

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CIVITAN CLUB OF GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Compiled by Rachel Drake

TO QUOTE the late William B. Price in his STORY OF CIVITAN,
“In March 17, 1917, when the fires of patriotism were burning brightly and the drums of war were reverberating in the distance, a group of business and professional men in Birmingham, Alabama, formed a local service club for the purpose of assisting our government in its war effort by the selling of War Bonds, participating in all drives necessary for the war effort of our government and at the same time contributing their time and efforts for all drives for the benefit of the armed forces of this country. Thus conceived primarily for the purpose of establishing good citizenship from the hearts and minds of patriotic and loyal Americans”

AT THAT TIME Jelks H. Cabiness proposed that the club take the name “CIVITAN,” a word coined from the Latin “CIVITAS,” meaning CITIZENSHIP. It also adopted the motto “BUILDERS OF GOOD CITIZENSHIP”. After the “Great War”, during a time in which the backwash of war psychology caused a lowering of standards and patriotism, the club continued and reinforced its work.

CITIZEN LEADERS from other southern communities, noting the good results of the Birmingham Civitan club, wanted the same benefices, thus causing Dr. Courtney Shropshire to head a committee to expand Civitan into a national organization. The result was the establishment of Civitan International on April 15, 1920. Within five years, Civitan had grown into 154 clubs. The first club in the Carolinas, in 1921, was the Asheville Civitan Club.

THE FIRST CLUB in South Carolina was in Greenville, chartered early in 1922. The Greenville club sponsored all the other early clubs in the state, including the Columbia Civitan Club. This pioneer Greenville club did some outstanding work in its eleven years of existence, including the bringing of the Boy Scouts of America to Greenville. The club backed scouting until the “Community Chest” a forerunner of the United Way, took over sponsorship. Civitan was one of the founders of Boy Scout Camp Old Indian. The great depression of the thirties ended this chapter of Civitan in Greenville and the charter was surrendered in 1933.

CIVITAN RETURNED to Greenville on April 28, 1947, being reorganized by the Columbia Civitan Club. {Thus the Greenville club could be said to be its own Grandfather OR Grandmother.} Two members of the first Greenville Civitan Club, James B. Aiken and J. Ed Means were charter members of the new club. DISTRICT AND INTERNATIONAL HONORS, have been won by the club, including the International Founders Trophy at least ten times, retiring it more than once. The club has been recognized at the International level as being one of Civitan’s most honored clubs for its efforts in raising funds and using them for many, many useful and worthwhile projects. This club may truly be said to have a glorious tradition. In addition

to its projects, many Greenville Civitans have served as South Carolina District officers (including several Governors) and International officers. The club at one time in its history was over 100 members strong and one of the larger clubs in Civitan.

THE ICE SHOW was brought to Greenville in 1947, when Harry Fay [the second club president] negotiated with HOLIDAY ON ICE for its smaller show, "ICE VOGUES," to play at the old Textile Hall on Washington Street. After the Memorial Auditorium was completed, Civitan Les Timms, who was also the auditorium manager, was instrumental in securing the larger HOLIDAY ON ICE show. This tremendously successful fund raising project became the first in a long line of Civitan sponsorships of ICE VOGUES, HOLIDAY ON ICE, an international circuit drag car race, SESAME STREET LIVE, and even a family oriented carnival. Many thousands of dollars have been earned by Civitans for the good of the community, and the shows provided good, clean family entertainment in our city.

CLAXTON FRUIT CAKE sales began in 1955. The club began by selling door-to-door and from a "cake house" on Main Street. This began another in the long line of fund raising traditions. In the-1-9-70's and 1-980's, -the-emphasis -changed -from retail-to -wholesale-with----- Club members stocking the cake in supermarkets.

THE CIVITAN CAMP was originally built and used by the Civilian Conservation Corps [C.C.C.], a depression-era government program for providing work for the unemployed. The C.C.C. Camp was acquired by a group of local citizens and made available to the Salvation Army as a camp for the underprivileged children of the community. In its early years, Civitan paid the fees for a number of campers and later began to underwrite the entire cost of the camp operation for the summer. The physical structure of the camp was deteriorating, however. In 1955 Civitan acquired a 40 year lease on the property, renamed it "THE CIVITAN FRESH AIR CAMP" and began an extensive program of construction and improvement. The lake was completed in 1963, largely through the work of Civitans Leon Robinson and Russell Ashmore.

CIVITAN CHARITIES, INC., a totally separate eleemosynary corporation, was created in order to secure tax and other benefits accruing to such a corporation. This corporation is controlled by the club members, however, since no one can be a member of the corporation unless also a member of the club. [NOTE: this is why it is necessary to adjourn meetings of the Civitan Club of Greenville in order to convene and transact business for Civitan Charities, Inc.] The club assigned its camp lease to the corporation. Civitan Charities, Inc. later negotiated for and received the title to the land on which the camp stands, with the proviso that it be perpetually used for the good of the young people of the area. THE CIVITAN CITIZENSHIP CENTER, (Known as the "3C's") was moved to the camp in 1977. The Salvation Army had by then acquired its own camp and so the club terminated its arrangement with them. The purpose of the 3C's was to be a training center for rising high school seniors. This "CIVITAN CITIZENSHIP CENTER" gave some of these young people their first clear understanding of the meaning of real leadership. Many, now adults, fondly remember those inspiring campfires at "3 C's".

THE CIVITAN CAMP opened another chapter in its life of service to youth in 1991. The camp was made available to the Greenville Association for the Retarded to establish a residential summer camp for mentally handicapped children. "CAMP SPEARHEAD," that had operated as a day camp at Paris Mountain State Park, was moved to the Civitan camp. The alliance has proved to be one of powerful impact for good for some of those who need it most.

MANY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES have received with great appreciation the honor paid to them in another of the Club's long-term projects. That is the annual Citizenship night, on which a young man and young woman from each of the county's high schools is treated to a dinner, presented with an award, and have their names added to an engraved plaque that each high school hangs in a place of honor. In addition, it has been a showcase for Civitans to see the finest caliber of young people that Greenville has nurtured. It was through the hard work of Judge Ralph Drake, Civitan for many years, that this project has been so universally accepted and appreciated.

ANOTHER PROJECT was begun in recent years in conjunction with the Civitan International Foundation, that of the CIVITAN CANDY BOXES. Boxes of candy, with a coin contribution slot, are set in places of business. The major part of the profits from the boxes is given to the foundation that uses them for grants throughout the world for the improvement of the lives of the mentally handicapped. The main beneficiary, however, is the Civitan Research Center, operated at the University of Alabama by scientists who seek ways to prevent and treat mental retardation and other mental diseases, such as the internationally recognized work being done with Alzheimer's disease. The club's part of the proceeds is used locally in Civitan projects such as the EARLE GLAZENER HOUSE and the DICK CRAIN HOUSE that allow mentally or multiple handicapped citizens to live in their community instead of an institution. The people of Greenville have donated thousands of dollars to these boxes to improve the quality of life for others.

THE CIVITAN CLUB OF GREENVILLE, in its short history, has made an enormous contribution to the community. Not least in importance, a great many women and men have passed through its ranks, and have had their lives made better and more meaningful through Civitan's KNOWLEDGE, FELLOWSHIP, AND SERVICE.

This short history leaned heavily on "The Civitan Story", compiled by the late Club President and District Governor, William B. Price. His paper is undated, but appears to have been published about 1959. Written by Civitan Fred E. Robinson, 9 January 1991. Revised August 2000.