

**Homefront Heroines:  
The Wartime Contributions of Civic Women in Whiteville, North Carolina**

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As Lieutenant Billy Bragaw, a World War II pilot from Southport, North Carolina, raced through the skies, defending his country, he must have held the women of the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club in high regard. By selling enough bonds during the Sixth War Loan Drive to purchase a Hellcat fighter, the ladies of Whiteville, North Carolina, played a part in the worldwide conflict each time Lt. Bragaw took to the skies. This is only one example of the many ways in which American civic women in small town America contributed to the war effort from 1941 to 1945. The traditional roles of civic organizations as sources of community involvement and social interaction expanded and took on new meaning in the context of the war. As seen in the work of the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, women's civic clubs played a valuable role in the war effort and in the continuation of American life on the homefront.

American women contributed to the Allied victory of World War II in a number of ways. There is little debate among historians about the importance of women's involvement and the spirit of volunteerism to the winning of the war. In the year after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Margaret Culkin Banning published *Women For Defense* to inform women about the ways in which they would be needed for the defense effort. She wrote, "Women by themselves cannot win this war. But quite certainly it cannot be won without them."<sup>1</sup> Many women served in the military as Navy WAVES, Air Force WASPs, Army WACS, Coast Guard SPARs, or Marines in non-combatant jobs that ranged from flight instructors to clerical staff.<sup>2</sup> Actresses in Hollywood and female musicians volunteered their time and fulfilled their patriotic duty by entertaining troops. As made famous by the movie *A League of Their Own*, women began playing softball professionally when male players were drafted into military service. Across the country women traded their skirts and purses for trousers and tool aprons and swapped their rural homes for city dwellings in the centers of defense production.

Driven by patriotism and the goal of bringing loved ones home, many women who were not laboring in factories or otherwise working to earn their livings spent their time volunteering for the war effort.<sup>3</sup> As Monica Kirkpatrick Johnson reported in an article entitled "Women's Community Service," "More than two out of three women studied participated in community service activities of one kind or another."<sup>4</sup> In 1942, twelve million women in the United States belonged to clubs, and nearly every club had a

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Culkin Banning, *Women for Defense* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1942), ix.

<sup>2</sup> WAVES is the acronym for Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service; WASPs is the acronym for Women Airforce Service Pilots; WAC is the acronym for Women's Army Corps; and SPARs is the nickname given to the U.S. Coast Guard Women's Reserve. It is a contraction of the Coast Guard motto: Semper Paratus: "Always Ready." Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers War* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 137-161.

<sup>3</sup> Roger W. Lotchin, *The Bad City in the Good War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 89.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Kirkpatrick Johnson, et al., "Women's Community Service, 1940-1960: Insights from a Cohort of Gifted American Women," *Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 1 (1996): 63.

specific committee working towards national defense.<sup>5</sup> The society pages of the county newspaper, *The News Reporter*, show that during the war years there was no lack of women's organizations in Columbus County, North Carolina. Civic groups, having already established a tradition of civic participation and community service, provided a medium through which women could contribute to the war effort.

The Junior Woman's club of Whiteville, North Carolina, is but one civic institution among many in North Carolina and the United States that exemplifies how the local assistance of women figured prominently in the global conflict. Historians have said surprisingly little about women's voluntary services to the war through the specific study of civic associations.<sup>6</sup> However, studying the work of the Junior Woman's Club adds to our understanding of the ways in which citizens of small towns coped with and contributed to the war effort.

The organizational structure of the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club helps to explain the accomplishments of the women during the years 1941 to 1945. The club was part of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs. Presidents of the state federation developed themes that the individual clubs worked towards such as the 1943 to 1945 theme, "Build for the future a life without fear, a faith without doubt, and a world without war."<sup>7</sup> In Whiteville, membership was open to women aged sixteen through thirty-five.

The group usually held their monthly meetings at the homes of club members. Participants were required to pay yearly dues, attend monthly meetings, and earn a minimum amount of points through participation in the group's activities. Each meeting began with singing the club hymn, reading the club collect (similar to a pledge), a roll

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<sup>5</sup> Banning, *Women for Defense*, 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> While primary sources on the topic of civic contribution are plentiful, secondary sources, specifically scholarly articles and analyses pertaining to the subject of civic contribution to the war effort, are lacking. Keith Ayling and Margaret Banning wrote books during the war that communicated the importance for women to join the fight on the domestic front explaining how they could do so. In his 1942 book *Calling All Women*, Keith Ayling wrote extensively on ways in which women could advance the war effort and protect democracy. He also reproduced the Office of Civilian Defense's list of opportunities for women volunteers. These books together with first hand accounts recorded in interviews, newspaper articles, and club minutes are primary sources offering insights into the specific response of the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club to their new role in the context of a society at war. Karen Anderson's *Wartime Women*, Emily Yellin's *Our Mother's War*, and Neil McMillen's *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South* are some examples of the substantial amount of writings on women's roles in World War II. Books such as *North Carolina's Role in World War II*, Geoffrey Perret's *Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph*, Roger Lotchin's, *The Good City in the Bad War*, and Monica Kirkpatrick Johnson's *Sociological Quarterly* article "Women's Community Service, 1940-1960" all address the prevalence of volunteering for the cause in general terms. Johnson wrote, "This was a time of strong national unity and patriotism. Opportunities and the awareness of opportunities to volunteer were heightened, and volunteering became simultaneously a way to help the war effort." In "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," Robert Putnam argues that civic participation has declined since the World War II generation exited civic life. His controversial argument posits that civic activity played a significant role during World War II.

Keith Ayling, *Calling All Women*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942), 43-58.

Johnson, "Women's Community Service", 60.

Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6.1 (1995): 65-78.

<sup>7</sup> Frances Renfro Doak. *Toward New Frontiers: A History of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs* (Raleigh: Capital Printing Company, 1962), 24.

call, reading and approval of the previous meetings' minutes, and the treasurer's report. Then each committee chair presented a report on her department's activities. The Whiteville Junior Woman's club minutes as recorded in the club's ledger show that the president conducted the meetings according to Robert's Rules of Order. All plans of action to be taken had to receive a motion, be seconded, and carried before going into effect. After the business portion of the meeting, the Program chair supervised the program for the month, which usually involved an educational speaker, but occasionally a musical performance or entertaining reading. Finally, the members enjoyed light refreshments and the meetings adjourned.<sup>8</sup> The discipline and focus of the meetings contributed to the overall efficiency of the club and allowed them to do as much as they did for the community and the war. In addition, through following proper club protocol, women practiced and preserved democracy, the ideology that Americans fought to defend.

As the war sat on the doorstep of America, the club added a specialized National Defense Committee, or as it was called in later years, the War Service Committee, to address the challenges posed by the war.<sup>9</sup> The first mention of a National Defense Department in the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club is found in the minutes of the September 1941 meeting in which club president Helen Fuller appointed a few ladies to meet with the Red Cross Production Chairman.<sup>10</sup> The group became the Defense Committee. In November 1941, they reported that twenty-six kits containing fruit cakes, cigars, and phonograph records had been prepared to send to soldiers stationed in Trinidad during Christmas. Additionally, twenty-one sweaters were knitted for distribution by the Red Cross.<sup>11</sup> By 1943, the committee had changed its name to the War Service Committee. As North Carolina Federation historian Frances Doak writes:

[T]he clubs and individuals seemed to work with a concentrated zeal at one single purpose: "Get done with the war," as reports show. While regular duties were not neglected, the war work over-shadowed all else and was a big part of the total effort of North Carolina in helping to win the war.<sup>12</sup>

The women wanted to devote a significant amount of their time and resources to supporting the war and bringing home their loved ones and the committee structure enabled them to do so.

Selling war bonds was one of the important projects undertaken by North Carolina defense and war service committees. The history of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs reports that in three bond drives, club women across the state raised over five million dollars. By the end of the war, sales reached \$12,179,245, ranking the North Carolina Federation fourth out of forty-eight federations. With their bond sales, each of the sixteen districts in North Carolina "bought" either a fighter plane or a bomber. Together with seven local clubs, the North Carolina Federation also

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<sup>8</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club. Records and Minutes of Meetings: 1938-1946. Whiteville, North Carolina.

<sup>9</sup> Other club committees included Education, Public Welfare, Ways and Means, Publicity, Fine Arts, and the Program. Banning, *Women for Defense*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 9/41, 115.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 11/41, 135.

<sup>12</sup> Doak. *Toward New Frontiers*, 21.

purchased bombers, bringing the total number of aircraft funded by North Carolina clubwomen to twenty-four. Additionally, the Fifth War Loan Campaign raised enough money to pay for one of the eighteen hospital ships, the *Larkspur*.<sup>13</sup>

Such strong results from the Tar Heel state were the consequence of hard work being done by clubs on the local level. Clubwomen in Whiteville did their part to sell and purchase war bonds. One common and fashionable way of vending defense stamps was to make stamp corsages worn in place of floral corsages. At the January 1943 meeting, War Service Chairman Erma Weaver reported that the committee had sold thirty defense stamp corsages, totaling \$50.08.<sup>14</sup> The following month, Belk Department Store ordered one-hundred corsages. Women who typically wore floral corsages on Easter purchased sixty-seven stamp corsages in April of 1943.<sup>15</sup> Men and women who attended the club's square dance and auction in 1944 sported war stamp boutonnieres and corsages to show their patriotism.<sup>16</sup> Flowers to finance the fight against fascism became Whiteville's latest trend.

The Whiteville Junior women became a driving force behind the seven war loan drives of Columbus County.<sup>17</sup> The ladies sold \$62,775 worth of bonds in the Fourth War Loan Drive of 1943-1944.<sup>18</sup> In June of 1944, the Juniors took part in the Fifth War Loan Drive by canvassing the residential districts of east Whiteville. During that drive, the club sold \$25,050 series E bonds, \$74 series F bonds, and \$3,000 series G bonds.<sup>19</sup> The women, however, outdid themselves in the following drive in 1944, selling \$99,345.55 worth of E, F, and G bonds.<sup>20</sup> The bonds from the Sixth War Loan Drive went towards the purchase of a Hellcat fighter plane. *Air Classics* magazine editor Michael O'Leary writes in "Incredible Cat" that "the initial cost for a Hellcat, minus government furnished equipment, was \$50,000, but this dropped to \$35,000 by the end of the production."<sup>21</sup> While the exact price paid by Junior Woman's Club for the plane is not recorded, the bonds sold would have more than covered the cost. A plaque recognizing the efforts of the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club was placed on the plane flown by Lieutenant Billy

<sup>13</sup> Emma Gay Stephenson. *Challenges for Change: A History of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, Volume IV* (Charlotte: The Delmar Company, 1982), 34.

<sup>14</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 193.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>17</sup> In August of 1941 President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met and drafted the Atlantic Charter. Its terms upheld the right of all people to choose their own governments and affirmed the Anglo-American dedication to peace after the destruction of the Nazi tyranny. By the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club joining the war effort, they agreed to uphold the goals set forth in the Atlantic Charter, to help get rid of tyranny and ensure the world the right to democracy. Michael Lyons, *World War II: A Short History*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 147-48.

<sup>18</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records., 249.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 323. Series E, F, and G Bonds were issued by the United States Treasury and did a great deal for financing the war. Series E bonds were issued at 75% of their face value, F Bonds at 74%, and G Bonds at their face value and paid interest by Treasury check every six months. Bureau of the Public Debt. "Series A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, and K Savings Bonds and Savings Notes." 2005. <[www.publicdebt.treas.gov/sav/savold.htm](http://www.publicdebt.treas.gov/sav/savold.htm)> (3 March 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Michael O'Leary. "Incredible Cat," *Air Classics*, January 2000, <[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3901/is\\_200001/ai\\_n8901621#continue](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3901/is_200001/ai_n8901621#continue)> (1 November 2005).

Bragaw. Acknowledging the women's contribution in a letter to W.B. Keziah of Southport, North Carolina, Lieutenant Bragaw wrote:

I have a new plane that I thought you might like to hear about. It is a Hellcat Nightfighter, the same as I flew on my last cruise, but this one has a little sticker just forward of the cockpit. It reads, 'This aircraft was bought through an equal amount in war bonds purchased by the Junior Woman's Club of Whiteville, North Carolina' . . . I am the only Tar Heel pilot on our squadron. The plane should be assigned to me. The next time you are over in Whiteville and should see any of these worthy ladies of the Junior Woman's Club, I wish that you would express to them my personal thanks. Tell them that this plane, which they bought, is the last word in carrier fighters.<sup>22</sup>

The plane was with Admiral Halsey's fleet off the coast of Japan and "giving the Japs trouble a plenty."<sup>23</sup> The cities that hosted war-time industry had much to boast about when it came to their contributions to the war effort, but little attention has been given to the aid received from small towns. Whiteville, a rural, southern town was certainly not a center for defense production; yet its citizens took pride in the modest contributions they could make. Bragaw had reason to be grateful for and proud of the way his fellow North Carolinians supported him and his comrades. The efforts of Whiteville women gave the United States a plane that truly had an impact on the war.

Even after this tremendous gift, the clubwomen did not stop, but continued to finance the fighting. Showing their determination and loyalty to the cause until the very end, in 1945 the club sold \$75,112.50 in bonds in the seventh and final war loan drive of the conflict.<sup>24</sup> In a war finance publication, Mabel Wingfield, the society editor for *The News Reporter* and county chairman of the Woman's Division for the sale of War Bonds, stated that her best help in selling war bonds in Columbus County was the Junior Woman's Club.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, its members took advantage of every avenue possible for the advancement of the war.

Tobacco markets provided one such innovative opportunity to serve the cause. The Junior Woman's Club made Whiteville the first tobacco market town in North Carolina to launch the Tobacco Bond program.<sup>26</sup> From August 8 through October 13, 1944, tobacco warehouse bond sales totaled \$37,500.<sup>27</sup> The campaign eventually extended to every North Carolina tobacco market town. Referring to the work of the Whiteville Junior Woman's club the state chairman of the Warehouse War Bond Program said, "If every group is as well organized and functions as smoothly as the one in Whiteville, the state committee will be highly gratified."<sup>28</sup> If the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club was representative of what women's organizations were doing across the country, then the entire nation had reason to be thankful.

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<sup>22</sup> "Pilots Junior Woman's Club 'Hellcat'," *The News Reporter*, 30 July, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 373.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

<sup>26</sup> "State Chairman of Tobacco Program in Whiteville." *The News Reporter*, 24 Aug. 1944, p.1.

<sup>27</sup> "Junior Women Report Sales." *The News Reporter*, 5 July, 1945, p.1.

<sup>28</sup> "State Chairman Pleased at Progress Here," *The News Reporter*, 28 August, 1944, 1.

In addition to their fundraising efforts, the ladies used club money to purchase bonds. In January 1942, the guild obtained a Defense Saving Stamp book.<sup>29</sup> For every \$18.75 invested in a war bond, \$25 would be returned in ten years.<sup>30</sup> The organization was able to purchase its first one hundred dollar war bond in March of 1942.<sup>31</sup> Throughout the war years, the Ways and Means committee held various fundraisers such as bazaars, rummage sales, and the sale of magazine subscriptions and wrapping paper.<sup>32</sup> “We were always raising money for something,” former clubwoman Katherine Sledge recalled in a November 2005 interview.<sup>33</sup> Ten percent of the money made by the Ways and Means committee of the club was earmarked for stamps and bonds as well. By 1945, the Junior Woman’s Club possessed \$600 in war bonds.<sup>34</sup> The returns on investments later went towards building a club house.<sup>35</sup> Taking the initiative to purchase bonds, the club set an example for its individual members.

The organization also held its members accountable for personal contributions. At the November 1943 meeting, the women had to report on the total amount of war bonds they purchased individually.<sup>36</sup> As many hours as the women put into selling bonds, none of them had an excuse not to own stamps and bonds for themselves. The Whiteville club, however, made it even more convenient for their members to own bonds by financing the sale of war stamps at every club meeting from October of 1944.<sup>37</sup> These efforts did not go unrecognized. In June 1945, the organization was one of the sixteen clubs in the state to receive the Minute Man Flag, an award reserved for North Carolina Women’s clubs in which at least 90 percent of members bought war bonds or stamps on a regular basis.<sup>38</sup>

The club also sought to boost soldier morale. For the first months of the conflict, the club served coffee and doughnuts to the young men boarding buses and trains bound for military bases.<sup>39</sup> For many men it was their first time leaving Whiteville. Unfortunately some never returned, but the hospitality and kindness of the Juniors provided them a last minute reminder of what they were fighting to protect. Before heading into the war zones, the men first stopped at domestic army or navy bases scattered across the country. Airmen of Maxton Air Base, located about an hour west of Whiteville, received support regularly from the Junior Woman’s Club. In March of 1943, clubwoman Erma Weaver received a letter from James McKinney, chairman of the “Dayroom Project” at the Maxton Airbase requesting that the club donate ten dollars towards the furnishing of the day room. The motion to send the ten dollars was carried as was a motion to send a year’s subscription of *Readers Digest*.<sup>40</sup> Later that year the District War Service Chairman, Mrs. McKinnon, requested that a subscription to *Life*

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<sup>29</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman’s Club. Records, 143.

<sup>30</sup> Ayling, *Calling All Women*, 30.

<sup>31</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman’s Club, Records, 153.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>33</sup> Sledge. Interview.

<sup>34</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman’s Club. History of Whiteville Junior Woman’s Club: 1938-1945, Whiteville, North Carolina.

<sup>35</sup> “Two Woman’s Clubs Plan Club House,” *The News Reporter*, 11 October, 1945, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman’s Club, Records, 237.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 203

magazine be sent to the troops at Maxton.<sup>41</sup> The women's organization also packed ten Christmas boxes for soldiers in the Maxton Air Base hospital.<sup>42</sup> The women worked to provide the soldiers with as many luxuries they could, both on and off the base.

On weekends, soldiers were allowed to travel off base, and Whiteville was a destination for many of them, especially after the opening of the Servicemen's Center at the American Legion Hut. Twenty-five men from nearby Camp Davis were invited to attend the grand opening Christmas party on December 25, 1943. One of the ninety servicemen who attended that night, Sergeant Eugene R. Askin of Chicago and Camp Davis said "that servicemen were most appreciative of the center and showed the 'Yankees' what southern hospitality really was like."<sup>43</sup> Financed with \$2,500 by citizens of Whiteville, the center operated under the direction of committees of various civic organizations including the Junior Woman's club.<sup>44</sup> In addition to acting as hostesses on some weekends, the Juniors supplied playing cards and games to the center.<sup>45</sup> The weekend hangout entertained soldiers and tried to make them feel as much at home as possible.<sup>46</sup> Some of those servicemen visiting were indeed very far from home. An October 1944 article titled, "Center Suspends Activities on a Temporary Basis," reports that 1,473 enlisted men from every state except Utah had registered at the center from its opening until its closing in September.<sup>47</sup>

As in the Servicemen's Center, some of the outreach efforts of the Junior Woman's Club required joint ventures. While there were several ways in which the women could aid soldiers stationed on the home front, the club's arm did not reach across and touch the soldiers fighting on the European and Pacific fronts. The Red Cross, however, did have the means of directly helping the soldiers overseas. Therefore the club partnered with the local chapter of the American Red Cross to extend their work into the struggle.

To raise money for the American Red Cross, the Public Welfare committee sponsored a play, "Mystery at Midnight" on February 5 and 6, 1942.<sup>48</sup> Not only was the play intended to raise funds for the Red Cross, but by providing entertainment during a troubled time it was also to serve as a distraction from the war. For reasons left unexplained in the club minutes, \$18.50 were actually lost on the play.<sup>49</sup> Fortunately, this one disappointment was not the only attempt of the Whiteville Junior Woman's Club to

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<sup>41</sup> Mrs. McKinnon's first name not recorded.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 237

<sup>43</sup> "Yule Party for Servicemen Was Grand Success," *The News Reporter*, 30 December 1943, p.1.

<sup>44</sup> "Servicemen's Center to Open December 25<sup>th</sup> with Christmas Party," *The News Reporter*, 13 December 1943, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 245.

<sup>46</sup> Frances Wheeler. Personal Interview by author. 21 Oct. 2005, Whiteville, North Carolina.

In the United States, the USO provided recreation to servicemen outside of camp in their off duty hours. USOs combined the efforts of the YMCA, YWCA, the Salvation Army, the Jewish Welfare Board, the National Catholic Community Service, and the Traveler's Aid Society.

Megan Kate Winchel, "Good Food, Good Fun, and Good Girls: USO Hostesses and World War Two," University of Arizona, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> "Center Suspends Activities on a Temporary Basis," *The News Reporter*, 9 Oct. 1944, pg.1.

<sup>48</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 145.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

work with the international relief agency. The women saw much better returns in March of 1945 when the War Services department raised \$664.20 for the Red Cross canvass.<sup>50</sup>

The Juniors also partnered with the Red Cross to sponsor first aid classes.<sup>51</sup> In December 1942, Mrs. Franks, supervisor of Red Cross Nurses for North Carolina, spoke at a club meeting about the need for classes on nurse's aids and home nursing, and in February 1944, the Education Department of the club sponsored a Red Cross course in home nursing.<sup>52</sup> Americans everywhere were encouraged to receive first aid certification, which would be greatly needed if the homeland were attacked. Ayling wrote that the Red Cross worked "to mobilize all men and women able to take training in first aid and accident prevention so that on every city block and in every rural center in America there [would] be a trained first aider."<sup>53</sup> Due in no small part to the Whiteville Junior Women, Columbus County citizens did their share of work in preparing for an enemy attack.

The war created a shortage of nurses, and the clubwomen did what they could to remedy the situation. As reported in the history of the General Federation of Woman's Clubs, state federations provided a total of \$234,834 dollars in nursing scholarships to increase the limited numbers of trained nurses.<sup>54</sup> The Whiteville guild created the Nurses Scholarship Fund, for which they raised money by selling magazine subscriptions, sponsoring a "Sunday picture show," and collecting revenue from each member hosting a bridge table. They also used funds from the club bank, to which each member contributed ten cents in each month.<sup>55</sup> In 1944, the Juniors awarded a \$250 scholarship to a nursing student at Pembroke College.<sup>56</sup> Because of their efforts, Whiteville the club found a place on the National Honor Roll for the Red Cross Nursing Scholarship.<sup>57</sup>

Through the Red Cross, the Junior Women's club also lent their needles and thread to the war effort. The Red Cross established a sewing room in a local armory, where the women could work as a club or individually. Between September 1941 and May 1942, the club members spent 102 hours in the sewing room and produced 104 articles of clothing.<sup>58</sup> "I remember knitting all the time," former clubwoman Katherine Sledge remarked. "It was interesting and you felt like you were doing something that would help. I remember the Junior Women's Club knitted a lot of women and children's sweaters."<sup>59</sup> As a way to reward efforts made outside of the club, members were awarded one point towards their club participation for every hour of war work, including time spent in the sewing room. However the hope for a triumphant conclusion to the conflict and not the reward of points was the incentive. As Sledge said, "Everybody was after one goal, to just have peace."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 343.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>52</sup> Mrs. Franks first name not recorded. Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 185; Ibid., 251.

<sup>53</sup> Ayling, *Calling All Women*, 71.

<sup>54</sup> Mildred Wells White. *Unity in Diversity: The History of the General Federation of Woman's Clubs* (Washington, D.C.: GFWC, 1953), 233.

<sup>55</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 195.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 163

<sup>59</sup> Sledge, Interview.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Interview.

Some women, however, had to stay at home with their children and had limited time for participation in war-related club activities. As Sledge explained, “It was hard to have time. It was hard to have help, because everyone was involved in the war effort. Even if you have two or three little children around, that takes a lot of time.”<sup>61</sup> In October 1942, the Whiteville Juniors proposed a solution to the childcare problem. Under the jurisdiction of the War Services department, the women began a cooperative club nursery.<sup>62</sup> Local Girl Scouts helped in the nursery, and the First Baptist Church donated Sunday School rooms.<sup>63</sup> This type of group childcare became a national trend. As Karen Anderson writes in *Wartime Women*, “the lack of public child care services spawned makeshift, informal group care arrangements which were almost impossible to regulate or eliminate.”<sup>64</sup>

The women’s clubs also maintained their traditional activities during the war. In fact, the Education, Public Welfare, and Ways and Means committees of the club were just as busy as the War Service committee. Undeniably, the struggle against the Axis powers was central to life on the homefront, but women could not let the war distract them from everyday needs and routines. Author of the wartime book, *Calling All Women*, Keith Ayling, elaborated on this idea:

[W]e must educate and feed the children and keep our homes running smoothly and efficiently, a little more efficiently than before . . . Imagine the distress of sons and menfolk coming on furlough at finding the homes closed, and their bitter disappointment at being forced to spend their well-earned leisure hours in strange surroundings.<sup>65</sup>

To allow the distractions of the war to interrupt American life would have provided a sort of victory to the Axis powers. The Whiteville Junior Woman’s Club strove to see that life continued as normally as possible.

To improve the local education system, women donated considerable efforts to local schools and libraries. Mildred Wells, historian of the General Federation of Woman’s Clubs, claims in her book *Unity in Diversity* that “interest in library work has never flagged.” She continues, “Clubwomen have always realized that libraries are an integral part of the great scheme of public education.”<sup>66</sup> In February 1942, the club purchased twenty-two books for the local library. Because of the club’s support, the library featured a Junior Woman’s Club shelf.<sup>67</sup> When the public library was briefly closed, the club contributed books to Whiteville Primary School.<sup>68</sup>

The club also worked in organizing the local instructional infrastructure. In January 1945, Helen Fuller and Elizabeth Baldwin of the club’s Education Department were appointed to represent the club on a committee to establish a city school system in Whiteville.<sup>69</sup> The Whiteville City Schools system that stands today resulted in part from

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<sup>61</sup> Sledge, Interview.

<sup>62</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman’s Club, Records, 179.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 197, 239.

<sup>64</sup> Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 126.

<sup>65</sup> Ayling, *Women for Defense*, 153-154.

<sup>66</sup> Wells, *Unity in Diversity*, 165.

<sup>67</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman’s Club, Records, 151.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

the contributions of these women. A club member also served on the enlarged library board, which initiated a movement to establish the Whiteville memorial library.<sup>70</sup> The committees for the city school system and library would have been incomplete without representatives from the organization that had already contributed so much to the instruction of neighborhood children.

The most significant club contribution to local education was the Public Welfare Department's establishment of the first kindergarten in Whiteville. Plans were submitted and approved in the September 1943 meeting, and by October 1943 kindergarten was being held in the home of the teacher, Emiline Smith.<sup>71</sup> Tuition was five dollars per week, not including the fees for lunch and supplies.<sup>72</sup> The kindergarten project earned the club second place in a competition for the most outstanding community service work, sponsored by the state Federation of Women's Club.<sup>73</sup> In its first year of operation, the kindergarten graduated seven pupils, and the following year it opened with twenty-six.<sup>74</sup>

The Junior Woman's Club also showed concern for even younger children. Soon after the club was formed in 1938, it adopted the Columbus County Hospital nursery and spent almost \$535 on related equipment and supplies.<sup>75</sup> By 1944, the Columbus County Hospital was able to operate independently, and the club decided to discontinue its maintenance of the nursery.<sup>76</sup>

The hospital nursery project was just one of the many ways in which the club demonstrated its concern for the health of Columbus County citizens. Throughout the war years, the organization contributed to several public health funds. Consistent with what was happening in clubs across the state, the women supported the Polio Fund, the Tuberculosis Christmas Seal Sale, and the Cancer Control Fund.<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, the Tuberculosis Christmas seal sale of 1944 was postponed because of the Sixth War Loan Drive indicating that war activities had acquired priority over other activities.<sup>78</sup> However, the ladies did not neglect the Christmas Seal sale. The February 1945 minutes point out that total receipts for the TB Christmas Seals campaign amounted to \$342.20.<sup>79</sup> The clubwomen did not disregard other important causes because of the war; they simply worked harder. As former Whiteville Junior Martha Burns said, "We just did everything that was necessary."<sup>80</sup>

Involvement in civic organizations also offered time for recreation. Clubwomen worked very hard, but club work and meetings also functioned as an escape from daily duties. Monthly meetings were not strictly business; they additionally provided time to socialize. The Whiteville Junior Woman's Club planned events whose only purpose was entertainment. For example, in the December 1943 meeting took the form of a Christmas

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<sup>70</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records,, 379.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 231, 235.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>73</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, History, 1.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 259, 309.

<sup>75</sup> "Junior Woman's Club Has Good Project Record" *The News Reporter*, 27 July 1944, pg. 1.

<sup>76</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 277.

<sup>77</sup> Doak, *Towards New Frontiers*, 22.

<sup>78</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 315.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>80</sup> Martha Burns. Personal Interview conducted by author. 11 Nov. 2005, Whiteville, North Carolina.

tea.<sup>81</sup> In April 1944, and again at Christmas, the ladies entertained their husbands or escorts in a banquet held at Lake Waccamaw, North Carolina.<sup>82</sup> Not all of the Juniors' husbands were drafted into the service. Katherine Sledge was one of the fortunate women whose husband, Ferbie Sledge, was able to attend the banquets. Ferbie worked in the lumber industry and his service was needed there rather than in the military.<sup>83</sup> Many women were not so fortunate. To distract themselves from the anxiety of having loved ones in the war, the citizens of Whiteville needed recreational activities.

The Junior Woman's club hosted several leisure opportunities, not only for themselves but for all Whiteville residents. In November 1944, the group planned to kick off the Sixth War Loan Drive with a box supper, square dance, and auction event.<sup>84</sup> In the summer of 1944 clubwomen and their husbands built a park, complete with swings, benches, sandboxes, and a fire pit on the club lot.<sup>85</sup> While some of these events raised money for club projects, maintaining civilian morale was the most important service of these activities.

Finally, on August 14, 1945, the Junior Women of Whiteville celebrated the surrender of Japan with the rest of the nation. The women gathered that day for what was likely an emotional, celebratory monthly meeting. However, while the war had ended, the work to rebuild the world had just begun. During the first post-war years, the president of the state federation declared "Beginning at Home, Build a Better World" to be the theme of the individual organizations.<sup>86</sup> In their support of the state objectives, the Juniors endorsed the rebuilding of the Manila clubhouse destroyed by the Japanese.<sup>87</sup> By 1945, the War Service Committee had become the Post War Service Committee, which was active at least through 1946. However, the committee did not record most of their activities.<sup>88</sup> Just as the statewide theme from 1945 to 1947 suggests, the women of Whiteville continued to work as hard as ever to further the cause of peace, prosperity, and democracy for the nation and the local community.

Whether working directly to advance the cause of freedom or to improve the aspects of day-to-day life, the Whiteville Juniors contributed significantly to the homefront war effort from 1941 to 1945. Men such as Lieutenant Billy Bragaw and women who became Rosie the Riveters are often celebrated as heroes of World War II. However, frequently forgotten homefront heroes are the twelve million civic soldiers who worked determinedly for the war effort and the ideals for which it stood. Civic women, as exemplified by the Whiteville Junior Woman's club, responded to the call of duty on a local level and made a global impact.

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<sup>81</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 243.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>83</sup> Sledge, Interview.

<sup>84</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 315.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>86</sup> Doak, *Towards New Frontiers*, 30.

<sup>87</sup> Whiteville Junior Woman's Club, Records, 385.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 477

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Whiteville is a city in Columbus County, North Carolina, United States. The population was 5,394 at the 2010 census. It is the largest city in Columbus County and is the county seat. The city was named in 1810 for James B. White, the original owner of the town site. A post office called Whiteville has been in operation since 1821. In 1950, Whiteville fielded a professional minor league baseball team in the Class D Tobacco State League. Named the Tobs, the club lasted only one season before disbanding... Women in the Military. Beringer, Robin M. 1997. *Looking Over vs. Overlooking Historic Contributions: Women Veterans's Experiences of WWII (World War II)*. Ph.D. diss., California School of Professional Psychology. De Pauw, Linda G. 1981. *Women's Veteran's Historical Collection*, University of North Carolina, Greensboro. World War II Rumor Project Collection. American Folklife Center (1945-001), Library of Congress. Homefront Heroines book. Read 24 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. Patriotic Service Leads to Victories in Romance Relive life on... Some of the heroines take places formerly held by men doing work welding and guarding critical war facilities. One woman helps her community create a Victory garden, which helped feed populations during wartime rationing. My favorite of the four was by Homefront Heroines is a delightful collection of stories! It chronicles their romantic meeting, wartime contributions, and how the Lord brings them together again as she works as a nurse, and he returns, requiring her care in a rehab hospital. I am grateful to the publisher and to NetGalley for providing me with an ARC for this, my honest review. ...more. Women's contributions to the war effort were highlighted in newspapers and magazines, and auxiliary forces paraded regularly through towns. As the war ended, however, printed publications took for granted the return of women to the home. It was understood throughout the war that what Britain's women were doing was really 'a man's job'. *Women in Uniform Through the Centuries* by Elizabeth Ewing (Batsford,1975). *Wartime Women - a Mass Observation Anthology* by Dorothy Sheridan (Phoenix Press, 1990). *Land Girl* by Anne Hall (Ex Libris, 1993). *The Long Weekend* by Robert Graves and Alan Hodge (Hutchinson, 1985).