

Woman's Club seeks historic status

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The strong-willed ladies who founded the Woman's Club of Evanston in 1889 were flexing some independence when they chose to name their group the "woman's club," a name often mistakenly put into a plural form in references today.

"The use of the singular was very popular in the 19th century because it was an attempt to show that a woman had power," said Mary McWilliams, a local preservation activist.

But it's the work of the club's free-thinking founders that is drawing the interest of history buffs and preservation advocates today.

The ladies' club that was hatched at a tea party took on typhoid fever, compulsory schooling, milk inspection and water filtration. No sooner did members succeed in winning women the right to vote in local school elections than one of their own, Louise Stanwood, became the first woman elected to an Evanston school board in 1892.

When a smallpox outbreak occurred, the club raised the first \$3,600 of seed money to create what is now Evanston Hospital.

Clubs launched programs

"The Woman's Club of Evanston and other woman's clubs were really able to address things that the government at



"We are no longer ladies who lunch; we are doers," says Wendy Irwin (left), past president of the Woman's Club of Evanston. "As we were from the beginning," adds President Patty Shaw Sprague, shown with the portrait of founder Elizabeth Boynton Harbert that graces the members' room. — Buzz Orr/Staff Photographer

tional register," said Irwin, who sowed the idea during her tenure. Irwin also gives the

