

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Congressional Club

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 2001 New Hampshire Avenue, NW not for publication

city or town Washington vicinity

state DC code _____ county _____ code _____ zip code 20009

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
 (Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
 (Check only **one** box.)

Number of Resources within Property
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

Current Functions
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL/CLUB HOUSE

CLUBHOUSE

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/ Neo-
Classical Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Brick

walls: Brick, Stone

roof: Copper, Tin

other: Iron

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Congressional Club house is an elegant three-story, Beaux-Arts building designed by George Oakley Totten, Jr. in 1914. It sits on a triangular plot of land at the intersection of New Hampshire Avenue, 16th Street and U Street in the 16th Street Historic District. The elegant yet unassuming blond brick building is considered an “important landmark”¹ that fits harmoniously within the varied urban fabric of the 16th and U Street corridors and serves as an important contribution to the City Beautiful Movement and Mary Foote Henderson’s vision for the development of Meridian Hill and 16th Street.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Exterior

The Congressional Club consists of three sections; the five-sided, three-story main block, a two-story side addition, and a rotunda that houses the main staircase. The rotunda is capped by a copper dome roof and is located at the apex of the triangular site, facing southwesterly, while the body of the building extends east along U Street and northeasterly along New Hampshire Avenue. The main exterior walls are blond brick and the north and rear east wall of the addition, as well as the north facing third story wall of the main block, is red brick. The ground story of the main block and the rotunda consist of a rusticated brick banding pattern terminated by a belt course with a sea scroll pattern. The double-hung windows on the ground floor possess no special detailing or ornamentation, and their small size relative to the second floor windows suggests a more domestic use of the space inside.

The main entrance is set back from New Hampshire Avenue. A large Palladian window which rises above the main entrance at the second story level features a pair of casement windows in the central opening and narrow side lights in the flanking windows. A stone balcony spans the entire opening at the base, while projecting stone cornices cap the sidelights and a brick voussoir with a central keystone frames the central arched opening. Circular stone panels are set above the side lights to either side of the central arch. A matching Palladian-style window, but with a stone balustrade, is located on the second floor of the south (U Street) side of the building.

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The remaining five windows on the second floor on south side of the building are grander in nature than those on the first, with cast stone frames and stone sills. Each window is crowned by an elliptical window above.

The rotunda on the southwest corner of the building, capped by a rounded copper dome, roof adds to the dimensionality of the building. The windows in the rotunda rest upon a stone cornice that runs the circumference of the rotunda. The windows in the rotunda are 2/2 double-hung sash a 2 lite fixed window transom above. They are capped with ornate bracketed window cornices with broken pediments. In the center of each pediment is an elliptical window.

On the main block, a stone belt course separates the shorter and more modest third story from the second. The third floor has small, double-hung windows with stone sills. A smaller stone cornice caps the third floor.

In 1939, the Washington, D.C. firm Beall and LeMay was commissioned to design a two-story addition on the north side of the building. The addition has three unornamented double sash windows on the ground floor. The second floor has a single large window with a stone sill and iron French balcony.

The function of the addition is mostly utilitarian, dedicated to support of the uses for the public spaces. On the ground floor is a square salon adjacent to the north end of the main entry hall. This space flanks the women's restrooms to the east, and was originally meant for informal gathering and small meetings. Its current use is dedicated to the display of miniature versions of all of the First Ladies' inaugural gowns, a tradition that began in 1962. The second floor consists of a large industrial kitchen and china room.

Interior

Forgoing an obvious main entrance to the building at the convergence of U Street and New Hampshire Avenue, Totten chose a more private location on the New Hampshire Avenue side of the property. To enter the building, one climbs a single step and advances through a modest set of glass double doors that are set back into the façade. Proceeding through a small vestibule, one enters into the main reception hall. This room is long and rectangular, with the width sufficient to accommodate a large number of guests entering at the same time. The floor is finished with wood parquet, with small inserts of ebony lining the perimeter. The entry hall serves as a circulation corridor for day-to-day use and also a greeting area for visitors before they move upstairs to join in large receptions or special events.

The main entry hall also acts as the backbone of the floor plan, anchoring the subsidiary spaces on the first floor. The interior crown molding, chair rails, and wall base are made of paint-grade pine. Plaster moldings are used to embellish the ceilings in the ceremonial spaces.

There are two small offices and a coat closet to the left and right of the weather vestibule, which were meant to be toilet rooms in the original Totten scheme. To the east of the main entry hall are two smaller salon spaces that are more angular in shape. The angular shape of these spaces can be attributed to the building's triangular lot. The larger of these two salons is on the U Street side of the building, and is currently used as the main informal meeting room. In the original Totten design, this room was split into a secretary's office and a smaller meeting room. The west end of the room now contains artifacts from Hawaii, donated to the club from a member. The smaller salon to the north has a small fireplace on the north wall with four chairs and a glass table arranged around it. Hanging on the walls are signed portraits from many of the former First Ladies.

Beyond this salon is another small room, originally designed to be the club library. It is now dedicated to housing gifts and souvenirs from all over the world. Adjacent to this room is a small men's restroom, and to the east of the men's bathroom is a small bedroom.

Moving through the main entry hall up to the second floor, one passes through a grand staircase with a central run of stairs that come to a middle landing and sweep around either side of the circular shaft that contains them. A white painted wrought iron guardrail supporting a stained walnut handrail adorns the open side of the stairs. The treads and risers of the stairs consist of the same wood. At the landing of the stairs is a small rotunda, decorated with a gold-painted array of plaster moldings and a simple glass chandelier. At the top of the grand stair, there is a small transitional vestibule that has a bust niche on either side.

From the vestibule, one enters the large ceremonial congregation space. The room serves as the main gathering area for the club, and has the size to accommodate more than one hundred people. It is hexagonal in shape and the ceilings are approximately 25 to 30 feet in height, rising from the sides to the center. There is a large fireplace on the north wall, with a

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heavy mantle and large brass-framed mirror above. Two plaster Corinthian pilasters are placed on either side. Sitting atop these pilasters is a large wood cornice that runs around the perimeter of the room at twelve feet above the floor. The southern and eastern walls are filled with large Palladian windows that allow in a great deal of natural light. The floors are the same parquet checkered pattern that is used on the first floor. There are two non-structural Corinthian columns on either side of two large openings that lead back to two supporting rooms. These rooms are smaller in size, have lower ceilings, and were originally designed to be the dining rooms. Whereas the first floor was designed to be of a more residential scale, the second floor is more ceremonial and important. Comparatively, the windows are larger, the ceiling heights are higher, and there is more detail and ornament placed into the finishes.

Narrative Description

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Social History

Period of Significance

1914-date 50 years from the present

Significant Dates

1914 to present – 50 years

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

George Oakley Totten, Jr.

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance spans from the construction of the building (1914), the role of the Congressional Club as an official social extension of the Wilson White House (1913-1921), its unique role during World War I, to the election of Congressional Club member Katharine Edgar Byron to Congress in 1941.

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Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Congressional Club meets National Register Criterion A as it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. The Congressional Club was chartered by Congress in 1908 as the official organization of Congressional wives. It is the only purely social organization listed in the Congressional Directory - the official directory of the United State Congress since 1888 and one of the oldest working handbooks within the United States Government.

The Congressional Club is unique for the part it played in providing a politically neutral meeting ground that fostered community among a distinctive and selective group of women: the wives and daughters of United States Congressmen and Cabinet members. During the Wilson administration, the Congressional Club was the only non-governmental organization asked to serve as an official extension of the White House in hosting important diplomatic and social events. Additionally, during World War I the Congressional Club made nationally significant wartime contributions, serving as a nexus between Washington, DC and local communities across the country in organizing state-side activities.

The Congressional Club also provided a network and a training ground for our nation's first female Congressional representatives; five Congressional Club members went on to serve in Congress between 1923 and 1941. Congresswoman Margaret Chase Smith, the first woman to be elected to both the U.S. House (1940-1948) and the Senate (1948-1972), and the first woman to have her name placed in nomination for the U.S. Presidency at a major party's convention at the 1964 Republican Convention, credited the Congressional Club with helping ease her transition into public office.

The Congressional Club was a collaborative effort between pioneering advocate Mary Foote Henderson, advocate for the improvement of 16th Street and noted architect George Oakley Totten, Jr. It is a key contributing resource to the 16th Street Historic District, exemplifying the City Beautiful Movement and Mary Foote Henderson's vision to transform the underdeveloped 16th Street into a ceremonial entrance to the nation's capital.

Integrity

The building retains its historic integrity from the time of its construction in 1914. It has continued to serve its original purpose as the headquarters of the Congressional Club. Its original materials and workmanship are unaltered, and the location and setting of the building remain unchanged. It still stands as a testament to Mary Foote Henderson's vision for 16th Street, and as an example of the use of the Beaux-Arts architectural style to bring a sense of grandeur to the nation's capital. The building's original interior layout and architectural detailing have also remained intact since its construction. The 1937 addition is on a secondary elevation, deferential to the main building, and does not detract from its original design and historic character.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Construction of the Congressional Club Building

The Congressional Club is a key resource of the 16th Street Historic District, exemplifying the vision of its pioneering development advocate, Mary Foote Henderson and the architecture of George Oakley Totten, Jr. It stands as a testament to Henderson's vision of what she referred to as "her 16th Street."

Many club houses were designed by prominent architects, and the Congressional Club was no exception.² What makes the Congressional Club building distinct and nationally significant is the story it tells about the ambition and business acumen of one of Washington's most high-profile socialites, Mary Foote Henderson, and the mark she and her "official architect" George Oakley Totten made on the nation's capital. The selection for the Club's architect and its location at the intersection of New Hampshire Ave, 16th Street, and U Streets, NW is due entirely to the efforts of Henderson, who

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intended that the Congressional Club further her vision of transforming upper 16th Street into an elite diplomatic and residential enclave.

Mary Newton Foote Henderson (1841-1931) was born into a prominent New England family, the daughter of Judge Elisha Foote of Massachusetts and the niece of Solomon Foote, a Senator from Vermont from 1851-1866. She was educated at private schools in upstate New York and attended a French finishing school in New York City. In 1868, she married Missouri Senator John B. Henderson, who served from 1862-1869. The Senator was a close friend of President Lincoln and one of the authors of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which abolished slavery.

After John Henderson's electoral defeat in 1870, they returned to his native Missouri, where Mary became a leading suffragist and immersed herself in a variety of causes and club activities. Capitalizing on her social skills, she wrote *Practical Cooking and Dinner Giving* (1877), a very popular guide to fine entertaining, etiquette and menus. She became an authority on hygiene and nutrition, writing *Diet for the Sick* (1883) and the 772-page *The Aristocracy of Health* (1904)³ and serving on the Committee of One Hundred on National Health of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.⁴

Although most architecture schools were closed to women at that time, Henderson developed her design abilities by studying art at Washington University in St. Louis and went on to found the St. Louis School of Design in 1876.⁵ Henderson also served as Vice President of the Women's Exchange of St. Louis, which promoted and helped to market the handiwork of working-class women.⁶

After savvy investments in Missouri made them wealthy,⁷ the Hendersons returned to Washington, D.C. in 1889. They built an imposing, three-story brownstone mansion dubbed "Boundary" or "Henderson's Castle," on the corner of 16th Street and Florida Avenue, just beyond the original city limits, in what was then a remote setting far from downtown. They quickly amassed six acres of land in the area. Henderson would frequently refer to the 16th Street corridor as "my Sixteenth Street."⁸ Henderson met architect George Oakley Totten, Jr. when she commissioned him to add a sunroom to her "Castle" and shortly thereafter, she made him her "official" architect.⁹ The Hendersons bought and sold land along 16th Street, primarily on Meridian Hill for three decades. But, when Mrs. Henderson referred to "my 16th Street," she meant the entire corridor to the White House. She wanted to improve the entire avenue to make it "befitting to a nation's capital."

Architect George Oakley Totten, Jr. (1866-1939), was born in New York City and studied architecture at Columbia and Catholic Universities. After winning Columbia University's McKim Traveling Fellowship in 1892, he studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris for two years.¹⁰ When he returned to Washington, D.C. in 1895, Totten took the position of Chief Designer of the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department. He used the valuable connections made during this time to start a private practice in 1899, devoting much of his career to designing private residences and institutions catering to affluent Washington residents. Totten was a respected and active member of the architectural community, serving as President of the Washington chapter of the American Institute of Architects and as representative to eight International Congresses.¹¹

In addition to the Congressional Club, Totten and Henderson collaborated on a dozen notable buildings along 16th Street. Their first collaborative effort was for the design of the National Register-listed, Venetian palazzo-inspired house, four-story "Pink Palace" (now the Inter-American Defense Board) at 2600 16th Street. The second—a four-story mansion at 2460 Sixteenth Street erected in 1907 between the Henderson Castle and the Pink Palace—was designed "the modern French style of architecture," specifically for the French government for use as a legation building. The third building was a four-story mansion at 2640 Sixteenth Street constructed in 1909, now the Polish Embassy.

Additionally, Totten designed such notable buildings as the Edward H. Everett House (now the Turkish ambassador's residence), the Christian Hauge House at 2349 Massachusetts Ave (Embassy of Cameroon), and the Embassy of Ecuador at 2535 15th Street NW all on or around Massachusetts Avenue and Sheridan Circle.

The construction of the Congressional Club was a team effort between Henderson and Totten. Due to the Club's strict insistence on a budget of \$30,000, the Club House lacks the grandeur and well-studied detail that characterized many of the collaborators' other buildings. Nevertheless, these circumstances led to the creation of a building that is respectful of the architectural precedents developed for the capital by the Federal-era architects. The contrast between the attractive yet modest ground floor, the setting for conversation and self-improvement, and the stately second floor, appropriate for galas and ceremonies, articulates the Club's role as a nexus between private and public spheres for Congressional wives.

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The design of the Congressional Club was influenced by the City Beautiful Movement, a reform philosophy of North American architecture and urban planning that flourished during the 1890s and 1900s. Associated mainly with Chicago, Detroit, and Washington, D.C., the movement sought to bring beautification and monumental grandeur to these cities. The philosophy promoted beauty not for its own sake, but rather to create moral and civic virtue among urban populations. Advocates of the philosophy believed that such beautification could thus promote a harmonious social order that would increase the quality of life.¹²

Sixteenth Street is considered one of the most important numbered streets in the federal city. Its upper section with a vista south to the White House, is contained between two major elements of the L'Enfant Plan: Scott Circle on the south and Florida Avenue, NW, originally known as Boundary Street, on the north, along with the sharp rise of Meridian Hill.¹³ Henderson's investments coincided with public works improvements in the area, as well as the McMillan Commission Plan of 1901, which extended 16th Street beyond the city's original boundary at Florida Avenue and reinforced the prominence conferred by the L'Enfant Plan.

Henderson was not just a developer, she was an advocate for civic improvements, albeit ones that would often serve her interests. She was the most vocal advocate for turning 16th Street into the District's premier gateway and thoroughfare, with a grandeur befitting the nation's capital.¹⁴ She spearheaded the Woman's [sic] 16th Street Improvement Association, whose 1909 pamphlet, *A Message to Congress*, mirrored Henderson's proposals and tried to make the case for developing Sixteenth Street into "the model street of the country, one of the greatest of National boulevards."¹⁵ Just as the United States was trying to project a role as a world leader, the group promoted the idea that the street could be an international showpiece of the finest in American architecture and landscape architecture.¹⁶ Almost twenty years later, Henderson continued to petition for the prestige she believed 16th Street warranted. Her 1927 booklet entitled *Remarks About Management of Washington in General and Sixteenth Street in Particular* consisted of her testimony before the Congressional committees of the District of Columbia, as well as several letters she had written to the editor of the Washington Post.

Henderson's method of buying and holding the land, commissioning architect Totten, and financing the construction costs was her practice not only for the Congressional Club, but also for some dozen other Meridian Hill mansions, later leased or purchased by upper-class residents, high-ranking federal officials or foreign governments.¹⁷ She sold many of these mansions at cost to the embassies,¹⁸ a strategic way to build value into her neighborhood by attracting the right kind of residents.

Henderson had a strong say in many aspects of a building's design. An article published in 1920 described the way. She often drew the preliminary sketches of her projects and gave them to her architect "to work them out." "The interiors," she explained, "are usually left as I plan them."¹⁹

Henderson attempted to extend the federal government's presence into "her" section of 16th Street. Her first campaign in Congress in 1898 promoted the construction of a new Executive Mansion on Meridian Hill.²⁰ She also made an offer that was rebuffed to donate one of her houses for use as a Vice Presidential mansion, arguing that the responsibility for entertaining had exhausted many presidents and should be delegated to the Vice President. More successful were her 1913-14 attempts to convince Congress to buy the land across from her castle and clear the rest of the settlements there to create Meridian Hill Park (NHL, 1994) and to change the name of 16th Street to "Avenue of the Presidents" (from 1913-1914).²¹ Besides these two efforts, enabling the Congressional Club to locate its building at a key southern entry to her neighborhood was the closest she came to establishing a federal government presence there.

Henderson and Totten sought to create an environment supportive of her social and design goals for upper 16th Street. James Goode describes the period of 1897-1918 as the "golden age"²² of apartment construction, and elegant Beaux-Arts luxury apartments such as the Balfour (1900) began to appear on what was then the upper boundary of development in Washington.

In the 1920s and 30s, churches increasingly appeared alongside the embassies on upper 16th Street. In 1920, Henderson played a pivotal role in attracting at least one, the Unitarian All Souls Church, to the neighborhood by offering to both sell her land and make a contribution to the construction costs "in her wish to maintain an avenue of distinguished architectural quality."²³

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Henderson had been involved in the leadership of the Club since its inception and was active as one of the vice-presidents (1911-13) and in honorary capacities (1925-29).²⁴ Her elite social standing, straddling the upper echelons of a relatively new Washington high society and the official community, served as an important asset for the nascent Club networks. The *Annals* describe how "Mrs. H. was the first woman of prominence to give social recognition to the new club, her dinner dance for the members and the men of their households being the first big affair planned by a hostess of established social position."²⁵

When the Club had outgrown the space it was leasing at 1432 K Street, it formed a committee to search for an alternative. The first mention of house hunting appears in Board Meeting minutes in February 1914. Only a month later a special meeting was called to discuss Henderson's proposal to enable the club to build a clubhouse on her lot rent-free for two years, with additional assistance with financing.²⁶ She also offered the services of Totten, who was present to discuss preliminary plans he had already drawn up. After some members expressed reservations about the site "in the borderlands,"²⁷ Henderson offered to donate the land instead, and by late May the cornerstone had been laid in a ceremony with President Wilson in attendance. The building was open for its first club meeting in November of 1914.

In addition to providing the architect and financing for the building, Henderson took an active role in advising the Club on various issues. Already anticipating its future capital needs in 1910, Henderson proposed the establishment of life memberships at \$500 each, and that the money be placed in a fund to be used to maintain, buy, or furnish a club house."²⁸

Mrs. Henderson expressed a concern with the small size of the building from the very beginning of the project. Henderson, who had been busy with her own building program, went over the Club House plans and expressed grave doubt about the size of the structure. She considered the auditorium too small, and the lack of a banquet or dining hall was a grave mistake. She suggested that the Club purchase a piece of adjoining land and change the plans to meet her objections and she would sign the notes necessary for the additional costs, which at that time would have been \$10,000 to \$15,000 more.²⁹

The Board was hesitant to assume more debt based on the Club's short history, but later would lament their unwillingness to listen to her recommendations: "The land in question was later purchased, and each succeeding group of officers regretted the rejection of Mrs. Henderson's offer."³⁰

The *Annals of the Congressional Club* relate one incident that demonstrates her attention to detail and influence on the Club's design:

We had spent days searching for a certain shade of green in tiling to be used in the dining alcove hearth. After the tiles were in place, Mrs. Towner [the Club President] looked with pride at the results. She returned Sunday morning to see about some hardware matter and found Mrs. John B. Henderson there with her 'fop boy,' the latter with paint brush in hand and was adding the final touches of white paint which covered the beautiful green tile. To this day the tile is painted white.³¹

Henderson also specified that her \$500 life membership funds be used for "brick and other extras,"³² and correspondence from Totten to the Club's builder notes that he had received funds from Mrs. Henderson to "substitute hydraulic pressed brick in place of brick as originally specified."³³

The Congressional Club supported Henderson's agenda of providing a setting for diplomatic interactions, a space for lectures by distinguished speakers, and a venue for cultural activities. However, it is notable that when the Club tried to get members to use their "moral influence" with their husbands to support several of her personal civic improvement efforts, her proposals were "met with small enthusiasm."³⁴ Preserving the Club House as a neutral and non-political space was apparently more important to its members than pleasing the woman widely viewed as the Club's "fairy godmother."

Overall, although the organization did not always accept her ideas, the *Annals* retrospectively portray Henderson as a visionary who was ahead of her time in her conception of what the Club and Club House could offer. In Henderson's front page obituary, the *Washington Post* remarks that, among her many other achievements, "one of the most important institutions in Washington, the Congressional Club...owes its prosperity to Mrs. Henderson."³⁵

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The Club Movement and the Role of Club Houses

The Congressional Club was established in the middle of what many scholars consider to be the heyday of the Women's Club movement (1880-1920). At least two million women were members of clubs at the turn of the century.³⁶ Women were motivated to join for a wide variety of reasons, from the joint pursuit of hobbies to collective political advocacy. However, one of the most important common aspirations of clubs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was simply providing a social and physical sphere that had been rarely available to women before. Although the establishment of women's clubs is sometimes viewed as mere retaliation for the the exclusionary practices of all-male clubs, Annette Baxter argues that female sociability and friendship in and of themselves were compelling needs for women and produced important societal benefits.³⁷

Clubhouses facilitated socialization and mutual support throughout the country, a number which have gained National Register or National Landmark status. These include: the General Federation of Women's Clubs (NHL 1991), chartered by the United States Congress (1901; the Berkeley Women's City Club (NR, 1979); and a group of American Woman's League Chapter Houses in Illinois (NR, 1980).³⁸

Other women's clubs, like the Congressional Club, had specific membership requirements. The National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution (Constitution Hall, NR 1985) limits membership to descendants of individuals who aided in achieving American independence. The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America (NR1990) limits membership to direct ancestors who held positions of leadership in the Thirteen Colonies. But the social needs of Congressional wives were exceptional, and the Congressional Club played a critical role in providing a "home away from home" for a unique group of women who came to the capital from every district.

The Congressional Club

The Congressional Club was chartered in 1908, during the heyday of the women's club movement. The Congressional Club stands apart from other social clubs that were active between 1908 and 1941 due to its unique purpose: to bring together in close association, in a hospitable environment in the nation's capital, the spouses and female family members of the U.S. Congress and Cabinet.³⁹

Among women's social clubs in the United States, the Congressional Club stands out as exceptional for its membership, its social relationship with the White House in the 1910s and 1920s, and its role supporting the nation during World War I. The clubhouse, built in 1914, has served as the location for nationally significant activities conducted by the Congressional Club, and represents the contributions the Congressional Club has made to U.S. history.

Women have historically played a nationally significant role as community builders and the Congressional Club exemplifies this concept on many levels.⁴⁰ First, the Club is unique for the part it played in fostering community among an exceptional and distinctive group of women—the wives and daughters of United States Congressmen and Cabinet members.

While the function of fostering social ties was essential, community-building efforts have not been limited to relationships within the Club. Club activities also contributed to the cosmopolitan character of our nation's capital and furthered diplomacy, helping burnish the image of the United States as it assumed the role of a world power. The Congressional Club also made nationally significant wartime contributions, with the Club uniquely able to serve as a nexus between Washington, D.C. and communities across the country.

The Congressional Club was also exceptional in offering a new kind of community for these notable women: a public sphere, straddling their highly public political life and their private responsibilities and ambitions.

Finally, the clubhouse is perhaps the emblematic expression of the goals of one pioneering "community builder," Mary Foote Henderson, who tirelessly championed the improvement of the nation's capital and arguably had more impact on an American city than any other woman of her time.

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Founding of the Congressional Club and Charter by Congress

The ingenuity of the Congressional Club's early founders is often recalled in the story of how the Club was chartered. According to the Annals, the 1907-1908 session brought an unusual number of Congressional wives and daughters to Washington. Mrs. Fairbanks, the wife of the Vice President of the United States, and Miss Helen Cannon, daughter of the Speaker of the House, began to organize opportunities for these women to get together in social settings. Inspired by the suggestion of Congressman Frank O. Lowden at a dinner party, Mrs. Perkins (wife of a New York Congressman) sought to "crystalize the friendliness" that had resulted from the initial events by forming a club for Congressional Women.⁴¹ After a just a few organizational meetings, 129 women had joined the group and Mrs. Perkins was elected President.⁴² Not all Congressmen shared Lowden's views; one opponent of women's clubs, Representative John Sharp Williams (reportedly convinced that club life would make women late for dinner), was prepared to filibuster to prevent Congress from chartering the Club. In a rare case of a Club member intervening in government affairs, Williams' wife lured her husband out to lunch in order to enable passage of the bill on the last day before the session adjourned.⁴³

On May 29, 1908, the Congressional Club was officially incorporated when H.R. 22029 was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, with the express purpose of promoting acquaintanceship among members, facilitating social intercourse, and providing a meeting place for wives of Congressmen.⁴⁴

Although a Congressional charter does not necessarily confer any official relationship to the federal government, it is considered highly prestigious since it implies Congressional endorsement of an organization's aims.⁴⁵ The charter put the Congressional Club in the company of two highly prominent womens' clubs with a national focus, the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) and the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).⁴⁶ The national significance of these organizations is underscored by the fact that the buildings associated with each of them have been designated as National Historic Landmarks (GFWC Headquarters, NHL 1991 and DAR's Constitution Hall, NHL 1985).

Exclusive Membership of the Club

In the Congressional Club's earliest years, membership was offered to wives of Senate and House members, no more than 100 family members of other branches of the Federal government, the wife of the President of the United States, and the wife of the Vice President of the United States.⁴⁷ In 1914, the Club's Constitution was amended to limit membership to families of Congressmen, Supreme Court Justices, and Cabinet Officials; honorary membership continued to be provided to the wives of the President and Vice President.⁴⁸ In 1988, Stephen Lowey, husband of Representative Nita Lowey of New York, was the first male spouse to attend the Club's orientation for new members.

Although other elite women's social clubs were established during this period, including the Washington Club, founded 1891 (NR, 1972), and the Sulgrave Club, founded in 1932 (NR, 1972), no other women's club in the United States is so integrally associated with such a prominent set of national political leaders. As described below, this special status gave the Congressional Club a unique role to play that was beyond the scope of other social clubs of the time.

Social Challenges for Congressional Wives

For 100 years, the Congressional Club has helped integrate the growing number of wives and families accompanying Congressmen to Washington. In the early part of the 19th century, Congressmen often boarded together in rooming houses, but improved transportation and housing opportunities after the Civil War made it more feasible for families to settle in Washington.⁴⁹ Moreover, the trend toward longer terms in office and the transition to a longer Congressional session made the prospect of relocating to the capital, for either the session or year round, more attractive. Wives also came to Washington for practical purposes, since many served as secretaries (paid and unpaid) for their understaffed husbands.⁵⁰

Congressional wives faced formidable challenges in entering Washington society, often arriving with limited social networks and little experience living in a large city. The few hotels that had been built in the early decades of the 20th century were not considered to be suitable venues for socializing or entertaining by women. Karen Blair notes that during

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this time, "women who valued their reputations" were required to limit their group meetings to "public meeting rooms, church parlors, or, if they were financially able, in clubhouses they funded themselves."⁵¹

The Clubhouse as an Alternative to the Calling System

Social responsibilities in Washington were onerous, but obligatory for building the connections that could further a Congressman's career. An 1897 *Washington Post* article noted that it is the Congressman's wife "who keeps Washington social life from growing stale; she it is who keeps the bubble of enthusiasm constantly rising...lending herself to the discipline and growing now and then into the great social leader, the diplomat, the power behind the throne."⁵²

Among the official duties of a Congressional wife was "calling," an elaborate and hierarchical practice of leaving cards at the homes of more senior government officials, including all of the Senate, House of Representatives and Cabinet members (who were often not at home to greet you).⁵³ While this custom existed in other cities in America and Europe as well, it took on a particular rigor in Washington.⁵⁴ This system was extremely daunting to Congressional wives, but neglecting the duty could result in social ostracism and damage to the career of her husband. One article cautioned, "the new hostess knows that it is important not only to her own social success but to her husband's political career as well. Build your house of calling cards high and wide and strong if you wish to achieve success in Capital society is the advice of old-timers to the newcomers."⁵⁵ Congressmen reportedly inspected documentation of the requisite calls and these records could show that their wives had personally delivered up to 2,000 cards in a season.⁵⁶

In early organizing for the Congressional Club, its first president Mrs. James Breck Perkins proposed that it could play a role in bringing all the "cliques, crowds and sets" in official life into one democratic group, for the promotion of friendliness and to eliminate some of the rigors of calling.⁵⁷ A *Washington Post* article, entitled "Capital Women Rebel: Fair Washingtonians Plan the Doom of Calling Evil," suggested that the newly formed Club had the potential to revolutionize the system of calling by providing a single place where women could meet and more efficiently exchange cards.⁵⁸

In 1913, a series of *Washington Post* articles highlighted the national significance of the calling card debate. One piece suggested that discord between the wives of members of the House of Representatives and wives of members of Cabinet on the issue might jeopardize House appropriations for certain federal agencies:

[A] situation has arisen in the social life of official Washington which...threatens to reflect itself upon the relations existing between the House of Representatives and the members of the Cabinet.⁵⁹

The question of "to call or not to call" reportedly diminished during World War I,⁶⁰ but contemporary accounts confirm that the debate over the ritual continued over the next several decades. In 1937, Representative Hamilton Fish of New York introduced a House resolution to set up a committee on social etiquette (composed of the female members of the House), asserting:

This practice and custom as carried out creates a vicious circle of leaving and returning calls to the detriment of the health, nerves and disposition of the wives, and to the discomfiture of the husbands. This social extraordinary custom has grown and expanded into a social Frankenstein which in its very essence is undemocratic, un-American and utterly stupid, and not acknowledged or practiced in any civilized country in the world.⁶¹

A Congressional wife in the late 1930s contrasted the "appalling demands" of official calling made upon those "who had hardly set foot in town" with the more nurturing sphere offered by the "place I needed for information and genuine friendship: the Women's Congressional Club."⁶²

Club members immediately saw the clubhouse environment as an alternative to and respite from the superficiality of "doing the circuit," which former Cabinet wife and future First Lady Helen Taft characterized as a life of "rather monotonous stress."⁶³ As the early members of the Club expressed:

If we can drop in at the club, see the same women every few days, find out whom we like, we may be able to make a real society here instead of the present conglomerate mass of individuals, with

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here and there little lumps composed of cliques which stick together with the glue of official etiquette, whether they want to or not.⁶⁴

Dorris Martin describes the stress on her family life during the “feverish days” leading up to World War II; her husband, a freshman congressman, was dispatched “countless times” to inspect military facilities and she stayed up late with him as he reviewed the “appalling” shortages and general lack of preparedness. She notes that “my duties in this time of preparation for war were also increasing,” adding that attending to constituents and keeping informed through attendance at lengthy committee sessions was quite time-consuming. Martin took comfort in trying to maintain some “semblance of normal life;” she gratefully notes that “at the Congressional Club the Friday teas continued.”⁶⁵

Although the opening of a permanent Club House did not completely overthrow social protocol, it provided a setting that encouraged genuine interaction and relationships through the less formal social rituals of teas, cards games and discussions.

A Retreat from Politics and the Demands of Philanthropy

The Club’s Annals from the early decades of the 20th century chronicle a recurrent tension between members who wanted the Club to engage directly in reformist causes and those who wanted the emphasis to remain social. In the end, some individual members did become well known as suffragists or Prohibitionists,⁶⁶ Club officers insisted that as an entity it would not serve as an advocate for any cause. A later president, Mrs. Clarence Dill (nee Rosalie Jones), had been a nationally prominent leader of the radical National Woman’s Party, earning the nickname “General Jones” for her skills in helping to organize the famous “March on Washington” to promote suffrage in 1913. During her tenure as Club president from 1933-1935, Dill brought considerable energy to her position, but was unsuccessful in her attempt to redirect the Club’s mission. According to the Annals,

“To her it was an organization with potential power and influence which should be used in some humanitarian way, ‘instead of merely for the social enjoyment of its members.’ It was inevitable that the energetic philanthropic President would clash with the supporters of the first ideals and purposes of the Club.”⁶⁷

One club member noted that many were already heavily involved in philanthropic activities in their own states and thus the neutrality of the clubhouse provided a “recreation to be free from the constant drive and appeals from scores of groups for various forms of service.”⁶⁸ Moreover, their status as political wives and the need to remain a “national” (and cordial) organization, rather than simply a collection of representatives from different regions and political parties, made discussion of reform a sensitive issue:

Even if a congressional woman abhorred an abuse, but her state was charged with the abuse, it is almost unthinkable that the congressional woman from that state should listen to charges against her state and not rise to its defense. Such experiences would be far from happy. The Club’s persistent policy of excluding propaganda and appeals...has probably been a wise provision for self-preservation.⁶⁹

According to one Congressional wife, “It took a bit of doing for all of us, grounded as we were in partisanship, to lay aside politics when we entered our clubhouse, but this was absolutely essential if the club’s reputation for gracious hospitality was to be maintained.”⁷⁰

Many of the most active Club members were heavily involved in volunteer efforts, both in their community and at a national scale. Their attitudes, however, reflected the diversity of opinions natural in a group drawn from two political parties and from all parts of the country. Mrs. Edgar D. Crumpacker, one of the charter members who also helped frame its Constitution, discussed her “plea for the Old-Fashioned Woman, especially the Old-Fashioned Mother,” noting that she saw “no utility in votes for women to decide political questions.” Although she felt that suffrage was “not a burning question” in her area of Indiana, she stressed that “we have public-spirited women by the scores. In my home town of Valparaiso, which boasts about 8000 inhabitants, we have clubs which seem to fulfill every craving a women might have for useful work...I have the honor of begin the regent of the William Henry Harrison chapter [patriotic society], which I organized in Valparaiso.”⁷¹

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In the end, although individual club members often remained engaged in particular causes, the Club steadily affirmed its position as a place where politics was “checked at the door” providing a rare domestic respite from the more active demands made by the myriad of women’s clubs.

Club’s Participation in Prominent Social Events

Elite men’s clubs like the Metropolitan Club (NR, 1995) and Cosmos Club (NR, 1973) played a critical role in providing a mingling ground for members of high society. The Congressional Club is unique in the way it served as an extension of official entertaining on behalf of the White House and initiated its diplomatic efforts during this time period.

As would be expected from its membership, the Congressional Club played an important role in fostering the social life of the nation’s capital. Its first social event was on December 11, 1908, with a tea honoring President and Mrs. Taft and the Club’s Annals describes the particularly prominent position the Club enjoyed during the Taft administration.

President Taft’s administration first allowed the scarlet coated marines to play for the Congressional Club because the Club stands next to the White House as an institution for official entertaining. It is the only purely social organization listed in the Congressional Directory and is the only women’s organization which enjoys that distinction.⁷²

When John Nance Garner was Speaker of the House (1931-1933), his wife reported that the couple “accept[ed] two invitations a year and that’s all. One of them is the President’s dinner for the Speaker and the other is the Congressional Club reception.”⁷³

Since then, the Club has issued a bi-annual invitation to each presidential couple for a gala reception, and the First Lady has been honored individually with an annual breakfast. In the alternate years, the Club hosts galas for the Vice President and spouse, the Speaker of the House and spouse, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and spouse. During the period of 1914 to 1945, the Club established close relations with many First Ladies, including former members Florence King Harding, Lou Henry Hoover, and Bess Wallace Truman.

Club’s Social Service Through Public Entertaining and Diplomatic Support

The Congressional Club made a significant contribution to the Wilson administration (1913-1921) by serving as an extension of the White House in hosting diplomatic events at a critical time in American history. In the autumn of 1914, First Lady Ellen Wilson died and President Wilson’s extended mourning period shut many customary social occasions.

The Club’s greatest distinction came after the death of Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, when the Division of Protocol of the Department of State called the Secretary of the Congressional Club, Mrs. Horace Mann Towner, and asked that the Club take over the public entertaining for the many official events during the World War and Peace Negotiation period. Each Club administration during the Wilson White House years responded to this request. While the taxpayer provided money for such entertaining at the White House, the Club gladly performed that service without receiving a cent of assistance except from the purses of its own members.⁷⁴

This account is supported by newspaper articles that described the White House mourning period⁷⁵ and the way that the Club “threw itself nobly into the [social] breach and kept open house.”⁷⁶ Later accounts relate that the new First Lady, Edith Wilson, disliked official entertainment and “scaled dinners and receptions back to an absolute minimum.”⁷⁷ The Club therefore continued its role in public entertaining throughout the Wilson years.⁷⁸

During this time in U.S. history, foreign relations were of the utmost importance, as President Wilson worked to create the League of Nations and the Pan-American Pact to secure the status of the United States as world leader. The fact that a non-governmental organization was asked to act on behalf of the White House in diplomatic and important social affairs is itself a noteworthy achievement; carrying out this request for multiple years with no added funding in order to lend support to the Wilson Administration is unique and nationally significant.⁷⁹

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Over the years, the Congressional Club entertained many official delegations and played an active role in the diplomatic party circuit, sponsoring lunches and parties with “only the best entertainers.”⁸⁰ The Club saw itself as taking a “leading part in the efforts to develop ‘Good Will among Nations through Acquaintanceship.’”⁸¹

The Congressional Club was particularly engaged with Pan-American relationships over the next several decades. While more official diplomatic efforts went on at the 1910 headquarters of the nation’s first international organization, the Pan American Union (NR, 1969), the Club offered a significant opportunity for promoting more informal educational and social opportunities for American and international political figures.⁸²

A passage from the Club’s history suggests the notable breadth and national stature of the Club’s social activities between the wars and its contribution to efforts to solidify Washington’s stature as a world class capital: “the Club presented a gram of radium to Madame Curie...held a reception for General and Mrs. Pershing...and placed a stone in the new [National] Cathedral.”⁸³

One small but highly symbolic example of “soft diplomacy” was the integration of international recipes into the Club’s popular cookbook, first published in 1927. In 1933, the Club adopted a more international approach to cuisine, with the result that “Adventuresome ladies from Alabama to the Argentine could learn to prepare ‘Dolmadakia Klimatophylla’ courtesy of Madame Simopoulous, wife of the Minister of Greece...or the typically British ‘Colchester Carpetbag.’”⁸⁴

World War I: Answering the Call to Duty

In addition to its outreach to international society, the Club was uniquely positioned to provide a personal link between the nation’s capital and constituents across America. Just as the GFWC and the DAR promoted public service to its members and chapters, Club members were called upon to provide important information to and inspire action by people in their home districts.

Just when members were settling into their new clubhouse, the advent of World War I dramatically changed social life in the capital and at the Club. The Annals describe the Club’s decision to “use all influence possible to arouse the organized womanhood of the country to begin war work immediately.”⁸⁵ While other service organizations in the U.S. were taking part in similar national campaigns to yield support from women, the Congressional Club members’ ability and willingness to leverage their exceptional national reach was notable. The Club issued a national “Call to Service,” which was sent out to women across the United States. The “Call” gave suggestions on how constituents could involve themselves in supporting the war effort.⁸⁶

The second unique war activity of the Congressional Club was the formation of the State Sponsors committee, comprised of a representative from each state, to assist the female workers pouring in from across the country.⁸⁷

A 1917 article entitled “Nation’s Capital Changed from Staid Quiet City to Big Hustling Community” notes that “one of the hardest and at the same time most interesting problems to be solved here is the housing of the hundreds of young women who are coming to Washington” to assume government jobs related to the war effort.⁸⁸ Newspapers across the United States publicized the Club’s efforts. The *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel* reported that, “the wives of the Indiana senators and representatives at Washington have organized through the Congressional Club for the purpose of caring for the Indiana people who may be in Washington at this time.”⁸⁹ The article went on to note that “the ladies will endeavor to get in touch with these young people and do all in their power to care for them in any way possible.” A California newspaper wrote about the Club’s offer to “bring an occasional home touch to the lives of those now established in or near Washington or, possibly, to advise with such as have not formed safe and sure friendships.”⁹⁰

Like many organizations, the Club organized a “War Work” committee, which coordinated first aid classes, sewing groups, food collections for hospitals and substantial donations of time and funds to the Red Cross. Members also hosted a lecture series on wartime food conservation at the Club House.⁹¹

Other efforts centered around comforting and providing a sense of home for the returning soldiers.⁹² Members of the Club either donated the use of their cars or took wounded soldiers out of hospitals for recreational purposes themselves. Some of the few entertainments the club offered during the war were dances geared specifically for servicemen.

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Despite the general lack of festivities during war time,⁹³ educational and voluntary activities at the clubhouse provided rare chances for socialization and mutual support. In the words of one contemporary account:

The Congressional Club furnishes a meeting place for the wives and daughters of senators and representatives, and with the crippled condition of society this season, looms out like a bright, particular star on the social firmament.⁹⁴

Following the war, the Club was able to slow down its voluntary service efforts and resume its original role of "relaxation and cheering hearts."⁹⁵ However, it continued its sewing groups, providing aid to Belgian refugees.⁹⁶

The particularly feminine nature of sewing, nursing and providing a "home away from home" for war workers and soldiers was echoed in the Congressional Club's participation in other high profile patriotic events between the wars. Starting in 1929, the Club collaborated with the National America War Mothers, for a Mother's Day celebration at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington Cemetery. In 1932, it sponsored the planting of a tree next to the tomb to honor the mother of the Unknown Soldier, along with another planted near the Lincoln Memorial for all mothers. This ceremony was broadcast to radio listeners nationwide.⁹⁷

Empowerment Through Participation in Club Politics and Organizational Responsibilities

The Congressional Club also served a number of functions that benefited members on a more personal level. Historians recognize clubs as important opportunities for women to occupy their own sphere between public and private. The clubhouse offered women a chance to inhabit a realm between the highly public world of their husbands and their private responsibilities as wives. However, the Club's unique membership often blurred these distinctions and in fact in many ways the Club provided an alternate way of participating in the public domain. As such, it provides strong support to Evans' assertion that "the study of women's history demands a more capacious definition of politics."⁹⁸

In 1914, the *Los Angeles Times* described the expectations of the Congressional wife this way: "nearly half a thousand whose prime duty in Washington is to establish social relationships with each other and with officialdom generally."⁹⁹ One significant aspect of the Club was that it even while it prepared women to participate in this official sphere, it also allowed them to define, create and organize a new social space of their own.

The politics of the Club itself were often equally dramatic. Once established, its members put together a governing body that included a president; five vice presidents; a recording secretary, a corresponding secretary and a treasurer. Offices were often fiercely contested and the novelty and drama of women participating in elections, especially the wives of noted public figures, drew the attention of the national press.¹⁰⁰ Reminiscent of the "calling" controversies, Club elections reportedly threatened to influence the operations of Congress.¹⁰¹

Participating in the elections allowed women a chance to express themselves as individuals and leaders. In interviews, officers were quizzed on their personal interests, regional biases and political views. The process of running for election and the interest of the national media allowed women the chance to become spokespeople in their own right, and ultimately preparing many for higher political office.¹⁰²

Maintaining continuity and leadership was challenging due to the inherent volatility of the club membership. Membership rolls fluctuated due to periodic Republican or Democratic sweeps, and other active members would leave Washington upon their husbands' retirement from Congress.¹⁰³ To assure financial stability, Club members capitalized on expertise in domestic matters and their prestige as the wives of public figures to gain better financial control of their organization. Since 1927, proceeds from the club's Cookbook (now in its 14th edition), have gone to a Building Fund that has allowed them to pay off the note on the clubhouse, remodel several times, and finance the 1940 addition.¹⁰⁴

Educational Opportunities in Public Affairs

A keen interest in public affairs was common to many women's groups of the time. Following the precedent set by pioneering clubs like the New England Woman's Club and New York's Sorosis, both founded in 1868, clubs across the

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country held discussions and presented essays and speeches on current events for women who had usually not had the opportunity to pursue higher education. Karen J. Blair discusses the vital link between education and empowerment, arguing that “clubwomen transformed lady hood by providing an intellectual and social self-improvement program outside the realm of the household, designed to nurture the skills that would enable women to demand reforms for all women and for all people in a society that had relegated them to the sidelines.”¹⁰⁵ Although the members’ unique status as Congressional wives could constrain their desire to demand reforms, the club also afforded extraordinary educational opportunities unlike that of any other. By virtue of their connections and prestige, members were able to attract notable speakers and educate themselves about highly significant issues of the day. In addition to the frequent visits of political figures accompanying their wives to events, many of the nation’s, and indeed the world’s, most distinguished authors, scientists, explorers and entertainers accepted the Club’s invitation to present lectures or performances at the clubhouse during these decades.¹⁰⁶ Many of the most notable speakers were strong female role models such as Amelia Earhart, who spoke of feminism and aeronautics in 1928.¹⁰⁷ The fact that these prominent guests accepted the Club’s invitation is testament to its very high social standing.

In addition to education through outside speakers, the club offered many courses, often taught by members themselves. The variety of topics offers a vivid and complex picture of both the members’ intellectual ambition and the day-to-day obligations of official life. Classes included “empowering” topics such as public speaking, newspaper writing, investment, art appreciation, and foreign languages, along with more typically “domestic” courses, such as millinery, bridge, and flower arrangements.

Some women used the club as an opportunity to educate themselves about public affairs and government operations. The journal of the chairman of the entertainment committee in 1911 discusses her engagement of the wife of the Ambassador to England to speak at the club, and her invitation to the heads of government agencies “to enlighten us about the things our government is doing quietly while we only hear the vociferous lawmakers.”¹⁰⁸ Many distinguished officials, from the U.S. and abroad would speak at the club over the next decades. Classes in parliamentary procedure were well-attended, especially in the Club’s early years, and informal discussions of public affairs were also popular.¹⁰⁹

As stated by Sara Evans, “education has had a very powerful and subversive impact by raising expectations, offering new skills and broader horizons.”¹¹⁰ By providing extraordinary exposure to distinguished guest speakers, diplomats and national voluntary opportunities, the Congressional Club played a role in preparing generations of Congressional wives to participate more fully in public, and sometimes political, life.

In keeping with the common practice among literary groups at this time to create pageants and performances as a means of self-expression,¹¹¹ the Club occasionally incorporated skits into public events as a way to comment on contemporary issues. With neither the right to vote nor much freedom to express political views, they used the clubhouse to “enact” their version of nationally significant events to a prominent audience. The 1913 annual club breakfast featured an elaborate “burlesque session of the United States Congress, from a feminine angle,” complete with a mock Congressional Record prepared by the Government Public Printer.¹¹² In 1917, the Club transformed the annual breakfast into a Barracks Breakfast set in an American camp in France, with Club members dressed up as Red Cross workers serving soldiers.¹¹³

Club Members Went on to Serve as Congressional Representatives and First Ladies

The Congressional Club played a significant role in providing a network and a training ground for our nation’s early female Congressional representatives. Women had made great strides in assuming formal political power in the decades following the Club’s move to New Hampshire Avenue, with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 and the first women serving in Congress in the 1910s and 20s, including three Club members. According to a U.S. House of Representatives document, most of the “pioneer women in Congress gained experience in public affairs as political confidantes and campaign surrogates for the Congressmen to whom they were married or otherwise related.”¹¹⁴ The report adds: “One enduring pattern, called the widow’s mandate... or the matrimonial connection, has been an important route for women to attain congressional office—especially the women in the first three generations [serving Congress].”¹¹⁵

Five Congressional Club members served in Congress between 1923 and 1941: Mae Ellen Hunt Nolan (1923-1925), Edith Nourse Rogers (1926-1960), Elizabeth Hawley Gasque (1938-1939), Margaret Chase Smith (1940-1973), and Katharine Edgar Byron (1941-1943).

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As a rule, widows rarely enjoyed long tenures in Congress, and few gained significant public stature in their own right.¹¹⁶ But, Congressional Club members were notable exceptions. For example, Edith Nourse Rogers, who assumed her husband's seat in 1925, went on to serve 35 years, establishing the longest term for a woman in Congressional history.¹¹⁷ Pioneering politician Margaret Chase Smith, who was elected to her husband's House seat in 1940 and continued to serve in the Senate until 1973. She was the first woman to be elected to both the House and the Senate, and when she left office, she held the record as the longest-serving female senator in U.S. history. Chase noted that the Club activities had introduced her to the complex social etiquette of Washington.¹¹⁸ According to the Margaret Chase Smith library, "Senator Smith credited the Congressional Club with helping ease her transition into her own congressional office."¹¹⁹

During this time period, three future First Ladies – Mrs. Warren Harding, Mrs. Herbert Hoover, and Mrs. Harry Truman¹²⁰ were also active members of the Club before their husbands became Presidents. It is likely that they gained leadership, knowledge and diplomatic skills by their participation in Club activities.

The Congressional Club Today

The activities of the Club have changed over the years. What was once a weekly program tea is now a bi-monthly luncheon featuring well-known speakers, musicians, and personalities. Its Red Cross work has been succeeded by other community services. The Children's Part has become the family holiday party in December. Founder's Day is still celebrated each year on or near the Club's March 4th anniversary date. The Club's largest social event is the annual First Lady's Luncheon.

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United States Senate. *Art & History: Senate Spouses.* Retrieved March 7, 2011 from <http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/SenateSpouses.htm>

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 5443 square feet
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

Congressional Club
Name of Property

Washington, DC
County and State

1	<u>18</u> Zone	<u>323493</u> Easting	<u>4309573</u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing	4	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Congressional Club is bounded to the south by U Street and to the west by the intersection of 16th Street and New Hampshire Avenue, on the north by the Northumberland Apartment building, and to the east by the Freedom Baptist Church.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.) The boundary is defined by the building's lot: SSL 0189 0801

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Stephen A. Hansen, Principal
organization DC Historic Designs, LLC date March 7, 2011
street & number 2323 Ashmead Place, NW telephone (202) 596-1961
city or town Washington state DC zip code 20009
e-mail shansen@dchistoricdesigns.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Congressional Club
City or Vicinity: Washington, DC

Congressional Club

Washington, DC

Name of Property

County and State

State: DC
Name of Photographer: Stephen A. Hansen
Date of Photographs: March 2011
Location of Original Digital Files: DC Historic Preservation Office

Photo #1 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0001
North façade (entrance) on NH Avenue, camera facing northeast

Photo #2 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0002
South façade on U Street, NW

Photo #3 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0003
View from the west showing front and side of the addition

Photo #4 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0004
View from the east showing back of the main block and rear face of the addition

Photo #5 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0005
View of first floor hallway

Photo #6 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0006
View of First Lady's Miniature Gown Room

Photo #7 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0007
View of the grand staircase

Photo #8 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0008
View of the grand hall, second floor

Photo #9 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0009
View of sitting area, first floor

Photo #10 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0010
View of First Lady's Portrait Room

Photo #11 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0011
View of Doll Collection Room

Photo #12 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0012
View of fireplace in the grand hall, second floor

Photo #13 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0013
View of the kitchen, second floor addition

Photo #14 of 14: Washington_DC_CongressionalClub_0014
View of NH Ave entrance, from interior

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Congressional Club Inc.

Congressional Club

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

street & number 2001 New Hampshire Avenue, NW

telephone (202) 332-1155

city or town Washington, DC

state DC

zip code 20009

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

ENDNOTES

¹ James M. Goode. *Capital Losses: A Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings*. Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003, 109.

² Dubrow, Gail Lee & Jennifer B. Goodman. *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, 92.

³ The full titles of these two books are *Diet for the Sick: A Treatise on the Values of Foods, their Application to Special Conditions of Health and Disease, and on the Best Methods of their Preparation* and *The Aristocracy of Health: A Study of Physical Culture, Our Favorite Poisons, and a National and International League for the Advancement of Physical Culture*.

⁴ The Committee of One Hundred. *American Health: The Official Organ of the American Health League*. Volume 1, Number 3.

⁵ "Mary F. Henderson," in Feeding America: The Historic American Cookbook Project.

http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks/html/authors/author_henderson.html#sources. Accessed November 1, 2007.

⁶ Beeson, Sue. *Woman's Work in Missouri. Literature Art, Invention and Practical Business*. Compiled for the State Committee on Womens' Work for the World's Fair at New Orleans, 1885.

⁷ The Hendersons' fortune was made through investing heavily in supposedly worthless bonds issued after the Civil War. See "Mary F. Henderson," in Feeding America.

⁸ *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, p. 344.

⁹ *Sixteenth Street Architecture*, p. 451.

¹⁰ "Major Totten Dies, Outstanding Architect, Designed Embassies." *The Washington Post*. Feb. 2, 1939.

¹¹ *Sixteenth Street Architecture*.

¹² *City Beautiful Movement*. Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Beautiful_movement

¹³ *Sixteenth Street Historic District National Register Nomination*. National Park Service. 1978, p. 3.

¹⁴ Kohler, *Sixteenth Street Architecture*.

¹⁵ *A Message to Congress From The Woman's [sic] 16th Street Improvement Association*, Girard Print. Philadelphia, PA. ca. 1909.

Henderson was the President of this group at least 6 of the 22 additional signatories were Congressional Club members, suggesting that some women did feel comfortable lobbying Congress under auspices distinct from the Congressional Club. Most of these members lived in the 16th Street neighborhood. See Congressional Club membership directory, various years.

¹⁶ Henderson's writings clearly demonstrate that she was familiar with the ideals of the City Beautiful movement and the role that ceremonial buildings could play in identity building. See her unsuccessful petition republished as "For An International Permanent Exposition at Washington, D.C." Originally published in the *Washington Times*, May 13, 1919.

¹⁷ *Washington Post*, Mar 15, 1914, 14.

¹⁸ "Mrs. J.B. Henderson Dies in Bar Harbor." *New York Times*. July 17, 1931, 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ Henderson retained Paul Pelz, co-designer of the Library of Congress, to draw up detailed renderings and floor plans, including two conservatories, two palm houses, and a winter garden, for a grander and more appropriate White House. Henderson was an ardent supporter of Architect Franklin W. Smith's 1900 petition to Congress, entitled "Aggrandizement of Washington," which also advocated the construction of a colossal Presidential Mansion on Meridian Hill. See Sue Kohler, *Sixteenth Street Architecture*. 1978-1988. Volume 1, 326.

Congressional Club

Name of Property

Washington, DC

County and State

²¹ The name change proved to be unpopular, so it reverted to 16th Street in 1914.

²² Goode, 22.

²³ Cited in Meridian Hill Historic District National Register Nomination [DRAFT], 8.

²⁴ Wives of ex-Congressmen were also eligible to be members. *Annals*, 44, 154, 162.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁶ Congressional Club Board Minutes (minutes 13-15), 73, 92.

²⁷ *Annals*, 95.

²⁸ *Annals*, 19.

²⁹ *Annals*, 213.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Annals*, 213.

³² Minutes of Executive Board Meeting, 1908-1915, 162.

³³ Letter from Totten to William P. Lipscomb, May 2, 1914. Congressional Club archives, accordion folder 1913-1915.

³⁴ *Annals*, 158.

³⁵ "Social Arbiter of Capital Dies at Bar Harbor," *The Washington Post*, July 17, 1931, 1.

³⁶ Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997, 5.

³⁷ Annette Baxter, "Preface," in Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914*. New York, 1980): xiii.

³⁸ Dubrow, 92-93.

³⁹ Congressional Club, *The Congressional Club Historical Review and Register [1908-1962]* [CCHR], p.1.

⁴⁰ Gail Lee Dubrow, "Women and Community," in Page Putnam Miller, *Reclaiming the Past: Landmarks of Women's History*.

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, 83.

⁴¹ *Annals*, 5. The *Annals* notes that Perkins had previously been the president of another large women's club.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴³ *Annals* and *CCHR*, 13.

⁴⁴ H.R. 22029. 1908.

⁴⁵ See Congressional Research Service, "Congressionally Chartered Nonprofit Organizations ('Title 36 Corporations'): What They Are and How Congress Treats Them" (Washington, DC: 2004). Note that the Congressional Club is not classified as a Title 36 corporation, like the DAR and GFWC.

⁴⁶ Both of these groups were established in 1890 and subsequently sought Congressional charter.

⁴⁷ *CCHR*, 3.

⁴⁸ Despite the slightly broader base, for simplicity's sake, this nomination generally refers to Club members as "Congressional wives," since they make up the majority of the membership roster. Daughters and other female relatives may join as Associate members and active members may remain members even after their husbands die or leave office. Some contemporary press accounts use the term "hostess" to describe the woman representing Congressmen or Cabinet members in public. Today, with women increasingly serving in Congress, the Club is now open to "spouses."

⁴⁹ United States Senate. "Senate Spouses." Retrieved October 10, 2007 from

<http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/SenateSpouses.htm>.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Formal employment of Congressional wives was discontinued only after the passage of nepotism laws following World War II.

⁵¹ Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: 1980):62.

⁵² *The Washington Post*, September 19, 1897, 24.

⁵³ The basic requirements at the time of the establishment of the Congressional Club were that wives of the Cabinet members call first on the wives of Senators (since it was the Senate that confirmed Cabinet positions), but the wives of the House members must call first on the wives of the Cabinet members. See Harrison Rhodes, "Washington the Cosmopolitan." *Harper's Weekly* (January 1917):159-161.

⁵⁴ James Hamilton developed a social code in 1789, six days after Washington's inauguration, which included the appropriate conduct when visiting the President's house and his family. See *Washington Post*, Feb 14, 1937, B5.

⁵⁵ *The Washington Post*. Feb 14, 1937, B5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Annals*, 5-6.

⁵⁸ *The Washington Post*. April 26, 1908, E1.

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⁵⁹ *The Washington Post*, November 16, 1913, 1.

⁶⁰ *Annals*, 114.

⁶¹ *The Washington Post*. Jan 26, 1937, 6.

⁶² Dorris B. Martin. "A Congressional Wife in Wartime Washington." *The Palimpsest*, 35.

⁶³ Helen Herron Taft. *Recollections of Full Years*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1914, 280.

⁶⁴ "Capital Women Rebel: Fair Washingtonians Plan the Doom of Calling Evil." *The Washington Post*. April 26, 1908, E1.

⁶⁵ Martin, 40.

⁶⁶ *CCHR*, p. 4.

⁶⁷ *Annals (1933-1935)*, 189.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Martin, 36.

⁷¹ Margaret Downing. *Mrs. Crumpacker*. *Los Angeles Times*. April 17, 1910, III 13.

⁷² *Annals*, 218-219.

⁷³ "Speaker's Secretary." *New York Times*. July 24, 1932.

⁷⁴ *Annals*, 218-219.

⁷⁵ See "President Goes Into Retreat in Seclusion of White House." *Philadelphia Inquirer* (March 21, 1915) and "Washington Looks for Gay Winter: Debutante Affairs and Weddings Loom Large on the Social Horizon." *Philadelphia Inquirer* (November 1, 1914)."

⁷⁶ "Reception to Diplomats at White House Omitted on New Year's." *Philadelphia Inquirer* (January 3, 1915). A 1968 article celebrating the Club's anniversary also relates this account, stating "during the period of mourning following the death of President Woodrow Wilson's first wife, the State Department asked the Congressional Club to take over the official entertaining of foreign officials coming to Washington. See Marie Smith, "Sixty Years Escaping Politics," *Washington Post*, March 3, 1968.

⁷⁷ Bill Harris, *The First Ladies Fact Book*. New York: Black Dog & Leventhal, 2005, 418.

⁷⁸ *Annals*, 90-91, 102.

⁷⁹ Mary Foote Henderson repeatedly lobbied the Club to offer membership to the "Diplomatic Corps' ladies, wives, and daughters," but her proposals were never adopted. See *Annals*.

⁸⁰ *Annals (1923-1925)*, 143.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁸² A number of the members' husbands, perhaps most notably that of Mary Foote Henderson, had been active in establishing the Bureau of American Republics, later the Pan American Union, and now the Organization of American States. See James M. Goode, *Capital Losses: A Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003):67-68.

⁸³ *CCHR*, 4.

⁸⁴ *CCHR*, 15. In 1948, the Club renamed the third edition *The Congressional Club Cookbook: Favorite National and International Recipes*. From then on, the cookbook featured an increasing number of recipes from all over the globe, submitted by wives of ambassadors, world leaders, and other important global figures, broadening the outlook of the cookbook's female constituency and representing the Club as an organization firmly entrenched in international affairs.

⁸⁵ *Annals*, 109.

⁸⁶ *Annals*, 108-109.

⁸⁷ *Annals*, 116-117.

⁸⁸ *Daily Journal of Commerce*. June 30, 1917.

⁸⁹ "Wives and Senators of Congressmen Organize in Order to Look After Hoosier Visitors in Washington." *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*.

⁹⁰ "Will Bring Touch of Home to the Lonely: Women of Congressional Club at Washington Announce Plans"

⁹¹ *Annals*, 110.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 110-112.

⁹³ After the nation's entry in World War I, the Wilson White House "set an example by ceasing all reception and parties, unless they were for a visiting ally." Robert P. Watson (ed.), *American First Ladies*. Pasadena: Salem Press, 2006, 198.

⁹⁴ "Women's Department."

⁹⁵ *Annals*, 123.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁹⁷ "Mothers Honored at National's Capital" *New York Times*. May 9, 1932

⁹⁸ Sara M. Evans, "Women's History Scholarship," in National Park Service, *Exploring A Common Past: Researching and Interpreting Women's History for Historic Sites* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 2nd edition with 2005 updates), 17.

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⁹⁹ “Mrs. Alexander White Gregg.” *Los Angeles Times*. April 25, 1914.

¹⁰⁰ “Society: Over the Teacups,” January 28, 1911 from *Annals*; “North Carolina Woman Heads Congressional Club,” ca. 1924 from scrapbooks; many others from scrapbooks.

¹⁰¹ Article from scrapbook.

¹⁰² The fact that a member had held a Congressional Club office was regularly cited in headlines about the woman and would later be prominently featured in their obituaries.

¹⁰³ *Annals*. Active membership during the years 1914-1945 averaged about 300 (with an additional several dozen associate and non-resident members).

¹⁰⁴ The cookbook also incorporated articles written by federal officials on food values and standards, proper feeding of children, and other issues related to nutrition. “Prominent Persons Give Recipes of Dishes in Congressional Club Cook Book” *New York Times*, Nov. 16, 1927.

¹⁰⁵ Dubrow, 90.

¹⁰⁶ *Annals* and *CCHR*.

¹⁰⁷ “Woman Fliers Entertained,” *New York Times*, Dec 15, 1928.

¹⁰⁸ Ellen Mary Slayden. *Washington Wife: Journal of Ellen Mary Slayden from 1897 to 1919*. c. 1962. Page 149.

¹⁰⁹ One contemporary account described the practice as members “meeting on Wednesday afternoons to knit and discuss pending national legislation.” See “Manifold Activities Occupy Prominent Persons in Capital.”

¹¹⁰ Evans, “Women’s History Scholarship,” p. 16.

¹¹¹ Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literary and Cultural Work in U.S. Women’s Clubs, 1880-1920*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1997):5.

¹¹² *Annals*, p.57.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹¹⁴ U.S. House of Representatives, “Women in Congress 1917–2006,” 25. Available at:

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/serialset/documents/hd108-223/>. Note there are two versions of this documents and we have to check page citations carefully

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, citing Irwin N. Gertzog, *Congressional Women: Their Recruitment, Integration, and Behavior*. Westport, CT: Praeger. 1995, 17–36.

¹¹⁶ “Women in Congress.”

¹¹⁷ “Women in Congress.”

¹¹⁸ Smith had served as the Club’s Treasurer in 1939 (*Congressional Club Yearbook* 1939). Smith was the first woman elected to both houses and Congress and the first woman to have her name put forward as a presidential nominee by a major party. See

<http://www.mcslibrary.org/bio/biog.htm>.

¹¹⁹ Margaret Chase Smith Library. Available at www.mcslibrary.org/program/museum/social.htm.

¹²⁰ Mrs. Truman was an active member for eight years and served as Finance Committee Chair in 1943, before becoming First Lady.