

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS
of the
WILLIAMS CLUB OF NEW YORK

by H. ROY HORTON '15

The Williams Club was aborning all the long, hot summer of 1913, while two alumni committees under the leadership of Clark Williams '92 labored mightily for enrollment of members and solicitation of funds by subscription and gift for remodeling and furnishing the clubhouse. The premises at 291 Madison Avenue on the east side between Fortieth and Forty-first Streets had been offered for Club use on a five-year lease at nominal rental by his aunt, Mrs. Frederick Ferris Thompson, donor of the Thompson Memorial Chapel and widow of the member of the Class of 1856, who had in the 1890's become the first of many individuals to supersede the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as the largest benefactor of Williams College.

By the time the incorporation papers were signed in October, a membership of 700 was assured, and the sum of \$12,217 was in hand. (One hundred and twenty years earlier, \$11,277 from the estate of Col. Ephraim Williams had founded Williams College.) The certificate of incorporation named as the first object of the corporation, "to advance the interests and influence of Williams College," and secondly, "to promote intellectual and social

intercourse among the members." President Harry A. Garfield '85 was the first contributor and the first to apply for membership. At the opening the membership was announced as 760, or about 25 per cent of the living alumni. The student body numbered 493.

The Clubhouse was ready for inspection on December tenth and officially opened two days later with a housewarming attended by 400 members and a program, which included the president of the Club, the president of the Alumni Association of New York, the presidents of four other college clubs, and from the campus President Garfield, Fred Daly, athletic director, and James P. Baxter, 3rd '14, representing the undergraduates. That the crowd must have severely taxed the capacity of the clubhouse is evident from a description of the premises, but it is not on record that anyone complained. It is on record that, "This final realization of a project so long cherished by alumni and friends of the College is most gratifying, and the new home in our greatest Williams center, so filled with reminders of the old home in the Berkshires, will henceforth be a factor of the highest importance in maintaining and developing interest of our graduates and former students in each other and our Alma Mater."

The *Alumni Review* commented, "No one who has visited the new Williams Club can have failed to notice the influence it is already exerting toward breaking up the cliquishness of Williams men. This clannish spirit, which is a direct (though not an inevitable) result of our fraternity system, has become a source of comment in the outside college world and it is time that our graduates recognized the fact, and availed themselves of

every means to secure broader fellowship. Williams will be a stronger college when they do."

The *Williams Record* heralded 1913-14 as "a big year, marked in Williams' history not only by the opening of the New York club but also by the acquisition of at least \$1,000,000 for the endowment drive," to which the Club was eventually to contribute \$100,000 from within its membership.

The first clubhouse was one of a row of typical brown-stone fronts with high steps up to the first floor and a couple of steps down to the basement, where was located the coatroom and grillroom with its four-foot service bar and the manager's desk space behind it. The early Club files must have reeked of gin, for the Bronx cocktail was the favorite libation. There were seats for no more than a score, but with cocktails at fifteen cents, two for a quarter, who cared! Up the narrow stairs on the first floor were the lounge, where members ensconced in deep leather chairs might watch the pedestrian and horse-drawn traffic with the merest trickle of automobiles, and to the rear a pair of tiny dining rooms, where the food was remarkably fine right from the start. There the members supped royally and doodled on the linen. The second floor held the library, which was considerably larger than the grill, and a small card room. There were six bedrooms on the upper floors with one bath to a floor.

As inadequate as this may sound today, it was the Miracle of Madison Avenue in 1913, and it served its purpose until 1919, when the membership had grown to 1,654 and the twin house next door became available.

The two buildings were joined by simply cutting through the party wall, which fortunately separated the hallways of the buildings. For the remodeling and furnishing of 289 Madison Avenue, the appropriation was \$17,500. Above the main floor the new building was used entirely for living space, but the lower floors doubled the size of the grill and dining areas. Then came Prohibition.

The first social event after the housewarming was a Ladies' Day. Club meetings were held monthly with enthusiastic attendance and excellent entertainment. By the first annual meeting in April of 1914, a *Club Annual* had been published, fifteen class dinners held, and the Club was operating at a profit. Daily attendance was recorded as between 100 and 150, which is an indication that in those days New Yorkers actually lived in their City.

The Club became the official organization of alumni in the City in 1915, when the Alumni Association of New York voted to turn over all of its records including the balance in the treasury. This was a vote of confidence in the new Club, which in two years had proved itself. The membership then numbered 895.

So World War I found the Club firmly established and ready for service to its members and all alumni in uniform. The first members donned khaki in 1916 to patrol the Mexican border and stew all summer in the Texas sun. Two months after the country's entry into the war, the Williams Club entered the service with a Williams ambulance for which \$18,750 was subscribed. The Club at once became a central bureau for records of Williams men at war. In February, 1918 a Club publication,

Ephraim Williams, Soldier, came off the press and was mailed to all alumni. Five issues were published during the ensuing year. It was the only publication of its kind circulating overseas and gained much praise and the commendation of the War Department. The regular monthly meeting of November, 1918 was converted to a welcome to Col. Charles W. Whittlesey '05, commander of the "Lost Battalion" and wearer of the Congressional Medal of Honor, who had just returned from France.

During the war the Club was most sincere in its compliance with the law against serving alcoholic beverages to men in uniform, an effort which was only circumvented by members who kept civilian clothes on the premises. According to the minutes of the Board of Governors, a resolution was passed in 1922 which provided for the strictest compliance with the Prohibition laws. The spirit was strong but the flesh was weak, and it seemed quite worthwhile to take along the wide planks of the grillroom floor when the move was made to Thirty-ninth Street in 1924.

The postwar period found the Club prospering and fulfilling to the utmost its dual purpose of providing means of intercourse between alumni and of advancing the interests and influence of Williams College. Williams Club scholarships were established; annual alumni dinners were sponsored; the College was brought to the attention of secondary schools in the area; athletic teams were entertained and the dramatic and musical clubs were given assistance. By merely existing on a parity with the clubs of the big universities, the Club immeasurably enhanced the prestige of Williams.

The move from Madison Avenue became necessary in 1924 when the settling of Mrs. Thompson's estate disposed of her properties as the site for an office building, and a committee went searching for a new home. The present building was found to be ideal for the purpose and was purchased with the considerable assistance of a mortgage loan from the College. Extensive alterations were made by a member contractor under the supervision of a member architect; new furniture was purchased and the new quarters were ready for occupancy in October, 1924. Considering the Club's humble beginnings, it is noteworthy that investment had now grown to \$300,000. These were boom days.

The new clubhouse and the years of plenty brought great prosperity and a peak membership of 1,800, but by the time the Twentieth Anniversary rolled around, to be celebrated with a resounding party and the publication of an anniversary booklet, the Depression had begun to cast its pall. Membership had dropped to 1,200, and the editor spoke sorrowfully of the possibility of taking in another college club as a blood transfusion to remedy this anemic condition.

Fortunately the Club's administration was ready, willing and able to face the issue. It had the courage to proceed with the construction of the present grill at a cost of \$6,000, which was raised by the sale to the members of non-interest-bearing baby bar bonds in ten dollar denominations to be retired by setting aside five percent of the gross receipts of the first standup bar. The room was completed in 1936 and paid for in five years. This was in a period when the Club's cash position had fallen

below what had previously been considered the bare minimum for operation. It took "some doing" to keep the Club alive.

In 1934 the *Williams Club Bulletin*, born in 1929, was expanded from a small folder to an 8½ x 11 inch, four-page, monthly publication so that it could cover, in addition to Club events, news fresh from the campus. It was frequently mailed to all alumni as promotional material and may be said to have spearheaded the constant drive for new members and for increased use of the Club during the perilous years. Publication continued until the modern format of the *Alumni Review* included the campus news, when it reverted to a folder and publication on a when and if basis.

While the Club had experimented during the lean years with extending its facilities to other college or fraternity clubs (including the Amherst Club) which found itself homeless, it did not actually admit another club until 1939 when the Tech Club, a small but active group of alumni of M.I.T., was accepted on a rental basis, an arrangement which was terminated in 1946. In 1962 the Hamilton Club of New York was invited to share the clubhouse until it could build up its membership and find a home of its own. The Dartmouth Club was a pleasant visitor for six months in 1961, while its new quarters in the Commodore Hotel were being readied. For more than ten years the Princeton and Williams Clubs traded their restaurant facilities during the annual vacations of their staffs.

During World War II the Club again became the clearing house for information on alumni in the service

and the rallying point for Williams men, in and out of uniform, for there was no College as such in Williams-town. For the most part the campus was taken over by the Navy V5 and V12 training programs. As members donned uniforms their dues were remitted while their names remained on the rolls, and all alumni in uniform were welcomed to the privileges of membership. The *Club Bulletin* brought news from home base. The Club, in cooperation with Wells College alumnae, and other women's college clubs, entertained enlisted personnel at the clubhouse, and an alumni jazz combo, the Chamber Music Society of Lower Hoxsey Street, toured veterans' hospitals in the Metropolitan area.

At the nadir of the lean years, the Club found itself with a mortgage far in excess of the value of its real estate and interest and amortization commitments well beyond its ability to pay. It did, however, do its very best, with the result that in 1943, when partial recovery had set in, the College was willing to make a financial arrangement which was mutually acceptable and resulted in the Club meeting its current obligations as well as making payments on past indebtedness. In fact the College at this time came again to the financial assistance of the Club, when the entire house was refurbished and refurnished in connection with the installation of the ladies' lounge and dining room.

For in 1943 the Board of Governors after months, if not years, of debate finally decided to stop bucking the trend, to submit to the inevitable and to admit lady members. Looking backward it appears certain that this step was essential to the very life of the organization.

Throughout the Club's history there runs a thread of continual efforts by all of the officers and house committee chairmen to keep its physical property in a condition beyond the criticism of a finicky membership, a problem which was enhanced by the advent of lady members and a lady manager. In 1949 the ladies' lounge and the three dining rooms were air-conditioned, a system which was soon extended to the grill and office. Today it is the proud boast that not only the public rooms but also all 29 bedrooms are cooled. In 1952 it became necessary at the insistence of the City Department of Buildings to make extensive installations for the safety of the residents, a matter which had already become a source of worry to the governors. These included fire-proofed, self-closing doors, a sprinkler system and automatic fire alarms throughout the building. In the recent past, the kitchen has been remodeled and newly equipped until it is a show place of stainless steel and sterility.

On the theory that a Club which is not active may be thought dead, the Williams Club has over the years sponsored as many activities as the members would support. Its Class "C" squash team has long placed well up in its league and in 1963 had its first undefeated season. In 1962 the golf team was awarded permanent possession by the College Club Golf League of N. Y. of the cup, which it had won seven times in nine years. While the bridge team can not be said to have done very well, it still sticks doggedly in the league.

Among activities hoary with tradition are the Father and Son Luncheon, which features the director of ad-

missions and an athletic coach, a luncheon for sub-freshmen sponsored by the Westchester Alumni Association, Class Dinners, which are actively promoted, Open House, which is a movable feast, and the Alumni Fund Telethon. This final chapter of the fund drive, when volunteers under the direction of the fund chairman and the alumni secretary man a bank of 'phones to solicit last-minute contributions, has been so successful that this year the Amherst fund chairman sought cooperation and the use of the clubhouse for a similar campaign.

It was of course to the Williams Club that Ralph Perkins '09 came with his hopes for an alumni house on the campus, and its members can certainly be said to have had a strong hand in the accomplishment of his dream.

So, for the first fifty years, the Williams Club has kept the faith with its founders in their high purpose. That this could have been accomplished is due to the unremitting labors of a long line of officers, governors and committee chairmen, far too numerous to mention, and the faithful service of a staff whose loyalty is evidenced by the length of tenure. To all of these, who have kept the purple flag with the big, gold "W" flying on Murray Hill, a deep bow of appreciation. Long may it wave!

CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION

We, the undersigned, *Eugene Delano, Francis Lynde Stetson, Arthur H. Masten, Thomas Nelson, Jr., Henry W. Banks, Jr., J. Addison Young, Albert Rathbone, Charles Thaddeus Terry, John S. Sheppard, Jr., Clark Williams, James C. Rogerson, Louis M. Starr, Edwin N. Chapman, Almon C. Barrell, E. Dimon Bird, William T. Quinn, Herbert H. Lehman, Ernest S. Suffern, Max B. Berking, Benno von Witzleben and Fred E. Linder*, all of full age, citizens of the United States of America and a majority also citizens of the State of New York, desiring to form a corporation under and by virtue of the laws of the State of New York, and in pursuance of the provisions of the Membership Corporations Law, being Chapter XXXV of the Consolidated Laws, and the acts amendatory thereof and supplemental thereto, do hereby make and acknowledge this Certificate of Incorporation and certify as follows:

I.

The objects for which said corporation is to be formed are to advance the interests and influence of Williams College, and to promote intellectual and social intercourse among the members of said corporation, who are to be persons who have been connected with Williams College as students or instructors or who have received honorary degrees therefrom, and in aid of that purpose to maintain a Club House or rooms for the use of its members.

II.

The name of the proposed corporation is "WILLIAMS CLUB, INC."

III.

The territory in which the operations of said corporation are to be principally conducted is the City of New York.

IV.

The principal office of said corporation is to be located in the Borough of Manhattan, City of New York.

V.

The number of directors of said corporation is to be twenty-two.

VI.

The names and places of residence of the persons to be the directors of said corporation until its first annual meeting are as follows:

<i>Names</i>	<i>Residences</i>
Clark Williams.....	293 Madison Avenue, New York City
J. Addison Young.....	99 Center Avenue, New Rochelle, N. Y.
Max B. Berking.....	122 East 86th Street, New York City
Ernest S. Suffern.....	Montclair, N. J.
Eugene Delano.....	12 Washington Square, New York City
Francis Lynde Stetson.....	4 East 74th Street, New York City
Arthur H. Masten.....	65 East 79th Street, New York City
Thomas Nelson, Jr.....	Peekskill, N. Y.
Henry W. Banks, Jr.....	Sound Beach, Conn.
Albert Rathbone.....	130 East 65th Street, New York City
Charles T. Terry.....	62 East 58th Street, New York City
John S. Sheppard, Jr.....	969 Park Avenue, New York City
James C. Rogerson.....	12 West 44th Street, New York City
Louis M. Starr.....	128 East 70th Street, New York City
Edwin N. Chapman.....	Greenwich, Conn.
Almon C. Barrell.....	Lawrence Park, Bronxville, N. Y.
E. Dimon Bird.....	43 Fifth Avenue, New York City
William T. Quinn.....	601 West 156th Street, New York City
Herbert H. Lehman.....	88 Central Park West, New York City
Harold P. Erskine.....	22 West 9th Street, New York City
Benno von Witzleben.....	817 West End Avenue, New York City
Fred E. Linder.....	1010 East 214th Street, New York City

VII.

The time for holding the annual meeting of said corporation is the first Friday of April in each year.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and seals this 16th day of October, 1913.

Francis Lynde Stetson	Edwin N. Chapman
Eugene Delano	J. Addison Young
Thomas Nelson, Jr.	Benno von Witzleben
Almon C. Barrell	Charles Thaddeus Terry
Ernest S. Suffern	Arthur H. Masten
Louis M. Starr	Wm. T. Quinn
Henry W. Banks, Jr.	E. Dimon Bird
John S. Sheppard, Jr.	Herbert H. Lehman
James C. Rogerson	Clark Williams
Max B. Berking	Albert Rathbone
	Fred E. Linder

(The acknowledgments follow.)

I, FRANCIS K. PENDLETON, a Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, do hereby approve of the foregoing certificate of incorporation of WILLIAMS CLUB INC., and consent to the filing and recording of the same in the manner provided by statute.

Dated October 28, 1913

F. K. PENDLETON
Justice of the Supreme Court
of the State of New York

(Filed and recorded in the office of the Secretary of State of the State of New York on October 30, 1913 and in the office of the County Clerk of New York County on October 31, 1913.)