs. J. B. Woodall (member from 1939-1951, 1955-1956, 1957-1960, 1961-1965, and 1970-1976, and Mrs. T. L. Woods (member from 1955-1956, 1957-1958, 1959-1960, 1961-1965 and 1970-1976). These women all taught over the years at the East Clinton Street schools that were located on the site of the original Greene Academy.³⁶

Trends in how the women's names were listed in membership rosters also varied significantly over the decades, which could be representative of greater societal trends that relate to women's' rights. Research demonstrates that the vast majority of these women were married during their membership, with only seven unmarried women ever appearing in the membership roster from the years 1912-1976 (Miss Myrtle Love, member from 1913-1924; Miss Jessie Hopper, member from 1939-1951 and 1955-1960; Miss Lottie Lamberson, member from 1939-1951 and 1955-1964; Miss Dorothy Webb, member from 1955-1962; Miss Margaret Neil, member from 1955-1965; Miss Bettie Clay Lawler, member from 1957-1965; and Miss Dorothy Adair, member from 1975-1976). After examining membership rosters in the Yearbooks from the years 1912-1976, it appeared that a majority of the members were listed by their husband's name instead of their own first

³⁶"Schools on the Site of Greene Academy, 1823-1956," Sketched for the Huntsville Culture Club by Sarah Huff Fisk, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

name until the mid 1950s, at which time more women appeared to be listed in membership by their first name. Interestingly, because of the vast number of women that chose to be listed by their husband's first name, the idea that these women were of a high social status can be further explored by researching their spouses. Research shows that a number of Culture Club members were married to very influential or well-known community members. For example, one prominent member was Mrs. A. M. Booth, married to Mr. A. M. Booth. He was known as "a civic leader and owner of one of the largest lumberyards in the City," and their home still stands at 512 Randolph Street Southeast, where it was built with salvaged materials from the Huntsville Female Seminary that once stood on the property.³⁷ Other notable members also include Mrs. John Fraser and Mrs. John Fraser, Jr., of the influential Fraser family who founded the Huntsville Wholesale Nursery company, which may have been one of the first businesses in Huntsville.³⁸ Perhaps the most influential and well-known Culture Club member, however, was Mrs. J. B. Clopton. Her husband, Mr.

³⁷"Huntsville, Alabama: Historic Huntsville Tour, Travel through the past in our downtown historic districts," Huntsville History Collection, accessed April 18, 2015, http://huntsvillehistorycollection.org/hh/hhpics/pdf/book/Walking_Tour.pdf.

Information regarding A. M. Booth's home: "Place: 512 Randolph Avenue Southeast," Huntsville History Collection, accessed April 20, 2015, http://huntsvillehistorycollection.org/hh/index.php?title=Place:512_Randolph_Avenue_SE.

³⁸"The Huntsville Historical Review, Winter-Spring 2006," The Huntsville History Collection, accessed April 18, 2015, http://huntsvillehistorycollection.org/hh/hhpics/pdf/hhr/Volume_31_1_Winter-Spring-06.pdf.

James Blunt Clopton, was very influential within the Merrimack Village, and when the area was sold, one of the streets was renamed "Clopton Street" in their honor.³⁹ Not only was Mr. J. B. Clopton an influential and well-known community member, but so was his wife, Anne Bradshaw Clopton. She was a well-known artist and received national recognition for her artwork, so it was no surprise that she went on to become the first president of the Arts Council, Inc.⁴⁰ Her other accomplishments included founding the first Girl Scout troop in Alabama, and in 1950 she was the first female candidate for the Huntsville Board of Education.⁴¹ She was easily one of the most involved community members that held membership in the Culture Club, and her leadership skills were evident by the many officer positions she held over the years within the club, as well as within other local organizations.

The purpose of each Culture Club meeting as documented in the club's yearbooks was to gather at a member's home and discuss topics the women thought pertinent to the time. It appears that the programming topics varied significantly over the years with two possible explanations for these trends. First, in many instances, it appears as though

³⁹"James Blunt Clopton of Alabama," via the Clopton Family website, accessed April 19, 2015, http://cloptonfamily.org/d_hist/jamblunt.html.

⁴⁰"Obituary Notice of Mrs. James Blunt Clopton," Anne Bradshaw Clopton: 1878-1956, Visionary Artist and Pioneering Woman, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://dreammakershop.com/annebradshawclopton/article6.html>.

⁴¹"Obituary Notice of Mrs. James Blunt Clopton," Anne Bradshaw Clopton: 1878-1956, Visionary Artist and Pioneering Woman, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://dreammakershop.com/annebradshawclopton/article6.html>.

the Huntsville Culture Club was culturally responsive, and their programming and discussion topics represented greater societal trends over time, including women's suffrage, WWI, the Great Depression, and so forth. The other possible explanation could be that in addition to these shifts in discussion topic trends over the years, Culture Club presidents also appeared to shift along with the most significant transformations. By considering these two distinct possibilities to explain why these women chose to talk about specific subjects at certain points in time, it becomes evident that the Huntsville Culture Club was at times much more than a typical book club or a garden club, and significant information can be gained from examining the change over time in their programming topics.

The first Culture Club yearbook for the year 1912-1913 demonstrated that the primary focus in programming topics was to keep up with current events, which encompassed discussion of new bureaus and organizations, new scientific advancements, and new educational methods.⁴² The club's founder Lucie D. Dillard was president that year, and therefore that year's programming could be representative of what she most likely originally envisioned for the club: keeping influential community women educated and up-to-date about current events and changes in society. This supposed goal of encouraging a small group of women to continue educating themselves on the world around them appeared to continue throughout the club's existence, and significant themes and trends can be seen through the examination of

⁴²1912-1913 Yearbook. 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

program topics as depicted in Culture Club yearbooks from the years 1912-1950.

In 1913 the club transitioned away from previously listed program topics, and began to seriously debate deeper questions regarding women's rights and women's roles within the home. Examples of such discussion questions listed in the 1913-1914 yearbook include "Just how far does the State consider a wife equal partner with her husband in property, in home management, in his children?," "If our laws regarding women are not as they should be, what shall we do about it?," "What benefit would woman derive from the ballot in our state?," and most interestingly, "On what grounds can a wife obtain a divorce in Alabama? On what grounds can a husband? How is the question of alimony decided?"⁴³ These discussion questions could be representative of greater outside forces taking shape in the community at this time regarding women's suffrage. The programming for that year could be a reflection of the women's apparent admiration for Virginia Clay Clopton and interest in her work; Virginia Clay Clopton was one of the founders of the Huntsville League for Woman Suffrage and later became president of the Alabama Woman Suffrage Association.⁴⁴ This sudden change in discussion topics could also be a result of a new club President that year, Mrs. R. O.

⁴³1913-1914 Yearbook. 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

⁴⁴"They Are Too Sweet and Angelic to Reason, or How Women Got the Vote in Alabama," Huntsville History Collection, accessed April 25, 2015, http://huntsvillehistorycollection.org/hh/index.php?title=%22They_Are_Too_Sweet_and_Angelic_to_Reason,%22_Or,_How_Women_Got_the_Vote_in_Alabama.

Shreve, with different Presidents serving before and after these specific discussions took place.⁴⁵

The years 1915-1916 and 1916-1917 showed another interesting shift in programming, and during this time Roll Call consisted of philosophical quotations and topics consisted of government or the Bible.⁴⁶ This period was also marked by a new presidency of Mrs. Archie McDonald, and these changes in presidency could account for some of the observable programming changes. Again in the 1917-1918 year, and under another new presidency, the discussion topics shifted again to cover topics representative of American culture and history, such as famous cities, landmarks, and past events such as colonization.⁴⁷ These topics could also be explained in relation to America's involvement in WWI, and some program topics hint at bigger issues plaguing the state of Alabama at this time. For example, one of the statistics that WWI brought to the fore was Alabama's high illiteracy rates, and "The work of the Illiteracy Commission of our State" was the topic of discussion at a meeting on February 22, 1917.⁴⁸ Therefore, the women appeared to be aware of what was occurring outside of the relatively small town of Huntsville at the time.

⁴⁵Range of yearbooks, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, AL., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

⁴⁶1915-1916 and 1916-1917 Yearbooks, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, AL., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

⁴⁷1917-1918 Yearbook, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, AL., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

⁴⁸"World War I and Alabama," Martin T. Olliff, Troy University, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1545>.

Another significant trend begins with the presidency of Mrs. C. E. Baxter in the years 1923-1924 and 1924-1925. During this time, literature was the women's primary focus during meetings. Literature continued to be a theme the following year, but while under the leadership of a different president. It appears as though during these three years, the club operated primarily as a book club, and examined such works as *The Witching Hour* and *The Great Gatsby*.⁴⁹ Similarly, a long lasting trend in programming topics can be seen between the years 1929-1939. During this ten year period, the vast majority of the program topics and specific subjects listed in the Culture Club Yearbooks appear to be representative of a women's book club. Programming was kept simple, and most meetings involved readings from a popular play, such as *Macbeth*, or novels such as *Gone With the Wind*.⁵⁰ In addition to plays, books, articles, and other literary reviews, the program topics included subjects relative to one's home. This included programs such as "The Garden: Round-table discussion of preparing the garden for the winter months," and "Round-table discussion of home conveniences."⁵¹ This approximate ten year period with comparatively simplistic programming could be linked to the Great Depression that was overtaking society at that time, and which

⁴⁹1924-1925 and 1925-1926 Yearbooks, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

⁵⁰1929-1930 and 1936-1937 Yearbooks, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

⁵¹1934-1935 Yearbook, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

significantly impacted industry in Huntsville.⁵² However, if this is the case, it is interesting that the women continued to host their lavish Annual Banquet in 1930, 1932, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938, and 1939, all of which are encompassed within the timeline of the Great Depression.

Perhaps the most noticeable trend, however, is the emphasis on WWII during the years 1943-1944 and 1944-1945. During these two years, under the leadership of Mrs. Walter Byrne, all discussion topics and presentations focused *very* heavily on issues related to WWII. The women began that year by revisiting issues surrounding WWI before they transitioned to topics such as the rise of the Nazis, eugenics, and Russia.⁵³ While who held the office of Culture Club president appears to have played a role in programming topics from year to year, evidence also shows that the club was culturally responsive and discussed many issues aligned with society at specific points in time. The vast majority of topics the women met to discuss demonstrated what was important at the time, such as women's rights, WWI, and WWII. The topics they *did not* discuss can provide important insight as well, however. This is evidenced by the simplistic programming and lack of topic variety that is seen during the years of the Great Depression.

These two explanations for discernible trends in programming topics can explain how the Huntsville Women's Culture Club demonstrated change over time. Other noticeable changes over time also included how women's names were listed,

⁵²"Great Depression in Alabama," Matthew L. Downs, University of Mobile, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3608>.

⁵³1943-1944 and 1944-1945 Yearbooks, 81-1, box 4, yearbooks 1912-present, Culture Club-Huntsville, Al., Huntsville Madison County Public Library Archives.

changes in representation of how the club's past was documented through scrapbook form, and physical changes in the Culture Club yearbooks themselves. Additionally, tracking membership and officer and committee member terms shows that the club potentially had a hierarchy of positions to be attained. The more interesting question, then, is how a club that was founded over one hundred years ago and limits membership to only twenty-five members at a time managed to continue its existence through the multitude of societal and community changes the women experienced. I believe that this longevity could be representative of two factors. First, the limited membership availability could have contributed to the club's social desirability. Considering the many influential women and the well-known men in the community many were married to, it is possible that these women valued their close-knit society and felt that being a member of such a small and selective women's club reinforced their social standing and ensured that the club would remain an upper-class organization over the years. Additionally, at the time of the club's founding, there were no other similar organizations within the city of Huntsville, though other women's Culture Clubs existed throughout the South. Other women's organizations were formed in the greater Huntsville area over the years of the Culture Club's existence, but more research is needed to verify if these women held membership in more than one local organization. Second, the club's ability to be culturally responsive ensured that the club was always relevant to the women's lives at specific moments in time. The trends examined demonstrate that the club was flexible in its discussion topics and that the women were most likely interested in staying informed on issues related to their community, as well as the nation as a whole. The activities the women took part in *outside* of their

regularly scheduled club meetings also demonstrate that these women had an interest in issues affecting their local community, and were actively involved in charitable activities and other events to enrich the lives of other community members outside of their own social class. It is for these two reasons that the Huntsville women's Culture Club most likely found itself able to persist continuously for over one hundred years, despite societal challenges that the women witnessed firsthand along with the rest of Huntsville's citizens. More research, especially for the years 1950-1985, is needed to reinforce these ideas, or potentially offer new insights into these questions.