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ABSTRACT

The Women's National Press Club (WNPC) existed in Washington, D.C., from 1919 to 1971 primarily because the National Press Club (NPC) refused to admit women. The WNPC offered mutual support in the face of male hostility. Women were virtually cut off from news sources; 20 women had Capitol press gallery privileges in 1879, but they were effectively excluded in 1880 when part-time correspondents were banned. The WNPC held luncheon meetings and invited speakers who gave the women a chance to obtain news stories and meet influential people. Leadership of the club was a hard fought honor and the women who became president exemplified journalistic competence and dedication. While most women journalists were confined to the society or women's pages, the NWPC presidents of the early 1930s held their own against male competitors, writing on politics, crime, courts, public affairs, and other front-page topics. Eleanor Roosevelt became a member in 1938 on the basis of her nationally syndicated column, "My Day," though her application was protested by some because she did not earn her living by writing. The situation for women improved in the 1950s when they were allowed to sit in the gallery of the NPC, but space was limited and they could not hear or ask questions. In the 1960s the State Department insisted that women be permitted to participate, and finally, in 1971, the NPC decided to admit women. Although the WNPC admitted men in the 1970s and changed its name to the Washington Press Club in an effort to survive, in 1985 it merged with NPC. (SRT)

The Women's National Press Club: Case Study in the Professionalization of Women Journalists

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Abstract

From 1919 to 1971, the Women's National Press Club existed in Washington, D.C., an outgrowth of the refusal of the National Press Club to admit women. This paper represents the first attempt to document the club's history from three perspectives: Its founding, initial leadership, and activities. It concludes that the club played a vital role in the lives of many of its members, teaching them to strive for the equality they finally gained in the 1970's. The conclusion states that the club allowed them to learn leadership skills and to make helpful contacts with other women, enhanced their knowledge of how to operate within the political climate of the nation's capital and provided them access to influential newsmakers. The club is described as raising the self-esteem of its members to the point where it was no longer needed since it had prepared them to press for - and to attain - a semblance of equality with male journalists.

The Women's National Press Club: Case Study in the Professionalization of Women Journalists

The year 1919 marked a high point for American women. Congress, confronted by evidence of women's contribution to the World War I war effort, passed the Nineteenth Amendment giving women the right to vote. As an outgrowth of the successful suffrage campaign, another event occurred that deserves attention from historians, although it has received virtually none to date. That event was the formation of the Women's National Press Club in Washington, D.C. This group was to continue until 1971, a self-help organization of women journalists as they fought for equal rights with men in the competition to get news in the nation's capital.

Born in the fall of 1919, the Women's National Press Club sought to combat what the first honorary president, Cora Rigby, called "the conspiracy of men to keep women off the newspapers - or at least to reduce their number, wages and importance to a minimum." Chief of the Washington Bureau of the Christian Science Monitor, Rigby was one of the very few women to have attained an influential part in Washington journalism. Along with other founding members of the club, she wanted to set up a formal organization to offer women journalists mutual support in the face of male hostility.[1]

Today nothing remains of the Women's National Press Club except 24 boxes of unindexed records recently deposited in the archives of the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. This paper represents the first attempt to document the history of the club by using material obtained by the author before the records were transferred to the archives. The club is viewed from three main perspectives: Its founding, initial leadership, and activities. The concluding section examines why the club died and assesses the role that it played in the professional development of Washington women journalists. In the paper the club will be referred to by its initials NWPC.

Founding

As one of the founders, Carolyn Vance Bell, recalled years later, "The campaign to give women the vote was closely entwined with the beginning of the NWPC." Of the six founders, three were volunteer publicists for the National's Woman's Party, the militant arm of the suffrage movement. They were Florence Brewer Boeckel, Eleanor Taylor Marsh Nelson and Alice Gram Robinson.[2]

"After the passage of the suffrage amendment...these three were looking around for new worlds to conquer, establishing a partnership for doing what we call today 'public relations,'" Bell continued. "The idea of starting a woman's press club where they could peddle their wares enthused them." Bell recollected that she herself suggested the idea of the press club to the

publicists, who handled news releases for women's groups like the Visiting Nurses Association. Robinson noted late in her life that the club began because "we needed to keep in close touch with the newspaper women, of course. It was good business for us and also they were our friends."[3]

The organizational meeting took place on September 27, 1919, at the office of the Boeckel-Nelson-Robinson public relations firm. Some 40 women attended but not Bell herself because she was pregnant. "It was considered shameful for a woman to show herself in public when there was the slightest evidence of the blessed state," she recalled.[4]

The letter of invitation went out to all women in government publicity bureaus, women reporters and society writers on local newspapers and the few women who worked in news bureaus. In addition to Bell and the three women in public relations, it was signed by Cora Rigby, whose position with the Monitor made her the single most distinguished women journalist in Washington, and Elizabeth King (later Stokes), a reporter for the New York Evening Post. Bell herself was a syndicated feature writer for the Newspaper Enterprise Association.

Giving impetus to the effort to organize were discriminatory practices of the National Press Club. This organization, started in 1908, refused to allow women to join or even to use its facilities. The need for women to band together in protest became apparent when the Prince of Wales came to Washington shortly after the NWPC's organizational meeting. His host was the National Press Club - and no women reporters were invited to meet him.[5]

As Bell recalled, "The club came into being because of the climate of the day with women demanding their rights on all sides." Twenty-eight members joined before the end of the year. Lily Lykes Rowe (later Shepard), correspondent for the New York Tribune, was elected president at the first luncheon-business meeting, held November 6, 1919, at a Washington restaurant. Rigby was chosen "honorary president," and Taylor secretary-treasurer. Dues were set at $2.50 annually with the warning an additional $2.50 might be needed later in the year.[6]

The WNPC was not the first organization of Washington women journalists. Its members - exceptional though they may have been in the male-dominated world of newspapers - possessed a heritage that predated the Civil War. In 1850 Jane G. Swisshelm, an abolitionist who wrote for Horace Greeley's New York Tribune, had won equal rights with men journalists to sit in the Congressional press galleries. After the Civil War women like Sara Clarke Lippincott, who wrote as "Grace Greenwood" for the New York Times, comprised a successful segment of the capital press corps.[7]

According to the Congressional Directory, twenty women were entitled to Capitol press gallery privileges in 1879, representing about 12 percent of the total number of 166 correspondents. About 1880, however, a change in rules in effect excluded women from the galleries by banning part-time correspondents. This led to a sharp decline in female journalists, who were cut off from valuable news sources.[8]

In this period at least some attempt was made to organize women journalists. A book on life in Washington published by Mrs. E.N. Chapin in 1887 referred to her as "an ex-secretary of the Ladies Press Association at Washington." Little else is known about this group.[9]

By the World War I era the number of women journalists in Washington again had reached a significant figure, in spite of the prevailing prejudice against them. In 1919, ten women correspondents were listed in the Congressional Directory as entitled to privileges in the Congressional press galleries. This was a sharp rise since 1912 when only one woman, Mrs. George F. Richards, was accredited (and concealed her sex by signing her columns for a New England newspaper chain simply "Richards"). Of the charter members of the NWPC, four were accredited to the press gallery - Rigby, King, Winifred Mallon, a correspondent for the Chicago Tribune (who later moved to the New York Times), and Roberta Bradshaw of the Buffalo Evening News.[10]

At the suggestion of Bell, the WNPC confinded itself chiefly to luncheon gatherings, "the idea being that we could more easily arrange to lunch together once a week than to meet otherwise," Mallon recalled in a club history written in 1937. Frequently it invited persons who were in the news to speak at its meetings. This fulfilled two objectives: Providing news stories for members and helping elevate the status of women journalists by giving them personal contact with influential individuals, both male and female.[11]

The first guest was Margaret Bondfield, a British expert on labor, who was in Washington as an adviser at an international

labor conference. She spoke at a luncheon on Nov. 13, 1919. Shortly thereafter the WNPC gave a tea for Lowell Thomas, on his return from travels abroad as the chief of a Presidential mission to study the history of World War I. There he told for the first time in the capital of his meeting with the legendary Lawrence of Arabia.[12]

Unlike their male counterparts in the National Press Club, the women journalists were not able to afford their own club building. As Mallon phrased it, the club was "rich only in its associations and interests" and never had its own "home." Over the years it met in many different places in Washington - at restaurants, tea rooms, hotels, particularly the Willard, and headquarters of women's groups like the National Woman's Party and the American Association of University Women.[13]

According to Bell, the WNPC was put "on the map" after Warren G. Harding was elected President in 1920. His wife, Florence, invited club members to sail down the Potomac River on the Presidential yacht and honored them with a tea at the White House. After that it was clear membership in the NWPC conferred prestigeous benefits.[14]

Still the group was not always taken as seriously as it wished to be. For example, William G. McAdoo, secretary of the treasury under President Wilson, talked down to club members at an early luncheon. "He treated us as if we were debutantes to be flattered by pretty compliments instead of giving us at least some shreds of information about current affairs," one member recalled. "He left us deflated and resentful."[15]

Occasional disappointments did not keep the club from an increasingly important role in the life of Washington women journalists. Of the 28 original members, 14 still were listed on the club rooster in 1937, when the NWPC had expanded to about 100 members. It was plain that the club served as a mechanism to allow its members to project an image that they were dignified and valued members of the journalistic profession even though they struggled with the handicap of being women.[16]

Early Leadership

Over the years the club roll served as a "Who's Who" of Washington women journalists. To be selected as president was an honor achieved through elections that sometimes were hotly contested. The women who held this position exemplified journalistic competence and dedication. From 1920 to 1926 Rigby, a frail, dignified figure known as "the soul of integrity," served as the elected president. During this period the club had no formal constitution. When one was adopted in 1926 after fierce debate, the president's term was limited, first to one year with the possibility of re-election for a second year and then to only one year.[17]

In the next decade the following were elected: Sallie V.H. Pickett, society editor of the Washington Star, Ruth Jones, society editor of the Washington Herald, Martha Strayer, a reporter for the Washington Daily News, Genevieve Forbes Herrick, a correspondent for the Chicago Tribune, Mallon and Mary Hornaday, who had been hired by Rigby for the Christian Science Monitor.

These women had attained professional standing in different ways. As a group they represented the diversity of journalistic interests included in the club membership. Pickett was considered the "dowager empress" of Washington society, one who had seen administrations rise and fall but never "missed a move in the social picture,' a contemporary observer said.[18]

Jones, who wrote under the pen name of "Jean Eliot," was famous for her skill in covering big society stories - visits of royalty, weddings, receptions and other functions of Washington's upper classes known as the "cave dwellers." When she died in 1940, Eleanor ("Cissy") Patterson, publisher of the Washington Times-Herald and also a WNPC member, praised Jones by quoting "the men" as saying, "She makes up her own page like a man."[19]

The leadership of Pickett and Jones, which extended from 1927 until 1929, marked the high point of the influence of society writers in the NWPC. In 1932 a group of society reporters withdrew in objection to the club policy of emphasizing luncheons with serious speakers. These women organized The Newspaper Women's Club. Unlike the NWPC, it offered associate memberships for prominent women featured in the society pages, and established an honorary membership category for women famous either in their own right or through their husbands.[20]

Under the leadership of co-founders Margaret Hart and Katharine M. Brooks, both society reporters for the Washington Star, the new group staged parties and charitable benefits. It also secured funds for the purchase of its own clubhouse in the Dupont Circle area of Washington, perhaps a reason why it remains in existence

today while the WNPC has vanished. In spite of initial hostility, through the years both groups included many of the same members with the Newspaper Women's Club offering numerous parties in contrast to the more political orientation of the NWPC. The NWPC never sought honorary members and proudly restricted membership to working professionals.[21]

The NWPC presidents of the early 1930s all were women who had proven themselves able to qualify for the hard-won title of "front page girl," the name given to newspaperwomen of the period deemed able to hold their own with male competitors. Whereas most women journalists were confined to society or women's pages or to the excessively sentimental feature writing of "sob sisters," the "front page girl" was allowed the rare privilege of covering the same "hard news" as men, writing on politics, crime, courts, public affairs and other front-page topics. Even so, these women were paid less than men and expected to make "few demands on their city editors," one "front page girl" explained.[22]

Strayer, who worked for the Washington Daily News for 40 years, attained her dream of moving from a secretarial job to a reporter's position by a physical feat. She walked 25 blocks through five-foot-deep snowdrifts to cover the collapse of a theater roof. Herrick was known both for her crisp reporting on Chicago criminals and her insightful articles on women in politics at the national level. Mallon had been hired by the New York Times in 1929 and assigned to politics - a landmark beat for a woman. Hornaday, Rigby's protege, regularly covered Congress and had a reputation for being "quiet, modest, competent,"in the opinion of her peers.[23]

While a limited number of publicity writers for governmental or non-profit organizations continued to be admitted as members, they did not play the leadership role in the WNPC that the newspaper women did. Successive presidents carried on the "front-page girl" tradition. Among them were Doris Fleeson (1937), a political columnist for the New York Daily News; Ruby Black (1939), who ran her own Washington bureau and was the first woman hired by the United Press; Helen Essary (1940), a columist for the Washington Times-Herald; and Esther Van Wagoner Tufty (1941), who like Black operated an independent news service. In the midst of these "hard-news" reporters, one society writer gained the presidency. She was Hope Ridings Miller, society editor of the Washington Post, who was elected in 1938.

Most of these women, like other club members, benefitted immeasurably from the interest in woman journalists taken by Eleanor Roosevelt, who was First Lady from 1933 to 1945. Realizing that newspaperwomen needed to obtain news that their masculine competitors could not get to keep employed during the Depression, Mrs. Roosevelt held more than 400 press conferences for women only during her White House years. Through the press conferences, which provided a steady stream of New Deal news geared to women's interests, she came into contact with almost all of the members of the WNPC.[24]

Mrs. Roosevelt herself became a member of the WNPC in 1938 on the basis of her syndicated diary-like column, "My Day," which was distributed by United Features. She was proposed for membership by Doris Fleeson and seconded by Ruby Black and Bess Furman, a

reporter for the Associated Press, who later moved to the New York Times and became WNPC President in 1946. The application, however, created controversy.[25]

Some members thought it was wrong to admit a woman who did not earn her living by writing, even though Mrs. Roosevelt earned a substantial sum from the column, which ran in hundreds of newspapers. Black, who owed her United Press job to Mrs. Roosevelt's insistence that women be assigned to cover her, was forced to deny "in all-inclusive detail and with final and definite emphasis that I am your ghost (writer for "My Day")," she told the First Lady. Furman jotted down in her diary that nine votes were cast against Mrs. Roosevelt by the club's "Old Guard," while she, Fleeson and Black pushed for the acceptance aided by Frances Parkinson Keyes, then a magazine writer and later a best-selling novelist.[26]

From the argument over Mrs. Roosevelt's admission, it was obvious the club members did not want to cast doubt on their standing as women who achieved in their own right. Once in the club, Mrs. Roosevelt was treated like her fellow members. After her name on the club roster appeared the asterisk commonly used to designate married members, but nothing indicated that her husband was Franklin D. Roosevelt, the President of the United States.[27]

Mrs. Roosevelt demonstrated her interest in the group in various ways. Annually she invited its members to the Grid-Widow party she gave at the White House for women journalists and wives who were not invited to the annual Gridiron Club dinner for the President. This event, at which the President is traditionally

"roasted" by elite Washington journalists, remained a stag affair until 1974 when women were admitted to the club.[28]

In addition, she was a fixture at the WNPC's annual Stunt Party - the group's own version of a satirical political show like the Gridiron performance. In 1968 Furman remembered Mrs. Roosevelt as "a tall, distinguished, dramatic figure, (who) rose, year after year, from her seat at the head table of the Women's National Press Club Stunt Party to reply to the ribbing she had just received in the dramatic skits of the Club." Although the club had begun its stunt parties in 1928, their significance as news events was enhanced when Mrs. Roosevelt became the first President's wife to attend in 1933. Whether or not all club members enthusiastically welcomed her, Eleanor Roosevelt was the NWPC's most famous member during her White House years.[29] In a sense she personified the active, energetic women journalists who were determined to break out of their subordinate role in the nation's capital.

Activities

The annual stunt party activities, which were discontinued during World War II, absorbed more of the the club members' talents and time than any other single event. The journalists devised elaborate dialogue, songs, and costumes to satire the political scene and invited outstanding Washington women to attend. Typical of the skits were two given in 1933 when President Roosevelt had closed the banks to avert total collapse of the monetary system. In one, Katharine Dayton, a

writer for the Saturday Evening Post, did a telephone monologue between Mrs. Democratic and Mrs. Republican, whose telephone number was Deflator 0000. As Furman recalled years later, "Mrs. Democratic had a buzzing in her fiscal year and had to lie flat on her back with her banks closed." Mrs. Democratic had troubles with her children, Frankie and Eleanor, "who was a little venturesome and would go on the air," a reference to Mrs. Roosevelt's controversial paid radic broadcasts, Furman continued.[30]

The second skit was aimed more directly at Mrs. Roosevelt. Titled "Babies, Just Babies," the name of a magazine that Mrs. Roosevelt edited, its lyrics ran, "Where did you come from, babies dear? Out of the ballot-box into the here. Where did you get your depression blues? From Herbert Hoover as he passed through." Although this may seem innocuous today, Mrs. Roosevelt found it embarrassing, particularly since the skit opened with the following: "We are new to the business of running the show. We're babies, just babies, just babies." According to her biographer, the ridicule influenced her decision to cancel the magazine contract.[31]

Through the years a host of famous figures were guests of the WNPC at its weekly luncheons and occasional formal banquets. They included Presidents Roosevelt, Truman. Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon as well as their wives, heads of foreign states, ambassadors and their wives visiting royalty, legislative leaders, and candidates for high office. Outstanding women like Amelia Earhart, Ethel Barrymore, Rebecca West, Clare Boothe Luce and Dorothy Thompson often spoke to the group. Sometimes guests appeared on an off-the-record basis, which led to friction over

what could or could not appear in print. In 1939 members were assured that they could always write about the fact that a guest was there, who accompanied him or her, what clothing was worn, and "what impression" the speaker made.[32]

Often it was hard for struggling journalists to find the money for club events. In 1985, Lee Jaffe, Washington correspondent for the Wichita Beacon in the 1930s, recalled when the NWPC's treasury had only $3.75. "It was a hardship for some of the girls when the club had a banquet and charged $3," she said.[33]

During World War II club programs boosted the war effort, featuring military and international leaders. Some members, including Esther Tufty and Ruth Cowan, an Associated Press reporter who served as club president in 1947, became war correspondents. With male journalists in uniform, opportunities expanded for women to be hired in newspaper and government publicity jobs. This enabled the WNPC to enlarge its membership as women covered beats ranging from Congress to sugarless cookery. By 1951 it had 335 members and a decade later more than 400.[34]

In spite of widened opportunities during the war, women journalists encountered continuing discrimination. Club members took a stand against it, but on an individual, not an organized basis. In 1944, for example, Mary Hornaday raised objections to the fact that women who belonged to the White House Correspondents Corps and paid the same dues as men were not allowed to attend its annual dinner. She also protested against the National Press Club ban on allowing women to "attend speeches given by officials to the press in the club's domain."[35]

World War II brought increased dependence on radio news and with it greater recognition of women broadcasters. In 1944 the WNPC amended its by-laws to include them as members. Reflecting their growing prominence in the club, Patty Cavin, commentator and producer of "Capital By-Lines," a show over an NBC radio affiliate in Washington, was elected club president in 1963.

One of the first broadcasters to join was Ruth Crane Schaefer, who was in charge of radio and television programs for women at WMAL, a Washington station. She played the part of Mamie Eisenhower, complete with bangs, at a stunt party with Mrs. Eisenhower present. "It was the only time I came near forgetting my lines as she didn't look amused," Schaefer recollected a decade later. "I wondered if she was offended by my take-off. Later she told me she didn't hear a word because the microphone went dead just as I went on."[36]

One of the club's best-known broadcast personalities of the post-World War II era, May Craig, a correspondent for Maine newspapers, was president of the group in 1943. For 17 years Craig appeared regularly on the NBC "Meet the Press" program. When she retired in 1966, she was honored at a reception given jointly by the WNPC and the National Press Club. The program included a film in which Craig was praised as "the quaint looking little lady in the hat - the petite grandmother who for 17 years skewered the high and mighty on the hat pin of her questions...with Cabinet officers, politicians and union leaders squirming and twisting to get out of her way."[37]

The Craig tribune was an example of growing contact between the clubs. Following World War II the WNPC took the first step to

integrate professional associations of men and women journalists. In 1946 it invited men to attend its annual dinner, at which President Truman was the guest of honor. That evening the club presented its first Woman of the Year award - to Lise Meitner, an atomic scientist. Similar awards were given for several years, then, like the stunt parties, dropped by the 1960s as members turned their attention to broader issues involving equal access to the news. Although there had been a swing towards conventional women's club projects in 1956 when the group published a cookbook, the WNPC took a militant stance against sex discrimination during the Kennedy years.

Ending

The end of the WNPC stemmed as did its beginning from its relationship to the National Press Club. The question of admitting women arose in 1955 when the National Press Club voted to accept its first Black member, Louis Lautier, a correspondent for the National Negro Press Association. Lautier said he wanted to belong to attend luncheons at which world figures made speeches and answered questions. A minority of members opposed his application, but the majority held the club to be a professional, not a social, organization.[38]

Shortly thereafter 54 members of the National Press Club signed a petition to admit women. This movement expired quietly when the WNPC president, Elizabeth Carpenter, a Houston Post correspondent who later became press secretary to Lady Bird

Johnson, told James J. Butler, sponsor of the petition, there was no substantial desire on the part of the newspaperwomen to become National Press Club members. At the same time an agreement was reached with the National Press Club to let "any member of the working press" cover luncheon addresses by newsworthy speakers. But newspaperwomen had to sit in the balcony overlooking the dining area and were not able to eat or drink.[39]

Carpenter's position reflected the opinion of Club members that it would not be dignified to join the National Press Club under the sponsorship of Butler because he had opposed the admittance of Lautier. Carpenter said, "...we don't like being used by the Dixiecrats...Why, our organization is much purer than the Press Club. We don't have morticians, patent attorneys and lobbyists on our rolls." This was a reference to 3,200 men of varying occupations affiliated with the National Press Club, where they far outnumbered the 900 working journalists.[40]

Not surprisingly the balcony arrangement - which left the women at a decided disadvantage - did not work out well. In 1959 James C. Hagerty, press secretary to President Eisenhower, facetiously suggested a "summit meeting" between Helen Thomas of United Press International, WNPC president, and William H. Lawrence, of the New York Times, who headed the National Press Club, "to blueprint a plan for an auditorium that has no balcony." His remark came after Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev insisted that the newswomen be allowed to eat with their male contemporaries when he spoke at the press club. Lawrence relunctantly agreed, saying "that's the way the Russians wanted it." After that event the

women were returned to the balcony, where space was limited and they could not hear well or ask questions.[41]

In 1962 newswomen sought support from President Kennedy in protest against relegation to the balcony during a speech by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Answering a question from Sarah McClendon, a correspondent for Texas newspapers, Kennedy commented at a press conference, "I will say that in my judgment, that when an official visitor comes to speak to the Press Club that all working reporters should be permitted in on a basis of equality." In response Bonnie Angelo, a Time magazine correspondent and WNPC president, said her organization's complaint was less with the National Press Club than the U.S. State Department for booking dignitaries "in a place that discriminates against women reporters."[42]

The dispute intensified in 1963 when Elsie Carper, a Washington Post reporter, was elected president of the WNPC. Carper was incensed when Susanna McBee, another Post reporter, was taken off a civil rights story because she was not able to attend a male-only press conference at the National Press Club. Determined that women receive equal treatment with men in covering newsworthy appearances, Carper insisted that the WNPC bring pressure to bear on political figures to keep them from speaking at the National Press Club. Her stand was not approved by some of the WNPC members who thought "I wasn't lady-like enough" she recalled in 1974. "I took incredible abuse, but later some of my opponents said I had been right," she added.[43]

"I remember one night 11 years ago when [Harold] Wilson was head of the Labor Party in England," Carper said. "Fran Lewine

[an Associated Press reporter and former president of the WNPC] and I were standing in the Western Union office on 14th Street [in downtown Washington] sending cables off to women Labor members of Parliament asking them to ask nim not to speak at the National Press Club. He didn't - he spoke at the British Embassy instead."[44]

Finally President Johnson, spurred by Elizabeth Carpenter, took action. At his direction the State Department informed the National Press Club that women journalists must be permitted to sit alongside of men or visiting heads of state no longer would be scheduled there. At first the National Press Club wanted to escort women in through the back door, but "we refused to go," Carper added. They insisted on entering through the front - just like the men.[45]

The early 1970s saw an end to the battle between the two press clubs, but also to the WNPC itself. In December, 1970, the group voted to change its name to the Washington Press Club and to admit men. It quickly elected two to its governing body. A few months later the National Press Club decided to admit women and accepted applications from 24.[46]

Among the first women to join the National Press Club was Sarah McClendon, who wept for joy. She was quoted as telling a female colleague, "Honey, I can't tell you the snubs I've endured. I've worked in a tenth-floor office in the NPB [National Press Club Building] every night for 12 years and I couldn't come up here to the 13th floor [the location of the club itself] to have a hamburger. It's taken me 27 years to travel three floors."[47]

Similarly it took the WNPC over half-a-century to triumph over discrimination. Although members did not always agree on the proper tactics to use in the fight, the club itself demonstrated the power of networking among women to give them a sense of identity as professional journalists. As the Washington Press Club, the group limped along until 1985, claiming a greater purity in professional membership than the National Press Club since it refused to admit lobbyists and those with marginal claims to journalistic employment. Faced with declining membership and lack of a suitable clubhouse, the Washington Press Club merged with the National Press Club in 1985.

Much more study needs to be done on the WNPC as an aspect of the occupational culture of women journalists. Even from this brief overview of the organization structure, it seems apparent that the club played a vital part in the lives of many of its members because they were so intensely involved in running it. It allowed them to learn leadership skills, make helpful contacts with other women within the profession, enhance their knowledge of operating within the political climate of the nation's capital, and gain access to influential newsmakers. By combining social and professional functions, it raised the self-esteem of its members. It enabled them to see themselves, not as downtrodden, second-class workers within a field in which they were not welcome, but as talented, dignified and valuable members of the journalistic community.

Notes

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2. Carolyn Vance Bell, "Founding," typescript, [1968], WNPCF, p.4.

3. Ibid., pp. 4, 7; typed notes of interview with Alice Gram Robinson, March 29, 1968, WNPCF, NPCA, p. 1.

4. Lonnelle Aikman, typed draft of first chapter for proposed book on WNPC [1968], WNPCF, NPCA, p. 16; Bell, "Founding," p. 8.

5. Aikman, p. 25.

6. Bell, "Founding," p. 8; Mallon, "The Whole Truth," p.2; Aikman, p. 32.

7. Maurine Beasley, "Pens and Petticoats: Early Women Washington Correspondents," Journalism History I (Winter 1974-75), 112-15.

8. U.S. Congress, Congressional Directory (45th Cong., 3rd sess.; 1879), pp. 92-93: Beasley, "Pens and Petticoats," p. 136.

9. F.B. Marbut, "News From the Capital: The Story of Washington Reporting," (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 251.

10. Aikman, typed draft, p. 28.

11. Mallon, "The Whole Truth," p. 4.

12. Ibid.; Aikman, typed draft, p. 33.

13. Mallon, "The Whole Truth," p. 445.

14. Bell, "Founding," p. 3.

15. Aikman, typed draft, p. 34.

16. Mallon, "The Whole Truth," pp. 2-3.

17. Aikman, typed draft, p. 19; Mallon, p.4.

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