

## SWEENY CIVIC CLUB 50 YEARS 1961

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### PROVIDES COMMUNITY HOUSE

## Sweeny Civic Club Is Oldest Country Group

The Sweeny Civic Club will observe its 50th anniversary next year. It is the oldest organized service club in the town, and perhaps the county for that matter.

The club's objects are now, and have been since its inception back in 1912 — "To promote civic and social improvements through organized efforts, and to promote the interests and improvements of the town of Sweeny."

The club recently adopted the promotion of a community hospital as one of this year's projects, and in doing so voted to donate \$400 toward this goal. They have also gone on record as backing the "City Beautification" program adopted by the city.

These, and other things the club is currently doing, is common knowledge to the general public, but few people know of some of the earlier accomplishments of the organization — and that the Civic Club got its name because its members were "up-braided" by a minister's wife shortly after it was organized.

This interesting, though perhaps a little embarrassing, fact was told the Facts reporter by Mrs. Marie D. Ellis, one of the seven charter members of the organization and the club's first president.

Mrs. Ellis has many memories of the earlier day events and activities of the club.

For instance, she and Mrs. George Nugent rode in a horse-drawn buggy daily for two weeks canvassing the district to obtain signatures on a petition that allowed the Sweeny school to be classified as an independent school district, and the organization bought the first piano owned by the brand-new two-story brick school building constructed in 1912.

Other women making up the list of charter members besides Mrs. Nugent and herself, included Mrs. Paul Eades, Mrs. Joe McNeil, Mrs. George Bagley and Mrs. Oscar Joiner.

Mrs. Ellis relates that the club put on a play in Sweeny and Brazoria to raise money to make a down payment on the piano. They had ice cream socials to raise the balance of the money.

She said the women called their organization the "Dorcas Needlework Club" when they first initiated their regular meetings. This name was chosen because they always carried what ever hand sewing they happened to be doing at

the moment with them to the club meetings.

Their first "City Beautification" project was a big success, she recalls, but as a result of the event they were reprimanded by the minister's wife, and decided to change the club's name. In fact, they were asked to, she said.

The story goes like this — "We just called our project an old fashioned clean-up campaign. Following an extremely dry summer, the weeds had grown high all over town, there were piles of empty cans and trash everywhere, and the club members resolved to do something about it."

"We enlisted the help of our husbands, and anyone else we could persuade to give a day's work toward the project. The response was very good, and we promised the men that we would cook a big noon meal for all the workers," she said.

"Naturally, those of us engaged in preparing the meal brought our children along. We also invited the families of the workmen, and the event turned into a community social, but lots of work was done."

"There was enough food left over to serve supper that night, and someone of the group. I do not recall just who, decided we should celebrate the success of the event, and they asked two Bay City fiddlers to come over and play for a dance that night."

"Most all of the families stayed on and danced and had a real good time, and the women of the club were feeling pretty smug about the tasks that had been accomplished."

"But our feeling of pride in a job well-done was short-lived when the minister's wife called on me the next day."

With a twinkle in her eye Mrs. Ellis reported the following conversation—"The minister's wife," she said, "was outraged that an organization with a biblical name would have the audacity to sponsor a dance, and she suggested that we change the name of the organization." And, so it was done.

Mrs. Ellis said the group agreed at their next meeting to change their name to the "Civic Club".

Many of the projects initiated by the seven-member club 49 years ago are still being carried on by the organization today.

The membership roll is much larger, and so is its annual budget, but problems of a growing

community and way and means to meet these needs seem to be not too different now than they were then.

Mrs. Ellis recalls that the Sweeny Civic Club women built up quite a reputation for their culinary arts during the earlier days of the club's activities for they raised money to finance their projects by cooking dinners for various events. Today they still do.

One of the club's projects begun shortly after its organization is one of today's current projects — the perpetual care of the Sweeny Cemetery.

They accomplished the job by doing the work themselves then, and now the club hires a caretaker on an annual basis, but they cater meals to finance the project.

Only the members of some 25 years standing know that the Civic Club actually owns the land dedicated for the public cemetery. Therefore the organization feels a great responsibility toward the care and upkeep of a project begun by dire necessity by a few dedicated women so long ago.

Mrs. Ellis recalls that in those days all of the land owners had family burial plots in some location on their own lands. But as the community grew, and people came in as tenant farmers, and the like, when a member of their family died, there was no place for them to be buried.

She recalls one particular case where a father had to search for a couple of days before he found someone willing to sell land to be used as a burial plot for his little girl who had died. He ultimately secured a third of an acre of land adjoining the Sweeny family plot.

In relating the incident she said, "Our organization discussed the situation at our next meeting and as a result we were able to secure a three-acre plot of land from R. D. McDonald that is today's public cemetery."

"We worked hard and long to get it surveyed and paid for, but we felt it fulfilled a great need in the community," she concluded.

The club now owns its own building where regular meetings are held monthly, more accurate records of the club's activities are kept now than were in the first year's of the organization.