

The Women's Organization Movement throughout Texas  
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During the last 100 years, who has made the greatest impact in the state of Texas? Have you ever considered what significance women's organizations have contributed to our communities, our state, and our world? This presentation "From A to Z and In Between: Women's Organizations Transforming Change from the Inside Out," will focus on the influence organizations such as the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs and the Texas of Association of Women's Clubs have had on education, the arts, conservation, and Texas Heritage since their founding. Before women had won their right to vote, they were working together committed to effecting change in their communities. Today, those first women and the organizations they so devoted themselves to have had a ripple effect on our society transforming the present in order to shape the future.

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**I would like to thank you for the opportunity to join you today. This is indeed a privilege and an honor. Do we have in AAUW members in the audience what about PEO or TFWC?**

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From A to Z and In Between:  
Women's Organizations Transforming Change from the Inside Out  
By Kimberly Johnson

***Educate, Agitate, then Legislate***

***Lifting As We Climb***

***In small things liberty, in large things unity, in all things charity***

***Exploring Possibilities***

***Letting Our Vision Light the Way***

These phrases are at the heart of what has motivated women's organizations throughout the last 100 years to advance their members, their initiatives, and change the world.

However, recent trends are indicating that membership in women's organizations is on the decline. Such groups as the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs, Texas Association of Women's Clubs, American Association of University Women, and PEO are concerned that an aging membership base coupled with a

decrease in new members will alter how these organizations function and serve their communities.

The Lone Star State has a rich history of women's involvement in such organizations as those mentioned above including Delta Kappa Gamma. Since the 1800's, women have been mobilizing to effect change throughout the county. They have worked behind the scenes and battled on the frontlines committed to causes such as education, literacy, conservation, preservation, and social justice. The women of these early organizations demonstrated that working together in solidarity not only changes the present world, but shapes the future.

The women's club movement in Texas began to grow in cities and towns during the 1800s as an outlet for educated women to meet and share knowledge, culture, and fellowship. The women's club movement was part of a national trend for continuing education that included home-study associations and the lyceum movement. At first, the clubs were nonpolitical. The majority of the women involved were committed to education and civic affairs. They dedicated themselves to orphans, to develop home-economics programs for girls attending public schools, to raise money for libraries, and to sponsor art exhibitions, historic

preservation, and other cultural events. The “mother’s clubs,” they founded to assist schools eventually became known as the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). However, by the mid 1800s women were rallying together to fight for their right to vote and advocating for aid to victims of natural disasters.

Today, I am excited to share with you a brief history of three of these legendary organizations: the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Texas Association of Women’s Clubs, the American Association of University Women, and Philanthropic Educational Organization or as it is more commonly referred to PEO.

### **TEXAS FEDERATION OF WOMEN’S CLUBS:**

The Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs organized in 1897, following a call to literary clubs throughout the state to gather in Waco to consider the advantages of a statewide organization. As a result, delegates from 18 clubs formed the Texas Federation of Literary Clubs, which hoped to encourage Texas women to pursue literary study and to promote cooperation between the clubs across Texas.

Middle and upper class white women who desired education and a new reason to feel “useful and contribute to society” formed study clubs. The federations’ initial concern for education was the basis for its first call to public action. When the group convened in 1898, members agreed to work for the establishment of public libraries. **Today, at least 70 percent of all the public libraries in Texas are a result of the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs.**

By 1899 the Texas group had joined the General Federation of Women’s Clubs headquartered in Washington, DC, and changed its name to the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs dropping the word literary from its name. These changes signified a growing interest in public affairs and a desire to affiliate with the growing national movement to improve the status of women. The enthusiasm for promoting progressive causes characterized many local clubs and the TFWC in general. In fact, the first few decades of the TFWC was a time of remarkable activism, and the early work of the federation is an often-overlooked and rarely researched chapter of the Progressive Era in early 20th-century Texas.

High profile women served in presidential capacities in the early years of the federation including Kate Sturm McCall Rotan of Waco, the TFWC’s first

president, earning her the title “The Mother of the Texas Federation.” Other prominent founders and early leaders included Anna J. Pennybacker, Mary P. Terrell, and Sophie Hertzberg. The state legislature granted the TFWC its first charter in 1914. The governing structure of the TFWC grew as interests and involvements increased. Standing committees to encourage work in education, household economics, music, art, civic improvement, club extension, parks and playgrounds, conservation, fire prevention, rural life, and public health, are just a few that were added before the federation celebrated its 20th anniversary.

The federation grew rapidly, and in March 1901 the state’s 132 member clubs were organized into five districts. It is suggested membership peaked in 1941, when the federation boasted 60,000 members, 1,200 clubs, and eight districts. By 1926 junior clubs were formed and in 1932, the cornerstone was laid for the permanent headquarters in Austin. Construction of the grand Southern Colonial would cost the TFWC \$157,000.

The activities and accomplishments of the TFWC are numerous. The federation influenced child labor legislation; juvenile courts; maternal and child health reform; music education and home economics in public schools; Texas

history as a required subject in public education; teacher certification; the Poet Laureate of Texas; treatment of the criminally insane; traffic and highway safety; driver's education; foster homes for children; married women's property rights; jury service for women; rape legislation; protection of Texas tidelands; and historical preservation of the Alamo, Sam Houston's residence, and the Governor's Mansion.

The TFWC is also credited for the establishment of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, the Texas Historical Commission, and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

The TFWC was *even* a significant force behind the establishment of Texas Woman's University. It is interesting to note that then member, Mrs. Cone Johnson, wrote a letter to Anna Penneybacker that contained a draft of the resolution adopted by the TFWC in support of the new girl's college in 1901. Today, this letter is housed in our University Archives. Its value is priceless as the University's copy has yet to be uncovered. Mrs. Johnson was also one of the original **Board of Regents of TWU** in 1901 and was still on the Board when she was elected **president of the TFWC**.

During World War I, the TFWC sponsored five recreational canteens for servicemen based in Texas. During World War II, the canteens were again a project spearheaded by the federation as were scrap salvage campaigns, the sale of war bonds, and food preservation and rationing.

Throughout its history, the TFWC has focused on the health and well-being of individuals to ensure that services were available to those most vulnerable in society. Over the years, members established state tuberculosis sanitariums, the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, state psychiatric hospitals; Palo Duro Canyon State Scenic Park; Big Bend National Park; and buildings for educational exhibits at the State Fair of Texas.

Over the years, the TFWC has moved beyond the borders of Texas and now reaches around the world. The federation's international activities have included goodwill tours to South America; scholarships for students from Latin America; and libraries for students in Peru. Since 1903, the TFWC has dedicated resources to support its statewide scholarship program. Federation philanthropy has also supported the Elisabet Ney Museum in Austin.

The role of the TFWC has evolved since its early days. Many of those first projects have transitioned to public and government agencies or now receive the attention from environmental, consumer, charity, or feminist groups. Still, the federation and its affiliated clubs serve thousands of Texas women who maintain an interest in organized study and volunteer activity and who remain committed to public policy and civic agency.

Like the TFWC, the Texas Association of Women's Clubs was organized as a direct response to the needs of communities throughout Texas.

### **TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN'S CLUBS:**

**FOUNDED IN 1905, THE TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN'S CLUBS** was originally known as the Texas Association of Colored Women's Clubs. While many African American women were disappointed they were not permitted membership into the TFWC, it was one woman who decided to take action. Living in a small modest home in Gainesville, Mrs. M. E. Y. Moore, wife and mother, issued a challenge to African American women to join together to assist with the needs in their communities. The result was overwhelming as African American women from around the state answered Moore's call to organize a federation in

order to improve the home, moral, and social life in Texas' poorest and neediest communities. In addition, they dedicated themselves to preserving peace during times of struggle and war.

It would take three presidents and five long years before the women began recording minutes from their monthly meetings. By 1916 when Carrie Adams of Beaumont was elected president, the TAWC was poised to embark on its most ambitious initiative since its formation -- a home and training school for delinquent black girls – which ended up taking the women 30 years to complete.

By 1918, the ladies were campaigning for this cause attempting to convince state legislators to authorize and fund the project. In 1920, the TAWC purchased the land that would ultimately be the site of the home with \$5,000 down and a monthly payments of \$700. In 1926, former suffragist, Jessie Daniel Ames, toured the state speaking to white women's organizations about the importance of the project hoping to generate interest and enthusiasm.

In 1927, the state finally approved the project and construction of the home, but refused to provide any funding until 1945 when finally \$60,000 was

made available. Eventually, Brady State School for Negro Girls, located in a former prisoner-of-war camp near Brady, opened its doors in 1947. But, by 1950 the school and its 100 students were relocated to Crockett.

The TAWC also campaigned for a state hospital for black tuberculosis patients, fought against lynching, and the right for women to vote. In 1982, the first order of business for newly elected national president, Ruby Morris, who had served as the Texas state president a few short years before, was dropping the word “colored” from both the state and national organization.

The TAWC grew rapidly in Texas, maintaining an active program committed to education and culture for its members, as well as placing a greater emphasis on home and family life that continues to endure. Likewise, the association remains committed to ensuring the civic and political rights of African Americans and protecting the rights of women and youth.

Over the years additional state projects have included scholarships, recommendations to the railroad companies for improved accommodations, and the establishment of Camp McMullen, a campsite for young at-risk girls and boys.

## **American Association of University Women**

When, in the 1880s, a Harvard doctor claimed higher education jeopardized women's health, people believed him--until research conducted by the American Association of University Women proved him wrong. A catalyst for change, the AAUW was founded in 1881 when Marion Talbot called together the first generation of alumnae. Seventeen women attended. A year later, they formally created a group to help women establish their new place--at school and at work--in a man's world. By 1988 AAUW had given Ida Street \$350 to pursue graduate research, the first scholarship of its kind in the country. Then in 1920 Marie Curie received \$156,413 toward the purchase of a gram of radium.

One hundred years after those first meetings, members remain undeterred in the advancement of equality for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research. AAUW boasts over 150,000 members strong with over 1,500 branches and 500 college and university partners throughout the nation. Fellowships, grants, and awards exceed \$3.3 million annually. Over the years, the organization has recognized such women as anthropologist, Margaret Mead; US Department of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala; and astronaut, Judith Resnick. 10,000 women have achieved their personal goals because of the assistance received from AAUW.

From its early beginnings, AAUW has staunchly advocated for educational, social, economic, and political reform that promotes the integrity and dignity of women and girls. AAUW members effect change in their communities that is reflected in all aspects of a woman's life. The AAUW Educational Foundation studies on sexual harassment, gender bias in the classroom, girls and computers, women's transitions through work and school, pay equity, and more have made headlines and sparked change.

Built on philosophy that barriers are meant to be broken, AAUW has raised millions of dollars during its tenure providing scholarships to women because they believe all woman deserve a chance to succeed and the opportunity to flourish. The organization contributes and supports the vision of a more promising future and provides a powerful voice for women and girls – a voice that cannot and will not be ignored.

### **Philanthropic Educational Organization/PEO**

The Sisterhood was founded in 1869, as a seven-member sorority at Iowa Wesleyan College. By 1884, the women had established Cottey College, a woman's college, in Nevada, Missouri. Offering associate and baccalaureate degrees, the College can enroll 350 students. In 1907, the Educational Loan Fund

was established to provide loans to qualified American and Canadian women in need of financial assistance. The International Peace Scholarship fund was established in 1949 to provide scholarships to international women interested in pursuing a graduate degree in the United State or Canada. During the 70s, the Program for Continuing Education was founded to provide need-based grants to women needing to return to school in order to support themselves and their families. Most recently, merit-based awards, also known as Scholar Awards, are granted to US and Canadian women pursuing doctoral degrees or post graduate research at accredited universities.

PEO also established a number of retirement homes throughout the country for its members. PEO, like other organizations dedicated to the advancement and empowerment of women, has contributed to transforming the lives of thousands of women, effecting change in their communities, and shaping our world. However, PEO also serves as a reminder that their accomplishments are largely hidden from the world. Without access to their history, the public record is incomplete because historians cannot fully document the role of women's organizations to spark change. The histories can reference and footnote the successes of PEO like those mentioned. But without records, there is no way to accurately capture the organizations efforts to better their world and the lives

of others. In 2005, the Sisterhood unveiled a new logo and an “It’s OK to Talk About P.E.O.” campaign, seeking to raise the public profile of the organization while maintaining its traditions.

As we revisit the early days of women’s organizations in Texas

**Conclusion:**

While organizations report that membership has a tendency to wax and wane, the commitment to take care of each other, one person, one community at a time remains constant. Women’s organizations throughout the state and our nation continue to raise funds in response to community needs. The total dollar amount women’s organizations have generated is unknown. But estimates are that if all totaled from the very beginning when that first quarter was collected until today the number would be in the hundreds of billions of dollars. The women’s club movement and the organizations that support and promote civic engagement are a testament that women are lifting as we climb. Thereby, making a difference individually and communally that is transformative.

Today, we gather here, the beneficiaries of the hard work of the early club women’s movement. Our lives have been enriched because of their vision to

reform, their desire to preserve, and their spirit to persevere. We enjoy the peace and convenience that comes from visiting our local libraries and stepping back in time to visit the Alamo, a sacred site representing the sacrifice men made to ensure the freedom of Texas. We have experienced natural beauty in the historic preservation of state landmarks such as Big Bend and the Palo Duro Canyon as well as the restoration efforts to historic structures like the Governor's Mansion.

For Tessies, we have been given a timeless treasure from a determined and visionary group of women committed to establishing a girls college deep in the heart of Denton – The pioneers of yesterday have provided the Pioneers of today with the most priceless of all gifts – Texas Woman's University.

We take for granted the work these courageous women did during a time when they weren't even valued enough to be allowed to vote. For without their vision and determination, our lives, our state, and our world be a very different place.

Thank you.

All materials are located in the Woman's Collection archive at Texas Woman's University on the Denton campus.

Refer to collections: Texas Federation of Women's Clubs, Delta Kappa Gamma, American Association of University of Women, PEO, and various vertical files on historic Texas women.