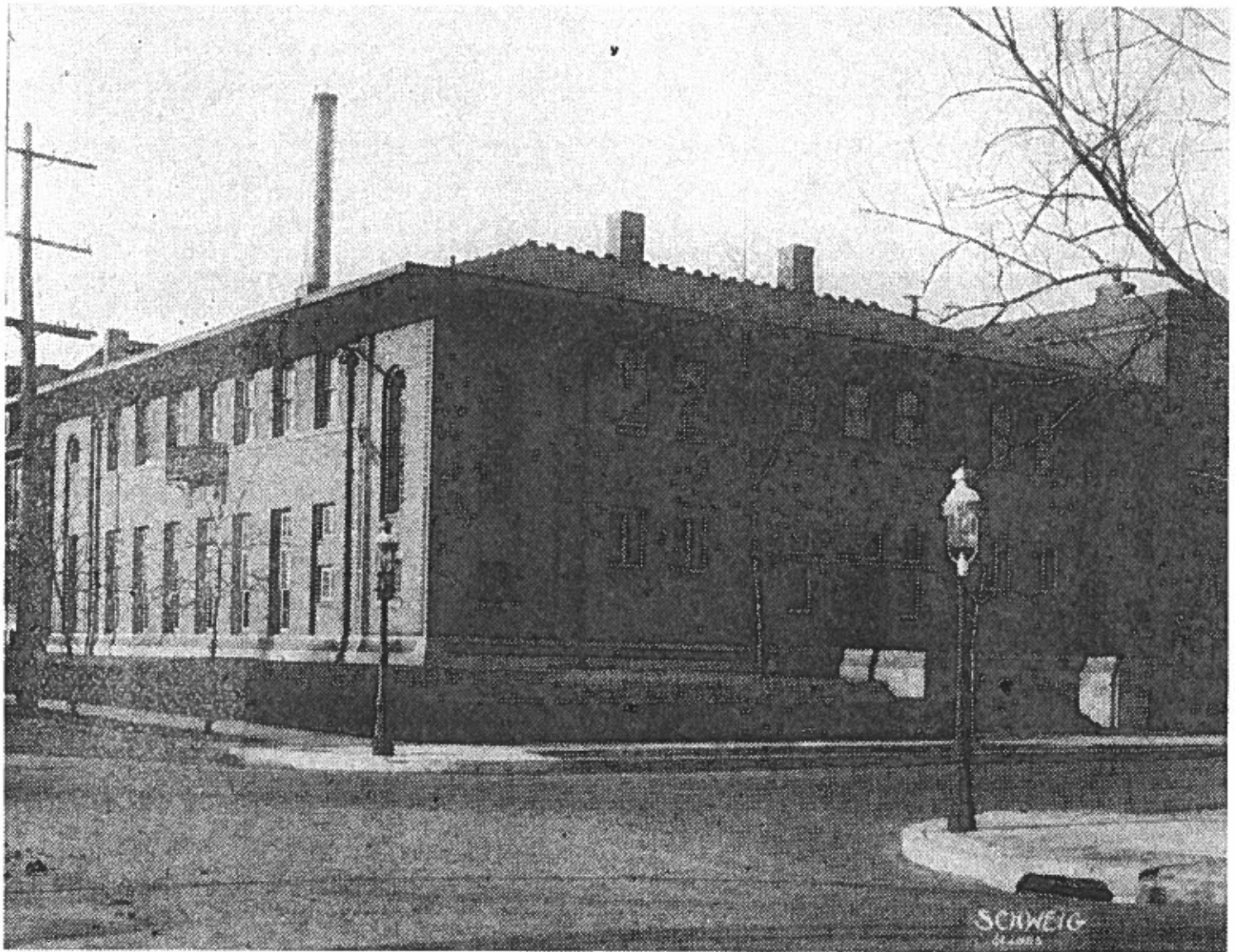


MARCH 11, 2021

The Wednesday Club

by **Katie Moon** | Exhibits Manager

As I began my research into the St. Louis suffrage movement, one women's organization continually came to the forefront as a source of leadership. Originally founded as a women's literary society in 1890, the Wednesday Club quickly grew into a formidable city institution, with its members regularly involved in attempts to improve the lives of St. Louisans in a variety of ways, including submitting legislation in Jefferson City.



The Wednesday Club building in *Missouri Woman*, March 1917.

Despite the fact that the Wednesday Club never officially supported the suffrage cause, the organization served as a crucial training ground for the women who would create and lead the **Equal Suffrage League** in 1910.

Although the yearly fees (which rose to \$20 in 1896, equal to about \$600 today) limited its membership to primarily affluent women, many of whom resided in the West End neighborhood, the group wasn't limited in two significant areas: financial resources and cultural influence.

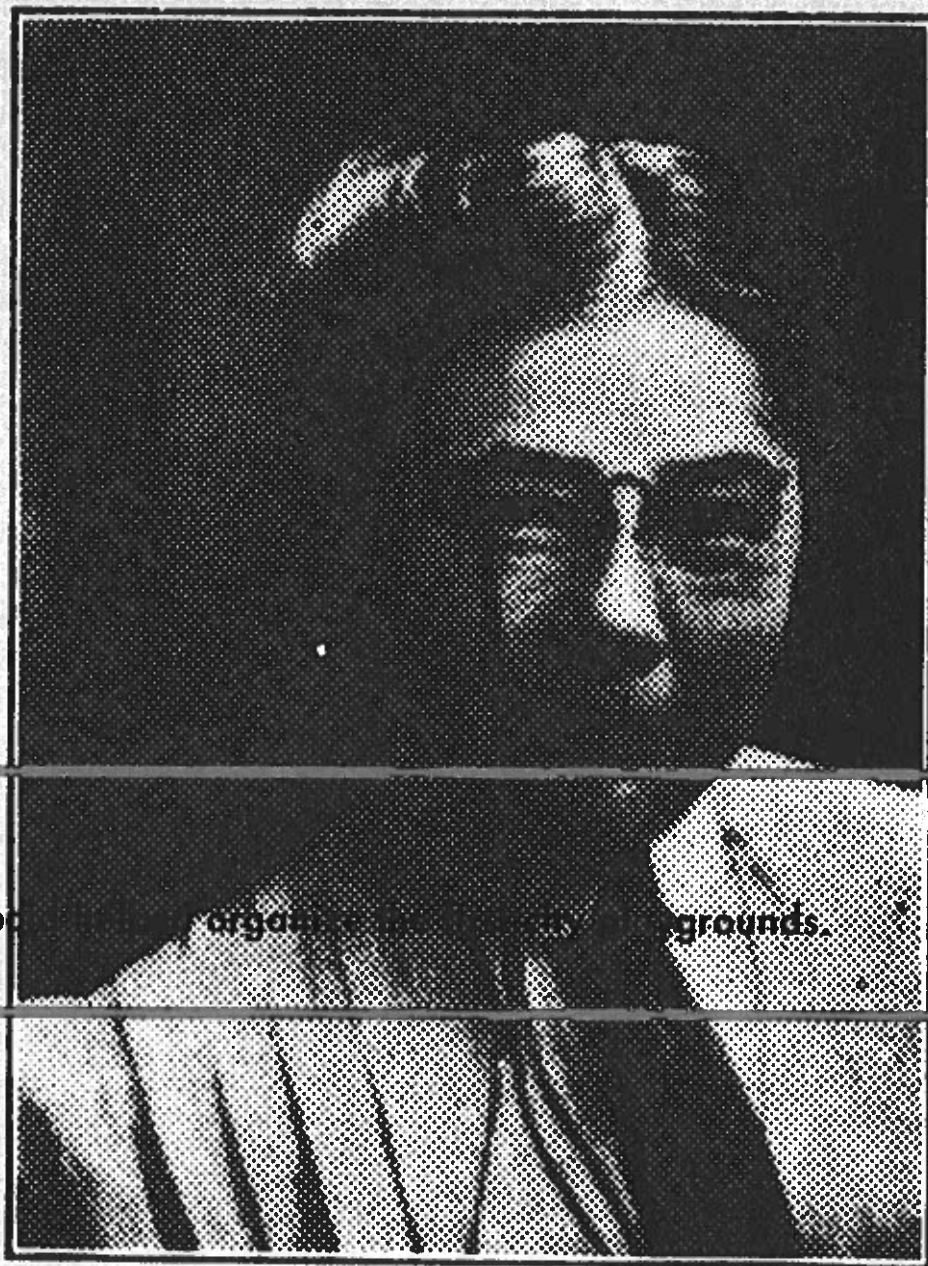


Mel-Harmonic Club of St. Louis onstage at the Wednesday Club in 1935. Missouri Historical Society Collections.

Many of the women were wives and daughters of well-known St. Louis businessmen, and, as a whole, were interested in playing a larger role in the functioning of the city. Unlike many of the hundreds of clubs being formed at

the time, the Wednesday Club never limited itself to acceptable “women’s activities.” Instead, the group dedicated itself to a mix of both intellectual and practical pursuits.

For example, in 1891, the Club became one of the first organizations in the city to push for legislation around smoke abatement. At the turn of the century, one of the Club’s most active members, **Charlotte Rumbold**, helped to organize and manage the first public playgrounds in the city, with the support and assistance of other members.



Rumbold organized the St. Louis playgrounds.

CHARLOTTE RUMBOLD

**Ex-Supervisor of playgrounds St. Louis,
secretary of St. Louis Pageant Association,
writer of articles on civic work
and reform, and lecturer.**

Theodore Link designed the Wednesday Club building.

Charlotte Rumbold, Missouri Historical Society Collections.

The group was highly organized, with a dedicated group of women looking to improve the conditions of others in the community. For some, this meant organizing public lectures and theatrical productions; for others, it meant providing inexpensive meals for disadvantaged school children and exposing hazardous working and living conditions.

As early as 1900, the women realized that they needed a permanent home, and created the Wednesday Club Building Company. They sold shares at \$10 and quickly raised enough money to proceed with a building plan. They purchased land at the southwest corner of Taylor Avenue and Westminster Place in the Central West End and hired architect Theodore Link to design the building. His name might sound familiar—he designed Union Station in 1894.

SUNDAY MORNING—ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH—APRIL 5, 1908

CORNERSTONE OF WEDNESDAY CLUB BUILDING LAID

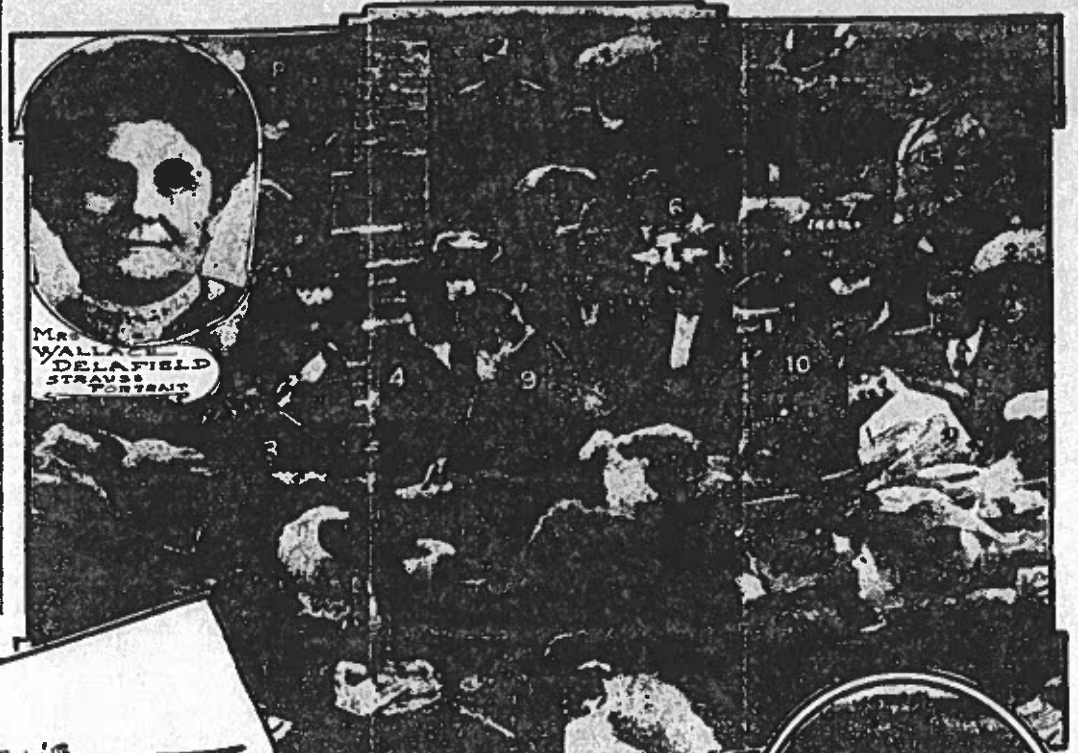
Mrs. William K. Bixby Points
It With Beautiful Sil-
ver Trowel.

MRS. SHAPLEIGH'S GIFT

Impressive Ceremony at First
Home Built Here by Wom-
an's Organization.

With a beautiful silver trowel, Mrs.
William K. Bixby pointed the corner-
stone of the new Wednesday Club
Building, Taylor avenue and Westmin-
ster place, after it had been set in place.

SCENE AT CORNERSTONE LAYING; STRUCTURE AS IT WILL LOOK COMPLETED; WOMEN LEADERS



1 MRS. A. L. SHAPLEIGH 2. MRS. W.
F. FISCHER 3. MRS. G. KIMBALL
4. MRS. W. K. BIXBY 5. MISS J.
M. JONES 6. MISS L. P. ERNST
7. MISS CHASE 8. MRS. L. M.
McCALL 9. BISHOP TUTTLE
10. REV. DR. S. J. NICCOLLS



yesterday by Mrs. Dwight Treadway.
The trowel was the gift of Mrs. Alfred
Lee Shapleigh, president of the club,
who opened the cornerstone ceremonies
with a speech in which she rehearsed
the history of the Wednesday Club.

Mrs. Bixby was presented with the
trowel she used, and a duplicate trowel
was given to the club by Mrs. Shap-
leigh. The cornerstone was laid at 11:30
a. m. and at the conclusion of the cere-
monies the members went to the Buck-
ingham Club for luncheon.

Tittman, Mrs. A. J. Shapleigh, Mrs.
Frank P. Clenden, Mrs. E. H. Sample
and Miss Lily Ernst.

The club has been a leader in many
charitable and educational movements
in St. Louis. It was organized in 1893.
Mrs. Edward C. Sterling, now living in
Redlands, Cal., was its first president.
The other officers were Mrs. John W.
Harrison, vice-president; Mrs. Beverly
Allen, second vice-president; Mrs. An-
thony H. Blaisdell, secretary; Mrs. Wil-
liam F. Ware, treasurer.

The first Board of Directors was com-
posed of Mrs. John Green, Mrs. W. E.
Fischel, Mrs. Miles Sells, Mrs. J. C.

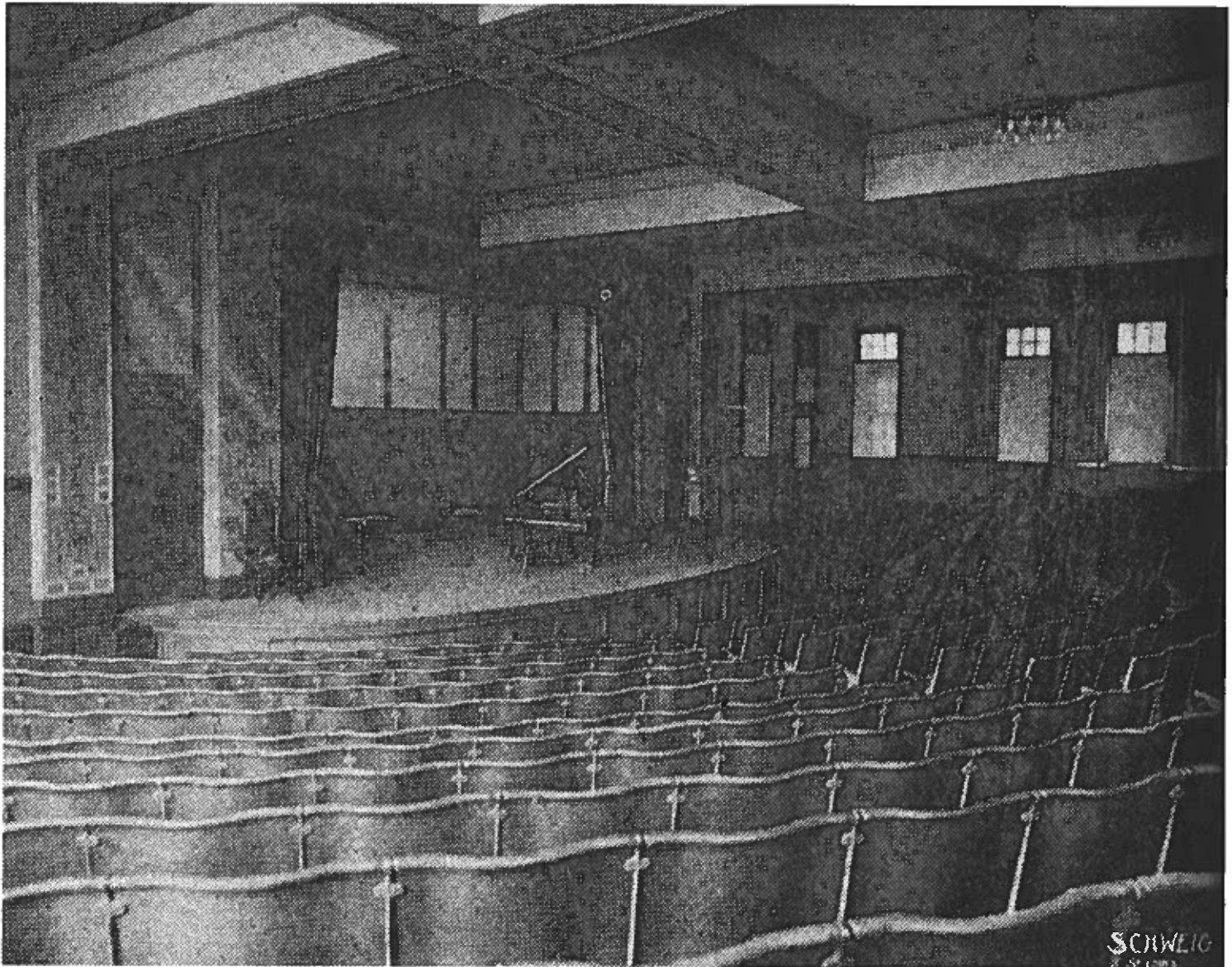
PLATT TELLS HOW PRESIDENTS WERE "MADE"

Article about the Wednesday Club and its leaders in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 5, 1908.

Teasdale won a Pulitzer Prize for her poetry.

By the fall of 1908, the group had moved into the grand new building, complete with a 500-seat auditorium, industrial kitchen, reception hall, library, conservatory, and reading room. The majority of members lived within

walking distance, and it soon became a center of community activity for women in the neighborhood.



The Wednesday Club auditorium. *Missouri Woman*, March 1917.

The Wednesday Club used the facility through 1971, when they moved their headquarters to St. Louis County. The building, now known as the Link Auditorium, retains nearly all of its original features, including incredible millwork, stained glass, and sculptures created by Caroline Risque, a sculptor and member of **the Potters** group, which also included **Sara Teasdale** and the Parrish Sisters.



Sara Teasdale ca. 1910. Missouri Historical Society Collections.

Unfortunately, a full history of the Wednesday Club remains to be written, but between the names on membership rolls (including the likes of **Kate Chopin**, **Edna Gellhorn**, and **Irma Rombauer**, to name just a few), and the list of those who performed for or presented to the group (such as Henry Miller, **Tennessee Williams**, and T. S. Elliot), the impact of the organization on both a local and national scale is undeniable.

Architecture, Beyond the Ballot: St. Louis and Suffrage, Charlotte Rumbold, Edna Gellhorn, Irma Rombauer, Kate Chopin, Sara Teasdale, St. Louis history, suffrage, Tennessee Williams, the Potters, Theodore Link, Union Station, Wednesday Club, Women's History

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