

BOULDER DAILY CAMERA: DECEMBER 10, 2000

A hundred years of beatitude

* * Members of The Woman's Club of Boulder started the Boulder Day Nursery in 1917 and has provided generous support over the years. In recognition of their 100 year anniversary and their disbanding of the club, the nursery is posting this article so that others may recognize their many contributions to Boulder.

It was December, 1900, and Republican William McKinley had just defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan to win a second term as president. A 15-year-old company, American Telephone and Telegraph, was on the move.

And away in provincial Colorado, the Woman's Club of Boulder was being organized. With a motto of, "Where there is work, there we are," the club became active in the Boulder community, cooking meals for the needy and doing other good works, such as starting the Boulder Day Nursery in 1917.

"They stressed that they wanted to work real hard for other people," says member Paula Temple, 82.

"But as we came to the part of our lives where we have less energy for hands-on projects, we've become more a giver of money," says Charlotte Haynes, 82.

And as fortune would have it, the club would have plenty to give: Early members had invested in that up-and-coming outfit now known as AT&T, and soon they had more than sweat equity to offer.

Since its formation, the club has given out hundreds of thousands of dollars to mostly local charities. In 1998-99, for instance, the club handed out \$11,000, from a \$50 donation to the homeless shelter to \$5,000 for Chautauqua's centennial.

"We've been a much more important club in Boulder than anybody really knows," says Maxine Schmidt (who gives her age as "old enough"), a member for 35 years.

On Wednesday, exactly 100 years after the club's founding, the few remaining members will gather to celebrate the centennial by ... disbanding? After such a storied history, why would the club fold up its tent now (though members will remain fast friends, of course)?

"It's fading away because we're fading away..." Schmidt says.

Five of her compatriots, working on egg-salad, coffee and eclaires, laugh at the joke, aware of both its truth and its inadequacy. Ranging from age 71 — Bea Kalaminsky — to 98 — Verna Hamm, currently in the hospital — members know they are closer to dusk than dawn, but they also know how alive they feel. And what of the estimated \$250,000 in AT&T stock, proceeds from which seeded so many good works across the 20th century? "We discussed it a lot, and decided to give it to the Boulder Community Hospital Foundation," says Dorothy Corman, 83, at the group's penultimate luncheon.

One hundred years. From President McKinley to President ... well, never mind: It's been a long time. What happened? Woman's clubs across America are losing members like loose chads. None of the Boulder members' daughters, for example, ever joined the group that once hummed with 500 members.

"It's because women don't have time. So many of them work outside the home," Corman says. "Now women are networking in the business world," Kalaminsky says. "Now women have business clubs."

But the last members of the club are not complaining. They're glad to see the advances made by women, and they accept that the club's time has passed.

Some will miss it.

"The women here are talented and dynamic. It's a pleasure to see aging women that way. When I joined, I wanted to grow up and be just like them," says Kalaminsky, inspiring laughter.

Others won't: Corman has been a member of a woman's club since she was 21, joining the local club wherever she moved.

"I have more important things to be sad about," says Corman. Then, with a smile, she says: "I'm more sad about being this old."

But to me, these women don't seem old — they seem almost ... immortal. After all, their work — their joy — will continue to give, even after they themselves are gone.

Clay Evans, December 10, 2000; to contact Clay Evans call (303) 473-1352 or e-mail evansc@thedailycamera.com