



## History of the Benton Woman's Club

The Benton Woman's Club was originated in 1910 as the Corona Literary Club with eight charter members: Mrs. J.D. Hall, Mrs. A.A. Nelson, Mrs. William Reeder, Mrs. V.A. Stilley, Mrs. Boone Reed, Mrs. E.B. Ferguson, Mrs. J.D. Peterson, and Mrs. Jack E. Fisher. The name was later changed to the Arts and Crafts Club and, in 1914, to the Benton Woman's Club - the year the club entered the state federation.

The club developed the motto "not what I can get but what I can give," and the club colors of green and white were established.

In order to help the community in meaningful ways, a club must first earn money to fund the projects and the Benton Woman's Club has had a diverse history in fundraising over the years. Some of the fundraisers have been rummage sales, pancake breakfasts, white elephant auctions, and fashion shows. One year they sold tote bags and wrapping paper. In early years, a very profitable project was the concession stand at the fair. The Senior Woman's Club in cooperation with the Junior Woman's Club built the stands and manned them during the county fair. In recent years, we have been successful with the Holiday Tour of Homes. It was a stable fundraiser for us from 1987 - 2002. In 2002, the development of the HoopFest Basketball tournament, offered us a new fundraising opportunity and we opted to forgo the tour of homes for a simpler Silent Auction Basket Booth at the tournament. With declining attendance at the tournament, we opted to bring back the Holiday Tour of Homes in 2012, 10 years after our last tour. For 2 years, we were very busy with both fundraisers taking place the very same weekend. The Tours became so successful, that in 2014, we decided to drop the HoopFest tournament and concentrate all our efforts on the tour.

Although the club has a long history of helping the community when it was in need, the establishment of the library was one of their greatest early achievements. According to Mrs. Jess Collier, it was Mrs. Douglas Rasco who first suggested the library.

Education has always been important to the club. The club annually gave money to the Pre-School departments to purchase books for the children, and many of our members volunteered at the local elementary schools to read to the students. We established a yearly scholarship to be given to a deserving young lady attending a high school in Marshall County. The main scholarship, which was previously unnamed, was renamed the Anita Poore Memorial Scholarship, following her death, to honor a long-time and valued member who was active on all levels of club work. For many years, the scholarship fund was funded exclusively with either the Holiday Tour of Homes or the Hoopfest Fundraisers. In addition to the College scholarship, the club often sponsored a student to HOBY, The Hugh O'Brien Youth Organization, a leadership camp for sophomores.

Throughout the years, the club has been very active on both the district and state levels. We are very proud of our club members, who have gone on to serve as District Governors: Mrs. Ray Smith, Mrs. Thomas Poore, Mrs. Curt Phillips, Mrs. Bill Morgan, Mrs. Brian (Darla) Doss, Mrs. Paul (Paula) Robinson, Mrs. Steven (Amy) Mason. We have even had a few State officers. Mrs. Thomas Poore served as State Treasurer. Peggy Barnes served as State President and SER President, Darla Doss served as State Treasurer for 2 terms (2018-2020 and 2020-2022), Paula Robinson served as State Secretary from 2020-2022, and Amy Mason has served as State President for the 2022-2024 term.

In the early years, our meetings were often held in members' homes in the afternoons and were very formal events. The ladies would wear their Sunday best complete with hats and gloves. As the times changed, the meetings were moved to the evenings where not only did the ladies' clothing become less formal but so did the food and decorations.

The Benton Woman's Club has been involved in many projects and activities in its 100 plus years. Sadly, history is lacking from 1914 until the 1940's because of a lack of copies

of local newspapers and club minutes. Club yearbooks and scrapbooks have preserved history since 1940. Some highlights over the decades have been:

1930's - The club planted trees along the highway to honor World War II Veterans who died in combat.

1940's - The club participated in fashion shows and holds luncheons to purchase war bonds

1950's - The club held fashion shows and recognized safe drivers by giving a safe driver award to high school students each month. This is also the decade that the Marshall County Public Library was founded in a room behind City Hall by the club. Club members pooled their own books and opened a library for public use. Since there was no money to hire a librarian, the club members took turns keeping the facility.

1960's - The Library was still a huge endeavor for the club during this decade. They were finally able to hire a club woman, Katie Major, as the first librarian. This was done so with the money paid through fines collected from overdue books. Later, in 1967, the Marshall County fiscal court passed a library tax, and the library moved into a new location. After the tax passed, an accredited librarian had to be hired, and Sonja Dollins, another club woman, became the first accredited librarian to serve the Marshall County Public Library.

1970's - Marshall County public library moved to a new structure at 1003 Poplar Street with funds from a grant from the commonwealth of Kentucky.

1980's - The club purchased a large lighted globe for the library from what was left in the club's original library account. Club purchased benches as a community improvement project and they were placed at the Memorial Plaza in memory of all past and future deceased club women. Also in 1989, the club celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary with tea at the home of the current club President, Mrs. Mary Bennett.

1990's - The club held a Holiday Tour of Homes each year during this decade. The Tour of Homes was started in the late 80's as a fundraiser and thrived during the 90's. The Club also participated in Pumpkinfest by sponsoring a costume contest each

year. The club established the Benton Woman's Club, Anita Poore Memorial Scholarship, and offered it to young ladies graduating from Marshall County High School.

2000's - The club donated \$300 annually to the local preschools to purchase books for its students. Club members volunteered and read stories to elementary school students, began the Hoop Fest Silent Auction fundraiser, and started a new project, Paint the Town Pink - a breast cancer awareness walk. This project was suggested by club member, Paula Robinson in honor of and memory of those that have fought and are fighting this terrible disease. In 2006, the Benton Woman's Club established a new club logo.

2010's - The club brought back the Holiday Tour of Homes from a 10-year hiatus. We participate in the Marshall County First Responders dinner and continued to put on the event, Paint the Town Pink. In 2014, we held a fashion show to honor our past during our 100-year celebration. In 2015, we took on a new endeavor, Puttin' on the Mitz, which was a gala-type fundraiser to raise money for the Marshall County Exceptional Center. We held this event four years in a row, with different themes each year. Two of our most popular were the Roaring 20s and Mardi Gras-themed. Because Puttin' on the Mitz was such a huge endeavor, we decided to make our Holiday Tour of Homes a Biennial event, taking place in even-numbered years. We established a second annual scholarship in memory of Mrs. Irene Morgan. Since KFWC (Kentucky Federation of Women's Clubs) was renamed to GFWC KY (General Federation of Women's Clubs - Kentucky) our club logo had to be updated to reflect the change. A club website along with Facebook and Instagram pages were established to help attract new members and share information with the public.

2020's - The club had to scale back our activities in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid 19 Pandemic. In December 2021, Marshall County was hit by a devastating Tornado and the club helped distribute gift cards to affected individuals. By 2022 things were starting to normalize around the country, so the Benton Woman's Club revved up for a busy club year. The club established the Paint the Town Pink Fund which gives grants of Gas Cards or Cold Therapy Socks and Gloves to women fighting

Breast Cancer in our area. We also started participating in Wreaths Across America with a goal of laying a wreath on every veteran's grave in our county for Christmas. This endeavor is funded by donations and the Treasures for Charity Booth we have at R.G.S. in Benton.

As you can see, the club has continued to grow and change. We have participated in many honorable endeavors throughout the years. The one thing that has not changed is the club's desire to serve and give back to the community. We still continue to strive to fulfil the club motto, "Not what I can get, but what I can give."