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The Women's Faculty Club

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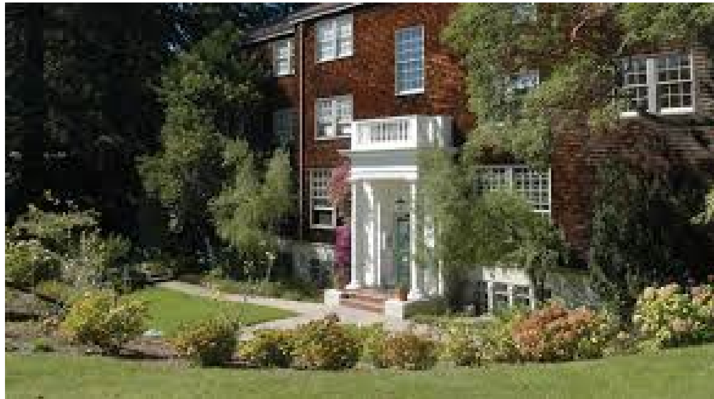
Chapter Six
Why Did Berkeley Women Need to Create Their Own Faculty Club?



1 Front entrance of the Women's Faculty Club

The independent (but university sanctioned) establishment calling itself "The Faculty Club" refused to admit women as members. Some were occasionally allowed to attend functions as guests, but they were not eligible for membership. The club's sexual restriction might not have been noticed in 1902, when it was built as a one-room clubhouse, since no women were then on the faculty. However, by the close of the 1910s, the clubhouse had been greatly expanded and over a score of new women had been added to the faculty, so the continued bar on their membership seemed unjustifiable. Still, we might wonder what was so important about having a club.

The women were, after all, voting members of their departments as well as members of the principal faculty organization, the Academic Senate, whose power was then increasing. Indeed, the women's desire for a club coincided exactly with the chapter in UC history known as the "Revolt of the Faculty", in which that group as a whole took a decisive step toward enhancing their own standing in relation to the administration, especially in the matter of professorial appointments and promotions (Stadtman, 239-56). In Benjamin Ide Wheeler's day those powers belonged to the President, with the consent of the Regents. With his resignation in 1919, the Academic Senate began campaigning for the system of shared governance that Berkeley has practiced ever since.

The simultaneity of the campaign for a Women's Faculty Club and the general expansion of collective faculty power raises the question of possible links between the two efforts. We can't say for sure that there was a direct connection, but what's known about the circumstances prompts the speculation that the women leaders, whose programs had often received Wheeler's support, might have been wondering how to proceed as the balance of power shifted toward the faculty. They thus might have been especially alert to signs of disrespect from their male colleagues, and yet they were also no doubt eager to claim their share of the faculty's growing

authority. Within this broad context of organizational change, there were many other reasons, both practical and symbolic, that made a Women's Faculty Club seem indispensable.

The Practical Reasons for a Club

To begin at the simplest level, the exclusion was not only insulting but also a significant impediment to leading a comfortable and sociable campus life; it even interfered with simply having lunch. A place for all to purchase meals conveniently may sound like an obvious requirement for a growing public university, but in the late teens, the campus was still a complete food desert for women. Thus, at the simplest and most literal level, exclusion by men from the only faculty club was a bread-and-butter issue.

The university, as we've noticed several times in these essays, had a policy against providing living or eating facilities, so all such places had to be created by independent associations, like the ASUC and the Faculty Club, both of which were exclusively male in 1919. Thus, as an early member of the Women's Faculty Club explained, all women on campus "who did not live close enough to walk home for lunch either carried it or went to a public restaurant off campus". The men, in contrast, had provided themselves with two places: the ASUC lunch counter in the basement of North Hall "was sacred to the men students"; and the male faculty had their club (*The Women's Faculty Club*, 82). The eating restrictions illustrate once again how the university's refusal to provide services made life particularly hard for women. They were not only constant reminders of their second-class citizenship but also sources of discomfort and inconvenience, costing them time and energy.

The faculty women thus keenly felt the need for a place to meet one another, enjoy relaxed conversation with peers, engage in social activities, hold meetings, give parties, have meals, and even find housing. And in providing one for themselves, they were following a pattern already well established at Berkeley: when women were excluded, they built separate, parallel institutions. Indeed, they had the recent example of the establishment of Senior Women's Hall by the students in 1911. The senior men's leadership organization, the Order of the Golden Bear, had built Senior Men's Hall in 1905-6 as a place to hold private, informal discussions with alumni, faculty, and administrators. Not allowed to enter that hall at any time, women students soon began raising money for a clubhouse of their own. Like all the clubs, it was built on land given by the Regents and with the approval of the administration (*Girton Hall*, 7-8), and architect Julia Morgan donated her labor (Darnall, 60). Throughout the 1910s, Senior Women's Hall was the primary assembly place for female students on campus. It did not have dining facilities but, fittingly, did have a small kitchen.

2 Meeting at Girton (Senior Women's) Hall, c. *1913*

Although partly following this earlier pattern, the building of the Women's Faculty Club in other ways departed from it. Like earlier club builders, the women faculty sought the approval of the administration and asked the Regents to allow them to build on university land. They raised money from the sale of bonds, took out a mortgage, and they asked John Galen Howard, the primary university architect, to design the building. But the Women's Faculty Club was a much bigger and more expensive project, built not only for meals, assembly, and recreation, but also residential purposes. It took four years to plan and build, and the leading lights of the women's faculty (incorporated as the Building Committee) were personally involved in all stages of the process (*Women's Faculty Club HSR,* 42-52). The sheer extent of their dedicated efforts indicates how much more than mere lunch was at stake in their enterprise.

The Symbolic Need: Public Recognition of Faculty Status

The exclusion of women from membership in the Faculty Club was tantamount to a denial of their faculty status. And in response, the faculty women did something unprecedented: they took an action on their own behalf that differed from their earlier behavior. Previously when campus women had organized (combining with donors, alumnae, and faculty wives) they had done so for the benefit of women students. Even the first appointment of a woman to the faculty, Lucy Sprague, was supported on the grounds that the students needed an older mentor and spokeswoman. But in response to the faculty club's exclusion, the academic women publicly banded together for the first time to advance their own interests. The 1919-20 foundation of the Women's Faculty Club was thus a turning point in the history of women at Berkeley because it showed the rise of a new collective identity, that of women academic professionals, and it manifested a new collective determination to advance their welfare, careers, and campus status. To be sure, it also promoted the cause of gender equality, but it was specifically focused on applying that principle inside the ranks of professional academics.

The number of women on the faculty, however, was still too small (under 5% of the total faculty) to be an adequate membership base for a substantial club housed in a building of its own. Thus, according to this 1920 description of the founding event, the plan was always to include women beyond the faculty: "On September 29, 1919, Miss Lucy Ward Stebbins, Dean of Women, called together the women of the University of California in a meeting which resulted in the organization of the Women's Faculty Club whose active members are the women of the faculty and of the administrative staff of the University, and whose associate members are chosen from professional women and women in public service in this community, and which has for its purpose the forwarding of the professional and social interests of these groups." (Club records, quoted in *Women's Faculty Club HSR*, 29). Thus even in looking outside the faculty for members, the planners emphasized that the club was to promote women's *professional* interests.

A note among the minutes of a 1920s meeting of the members further indicates that the founders were fully conscious of how different their own organization was from the many women's clubs springing up at that time, which were dedicated to philanthropy and civic

improvement programs. Discussing the possibility that a general "college women's club" might be in the offing, they decided that "since the college women's club is to promote social ideals and interests of a social and educational nature, while the Women's Faculty Club is more professional, a club for contacts rather than programs, it seemed hardly possible that any duplication of effort or interest could occur" (Quoted in *Women's Faculty Club HSR*, 32). This was to be a club devoted to providing professional benefits to its own members; it was not to be a service organization assisting others. Its rationale thus marks a break from the altruistic, service-oriented reasons normally given for women's organizations. And it represents a step, like several noted in the last essay, from women's occupational volunteerism to fully fledged professionalism.

Professionalism, as this note indicates, gave the club a way to expand without becoming simply another women's club. But, of course, it also entailed exclusions and even occasionally created a sense of internal hierarchy. One later member, who came up through the administrative ranks, for example, reported that she'd perceived the academics as "snobby" and believed they had only offered membership to women in managerial jobs out of economic necessity (*Women's Faculty Club*, p. 5). Such comments in the club's oral histories might seem to indicate mere matters of personal attitude or behavior, but they point to a structural paradox going far beyond individual intentions and failings. Obviously, the WFC's assertion of its members' professional status ruled out membership for most of the campus's women employees, and the emphasis on professionalism had socially variable implications even inside the club. The very name of the place indicates the original primacy of the academic women's need for professional recognition, and yet the club's survival has always depended on a much wider constituency. It was inevitable that different groups of members would sometimes see the professionalism issue from conflicting angles. Seeking the same status privilege as their male counterparts looked egalitarian to the academic members, but to others it could seem elitist.

Another layer of complexity is added by the fact that the academics who were most deeply involved in founding the club were also those most engaged in socially and politically progressive research. The growth in female faculty numbers by 1920, as noted in the last essay, had been greatest at the points in the curriculum where the academy intersected with public service: e. g., health, nutrition, family and child welfare, education. WWI intensified these activities, and in the 1920s and 30s, the list would grow. The faculty found themselves not only educating women for new professions but also giving expert advice and serving on committees and commissions at various government levels. Thus, the more interested a faculty member was in bringing about change beyond campus, the more she would want to display her professional credentials.

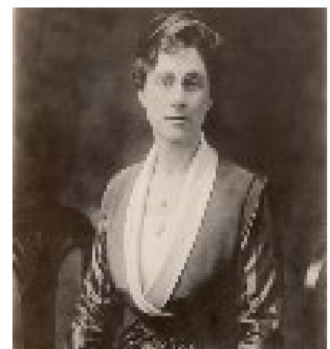
Statistician Elizabeth Scott recalled how humiliating it could be for a woman to participate at such meetings in the men's Faculty Club even as late as the 1950s. While advising a state agricultural group at the men's club, she explained, "We hardly made any progress at all

when in came a man called Mr. Smith who was a desk, a counter employee. He ordered me to leave. Because I wasn't a member, therefore, I could not be eating in this room, only members were allowed to eat in that room" (Scott, in *Women's Faculty Club*, 158). Everyone at that meeting left in protest, but the incident nevertheless illustrates why being able to hold meetings and host contacts in a respectful environment seemed a necessity.

It is little wonder, then, that the club's early leadership contained many women whose academic work entailed extensive contacts and experience in public service. They had broad university administrative experience, which gave them an overview of the general condition of women on campus, and they were also widely respected and influential beyond the campus. The founders were convened by the Dean of Women, Lucy Stebbins, while the campus was returning to normal in the wake of WWI. She had taken over from the first Dean, Lucy Sprague, who departed in 1912, and like her predecessor was a graduate of Radcliffe. Stebbins had been a social worker in Massachusetts before returning to her home state of California. She served as Sprague's assistant for two years in addition to playing an active role in the early years of the Social Economics program. By 1919, she was an assistant professor and had proved her administrative worth by guiding the women students through the crisis of the war years and the deadly influenza epidemic. Each year, Stebbins drafted a full report on every aspect of women's lives at Berkeley. Moreover, she'd become central to the efforts to increase curricular offerings and recruit more women faculty when President Wheeler sent her to the east coast to find candidates for jobs in the new Home Economics Department, whose leaders she recruited (Nerad, 65). No doubt her role in hiring such key women faculty strongly motivated her to look after their interests once they had arrived.

3 Lucy Stebbins

Stebbins enlisted the help of Jessica Peixotto, with whom she had earlier worked in the Social Economics program inside the Economics Department. According to historian Mary Ann Dzuback, the program had a clear policy orientation toward research concerned with "laborers, the poor, the unemployed, children, women, and the living conditions of middle-class families and citizens of California, who faced uncertain economic and social change" (Dzuback, 155-56). In 1918, Peixotto had been the first woman promoted to full professor at Berkeley. Widely published, she had a strong national scholarly reputation and a prominent place in policy discussions. During the war, she'd been called to advise the National Council of Defense's Committee on Children. In short, her credentials and scholarly respectability were unquestionable. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter Five, she was an important advisor to President Wheeler, who had given her the responsibility of chairing the committee to create the home economics programs, just as he'd given Stebbins the job of recruiting their personnel. Like Stebbins, Peixotto had a


4. Jessica Peixotto

comprehensive knowledge of the faculty women, a strong investment in their collective welfare, and a desire for a convenient place in which to maintain and enlarge her network of connections.

5 Barbara Nachtrieb (later Armstrong) in 1915

Stebbins and Peixotto thus took the lead, and they recruited a rapidly rising young female faculty star, Barbara Nachtrieb Grimes (later Armstrong) who had also been hired in Social Economics in 1919. She had graduated from Berkeley in 1913, received her law degree in 1915, and served as executive secretary of the California Social Insurance Commission until 1919 while working on an Economics PhD (completed in 1921). She was then given a joint appointment in Economics and Law, the first woman to have a faculty appointment at the law school of a major American university. Later in her career, she published a ground-breaking study of social insurance programs (1932), was summoned to Washington D.C., and became an influential consultant in the drafting of the Social Security Act of 1935 (Buck, n.p.).

Many other early members of the WFC worked at the intersection of academic research and social and governmental policy. There was Margaret Beattie, in the Hygiene Department (later Public Health) whose WWI service in a field laboratory of an American Expeditionary Forces hospital in France had led to a career of reforming medical laboratory procedures. Sophia Levy, in Mathematics, became Director of Mathematics Instruction for the Army Specialized Training Program during WWII, which resulted in a book about artillery. And the redoubtable Agnes Faye Morgan's professional public service ranged from reforming the food service at San Quentin Prison to serving on the Governor's Committee on Agricultural Chemicals. The number of Women's Faculty Club founders whose professional work relied on networks beyond the university allows us to see the overlapping practical and symbolic importance of the club.

There were also, to be sure, important WFC leaders whose service remained more campus oriented, like Pauline Sperry in Mathematics and Alice Tabor in German, "who handled the finances that were done most successfully, and were responsible for the short time before our club was all ours and the mortgage cleared", according to Lucy Stebbins's assistant, Margaret Murdock (*Women's Faculty Club*, 30). Even though their work brought fewer nonacademic professional contacts, though, Sperry and Tabor practiced an ardent political and social activism in accord with the concerns of the principal founders ("Sperry", Greene and LaDuke, 2-3).

The careers of the Women's Faculty Club founders display the characteristic opportunities and dilemmas of women academics as they developed toward professional parity. They brought a strong consciousness of the social problems of their day as well as a progressive belief in government's ability to ameliorate them. They added confidence in their own ability to point the way, through research and scientific methods of analysis, toward the solutions. Their

ambitions, in other words, don't seem far from those of earlier intellectual women, but their faculty status gave them the additional need for professional authority, which replaced the earlier desire for mere moral influence. The consequences of the transition from influence to authority were multiple. With their growing opportunities to exercise power in the outside world came anxiety about campus practices that undercut the professional basis for that authority. Thus, they continued to need a separate enclave of operations, and the two faculty clubs did not find a viable mode of blending their memberships until the mid-1970s. And finally, the professional insistence of the women faculty unintentionally opened a status gulf, small at first but not soon to be bridged, between the career academics and other campus women.

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2. Interior of Girton Hall, c. 1913, *Blue and Gold*. From Girton Hall/Senior Women's Hall, University of California at Berkeley: Historic Structure Report. Preservation Architecture. Nov. 28, 2011, fig. 12, p. 8.

3. Photo of Lucy Ward Stebbins. From "Lucy Ward Stebbins", Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucy_Ward_Stebbins.

4. Photo of Jessica Blanche Peixotto in 1918. From Eddleson, Jeffrey. "Our Founding Mother: Jessica Blanche Peixotto." https://socialwelfare.berkeley.edu/news/our-founding-mother-jessica-blanche-peixotto. Photo in University Archives, University of California, Berkeley.

5. Photo of Barbara Nachtrieb Armstrong. From "Barbara Nachtrieb Armstrong", Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbara_Nachtrieb_Armstrong.