“Cleveland’s Sweetheart,” Effie Ellsler, became a Broadway star. The redheaded daughter of actress Euphemia Emma Ellsler and theatrical impresario John A. Ellsler, known for her expressive acting, made her debut at age five as Little Eva in a stage version of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In 1875 she starred in her father’s production of *Saratoga* at the Euclid Avenue Opera House, and five years later she opened in what was to be a long-running New York production of Steele MacKaye’s *Hazel Kirke*. The “natural and proper timidity and delicacy” which allegedly prevented women from entering the law did not prevent them from pursuing the arts, even when that pursuit meant appearing on stage. (See Figure 48.)

Nineteenth-century women were considered more expressive and more artistic than men. The presumed possession of these virtues encouraged middle-class women to consider themselves the appropriate custodians of high culture. Just as teaching and librarianship became “women’s work,” women became enthusiastic patrons and consumers of art. They also became the practitioners of the arts, most often as amateurs but sometimes, like Ellsler, as professionals.

Women thus played key roles in the building of Cleveland’s major cultural institutions, including the Cleveland Institute of Art and the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra, as well as a host of smaller teaching and performing institutions. Following the eastward migration of the city’s upper class, many of these institutions located on or near University Circle. Their growth
FIGURE 48. Effie Ellsler, “Cleveland’s Sweetheart” of the stage, adorned in Egyptian garb, ca. 1890s. Western Reserve Historical Society

**EFFIE ELLSLER** (4 Apr. 1854–8 Oct. 1942) made some films in the early 1900s and gave her last stage performance in Cleveland in 1919 in *Old Lady 31*. She was married to actor Frank Weston, who joined her in the cast of *Hazel Kirke* and many other plays.

reflected the emergence of the city as a prosperous industrial center and the emergence of very wealthy individuals interested in maintaining and financially supporting the arts.

The perpetuation of culture, broadly although ethnocentrically defined, was the earliest mission of many women’s clubs. Led by Catherine Hitchcock Tilden (Mrs. Elroy M.) Avery, Cleveland women formed the Western Reserve Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1891, open only to descendants of those who served in the American Revolution. Inspired by the enthusiastic nationalism of the period, the organization sought to preserve Anglo-American culture by encouraging the study of genealogy and the Americanization of immigrants.

Members of the Cleveland Sorosis, also founded in 1891, sought “the higher things of life, culture, responsibility, and service.” To this end, the club established departments of literature, art, drama, and philanthropy, as well as subjects of specific interest to women such as suffrage, physical culture, and dress reform. The Sorosis did not sustain its early interest in the vote
(its very first speaker was Francis Dana Gage on the suffrage), and despite a lecture in 1904 from settlement worker Jane Addams on "The Social Waste of Child Labor," the club remained chiefly interested in culture for its first three decades.

Representatives from several cultural clubs, including the Sorosis, the Society of Art and History, the Literary Guild, and the Book and Thimble, formed the Federation of Women's Clubs of Greater Cleveland in 1902. The Cleveland group joined the national General Federation of Women's Clubs, founded a decade earlier. At the local federation's first meeting, 100 women gathered at the Pythian Temple to hear Mrs. Willis Vickers of the Sorosis lecture on "Man's Ideal of Womanhood." Members soon began the pursuit of civic beautification, passing a resolution that asked the city to establish an art museum and issuing public protests against indecent advertising billboards "pertaining to the private ills of men."

An interest in literature—as both vocation and avocation—inspired the founding of 1882 of the Women's Press Club. Even in the pre-Civil War period women had become successful authors, immortalized by Nathaniel Hawthorne's scathing remark about the "damned mob of scribbling women" whose sentimental novels outsold his own. Writing as a profession had few exclusive criteria for membership—it required no formal training, for example—and since writing could be done in a woman's home, it could be combined with domestic responsibilities with relative ease. Consequently, many middle-class women wrote, often for pleasure and sometimes for money. The publication and sale of books were relatively simple because of the growing numbers of printers and bookstores.

The purpose of the Women's Press Club was to bring women together to exchange ideas about writing and to encourage their study of literature. Club members presented their own work for suggestions and advice and heard lectures on topics of professional interest, including finding an editor or writing for a particular marketplace such as monthly magazines or daily newspapers. The club joined the Cleveland Federation of Women's Clubs in 1916 and in 1922 adopted the name Cleveland Writers' Club.

The club's ten founders included two professional journalists, Harriet Ellen Grannis (Mrs. Oliver) Arey and Gertrude Van Rensselaer (Mrs. Samuel) Wickham. Arey was the author of two books, *Elements of Natural Philosophy* and *Home and School Training*. Wickham, the editor of *Memorial to the Pioneer Women of the Western Reserve*, was the first woman to hold an editorial position at a Cleveland newspaper. She became a columnist for the *Cleveland Herald* in 1878, where her fashion columns became the basis for the paper's women's department. Wickham moved to the *Cleveland Leader* when it merged with the *Herald*. Writing for an audience of middle-class women interested in charitable activities, she wrote about needy women and children, featuring
letters from them in her columns. She left the Leader in 1884 but continued to write occasionally for the paper. In 1914 she published *Pioneer Families of the Western Reserve.* (See Figure 49.)

The club also admitted women such as Dr. Martha Canfield and educator Linda Thayer Guilford, who were not professional writers but were probably attracted by the club’s lectures on literary subjects. Other members likely made some money writing but earned their primary livings in some other profession such as teaching. Some were full-time housewives.

These talented amateurs included Mary Bigelow (Mrs. William A.) Ingham, whose writings promoted her interests in temperance and the advancement of women. Using the pen name Anne Hathaway, she contributed to the *Cleveland Leader* a three-year series on notable Cleveland women, which became the basis for *Women of Cleveland and Their Work*, published in 1893. (See Figure 50.)

A list of 229 Cleveland authors compiled by William Howard Brett of the Cleveland Public Library, published in

![GERTRUDE VAN RENSSELAER WICKHAM](image)

**FIGURE 49.** Journalist and historian Gertrude Van Rensselaer Wickham, ca. 1920. Wickham became the first woman to hold an editorial position on a Cleveland newspaper when she joined the *Cleveland Leader* in 1881. Western Reserve Historical Society

**GERTRUDE VAN RENSSELAER WICKHAM**

(20 May 1844–18 Mar. 1930) Widowed at 25, Wickham first tried teaching to support herself and her daughter. She became a journalist by accident, on the strength of a letter to the Sunday *Post*, which generated so much public interest that the editor asked her to contribute a weekly column. In 1886 she was one of the founders of the Women’s Press Club, later the Cleveland Writers’ Club. Wickham also became a historian when she agreed to edit *Memorial to the Pioneer Women of the Western Reserve*, which was followed by her own book, *Pioneer Families of the Western Reserve.*
1910, included 46 women. Most of them, like most of the men, were occasional rather than professional writers. Listed among the publications, for example, were the medical texts written by homeopath Dr. W. F. Biggar, the devotional writings of two Protestant ministers, and several books on higher education, including *The College Woman* by Western Reserve University president Charles F. Thwing. Many of the women had only a single publication, associated with some nonliterary interest, for instance Mrs. A. E. Hatch’s *Choice Receipts from the Cleveland Health Protective Association* or Mrs. Howard Ingham’s *Twenty Years’ Work in the Woman’s Christian Association*. Others had written one or two sentimental romances, still very popular in this period, such as Mrs. A. W. Hunt’s *Leaden Casket*.

The most popular genre for these women writers was juvenile literature. Sarah Coolidge Woolsey, under the pen name Sarah Coolidge, wrote children’s histories as well as a fiction series entitled “What Katy Did.” Lydia Hoyt Farmer specialized in history; among her works were *Boys’ Book of Famous Rulers, Girls’ Book of Famous Queens*, and *What America Owes to Women*. The most prolific juvenile author was Sarah K. Bolton. She came to Cleveland in 1866 with her husband, businessman Charles E. Bolton, who shared her interest in temperance. The titles of her many published histories, biographies, and

**FIGURE 50.** Mary B. Ingham, one of the cofounders of the Cleveland School of Art and president of the Woman’s Department of the Centennial of 1896. Western Reserve Historical Society

**MARY BIGELOW INGHAM** (10 Mar. 1832–17 Nov. 1923) was both author and activist. Having initiated the Woman’s Department of the Centennial Celebration, she also became its president. As with many women of her generation, her first profession was teaching. She taught in primary schools and at Ohio Wesleyan College for Women before becoming a public school principal. In 1886 she gave up academic life for a career as a temperance reformer with the Cleveland Nonpartisan Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, becoming the manager of one of its temperance inns. Ingham was also a cofounder of the Cleveland School of Art and served on its board of directors.
poems reflect not only her evangelical and didactic intent but, like the books of Ingham and Farmer, her pride in women’s achievements: How Success Is Won, Poor Boys Who Became Famous, Poor Girls Who Became Famous, Famous Leaders among Men, Famous Leaders among Women, and Some Successful Women. (See Figure 51.)

A well-known author of adult literature, Martha Wolfenstein, wrote short stories about the Jewish immigrant experience, which were published in secular and Jewish literary journals. The Jewish Publication Society of America issued two collections of her short stories, Idylls of the Gass (1901) and The Renegade and Other Stories (1905). The National Council of Jewish Women named their home for working women, Martha House, in her honor. (See Figure 52.)

Brett listed as a Cleveland author Constance Fenimore Woolson, but her connections with the city were tenuous. Woolson’s father moved his family from Boston to Cleveland in 1840, and she came to know the Great Lakes area then and on later vacations. Her first book of short stories, Castle Nowhere: Lake County Sketches (1875), drew on those experiences. Woolson, however, was educated in New York City and lived much of her life in Europe. She was the friend and protégé of Henry James and William Dean Howells and achieved an international literary reputation as a local colorist and regionalist writer.

Art, like writing, was considered an appropriately refined (and nonremunerative) occupation or pastime for women. Many middle-class women painted in their homes as a hobby, and several became professional artists or teachers of art. The most financially successful of these in the late nineteenth century was probably Caroline L. Ormes Ransom, who opened her Cleveland studio in 1860 after study in New York and Germany. Ransom made her reputation doing large oil portraits of political leaders and other notable men. Her subjects included Ohio congressman and abolitionist Joshua R. Giddings and future president (then general) James A. Garfield in his Civil War uniform.

Finding themselves excluded from male organizations, women artists, like women doctors (and probably women writers), created their own professional institutions, which promoted art and artists for the wider Cleveland community. In 1876 a group of men including Archibald M. Willard, best known for his painting The Spirit of ’76, painters John Semon and Louis Loeb, and woodcarver John Herkomer formed the Art Club. The group met in Willard’s studio on the top floor of City Hall, where they gave instruction in drawing and painting.

Apparently no female students were admitted, for in 1882, Sarah (Mrs. Samuel H.) Kimball spearheaded the founding of the Western Reserve School of Design for Women. Reflecting the current popularity of the arts and crafts movement, the school’s stated objects were to teach “the principles of Art and Design as
FIGURE 51. Essayist and author Sarah Knowles Bolton, ca. 1890. Bolton’s works included many biographies of the leading women of the nineteenth century. Western Reserve Historical Society


FIGURE 52. Martha Wolfenstein, the first Jewish woman author to write stories depicting the Jewish immigrant experience for the secular press, in her studio, ca. 1900. Western Reserve Historical Society

MARTHA WOLFENSTEIN (1869–3 Mar. 1906), author and daughter of Jewish Orphan Asylum superintendent Samuel Wolfenstein, provided this insight into the immigrant Jewish experience and the religious purpose of the asylum: “The disintegrating influence of our country is surely operating upon our race; as it is upon the other races which inhabit it. The second, or at most the third generation of American-born Jews, have already lost their religion, one of the strongest strands in the bond which holds us together. Therefore must he who wishes for the defeat of this disintegrating power—as it operates upon our people—witness with hope [the asylum’s] Seder service. Therefore must he witness it with high hope, since those who partipate in it, though mostly, are not all of them children. A goodly number of them are young men and women, former pupils of our institution and they never lose an opportunity of celebrating with us. This is a hopeful sign.”
practically applied to artistic and industrial pursuits” and to exhibit works of art. Many, although not all, of the students were employed as graphic artists and designers by local businesses and stores. Male students soon enrolled, and the school’s faculty included four members of the Art Club. The school first leased quarters in the City Hall annex, adjacent to the Art Club, but financial difficulties led to its incorporation into Western Reserve University in 1888. The vocational thrust of the school did not coexist easily with the academic goal of the university, and the merger ended in 1891. (See Figure 53.)

In 1891 the school got a new name, the Cleveland School of Art, and a new head, Georgie Leighton Norton, previously the supervisor of drawing in the Medford, Massachusetts, public schools. In 1892 the school moved into spacious quarters on Willson Avenue (East 55th Street), the former home of Horace Kelley. Its distinguished faculty included painter Henry Keller, sculptor Henry Matzen, and painter Frederick Carl Gottwald,

FIGURE 53. A gathering of students at the Cleveland School of Art, later to become the Cleveland Institute of Art, ca. 1900. Western Reserve Historical Society
who taught at the school until 1926. In 1904 J. Homer Wade, a member of the school’s board of trustees, donated a parcel of land at Juniper Road and Magnolia Drive, near the site that Wade’s grandfather Jeptha H. Wade had given for a future art museum. In 1905 the first classes were held in the new building, whose large exhibition hall became the site of exhibitions of national and local artists. In 1948 the school was renamed the Cleveland Institute of Art.

Women also initiated significant art events. In 1878 a group of wealthy women organized an exhibition of the art of local collectors. The display included hundreds of ceramics, paintings, manuscripts, sculpture, coins, and a wide array of miscellaneous art objects such as a sword of Napoleon and a cane which had allegedly arrived on the Mayflower. Local artists also exhibited. The purpose of the exhibit, however, was not to encourage art but to raise money for local hospitals, which had been hard hit by the current depression. More than forty thousand people, some from as far away as Erie and Dayton, paid the twenty-five-cent admission fee, and the show raised almost thirteen thousand dollars.

The terrible depression of 1893 inspired two more fund-raising art exhibits. In 1894 and 1895, Cleveland’s wealthy art collectors put their best on display, including works by Leonardo da Vinci, Tintoretto, and Rubens as well as local artists Keller, Willard, and Gottwald.

The owners of the art were men, but the organizers and administrators of the exhibitions were probably their wives and daughters. Few women during this period made major endowments to art institutions, for few earned or controlled their own moneys. Although they supported institutions such as the Cleveland School of Art, the funds were usually their husbands’.

Men therefore led in the long-awaited opening of the Cleveland Art Museum. Funds for a museum had been left by John P. Huntington, Horace Kelley, and Hinman B. Hurlbut, and a site by Jeptha H. Wade in the 1890s. The legal difficulties of consolidating the three trusts and the desire to begin the institution with an adequate endowment slowed the museum’s progress. In 1913, however, the Cleveland Museum of Art was incorporated, and in 1916 it opened its doors in University Circle. No women served on its early board of trustees. The major donors to the museum were men, but a few wealthy women such as Elisabeth Severance (Mrs. Francis) Prentiss also donated their collections.

Women played a pivotal role in Cleveland’s musical life as performers and particularly as institution-builders. Most of Cleveland’s music was performed by amateurs in church choirs or groups such as the Cleveland Vocal Society, composed of seventy male and female singers and winner of the first prize in the world choral competition at the 1893 Columbia Exposition.
Some women were able to make a living performing or teaching music. Music was taught in the city’s public schools, often by female teachers. Women also gave lessons in voice or instrumental music at private institutions such as the Cleveland School of Music, which opened in 1875. In 1901 the Cleveland Federation of Musicians, founded in 1877, began to admit women. The membership register for 1904 to 1910 lists thirty-five female instrumentalists, including Celia Hruby, a pianist and flutist and the daughter of Frank Hruby, the founder of three generations of Cleveland musicians.

Two Cleveland vocalists gained national recognition. Estelle (Mrs. Seabury) Ford, trained at the Cleveland Conservatory of Music, performed widely as a soloist in the 1880s and 1890s. From 1907 to 1910 she was musical director of the Rubinstein Club, a women’s choral group formed in 1899. Rachel Walker (Mrs. Robert) Turner, an African American soprano who began her career as a teacher of music, performed in both the United States and Europe. She was born in 1868, graduated from Central High School, and taught in the Cleveland public schools until the mid-1890s, when she went to New York for formal voice training. In 1895–96 Turner toured the West and East Coasts as a soloist with white musical companies and then went to London for further study. She made successful appearances in Europe but returned to Cleveland after the outbreak of World War I. (See Figure 54.)

Beginning in 1881 with the Cleveland Philharmonic Society, Clevelanders made several unsuccessful attempts to sustain a symphony orchestra. When in 1918 today’s Cleveland Symphony Orchestra made its debut, it was in large part the creation of the city’s first woman music impresario, Adella Prentiss (Mrs. Felix) Hughes. Hughes recorded in her autobiography, Music Is My Life, that her grandfather Benjamin Rouse, husband of Rebecca, had enthusiastically sung in the choir of the First Baptist Church and in the Bethel Singing Society. After graduation from Vassar College, his musically talented granddaughter began her career by playing piano accompaniment at musical benefits and for visiting artists.

Partly to ensure that she would have work, Hughes began in 1898 a more important career as a booking agent and brought to Cleveland a wide variety of performers, including Richard Strauss, Ignace Jan Paderewski, Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heinck, Nellie Melba, Gustav Mahler, the Diaghileff Ballet Russe, and the Boston Grand Opera. These performers played at Grays Armory and other local auditoriums.

The financial and logistical difficulties of their arrangements persuaded Hughes and a group of interested businessmen to form the Musical Arts Association in 1915, the purpose of which was to support the city’s musical life and institutions. In 1918 the association and Hughes founded the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Nikolai Sokoloff,
whom she had persuaded to come to Cleveland. In 1920 the orchestra, with seventy-five members, made its first tour to East Coast cities. Its first home was Grays Armory, and from 1919 to 1931, when Severance Hall was opened, the orchestra played at the Masonic Hall on Euclid Avenue at 36th Street. Sokoloff remained orchestra director until 1932, and Hughes its general manager until 1933. (See Figure 55.)

Also crucial in the orchestra’s establishment was the Fortnightly Club, of which Hughes was an active member. Founded in 1894 by women musicians and music lovers, the club sought to “advance the interests of music in Cleveland” by sponsoring recitals by members and concerts by visiting performers. The Fortnightly’s membership quickly rose to six hundred. In the 1896–97 season, the club sponsored twelve afternoon concerts by members and several evening performances by well-known local artists, including violinists Johann Beck and Sol Marcosson. (Marcosson had been persuaded to move to Cleveland by the Fortnightly Club and became the first concertmaster of the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra.) The Chicago Orchestra also gave four concerts under the Fortnightly’s auspices, which netted the club $27.28 after the orchestra and other expenses had been paid. Beginning in 1901, the Fortnightly cosponsored with Hughes the Symphony Orchestra Concerts by

FIGURE 54. Vocalist Rachel Walker Turner, shown here in costume for a London Pavilion performance in 1897. Western Reserve Historical Society
ADELLA PRENTISS HUGHES (29 Nov. 1869–23 Aug. 1950) had little in her background to predict the success she would achieve as an entrepreneur and music impresario. The daughter of Loren and Ellen Rouse Prentiss graduated from Miss Fisher’s School for Girls and Vassar College in 1890 with a degree in music. She briefly contemplated studying for a doctorate in history at a European university but turned instead to her first love, music. Until her retirement in 1945, Hughes held administrative posts with two of the institutions she helped to found, the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra and the Musical Arts Association visiting and local instrumental groups, and by 1912 had presented the New York, Boston, and Cincinnati symphonies and the New York Philharmonic. In 1917 Fortnightly became the first organization to provide financial support for Hughes’s proposed Cleveland orchestra, with a gift of $1,000.

The Fortnightly Club and Hughes had already been instrumental in founding the Cleveland Music School Settlement in 1911. The club had provided $1,000, and Hughes, influential support and contacts. The settlement, first located at the original site of Goodrich House, had both an artistic and a social-service mission. Under its director, Almeda Adams, the institution gave inexpensive musical instruction to neighborhood children of many ethnic backgrounds and organized classes in dancing and vocal music, as well as an orchestra and singing groups.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, Cleveland women participated in the experimental Little Theater movement. The movement was a reaction to the vaudevillian spectacles...
staged in huge theaters such as John Ellsler’s and the melodramas in which Effie Ellsler had starred, and it sought to emphasize the more realistic and controversial subject matter of modern playwrights such as Eugene O’Neill. In 1916 a group of amateur performers, women and men, formed the Play House Company to foster avant-garde theater in Cleveland. Its first officers included Charles and Minerva Brooks, at whose home the group held its initial meeting. Ten years later, having outgrown its first permanent location, the Cedar Avenue Church on East 73d and Euclid Avenue, the company built a new facility containing two theaters, the Brooks and the Drury, on land donated by Francis E. Drury. In their first seasons the ambitious amateurs presented puppet shows, shadowgraphs, dance performances, and one-act plays and sponsored exhibits by local artists and readings by local playwrights. During the 1920s the performances became more conventional and more professional, and eventually the Cleveland Play House became the home for the country’s oldest continuously running repertory company. (See Figure 56.)
The impetus for the Playhouse Settlement was not artistic experimentation but social reform. The inspiration and the financial support for the settlement came from the Men’s Club of the Second Presbyterian Church. Club members envisioned an agency which would benefit the blacks in the neighborhood near their church, who were not welcome at the existing settlements. Social workers Russell and Rowena Jelliffe came to Cleveland to head the settlement. After consulting with leaders in the African American community, the Jelliffes chose a site in the notorious “Roaring Third” between East 38th and East 39th streets near Central Avenue. In 1915 the Jelliffes opened the Playhouse Settlement, so named because of its early emphasis on games and organized play, and the settlement soon had the usual clubs, classes, and other activities for children and young adults. Its volunteers were both black and white.

The settlement also quickly began to develop an emphasis on theater. Rowena Jelliffe expressed her own interest in drama in the stories that she told neighborhood children. The children improvised plays from the stories. In 1917 the settlement staged *Cinderella* with a racially integrated cast. Struck by the children’s desire to perform and the ability of drama to bring together people of different races, Rowena Jelliffe encouraged the formation of the Dumas Dramatic Club in 1920. In 1922 the group became the Gilpin Players, in recognition of the enthusiastic support of black actor Charles Gilpin. Jelliffe became the group’s director, taking a year off from the settlement to study drama in New York City. (See Figure 57.) Until the mid-1920s the Players performed plays by white authors, but by the end of the decade they had staged the works of blacks, including Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes. (See Figure 58.)

As delegates of the Cleveland branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Jelliffes attended a Pan-African Congress in Paris in 1921 and became interested in African art, which then became integral to the settlement’s programs. In 1927 the Gilpin Players named their newly remodeled theater Karamu, Swahili for “a place of joyful meeting.” In 1941 Playhouse Settlement was named Karamu House.

As women established themselves in the arts, they also fought for a place on the political stage. Their next starring role was as suffragists.
FIGURE 57. Rowena Jelliffe (left) and Edna Wasem of Karamu House read through a Langston Hughes wartime ditty entitled “Go and Get the Enemy Blues” in 1942. Cleveland Public Library.

ROWENA WOODHAM JELLIFFE (23 Mar. 1892–6 Apr. 1992) graduated in 1910 from Oberlin College, where she met her future husband, Russell, whom she married in 1915. Both received master’s degrees in sociology from the University of Chicago. Rowena and Russell Jelliffe directed Playhouse Settlement, later Karamu House, until their retirement in 1963, and the settlement became an internationally known interracial theater and center for African American culture.

FIGURE 58. Actress Minnie Gentry and the Gilpin Players perform a scene from playwright Shirley Graham’s I Gotta Home at Eldred Hall Theater, February 1940. Cleveland State University Archives.