The Belmont Home Demonstration Club

Willie B. Biscoe

Foreword

A number of people in the Belmont area have requested a history of the Belmont Home Demonstration Club. To the best of my ability, and drawing on a number of sources: Club minutes and treasurer's books, newspaper articles, various records, and memories of many people who have shared with me, I have attempted to put together a record which will be of interest
o the newcomers in our community as well as those of us who have resided ere for longer periods. I have not included many names because "so many did so much" (to quote from one secretary's notes) that space does not permit their inclusion.

Willie Wood Biscoe

A HISTORY OF THE BELMONT HOME DEMONSTRATION CLUB - 1923-1999

In 1923, Mrs. M.M. Davis, State Home Demonstration Agent called a meeting of her staff and the women attending the Farmer's institute at Virginia Polytechnic Institute to consider the possibility of a state organization for rural women. The resulting organization, modeled after the work of the New York Home Bureau, was called the Virginia Homemakers' Association. The name was changed in 1934 to the Virginia Federation of Home Demonstration Clubs in order to better reflect the nature of the

organization. In 1936, Virginia, in cooperation with eight other states, formed the National Home Demonstration Council, and Mrs. Guy Roop of Virginia became its first president. Local clubs were associated not only with the national organization but also with the Associated Country Women of the World.

The purpose of these organizations was to promote the welfare of rural women in all areas of their lives. The Secretary's Record Book for Home Demonstration Groups contained this statement of the aim of home demonstration work: Our aim is to have every home; *Economically sound;
Mechanically convenient; *Physically healthful, *Morally wholesome; *Artistically satisfying; *Mentally stimulating; *Socially responsible; *Spiritually inspiring, and *Founded upon mutual affection and respect.

Lita Bane, Illinois

The Homemaker's Creed, written n 1924 by a committee of three Virginia women, is the one still used today. The ideals it supports are just as appropriate now as when it was written:

"As homemakers, we will strive to:

- Have our organization foster the highest ideal of home, church, school and public life.

- Have our homes reach out in service to the community and help unite the people.

- Have cooperation and progress the leading forces in our communities.

- Study the best ways to do everyday work that we may find joy in common tasks well done.

- Be kind beyond the standard of charity; avoid thoughts and words that condemn; be more thoughtful than love requires; maintain the highest ideals of Christian life."

The state organization selected programs of work such as Citizenship, Cultural Arts, Family Life, Health, International and Safety and named chairpersons to develop goals and to assist the county clubs in activities along these lines, The county Council, made up of representatives of each club, chose one of these areas to be the focus for the year, and with the help of the home agent, planned programs for each month. The home agent attended most club meetings and presented most of the programs. As the time went by and her workload increased, leaders were trained from each club to present the program in their club.

Home Demonstration work began in Spotsylvania County in September 1928 when the Chancellor Club was formed. Three more clubs were organized that year: Belmont, Courtland, and Maude Wallace. Among the charter members of the Belmont Club were Mrs. G.W. Biscoe, Mrs. S. Penn Frazer, Mrs. V.M. Graves, Mrs. M.C. Dickinson, Mrs. Carey Goodwin, and Mrs. H.A. Towsey.

Mrs. Biscoe was chosen an and Mrs. Dickinson, Secretary-Treasurer. Miss Elizabeth Carmichael was the first Home Agent and one of her first demonstrations was how to use a pressure canner.

Life in the country was not easy in the 1930's. Until the Rural Electric Cooperatives were formed around 1935, there was no electricity available in rural areas. Wood burning stoves provided heat; oil lamps, light; gasoline motors or windmills pumped water; vegetables from the garden were preserved by canning or drying; ice boxes kept foods cool; clothes were washed in gasoline-pow ered wringer machines, hung on outside lines to dry and ironed with irons heated on the kitchen stove. With no electrical appliances to help with the work, farm women were happy to learn new ways of doing the necessary chores.

Club meetings were held in the homes of members with an occasional meeting held at the Belmont School. Belmont became the first club in the county to have a clubhouse when a member loaned the use of a house for that purpose. Members cleaned, repaired, and acquired the needed furnishings and held their first meeting there in April of 1932. This was a short-lived arrangement, since the secretary's minutes showed they returned to meeting in homes again in November of that year. In 1934 they decided to meet in the Fork School building for a three-month trial period. This was more successful, and this continued for several years, but gradually more meetings began to be held in the homes. The enrollment ranged between 30-50. In 1938 and again in 1954 it rose to 54. Generally, however, attendance was much lower. For a program requiring space it was considered better to meet in the Belmont School.

The work of the Home Agent was on trial in the early years. Her salary was paid jointly by the state and county, and often there were more places to spend tax dollars than there were to raise them. Each year the club women sent representatives to the Board of Supervisors' meeting to plead for the services of the agent. In 1934, the Belmont Club gave $3.00 toward her salary, and $5.00 in 1935 and 1936. In years of the depression each penny was important.

The club tried various means of raising money, including bringing a dozen eggs or a hen to a meeting to be sold, as well as making and selling ice cream at the ball games at Ranny Jones' store. A spelling match was sponsored, with an admission of $.05. They raised a total of $37.10 in 1934 and had a year-end balance of $12.30. Finances continued to be a concern throughout 1935. In 1936, when they were asked to contribute $50.00 towards the $1000. salary for a public health nurse, there was not enough money. At the July meeting, the chairwoman, Miss Mary P. Gardner, "presented for Mrs. Holladay who was unable to be there, the idea of having a Horse Show as a money-making proposition for the club. This was discussed and agreed upon as a splendid idea." The following committee was appointed to work with the Chairman: Mrs. Percy Holladay, Mrs. V.M. Graves, and Mrs. Richard Goodwin.

The Show was held at the Holladay home, Prospect Hill (currently called Littlepage Inn) on the afternoon of August 15. People from the neighborhood showed their draft horses and mules, along with saddle horses and foxhounds. Judges were Dr. J.S. Andrews and Mr. Manley Carter of Orange. Mr. Carter was an avid foxhunter and would not agree to judge unless hounds were included. Around 500 spectators turned out to watch, and the proceeds were $166.25, with expenses being $18.75. The women were then able to donate the $50.00 for the nurse's salary, along with a $27.50 donation to the Belmont School for reference books. Through the years, the horse show has continued to be the major fundraiser for the club. Over $50,000.00 has been raised, with the money used to benefit the community. (A more complete history of the Belmont Horse Show was written in 1990 and is available at the Belmont Community Center Building.)

The number of clubs within the county has varied as some disbanded and others formed. There was a total of 12 in 1954, today only three remain. Under the leadership of the county council, a number of joint activities were undertaken. Countywide contests were held to encourage members to use the information they were given. Mrs. Carey Goodwin of Belmont won first place for work done in 1930 on her living room. The Belmont women won awards for dressmaking, canning and other areas. Women sold their baked goods at the Curb Market in Fredericksburg. A number of projects were undertaken in order to finance the countywide work.

The Belmont secretary reported in 1960. "The Auction Sale at the American Legion Hall was to be held May 21. We were asked for five pies and two women."

The County Council sponsored the Spotsylvania Sanitation and Better Housing Campaign in 1937. The Clubs worked with families in the black community to improve their homes and sanitary facilities. A contest was held in each community, with prizes of $5.00, $3.00, and $2.00 given. The participation was so good that the Belmont Club gave three extra prizes of $1.00 each. In 1938 Belmont continued the campaign, again giving prizes.

Achievement Day was held each fall, with all of the county clubs taking part. There were exhibits made with judging and reports of accomplishments. Interesting speakers and the chance to visit with friends from around the county made the day a highlight of the year. The club sent delegates to the annual district meeting and women attended the Institute of Rural Affairs at the State meeting in Blacksburg.

The Belmont Club women consistently reached out to the Community in a variety of ways: gifts to the Belmont School for shrubs, library books, class trips, pots and pans for their new cafeteria, as well as a water heater, typewriter, and record player. They helped the high school with moneys provided for the band uniforms, athletic equipment, and a band trip to Europe. The 4-H Club was provided leaders and finances.

The H.D. Club contributed to the Mary Washington Hospital building fund and work with needy children. They furnished a room at the Louisa Community Hospital, contributed to the Henderson Nursing Home, local fire and rescue squads, British Red Cross, the British War Relief, a safe house for battered women, and many other worthy organizations. Help was given to those having tonsils removed, TB treatment, dental work, vitamins, and also for a liver transplant. Numerous families were helped with food and clothing and other needs. One widow was given $100.00 each year at Christmastime for fifteen years, to help with medicine and fuel costs.

A library was operated out of Belmont School for a number of years. Members kept it open several days each week during the summer months.

Books were donated by members and some borrowed from the State Library.

World War II had a strong impact on both the community and the Club. As young men and women went into the service and to work in cities, more work fell to the younger and the older family members. Gas rationing caused a number of activities to be curtailed. While gas could be used to attend the club meetings, only half of them were even held. In 1942, 1944, and 1945 there was no Achievement Day, and the Horse Show was not held. Club women had supported the Allied cause even before the United States entered the war in 1941. They sewed and knitted for the Red Cross and sent money to both the British Red Cross and the British War Relief.

After the war ended in September 1945, things began to return to normal. The Horse Show was resumed in 1946, and one of the most successful and largest shows was held in 1947. This was a time of homecoming for many of those who had been away, and more than 2,000 attended.

Notes of Mary Biscoe, the food chairman, listed the following items that were requested for the Show: 50 fried chickens, 30 hens for chicken salad, 2 hams weighing 35 and 42 pounds, 100 pies, 20 gallons of tea, 75 loaves of bread, and 200 rolls were bought. She further noted that they received only 40 fried chickens and 30 hens and this was insufficient.

The menu and the amounts of food have both changed over the years. Fried chicken is no longer served, but chicken salad, ham and ham salad, hotdogs, barbecue, pies and ice cream still draw those looking for good food.
The prices have changed as well. 1970 prices were as follows:

*Chicken leg	$.35
*Chicken breast	.35
*2 Chicken wings	.20
*Ham sandwich	.45
*Ham salad sandwich	.40
*Barbecue	.40
*Hot dog	.30
*Pie	.20
*Ice cream	15 and 25

After the Belmont Ruritan Club was organized in 1947, the men joined the H.D. Club in serving the community. The two clubs share many activities but are not officially related in any way. The Horse Show became the first of a number of cooperative projects. In 1950 the two clubs worked together in an effort to secure a doctor for the area. While office space was found and the negotiations seemed promising, the doctor decided to locate elsewhere.

The community picnic began in the early '50's, when the H.D. Club invited the Ruritan Club to join them. This was continued and evolved into the current Ruritan picnic, which is held each August at the Bennett's shelter on Lake Anna.

Another project that was started by the Belmont Home Demonstration Club was that of giving fruit boxes to the shut-ins and the elderly. This has now become a joint effort, with the Ruritans taking the lead. In 1999 generous boxes of oranges, apples, grapefruit, grapes and bananas were given to about a dozen people.

An annual Christmas party the Club had for their members evolved into a community Christmas dinner in 1958. The club furnishes the turkeys and fixings, and the guests bring a variety of dishes. Since the beginning there has been a good local attendance.

In 1950 a Senior Tea was first held as a function of the County Council. This was a means of introducing the senior high school girls to a formal occasion. Originally, it was held during school hours in the gymnasium, with the girls and their mothers as guests. Each club furnished food, money, and wrote the invitations or made the favors. Hats and gloves were worn, and the guests were greeted by a receiving line of club officers. When the senior boys were included, the Tea became too large to handle during school hours, and in 1973 it was held after the baccalaureate service, and bothparents were invited.

As the school population rose, it was harder to provide for the larger numbers of students, and the clubs were asked to take turns in planning the Tea. Belmont took charge in 1974.

They were asked to provide nuts for 1,000 people in 1979, and because of conflicts in scheduling in 1980 when Salem was in charge, money was given for roses for the graduates in lieu of the Tea. No Tea was given in 1981, but the Belmont women continued the tradition again in 1982 for the Spotsylvania High School seniors. Courtland High School had opened, and the class was not as large. With the help from merchants with the ingredients for the punch, and cookies made by junior class mothers, the Tea was resumed. After several years, the Belmont women decided to handle the Tea by themselves. As the Spotsylvania High School moved from one building to another, the Tea has moved with it. In 1987 the Tea became a morning reception held after the Awards Assembly. Known for the delicious sandwiches and cookies and for the special banana punch, the Tea has become a delightful occasion for the seniors, their parents and for the club women who serve. To our knowledge, this is the only senior class in Virginia to be honored in this manner. Our club feels it is a nice way to say well done to our young people.

Almost from the time it was organized, the Belmont Home Demonstration Club began to think of the possibility of a community building. Some money from the 1937 and the 1938 horse shows and all of the proceeds from the 1947 show were set aside for this purpose. The Ruritan Club was concerned also with the need for a community building, and when the Belmont School closed, and the area children began attending the new Livingston Elementary School, the two clubs got serious about the matter.

In January 1962 the H.D. Club met with the Ruritans to discuss a community building. In April of that year the Club voted to work with the Ruritans to acquire the Belmont School property, and in May the property, consisting of three acres and two buildings was bought for $2,500. The contents of the building were bought for $500. The two heavy tables, wooden chairs, and the small oak desk in the building today were part of those used in the school.

A committee of five was selected to be in charge of the building: the president of each club, a member elected from each club, and the building treasurer. For a number of years, the H.D. Club treasurer has served as building treasurer. Different members have had the task of overseeing the regular upkeep and the rental.

The Belmont School was opened in 1919 and contained all grades through high school. The large square building of white weatherboarding contained four, one of which had a stage that opened up into the adjoining rooms for programs. Classes were also taught on the stage. A small room at the end of the large central hall served as an office and library. Rooms were heated with large wood burning stoves, and there were outside toilets. Several grades were taught in one room, with the older children sometimes helping the younger. A picture of the school taken during the 1920-21 school year shows 51 pupils and 3 teachers.

A second building consisting of one room was built in 1936 and two more rooms moved from the Paytes School were added in 1937. At some time the original building was covered with a brick patterned material. In 1940 the new consolidated high school opened at the Courthouse for all white school students in the county. Belmont then continued as a grade school only. One room in the older building was then divided into a kitchen and a cafeteria.

After the two clubs acquired the Belmont building, the old building was torn down and the newer one remodeled. Men and women together spent many hours tearing out partitions, removing blackboards, cutting a door between the rooms, and building a kitchen in another room. Walls were paneled, acoustical tile ceilings added, floors sanded and refinished, and finally in 1967, the rest rooms were finished and the project was declared completed. As with any building, the job is never finished, and the kitchen has since been remodeled, a closet built, vinyl siding installed, and a porch with a ramp and steps added. The floor in the large room was again refinished in 1999. The dark oiled floors from school days are again their original beautiful pine.

The Belmont Community Building serves the community in a number of ways. Permission was granted the county to place green trash collection boxes on the property in 1977. This proved to be both a blessing and a curse, since many people are careless when disposing of their trash. Referred to loosely as the "Belmont Mall", it has also been a scavenging attraction, proving the old adage of "one person's trash is another's treasure" to be true! In addition, the building serves as the voting precinct for Belmont and the North Anna Plant maintains a warning siren on the grounds.

In addition to the two clubs using the building for their meetings, it is used for painting and aerobic classes, bridge groups, the annual Christmas dinner, the ham and oyster dinner, a Fall Craft show and other events. It is available for rental to the public for wedding receptions, showers, parties and to the Foxhunters' Association each year for their meet in the area. The upkeep costs are shared by both clubs.

In The 1970's Andrew Bennett was named as the Livingston District Representative to the Board of Directors of the newly formed Spotsylvania Rescue Squad. He, his family and some friends discussed ways to help get the squad established. A suggestion was made of having an oyster dinner to raise funds. Gladys Bennett approached the H.D. Club for their help with a dinner to be held on January 31, 1976, and another tradition was born at Belmont. For several years the Bennett family took the lead in planning the dinner, and after Andrew's death in 1977, the Ruritan Club took on the project in his memory. A committee of both clubs has done the planning and soliciting for food, but all members of the community continue to support this annual event, which is now held each year on the second Saturday in March. It continues to be one of the more popular events and is attended every year by nearly700 people, with no publicity except word-of-mouth. The proceeds are divided between the Louisa, Orange, and Spotsylvania rescue squads, and the Mine Run Fire Company. A portion is retained by the Ruritans to cover improvements to the building.

A "progressive dinner" was part of the club member's Christmas celebrations from 1979 to 1989, with members and spouses traveling from home to home, enjoying a different course at each. Starting with hors d'oeuvres, then salads and vegetables, followed by the main course, and finally dessert, everyone wound up feeling more than replete. This proved to be a fun way to share Christmas with friends and enjoy the variety of holiday decorations.

When the U.S. Department of Agriculture audited ten counties in Virginia in 1980, they found the Extension Homemakers were not in compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the 1972 Education Amendment.

A quota and time schedule was established and the clubs were given a mandate that each club's membership must be at least 75% of the minority race of the community in which it was located by the end of 1981. If they failed to reach the quota by recruiting and enrolling new members, they would have to merge with another club or no longer be associated with the Extension Service.

In Spotsylvania County at the time were 13 clubs, one all black, one integrated, and 11 all white. Black and white clubs enjoyed a good relationship and worked together on all county projects. Mrs. Dorothy Jones, County President at the time, was the first black woman to serve in that position and the first black member of the National Extension Homemakers' Council.

Throughout the state there was considerable turmoil, with the women uncomfortable with the idea of actively recruiting members, and with the documentation required which included stating the reasons for not joining. As a result, many clubs disbanded, including all eight of those existing in Brunswick County. Some became private, with the result that individual members could avail themselves of various services of the Extension Service, but the clubs could not do so.

The women at the Belmont Club had become disenchanted with the various changes made in the Extension program before this, and the interference from the government became too much. As a result, the club voted at their April 1981 meeting to withdraw from the Extension Homemakers and to become a private club. Since the club had never changed its name to Extension Homemakers, it continued to be known as the Belmont Home Demonstration Club. (At times the "H.D." seems to be variously interpreted by husbands as "Heavy Duties" or "Home Demons" !!)

The Belmont women never looked back, but planned and conducted their programs without a break in stride. The club continues to be a major force in the community. The demonstration has always been the main focus of the meetings, diverse programs have enriched our lives: upholstery, basketmaking, chair caning, calligraphy, quilting, fabric painting, foreign cooking, quick meals, cooking with herbs, flower arranging, and sewing.

There have been speakers on health issues, local history, genealogy, antiques, birds, herbs, homeopathic medicines, and even book reviews. In 1991 and 1992 the December program was a cookie exchange where women brought their favorite cookies, along with their recipes. A trip to a local area such as Mt. Vernon, Monticello, Jamestown, Williamsburg, Harpers Ferry, and Waterford was taken each year. In recent years, more trips have been taken in lieu of club meetings, including wineries, nurseries, museums, and flower shops.

In 1992, members and friends of the Belmont H.D. Club published CALORIES AND CHOLESTEROL, a cookbook of favorite recipes compiled by the committee, with the illustrations done by Carolyn Emerson. A total of 500 copies were printed and sold rapidly at $8.00 each. There has been a discussion of reordering a supply of the cookbooks, since they were so well received in the community.

The club has undertaken other projects such as adopting Belmont Road for trash pick-up twice yearly, in the Spring and Fall. A Newsletter edited by Donna Marquis is mailed to each of more than 80 members on a monthly basis. This keeps members informed of previous and upcoming activities of the club. Another endeavor is the blood drive. It has been said that some members "bleed" while others "feed" twice annually when the Red Cross Bloodmobile comes to the local Kirk O'Cliff Church. Those who can and will, donate blood, and other club members alternate with ladies of the church supplying cookies and food for the workers.

The H.D. Club members, along with members in the community, have been holding a Fall Craft Fair each year since 1995 on the second Saturday in November. The sale of space for displays, along with the lunch and snacks that are sold makes this yet another fundraiser for the club. Membership in the Belmont Home Demonstration Club has increased rapidly since Lake Anna was built. As homes have been built around the lake, the population has grown by leaps and bounds. No longer a rural area of farmers and their families, the focus and needs of the community are vastly different from those of 1928 when the group was first formed. Members in the early years of the club would find it difficult to recognize the community today.

Our thanks and deep gratitude go to the women who worked and often struggled to keep the club going. They have left all of us a rich heritage of devotion to family, community, country, and the world that is remembered and cherished by those who knew them. Three generations of several families have been members of the H.D. Club, and four current members who were active in 1950 are: Milly Goodwin, Pauline Harris, Gladys Bennett, and Willie Wood Biscoe.

With most of the newcomers being retired, there is now a whole new body of willing workers to help with community projects. It is a tribute to both the natives and the newcomers that a strong sense of community still prevails, and that the two groups have meshed without resentment or hard feelings. The presence of the Home Demonstration Club and the Ruritan Club has been a strong influence in promoting a spirit of cooperation and in making our community a better place in which to live.

Presidents or Chairman of the Belmont Home Demonstration Club - 1928-2000

1928 - Mary B. Biscoe
1929-1931 - No Names
1932-1933 - Mrs. J. Paul Harris
1934-1937 - Mary P. Gardner
1938 - Mary B. Biscoe
1939-1940 - No Names
1941-1943 - Mrs. J. Paul Harris
1945 - Mrs. Goodwin Frazer
1946-1950 - No names
1951 - Gladys Bennett
1952 - Mary Lou Towsey
1953-1957- Wille B. Biscoe
1958-1960 - Sara Harris
1961-1962 - Gladys Bennett
1962-1965 - Willie B. Biscoe
1966-1967 - Sara Harris
1968 - Adelle Goodwin
1969 - Vivian Paul
1970 - Milly Goodwin
1971 - Mary Waddy
1972 - Frances Baker
1973 - Carol Baker
1974 - Vivian Paul
1975 - Pauline Harris
1976 - Willie B. Biscoe
1977 - Pauline Harris
1978 - Nancy Biscoe
1979 - Linda Benn
1980 - Willie B. Biscoe
1981-1982- Mary Freeman
1983 - Nancy Biscoe
1984 - Willie B. Biscoe
1985-1987 - Barbara Benton
1988-1989 - Peggy Rower
1990-1991 - Willie B. Biscoe

Presidents or Chairman of the Belmont Home Demonstration Club - 1928-2000

Continued

1992-1993 - Peggy Rower
1994-1995 - Carolyn Amick
1996-1997 - Bernadette Michel
1998-1999 - Luanne Klotz
2000-2001 - Sally Goodwin