

Philos have evolved from a social to a service club

Oldtimers admire spunk of today's girls

By SUE LENTHE
Staff Writer

There was a time, not so very long ago, when the view from the Ray Patterson home on Gregg Drive saw not shopping centers and subdivisions stretching from Lake Loveland to the foothills but a carpet of cherry trees and meadows, dotted with farms and fields.

It was a different time for Loveland — not a city then but a village.

It was a different time for Loveland's Philo Club as well.

Recently, gazing out over the Patterson's sun-dappled view of modern-day Loveland, Lillian Patterson and Eva Bliss shared their impressions of Loveland's Philo Club, then and now. Both are long-time members of the local women's service organization.

The Philo Club, referred to then as the Philomatheon Club, had been in existence in Loveland for 10 years when Eva Bliss joined in 1928.

"It was started by a bunch of high school girls," she recalled, under the watchful eye of Mrs. Henry Van Sant.

"It was such a lively bunch of girls, she wanted to corral that energy," Lillian Patterson commented, to keep them from putting it to a bad use.

In 1929 and 1930 when the Depression began reaching cold fingers of poverty into Loveland, the Philomatheons (Greek for "seekers of knowledge") turned from their social activities and their studies of cultural things to philanthropic work. Philanthropy stayed with the group. "That's pretty much the whole drift now," said Mrs. Patterson, who joined the group in 1938.

The club was much smaller then, a membership of maybe 20 contrasted with the 75-member Philo Club of today.

"Every Philo member had responsibility for the whole program," Mrs. Bliss said. Members gathered "a composite of food, clothing and toys" for needy Loveland families, "for Christmas, but also the year around," she said. "Of course, there weren't the social services agencies at that time."

The Philo Club rooms at Fourth and Cleveland, downstairs in what was then the First National Bank building, would smell of fruit and the other good things gathered for the

project. "We would pack the boxes ourselves," said Mrs. Bliss, and then the members would deliver them to needy families.

"One group that helped for years with the delivery was the L Club at Loveland High School," recalled Mrs. Patterson. The L Club members provided the muscle for the project, she said.

As recently as 15 years ago, the project began to change, evolving into what is now the Philo Club's annual Santa Shop. The Santa Shop, held for one day in early December, transforms the Philo club rooms (still at Fourth and Cleveland) into a veritable department store, stuffed to the gills with the trappings of Christmas.

The parents of low-income families are invited to come to the club rooms on that December afternoon and "shop" for their children. They go away laden with bags and packages.

The families, referred to Philo by the House of Neighborly Service, are screened by club members in the fall. From information gathered during the screening, Philo is able to provide each child in each family with an impressive list of toys, books, games and clothing.

While most all of the membership pitches in to help with the Santa Shop, the effort is orchestrated by two club members who are appointed Santa Shop co-chairmen.

As the Santa Shop has grown in scope each year (this year nearly 300 children will be served) the participation of the community has also grown. Many Loveland clubs, organizations and individuals pitch in, donating money, toys and clothes and knitting hats and mittens for the Santa Shop.

Along with the Santa Shop, today's Philo Club also coordinates a Christmas food basket project. Club members are joined by schools, churches, businesses and families across town who collect food and fill baskets for families in need.

While they say Philo has always been an ambitious group, Mrs. Bliss and Mrs. Patterson both commented on their respect for the accomplishments of today's club. "The young girls are so ambitious now," said Mrs. Bliss. To which Mrs. Patterson added, "We're kind of in awe, I guess, of these marvelous, energetic gals."



Photo by SUE LENTHE

Eva Bliss, seated and Lillian Patterson, are both long-time members of the Philo Club. As such, the two have witnessed many changes in both the club and the town over the years. They shared their impressions of some of these changes during a recent interview.