

Linda Beatty -GFWC Virginia Historian – 2024-26 – Southside District

(Tidbits of information gleaned from annual reports, Virginia Clubwoman Magazines at GFWC Virginia Headquarters and 50th & 100th Anniversary books.)

Southside District almost became part of the charter organization but **Petersburg WC** – declined an invitation to send a representative to the first meeting because that club was described as “being largely social & literary,” therefore Southside did not become a part of Federation until 1923 when **Franklin, Lawrenceville, Smithfield**, several **Suffolk clubs** and **South Hill** federated and became part of the 6th District, thus allowing Southside to celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2023 with a tea party. Southside was the fifth District (in 2026) to charter a **Past District Presidents’ Club** with 9 members.

In 1950 club presidents were asked to tell what they deemed to be the most pressing problems in their clubs. Of course, attendance, getting officers, getting out the vote, expensive meals at convention and how to get members to do more than pay dues were all high on the list, but one club – to remain unnamed – reported that the problem they had was how to fill out the inadequately worded Headquarters Form

In 2026 Southside has 10 general, 2 Junior and the **GFWC Jilts Juniores** with a total of 376 members in 2026. Southside has provided NINE state presidents and SIX State Jr Directors. One of those women was Mrs. Henry Eley from Suffolk who has the distinction of having been the only woman who ever served as state president for TWO TERMS. During one of those terms she appealed to clubs to donate musical instruments – from pianos to harmonicas – to give to the service camps and hospitals thru Red Cross. This district was all about supporting the war effort. In 2017 Fran Edwards of **GFWC Tarrara Woman’s Club** became the first sitting president to die while still in office as President of GFWC Virginia.

When the state bylaws were amended to allow more than one officer from a District to serve on the executive board, Southside was the first to do so with Joanie Burgess holding the office of Secretary and Fran Edwards serving as Treasurer. In the election held for 2026-28 there are again two officers from Southside – Lori Chevalier, **GFWC James River Junior WC** and Angela Paez, **GFWC JWC of Hopewell**.

Mrs. Sara Pope once Sec’y/Treas for the 7th District remarked: “as the *‘Fireside Front’* our clubwomen can play a great part of putting Unity in Community.” Here’s how some did: In 1943 **Hopewell WC** could be found every Saturday from 4 til 6 serving hot coffee, sandwiches & cake to hundreds of enlisted men at USO Clubs. And, **Smithfield JWC** held - without interruption for a year - a weekly tea dance for servicemen stationed in the vicinity.

Several Southside clubs including **Boykins** and **Windsor** reported that 100% of their members contributed to the Red Cross Ambulance fund – which was the state project and the Federation was able to purchase TWO fully equipped ambulances for Red Cross. Maybe that inspired a later state president to choose as her state project an ambulance for Va Tech. More recently **Windsor WC** won awards for its Little Food Pantry project to help with food insecurity in their community.

Did you know that in 1942 **Suffolk Woman's Club** presented a reading of Dickens "Christmas Carol" with 700 attending and another 100 turned away for lack of seating and the entire program was broadcast by WLPM radio?

Sedley WC wrote "Highlights to History" about Southampton Co and more recently Anne Bryant produced a pictorial book of Sedley. **Sedley WC** also received accolades for their Bra-Ha-Ha project which showed off bras decorated with different themes for breast cancer awareness.

Riparian WC of Emporia members handmade a braided rug and donated to Butt's Tavern their official meeting place in 1964. In 1946 that same club, in conjunction with other civic clubs opened a youth center in the Masonic Temple for teenagers two evenings a week.

In 2007 the President of **King's Fork WC** remarked "What we do as individuals and as a group of women dedicated to service to our community has an impact on the lives of others that we cannot always see."

The club president in 2006-2008 remarked in her report for the 100th anniversary history book that **Junto WC** was in its beginning a book club that met in a one-room log cabin on the Godwin Estate in Chuckatuck, Virginia in 1924 and later joined the VFWC in 1927.

A unique project of the **WC of Prince George County** was restoring an historic deed book that was found and returned to the County.

Smithfield WC members could be found getting their exercise with their Walk-with-a-doc project in their local recreational park.

An early fundraiser for **Hopewell JWC** was an antique show which later became an Arts & Crafts Show and then the Craft Show and Bazaar which in 2007 was the club's largest fundraiser and well attended for its variety and number of vendors.

In the small town of Boykins, there were at one time THREE women's clubs: The **Boykins JWC**, the **Tarrara WC** and the **Boykins Senior WC**. The thought was that there would always be a club to "graduate" to, but that idea failed. First to go was the senior club and 8 of their members joined Tarrara. Then because Juniors were "aging out" when turning 35 then 45 as dictated by club bylaws, that club disbanded and two joined Tarrara. The good news is that there still exists a **GFWC Tarrara WC** that got down to two members but are now up to NINE.

For over 25 years the **Swift Creek WC** has held as a fundraiser their Longaberger/ Vera Bradley themed Basket Bingo at the local American Legion Building with proceeds going to fund their generous scholarships for local high school seniors.

In 2024 the Mary Frances Hartz Scholarship was awarded to a student who was a Juniorette – Emily Griffin was a member of **JILTS Juniorettes**, and her mother Stephanie is a member of **Hopewell Juniors**. In 2026 the **JILTS Juniorettes** were recognized for their efforts in creating

birthday packages, sun catches for assisted living patients and comfort bags – all assembled from in-kind donations.

The **GFWC James River JWC** which organized in 2011 was recognized in 2026 with a district award for their efforts on a literacy-focused project “Camp Read S’more” held during Advocates for Children Week at a local middle school. Club members volunteered to serve dinner to parents and students attending.

A tea caddy was donated by the District to Headquarters in honor of Mrs. A. Paul Hartz, State President 1950-52.

A brass desk lamp in the President’s office was donated by the **WC of Petersburg** in memory of Edith Collier who not only served the district as President 1980-82 but held countless positions in VFWC.

Sometimes history repeats itself. Let’s hope that if it does so, it repeats all the good things we have done as we all try to “live each day trying to accomplish something”.