

If there's a list of "'unsung heroes" in the history of Wellington, then the names Ida Hoge and Ethel Showalter must be included.

Unsatisfied with the idea of graduating from school simply to become part of the social fabric of the town, these two young girls resisted the expectations assigned to women of that era. They made, and executed, a plan to continue learning. Gathering a group of friends, they formed a "**study club**" which would eventually grow and morph into the Wellington Public Library.

The year was October 17th, 1898, and Ida and Blanche Hoge hosted their first organizational meeting. Eighteen girls attended, making 20 total founding members. Meeting on alternate Monday evenings, the young ladies followed a course of studies and exchanged thoughts and friendly conversation. They hoped to build long-lasting friendships.

The first winter, the **Club** studied five English 19th Century writers, followed by Kipling and Shakespeare. The next few years, they pursued English history and more literature.

They chose to name their group "The **Prentis Club**" in tribute to Mrs. Noble L. (Caroline) **Prentis**, who was considered to be the epitome of a "typical Kansas woman." Mrs. **Prentis** was indeed noteworthy as she was a pioneer in women's work in the newspaper and railroad fields. She was also involved in the women's **club** movement, which was later named the State Women's Federation of Clubs, and the Ottawa Kansas Chautauqua Society.

In the fall of 1899, Mrs. **Prentis** visited the Wellington **club** and the members found her to be a warm, gracious guest. Upon learning that Wellington had no public library, Mrs. **Prentis** strongly encouraged the **Club** to assume that project as their special responsibility.

Up until this time, there was no public library. The **Club** members, being young and enthusiastic, embarked on this community project. For the next eight years they "lived and breathed for the library." The **club** motto became "Literature is Ultimate Truth and Beauty Interpreted."

As part of their undertaking, the **Prentis Study Club** organized various fundraisers and special events. One particularly noteworthy occasion occurred on New Year's Day, 1900. The young ladies decided to host what would become a very memorable reception.

The **Club** members, adorned in the festive **Club** colors of turquoise blue and white carnations, gave a reception for their gentlemen friends at the home of Mr. F.K. Robbins. Rather than presenting the usual calling cards of the time, the gentlemen were asked to donate a book. This successful endeavor resulted in the collection of over two-hundred books, forming the foundation of the **Prentis Library**.

The **Club** purchased an additional 200 books with funds they had raised. In The Wellington Daily News, dated March 3rd, 1902, it states that "Miss Maude Barrett was chosen to serve as the first librarian." She served for the first two years, opening the library to the public on Saturday afternoons.

As the years passed, the library outgrew the **Club's** ability to maintain the collection. Through the Federation of Women's Clubs, the **Prentis Library** was turned over to the city of Wellington. Mayor T.A. Hubbard accepted their generous gift and appointed a committee to organize a Wellington Library Association.

Fifty years after the **Club** was established, Ida Hoge remained a member and was listed as "active" in the 1947-48 **Club** booklet. Even though the **Prentis Study Club** no longer had direct responsibility for the book collection, **Club** members continued to be actively involved by serving on the Library Board.

These women are owed a debt of gratitude for their foresight and dedication to the Wellington community. If you are interested in learning more about the **Prentis Study Club**, the Library has "The History of the **Prentis**

**Club "** by Berthe Van Vorhees in the display case.

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