



Well-intentioned ladies organized to aid the needy.

women went on strike. The result was disconcerting – instead of answering the strikers' demands, the factory closed down and moved to Scranton, Pennsylvania!⁶

Strikes were rarely successful. In 1908, twenty out of twenty-one women quit their job at the Cayuga Lake House – a summer hotel in neighboring Sheldrake – to show solidarity with the headwaitress, apparently fired unjustly. The women headed for Ithaca “in a solid phalanx” to look for new jobs, and the management, not very much bothered, simply sent out telegrams for twenty male replacements.⁷

Factory conditions were often far from Safe, Clean, & Happy. Long hours without rest was the norm. Finally in 1909, concern over the health of women and children climaxed, and new legislation emerged which for the first time stipulated the eight-hour work day, a required day of rest, and health regulations aplenty. A local soda fountain owner lamented the coming of these laws, saying that he “could not give the people the best service” anymore, the women being unable to work more than fifty-four hours a week, or not before seven o'clock in the morning, nor later than ten o'clock at night.⁸

Benefits and Hardships

Despite the hardships, many women were anxious to work, and for good reason – not only could a working woman enjoy the benefits of personal monies and independence, but knowing she had the option of supporting herself, she need not live with a marriage gone sour. The *Ithaca Daily News* of 1912 objected:

It is because they know no way by which they can support themselves that myriads of women are forced to endure the purgatory of unhappy homes and live with men who abuse and insult them. If she possessed a self-supporting occupation that she could turn to, many a miserable wife would pack her trunk and go back to her typewriter or her sewing machine or her book-keeping.⁹

Most women's rights advocates since 1900 have promoted the idea of women in trades. Then, these trades were generally those of typing, sewing, or bookkeeping. Many of the specific opportunities for women have changed since then, but the goals remain the same – the desire for competence, self-assurance, and independence.

Working-class women have always had a tough time of it. They have often had to support children and husbands by means of a job that paid piddling little and would never pay more. Meanwhile, clothes get dirty, cobwebs appear in corners, and there are always the never-ending chores of cleaning and cooking to be done. After a long day in the work place,

many women came home to their unpaid but essential second job of keeping house, and keeping the family together. There was seldom any time left for themselves.

Social distinctions are as visible today as ever. Women from middle-class and affluent families stand more of a chance of learning a lucrative trade, since their family can put them through school, help them get started, and give a “little something” when needed. Ironically, those women who most need the training are least likely to receive it. You won't often see children from prosperous homes coughing in the dust of a coal mine, or having as the proud product of their existence 840,000 buttons successfully sewed on cards.

Women's Organizations

For all their teas, quilting bees, and church auxiliaries, local women never formalized their groups into organizations until the 1860s.

The Ladies Union Benevolent Society (LUBS)

Established in 1869, LUBS was both one of the original women's organizations in Ithaca, and also the first secular organization designed to care for the city's poor.

These women were wealthy (Mrs. Ezra Cornell was a long-time member);¹ some were even driven to their meetings by chauffeurs. But they were more than generous with their money. They completely financed and operated a Children's Home and an Old Ladies' Home. The former incorporated in 1900 and became self-supporting. The latter group resided for many years in a house at 514 North Aurora Street. In 1871 the house was sold, and the Home moved to a wing in the McGraw House at 221 South Geneva Street, where the Ladies Union Benevolent Society cares for elderly women to this day.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)

Women had a vested interest in the struggle to abolish liquor — that is, the temperance movement. In the 1870s when organized women's temperance was born, they had no legal protection against physical abuse, neglect, or abandonment by a drunken husband. Since ladies were not welcome in the existing men's temperance groups, they formed their own.²

Ithaca women were sincere, but disorganized. A speech by visiting temperance advocate Diocletian Lewis on February 26, 1874 finally sparked them to action.³ A stirring orator, he ended his emotionally-charged speech with this plea:

Women of Ithaca! — organize this movement,
and try to do what you can for the glory
of God!⁴

The next morning, 130 names filled the sign-up sheet at the first women's temperance meeting at the Aurora Street Methodist Church. That same day, the *Ithaca Daily Journal* excitedly reported:

The spirit is indeed in the movement. Never has there been anything like it in Ithaca. . . . There was scarcely any other topic of conversation on the streets yesterday . . . Those who were most incredulous two days ago and thought it was not the woman's place to go into active temperance work, now freely express the hope that the movement may be successful.⁵

The new crusaders were spurred on by all-too-common tales of woe; the plight of one victim appeared in print on March 3, 1874.

The liquor dealers have asked a hearing. Has not a poor helpless drunkard's wife a right to be heard also? My once kind husband is fast becoming a drunkard. I often at night sit praying, weeping, and listening until 11, 12, and 1 o'clock, fearing and yet anxious to hear his unsteady, familiar step coming home. Could the rum dealer but see a very small part of the misery that has come upon our once happy home, he could not have the heart to sell my husband another drop of liquor. Many a wife and mother in Ithaca, today, is suffering silently, prayerfully, and uncomplainingly. It is far better that your money-making should suffer than that whole families should come to poverty and shame and eternal death through your love of gain by selling liquor.

A Sufferer⁶

Their tactics included convincing respected locals to print their names in the newspapers as abstinent, persuading saloons to stop selling liquor,⁷ starting coffee houses, and making periodic trips to the seats of authority with petitions, statements, and demands. The *Ithaca Daily Journal* praised Ithaca's two-week-old women's temperance movement.

The most encouraging success has thus far attended the efforts of the ladies . . . The Cause is continually gathering strength, and the women are determined, under divine guidance, to prevail.⁸

Besides temperance activities, the women busied themselves operating Ithaca's first kindergarten, caring for the needy, and engaging in regular "jail work." WCTU member Katherine Shaw listed some of these penal activities in a report of 1909:

Prisoners visited regularly. Sunday services under

ANOTHER VICTORY FOR THE LADIES.

Charles Davenport Closes up his Saloon, and it is to Be Used as a Temperance Restaurant.

The first saloon in Ithaca to succumb to the influence of the temperance crusade, is that of Charles Davenport, in the Clinton Block on Cayuga street. A committee of the Women's Temperance Band has been negotiating with Mr. Davenport for some days; his stock was appraised, and this morning a bargain was closed, stipulating that he shall turn over, to the committee, the saloon with all its properties, and not again sell intoxicating liquors in the county, either party agreeing to forfeit one hundred dollars if they violate their contract.

The saloon will be closed up to-morrow morning and will be immediately put under a process of repairs. The ladies have engaged Mr. John Stoddard to open it as a temperance restaurant, at present under their direction. A cup of coffee will be furnished with sugar and milk for five cents, and other harmless refreshments at the same reasonable rate.

A table will be supplied with newspapers and periodicals, and it will be run as a first-class temperance resort. A sort of intelligence office will be kept in connection with it, where those out of work can learn of employment. We understand a number of other saloon men have made overtures to the committee, desiring to dispose of their property and quit the business. Indeed, it looks very much as though the whisky war in Ithaca would be waged to a successful termination.

the auspices of the WCTU. 17 conversions. Special work done for women and children . . . Clothing and shoes provided for 16 prisoners and employment found for 7 discharged prisoners.



Zealous bands of women led the crusade for temperance.

And under the heading, "Rescue Work":

Four girls sent to industrial homes, 15 girls carefully guarded. Secured christian homes for 3 others. Prosecuted a notorious keeper of ill-fame house till it was closed. Sent 32 cans of fruit to Bullock Training School for Girls.⁹

In addition, the WCTU gave the city a public drinking fountain. Purchased for \$600 in 1898, this fountain was adorned by a beautiful statue of Hebe, the Greek goddess of youth. But as horses became less numerous, Fire Chief B. J. Reilly decided that it was likely to obstruct traffic in case of a fire, and the fountain was removed to Washington Park (Washington and Buffalo Streets). There, the "lady" was viciously assaulted; some Cornell students removed one of the arms of the statue, and it was later found on a dump heap on the campus.¹⁰

The fountain no longer exists; the mystery of its disappearance remains unsolved.

By 1913, there was a Tompkins County WCTU with local chapters in all of the following communities:

Asbury	Freeville	Peruville
Bethel Grove	Groton	Slaterville
Brookton	Ithaca	Snyder Hill
Coddington Rd.	Ithaca Eliza Peterson	S. Danby
Danby	Jacksonville	Trumansburg
Dryden	Kennedy's Corners	Trumbull's Corners
E. Lansing	Lake Ridge	Varna
Enfield	Myers	W. Danby
Etna	Newfield	W. Dryden
Forest Home	N. Lansing	W. Groton ¹¹



Ladies dress reform meeting, c.1875.

By 1917, the major focus was to convince the various municipalities to exercise "local option" and vote the area dry. (Local option had no legal connection with the prohibition amendment, still three years in the future.) The county rallying cry was:

Prohibition! State and Nation!
We will work like all creation,
Till as sure as if you'd seen it,
Tompkins County women mean it!¹²

On April 17, 1918, the efforts of Ithaca's WCTU finally brought the issue to a vote. By a 3:2 margin, the town voted "Bone Dry" according to an *Ithaca Daily Journal* headline; only West Hill voted "wet."¹³ On that same day, nineteen other cities in New York State also went "dry" including Elmira, Cortland, Auburn, and Binghamton. On October 1, 1918 in Ithaca, thirty-two hotels and saloons, six wholesalers and retailers, and nine drug stores gave up their license to sell intoxicating liquors. Despite the orgy of drink which swept the city the previous night (liquor licenses expiring at midnight), the vote was a WCTU victory.

One crucial factor in the outcome of the election was that by this time New York State women had the vote. On April 18, the *Ithaca Daily Journal* declared:

Without question, the vote of the women, exercising their franchise for the first time, was the deciding factor in the outcome.

Though the cause of temperance was won, the WCTU was not about to fold. Still to be done was the establishment of temperance and narcotic educational programs, distribution of literature, and the operation of another free kindergarten. Since its inception forty-four years before, the WCTU had expanded. In fact, by 1927 the Ithaca chapter numbered 1,008 strong, making it the second largest temperance union in the entire country.¹⁴

Over the years, however, the group began to wane. More women were employed, and there was less time to spend in volunteer activities. Young people showed little interest in joining. On January 1, 1976, the twenty-five to thirty remaining members, all well into their eighties, disbanded the WCTU. This marked the end of a once-mighty women's organization.

The Ithaca Woman's Club

The return of Susan B. Anthony to Ithaca in November of 1874 inspired Louisa Lord Riley to contemplate a local women's suffrage club. She was a newcomer to Ithaca, and had successfully organized such a group in Pennsylvania. She soon found, though, that the women here were very conservative; another potential member described them as being "embarrassed."¹⁵ But — undaunted — Louisa devised a compromise measure of a "Woman's Club" which would explore socially acceptable issues (literature, education, current events) and discuss suffrage only every fourth week. This was palatable to the club membership, but not so to the community at large. Mrs. Ada Hasbrouck, a charter member, recalled:

It is impossible in this day and age to realize what a storm of comment and criticism the organizing of this small club of about 10 or 25 members called forth, especially the suffrage section. . . . The husbands regarded with trepidation this new thing which would demand the housewife's time one afternoon every two weeks.¹⁶

Despite all opposition, the club thrived. It was not long, however, before a "slight cloud appeared on the horizon."¹⁷

Mary M. Denton, president of the Ithaca Woman's Club from 1913 to 1915, put to rhyme this political quandry:

Our club was small, they tell us,
In good old days of yore;
Its membership, though quite select,
Once numbered but a score.
And once — oh sad to tell is —
I hope 'wont spoil digestion —
The roster nearly split in two
Upon the suffrage question.¹⁸

Yes, it seemed a gap had developed between the suffrage section and the rest of the Woman's Club. So "with kind feelings 'tord the Woman's Club who had mothered them while they were getting rooted," the suffrage section decided to withdraw. "Since that separation," one old-timer wrote, "politics and religion have been taboo in the Woman's Club and harmony has prevailed."¹⁹

Largest Union Membership

Alabama—Birmingham Central	409
Alaska—Fairbanks	16
Arizona—Tucson	117
Arkansas—Little Rock	520
California (N.)—San Jose	353
California (S.)—Los Angeles Central	1,060
Colorado—Longmont	282
Connecticut—Bridgeport	300
Delaware—Thacher	215
District of Columbia—Mt. Pleasant	232
Florida—Cocoanut Grove	220
Georgia—Macon City	432
Hawaii—Honolulu	168
Idaho (N.)—Lewiston	172
Idaho (S.)—Boise Central	199
Illinois—Englewood	835
Indiana—Elkhart	433
Iowa—University, Des Moines	437
Kansas—Winfield	215
Kentucky—Lexington Central	539
Louisiana—Alexandria	106
Maine—Portland	240
Maryland—Baltimore	188
Massachusetts—New Bedford	450
Michigan—Holland	304
Minnesota—8th Ward Minneapolis	293
Mississippi—Jackson	156
Missouri—St. Louis Central	260
Montana—Bozeman	182
Nebraska—Fremont	321
Nevada—Las Vegas	68
New Hampshire—Dover	170
New Jersey—Salem, Demorest	260
* New York—Ithaca	1,008
North Carolina—Asheville	192
North Dakota—Fargo, Scandinavian	320
Ohio—Wooster	468
Oklahoma—Enid, Frances Willard	250
Oregon—Hood River	164
Pennsylvania—Wilkinsburg	395
Rhode Island—Providence	400
South Carolina—Columbia	152
South Dakota—Ipswich	101
Tennessee—Memphis	376
Texas—Ennis	150
Utah—F. E. Willard—Salt Lake	77
Vermont—Rutland	77
Virginia—Winchester	312
Washington (W.)—Seattle, University	256
Washington (E.)—Spokane, Hays Park	120
West Virginia—Clarksburg	450
Wisconsin—Madison Central	375
Wyoming—Casper	156

May 7, 1927

The Political Study Club

The new group was reluctant to align itself with the suffrage movement and risk the scorn of the community, so they chose the scholarly title, "The Political Study Club." Lucy Calkins, Ithaca resident since 1895, held the first meeting in her home on 6 Lake Avenue on March 14, 1899.



Thirteen women attended, about half of whom were widows or teachers. These women met regularly thereafter to explore and debate the issue of women's rights.

The group's last meeting was held in the same place on November 12, 1917, eighteen years later. The woman's vote in New York had finally been won, so the group jumped track and became - "The League of Women Voters."

The Federation is Born

The first alliance between these organizations was implemented when members of the Political Study Club were pushing for the woman's right to vote on school matters. In order to strengthen their petition to the city council, these women asked the members of the Ithaca Woman's Club and the WCTU to lend their support. Through their combined efforts, the petition was granted. From this seed, the idea of a permanent federation of women's clubs in the city broke ground.

On January 8, 1910, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Ithaca Woman's Club, and the Political Study Club²⁰ met at the home of Juanita Bates at 310 North Aurora Street (where the Prudential Life Building now stands) to discuss formation of a united front - thus the City Federation of Women's Organizations was born.

II

A Building for the Federation

At first only three groups were involved in the Federation, but others soon expressed interest in joining. The time was near when the membership would outgrow private homes, and the idea was suggested of a women's building which could be a center for them all. This building was also envisioned as a place where young working women in Ithaca

could find inexpensive rooming and enjoy recreational space, services that were hard to come by. One visitor to the city wrote:

I liked your free spirit and fine civic pride,
But ere long I was pained at one thing I espied.
You have fine amusements and a YMCA,
And places where boys could be busy and play.

But as for the women and girls in your town,
They haven't a place they could even sit down
And I thought that their being left out was a pity
And a very dark blot on your beautiful city.¹

The building idea showed promise, but there was no money available. They stored the idea in the back of their minds, and instead turned their energies toward securing a policewoman for the city, a police matron for the jail and female representative on the Board of Education, establishing Ithaca's first playground, forming a Mother-Teachers Club (forerunner of the PTA), investigating conditions of women prisoners in the county jail, replacing drinking cups with fountains in the schools, and installing a badly needed women's public rest room downtown.

Most shoppers were farming families from outlying regions, and the journey home was often tiresome. On April 15, 1915, in co-operation with the Business Men's Association, two rooms at 119 South Tioga Street near a livery stable were opened as public rest rooms. The Federation furnished one room with couches, magazines, and picture books, provided child care facilities to shoppers, served hot tea at cost, and supervised the entire operation. In the first month the rest room was visited by over three hundred individuals.²

World War I brought new priorities to the Federation membership. Women knitted, sewed, and dutifully rationed food. But they had no place to work together, and were again reminded of the need for a common structure. When the war was over in 1918, Federation members reconsidered the question.

In June 1920 the women decided to find and buy a building - this project would involve a tremendous fund-raising effort. A dinner at the First Episcopal Church launched the campaign. The *Ithaca Journal-News* mused the next day that this dinner was especially remarkable because of the "absence of out-of-town speakers to stir up enthusiasm in the project"; apparently, the *Journal* had expected outside agitators. Speakers for the event included female telephone workers, stenographers, and teachers. Over coffee, Mrs. Alma H. Potter announced that two hundred shop and fifty office employees of Morse Chain voted unanimously to support the proposed women's building "financially and in every possible way."³

Thus fund-raising, thereafter a perpetual state of affairs, began in earnest.

And What a Building!

Federation members were delighted at the purchase of the Winton-Brooks mansion on Seneca and Cayuga Streets seven months later on December 23, 1920. This was a beautiful and imposing structure, designed by Ithaca's William Henry Miller (also the architect of the Andrew Dickson White house, Uris Library at Cornell University, the old DeWitt School, and the Unitarian, Baptist, and old Congregational Churches). Luckily, property values had decreased at the close of the war and the Federation was able to buy the mansion for \$17,000, less than half the original figure.

How did they come up with that amount of money? No banker in town was interested in investing in a women's project. In the course of that year, the dedicated souls held a



Buttermilk Falls, Ithaca.



The stately Winton-Brooks mansion, home of the City Federation of Women's Organizations from 1920 to 1958.

myriad of receptions, a mid-summer fête, a "Baby Week," a book exhibit, as well as operated a tearoom. In addition, a limerick contest was inaugurated to "add zest to the drive."⁴ Entries included:

Be a sport and give a million for the building
That the women of the city want to boost
Don't you know just how it feels
To be lonely? Hate your meals?
When you've no congenial hang-out where
to roost?

* * *

In order to make our girls happy
To keep all the women quite snappy,
We need a nice house —
A community house —
Where gymnasium and parlors mayhap be.

* * *

There was a young woman named Prithaca
Who said with a frown
As she alighted in town
They have no community building in Ithaca.⁵

The debt was paid off in a single year. Proceeds from all projects when added to individual gifts and pledges (average pledge per woman — \$17.78) covered the costs. New public rest rooms were constructed, the place was renovated, and Federation women happily moved into their new home.

From the day of its opening, the Women's Community Building was used by an average of two thousand persons per month.⁶ More space was soon needed, and in the fall of

1926 the Federation bought the Eugene Baker house, adjacent to their building, for \$15,000. The "Annex" opened in 1927.

Friction

In 1931, a controversy took the Federation by storm. An Ithaca branch of the National Prohibition Reform Group had recently formed, and its members wanted to join the City Federation of Women's Organizations. Since any women's group was eligible for membership and all previous applicants had been routinely accepted, it came as quite a surprise when certain Federation members expressed a desire to keep them out. The Women's Christian Temperance Union provided the most vehement opposition, but other women felt similarly. The enemy, King Alcohol, had been met and beaten on the books, and they wanted to keep it that way. When the vote for admittance came, there was a tie. The *Ithaca Journal-News* reported:

It was hoped that the friction between the women's organizations of the town would be smoothed over, but the undecided vote has served to whip the flames of opposition and resentment into even greater fury. . . . The reform group is very indignant in their charge that the WCTU had been working for some time on an organized opposition to keep them out of a community building which they helped to organize and which should be open to all women's organizations of the city.⁷

There seemed to be no legitimate grounds for refusing. The building was in part publicly funded,⁸ in addition, the Federation by-laws stated that permission to use the building could not be denied to any women's organization in the city. Again they voted, and this time the tally read sixty-two to twenty-eight in favor of admittance. The Prohibition Reform Group was in.

This instance of contention was an exception; by-and-large the atmosphere in the Federation has been harmonious.

Cornucopia

Over the years, there have been between thirty and forty member organizations in the Federation, each with its own separate activities. In addition, the Federation as a whole would occasionally undertake a project. In 1922, members rented a farm about twenty miles north of Ithaca and converted it into a summer camp for Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Girls. This very successful camp is still in existence today, though no longer under the auspices of the Women's Federation.

The building also offered space for female transients who needed a place to stay overnight, and many visitors availed themselves of this service.

One girl missed her bus connection in Elmira one very stormy, snowy night, and started to walk to Ithaca. She had her ticket to Utica but no money. Someone picked her up along the road and left her here on the porch, wet, discouraged, and forlorn. We dried her off, put her to bed and saw to it that she had money enough for food until she reached her destination.⁹

Another luckless out-of-towner was stranded here one night by her brother.

The girl walked the street for many hours, exhausted and hungry . . . She stumbled into the Catholic Church and finally to the Women's Community Building. She was frightened, immature, and perhaps slightly unbalanced mentally, so most of the night was spent calming her down.¹⁰

She was later sent by bus back home, and it was arranged that she would be met by an Order of Catholic Sisters.

Most importantly, the women's building provided a much-needed second home to young working women. One member explained:

Many of the girls come to us very young – just out of High School – their first taste of freedom and money of their own. It could mean a big lonesome homesick time. But with these surroundings and the companionship they find here, they make the adjustment easily.¹¹

Some of the young women were from farms in isolated sections, some were from the city. The following are descriptions of some residents in the early 1950s:

[She] had a bad family background. She lived in an orphanage, not in Ithaca, and in various foster homes. When they brought her to us she was only 15 and a little rebel is I ever saw one. Only 15 but overdeveloped, no emotional stability, suspicious and unhappy. Her two years' contact with the girls did smooth things out for her and at least gave her a feeling of belonging.

* * *

Suddenly her house was sold and [the] former owner took her furniture and left town hardly giving [the] girl time to get her own possessions together.

* * *

Victim of [a] broken home, [she] found [her] home here, helped to make a good adjustment and take a softer view of life. She has had a little shell around herself when she came in but is breaking from it. Really brilliant and has sadly needed some feeling of security.

* * *

This one kept us completely stirred up for 8 months. She could talk herself in and out of situations and jobs faster than anyone I ever saw. Finally, to our immense relief, she decided to get married and announced the date. Conjecture ran wild as to whether she would or wouldn't. Odds were all against. But she fooled us all and married on the date set, although the week previous to the wedding she switched bridegrooms.¹²



A close-up view on an Ithaca winter's day.

The atmosphere was kindly and protective. One woman at the building expressed her concern:

It sometimes happens that girls do not always fit [their] job or the job fit the girl, and they lose out. Many do not have homes where they can conveniently return, and they get in a panic. I have one little girl now who has a borderline job which is not too certain, and she has no home. It is such a comfort to them when I can assure them they have no need to worry. They can have a home with us as long as need be. Some of them have gone weeks, but they are always very honorable about paying up when they can. I try to watch and see that they have food enough.¹³

Such was the Women's Community Building – not only a place for meetings and offices, but also a home.

Cramped Once More

Alas, the beautiful mansion, even with the Annex, proved to be too small. By 1956, one third of the member organizations were unable to use the building for lack of space and adequate facilities. The "transient room" often consisted of a cot in the upstairs hall. Furthermore, the building was over eighty years old and the cost of maintenance and upkeep became greater each year. A stiff wind was likely to tear off chunks of the roof, and there was no heating on the third floor, originally the attic of the building. A total of \$20,000 would be needed to bring it back to rights.¹⁴

A new building was clearly in order. The need for more meeting space would alone justify this move. And what about the recreational spaces and rooms for young working women? – presently, only eighteen bedrooms were available. To determine if these facilities were sufficient, a survey was broadly distributed in 1956 to women in their places of work – Cornell University, the banks, J. C. Penney's, the telephone company, Morse Chain, to name a few. The results established loud and clear that both rooms and recreational centers for young women most certainly were needed.

Age 23: Recreational grounds for the women in Ithaca should be improved. There is no ball field which we can play on that the men don't want. . . . The pool at the "Y" is so small you can't swim in any direction. It looks more like a "Hollywood bath tub." For the size of this city it could have recreational grounds any person would be honored to go.

Age 20: I think there is a great need in Ithaca for [a] working girls' residential hall. This would in part compensate for the poor housing in Ithaca for the working girl. As it is now, she must either share an apartment (which in the first place is hard to find and secondly quite expensive), or she must live alone in a room, most of which are expensive and without cooking facilities.

Age 23: When I first came to Ithaca I was astonished not to find a YWCA or something where I could stay a week or so until I could find an apartment. I ended up in a *cruddy* room in an Ithaca hotel. Surely Ithaca should have a reputable place for young women to stay temporarily at least.¹⁵



A broad smile lights up the face of Ester Spielman of Ludlowville, creator of the 3'x3'x 3½' cake which was sold in benefit of the proposed Women's Community Building. To her left, Mrs. R. C. Osborn, building committee chairwoman; to her right, Mrs. Whiton Powell, president of the City Federation of Women's Organizations. Below, the same cake by 1:15 that afternoon.

The City Federation of Women's Organizations

— Incorporated —



Louisa Lord Riley, founder of the Ithaca Woman's Club.

A Brand-New Building

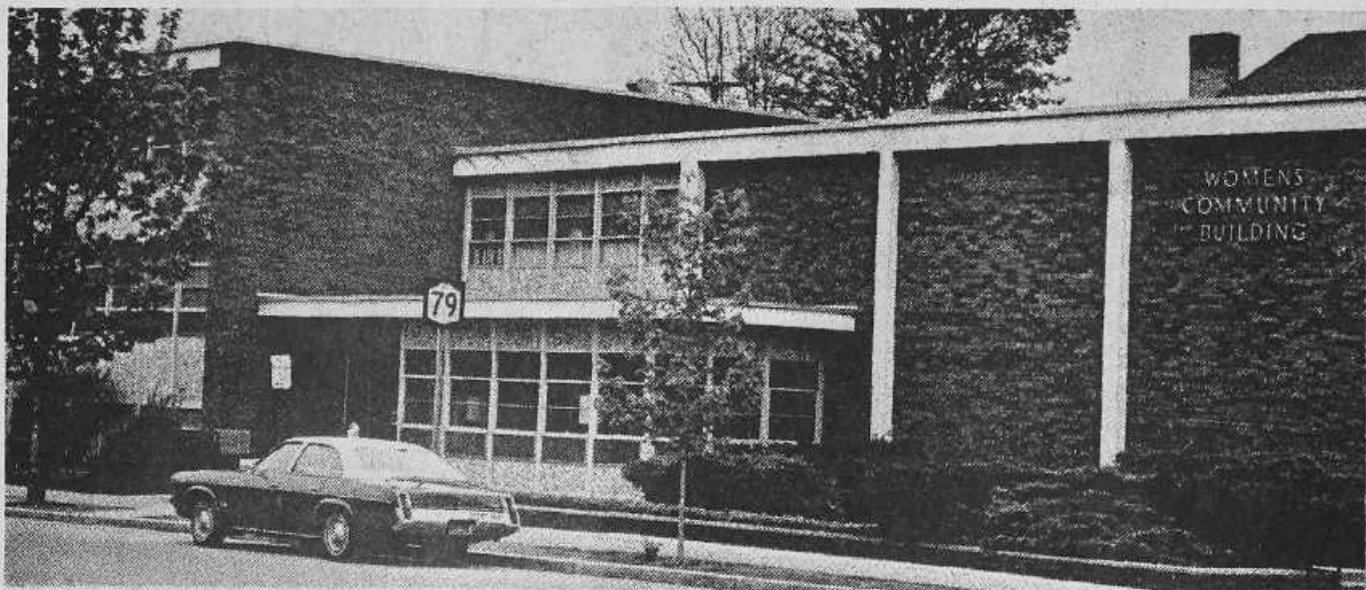
On November 9, 1954, Federation members unanimously voted to raze the Winton-Brooks mansion and the Annex, and build a newer, bigger building in their stead.

Here was another elephantine fund-raising feat. The estimated cost was \$285,000, of which \$100,000 had to be raised initially before they could qualify for further financing. Again, the banks were reluctant to invest, and so the money had to be scraped up elsewhere. Brownie Troop 201 of the Girl Scouts gave \$50 — their earnings of three years. A woman from Ludlowville baked a huge cake topped with a model of the proposed building (300 pieces sold at 35 cents apiece). And there were individual contributions and gifts aplenty. By January 1959, \$102,231 had been raised (50 percent in cash), and their consultant Walter Foertsch called it a "remarkable achievement."¹⁶

The new building opened on February 14, 1960 despite the raging snowstorm that had blanketed the city the previous night. Constant fund-raising activity went on for years after the opening to pay off the \$100,000 mortgage, originally set up on a twenty-year schedule. But Ithaca women realized, as one Federation member put it, that "the only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary."¹⁷ On May 20, 1969, a mere nine years later, the necessary sum was realized. The building was theirs at last. They held a party and jubilantly burned the mortgage.

Today

Ithaca women can take pride in the fact that the Women's Community Building is totally self-sufficient and debt-free. Dormitory and meeting space rentals, dues paid by member organizations, special fund-raising projects, and \$1,000 yearly from the United Way (which, the members boast, represents the smallest UW endowment made to any



Women's Community Building as it stands today.

organization except the Ithaca Nursery School) all help to pay the way.

The building now standing solidly at the corner of Seneca and Cayuga Streets came into being only after hopes and dreams without limit – plus innumerable meetings, thousands of letters, and rummage and bake sales galore.

Professions

Throughout history, a great number of women have thoroughly enjoyed woman's "traditional role" – that is, as mother, housekeeper and wife – and many, for good reason, choose that role today. But those women who wanted to explore other lifestyles without a family, or who simply had other interests in addition to their families, had to contend with strong outside disapproval. Such was the dilemma of women entering the professional world.

All of the following professions were originally "men only," and have since had to adjust accordingly.

Teachers

Teaching was the first profession to open up to women, this transition occurring in the mid-1800s.¹ Soon it became the most acceptable job for a woman – perhaps because it was the most "maternal" of the professions – and kept that status well into the 1900s. For a long time, teachers were in especially great demand. County schools were rarely more than a few miles apart so that youngsters could get there easily. And each of these many schools needed a teacher.

The story of Cornelia Bascom of Ludlowville reflects the attitude in the mid-1800s towards the female teacher. Cornelia took two orphans into her home and gave them lessons, room, and board. They, in return, did chores around the house. Though a "brilliant scholar,"² she soon found that the students expected more of her than her ability to teach. Cornelia, you see, lacked all home-making skills, and alas, her young charges could not do without domestic delights.

Poor soul, the tragedy of it was she didn't know she was not making them happy. They were there to be taught, and she taught them, to be fed and she fed them, to be clothed and she clothed them. What more could she do? Poor Miss Bascom and poor boys! They endured their meager life for a few years and then revolted.³

One romantic moonlit night, the boys escaped by climbing down a rope from their window. The same moon allowed neighbors to observe the daring escape and so they were caught, but the whole episode brought a quick end to Cornelia's school and to her tutoring ambitions. Such was the fate of those dismissing too lightly their female responsibilities.

Merchants

Many times the "first" woman in any given profession was boosted along the way by the support and understanding

she got at home. Susan B. Anthony came from a family of physicians. Lawyer Georgia Hare came from a family of lawyers. And Mrs. Ayers, the county's first female merchant, was married to a merchant. The two of them opened a store on West State Street in 1817, "he engaging in the sale of general merchandise and Mrs. Ayers specializing in millinery and ladies wear."⁴

At first, as with teaching, the world of merchandising allowed women in only that most feminine niche – millinery. Later on, other women entered the millinery market, and then all aspects of merchandising. Today, women have infiltrated just about every kind of business there is, and have made it their business to do so.

Miss or Mrs. Drs.

The healing art was among the next of the professions to open up to women – like teaching, it was one in which women were considered to have "natural aptitude" (the nurse, mother, midwife). Women had long been nurses, but in a "non-professional" capacity.

There were a few lady doctors scattered throughout this county in its early history. Samantha S. Nivison was one, practicing in Dryden in the 1860s. "Mrs. Dr. Albina Hunter" (note the arrangement of titles) took up office at the corner of State and Tioga Streets in 1883. She was lavishly praised in 1887 as one of the most successful physicians in Ithaca.

Mrs. Albina Hunter of this place has demonstrated that it is possible for a female doctor of medicine to establish a successful practice and secure the confidence and good will of her contemporary male practitioners.⁵

Mrs. Dr. Hunter was one of the thirteen women doctors admitted to the Homeopathic Medical Society of Tompkins County in 1880, the first of which were allowed in only "after considerable discussion."⁶ With 166 men enrolled, that amounted to one female doctor to every sixteen males.



Millinery was one of the first professions open to women.