



A New History of the Chicago Curling Club, Part Two

“Meet the Girls who Curl”

– *Chicago Tribune*, 6 January 1963



Even before the doors officially opened, the Women's Division of the Chicago Curling Club was up and running. They met casually for the first time on December 15, 1948, at the Skokie Country Club, to set up their governing board and plan their first events. Created by the wives of the founding male members, the Women's Division was its own autonomous organization – a club within a club.

The early members – Migs McBain, Jeanne Vaile, Ginny Jones, Flo Fetzner, Helen Erwin, to name a few – nominated officers and set up a pin committee. They applied for membership in the USWCA, and they set dues at \$5 a head. Their primary goal was to get on the ice, so they planned a set-rinks event on Wednesday mornings, with pickup games on Tuesdays and Thursdays. They wanted to make sure that their own country club affiliations didn't follow them onto the ice at the CCC, so they purposefully re-mixed rinks at regular intervals. This new women's club was to have its own distinct identity, not merely be an extension of Exmoor, Indian Hill, Skokie, and Glen View Country Clubs. On December 30, 1948, the Women's Division of the Chicago Curling Club had its first official meeting. By January 4, they were curling.

Chicago Brownie Braes?

Much goes into setting up a new club, not least of which involves picking a name. At the March 2, 1949, meeting, board members tossed around

“Lassies, Lauries, Brownie Braes, Brownie Lassies, Scotch Plaids, Skirlers, Sweepers, and Glen Garrys.” At its April 26 Annual Meeting (“a delicious luncheon arranged by Mrs. Trieschmann and Mrs. Osborn”), the pin committee presented “a beautiful drawing for a pin,” a clump of heather tied with a plaid ribbon, set in a white enamel circle. Thus inspired, the Women's Division of the Chicago Curling Club officially became the Heathers.

The Heathers, in turn, became a hit. At the end of the first season they had 61 members; by the second season, their ranks had swelled to 111, making them the largest women's curling club in the United States. They expanded their events to four days per week, and in addition to women's curling, the Heathers took on responsibility for the Club's mixed events on weekends. They created a “School for Skips” and hosted the opening and closing parties for the club as a whole. And, as noted in the minutes, “The Heathers' Hospitality Committee is glad to assist the Men's Board when they are entertaining.”

To be a member of the Heathers, one had to be “any woman whose husband or father is a member in good standing of the Chicago Curling Club.” On October 31, 1949, the Heather Board added a social member category for non-curling wives of Club members. Women, of course, were not actual members of the Chicago Curling Club. There were no single women in the Heathers unless they were the daughter of a male







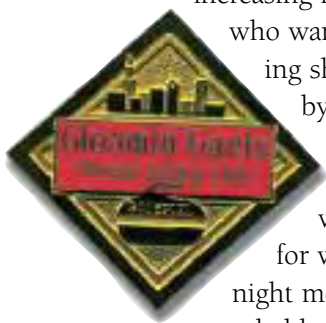
However, as the era of Women's Lib and NOW entered lives and the world changed, so did the members of the club. By the early 80s, working women, who were only curling mixed, noticed there was open ice in the evenings and wondered, "Why can't we curl at night?" A group of the younger women, including Willa Arntz, Barbara Moses, Barbara Philips, Marta Crawford, Karen Begley, Sally McNamara, and Laurie Rahn, organized into a group and canvassed other curling clubs in Illinois about their evening curling. They eventually put together a Thursday night league that began in 1981. Willa remembers the tremendous levels of support and encouragement they received from the daytime curlers, many of whom were in their 60s and 70s. "Who wants to curl with us old ladies anyhow?" one long-time Heather joked. Joanne Miller's husband Bill came up with the name "Gloamin' Gaels," or Ladies of the Evening.

From the beginning, the Gloamin' Gaels saw their group a little differently from the Heathers. Rules were relaxed to accommodate women who might arrive late due to work or traffic reasons. Fun curling was the goal, and evening events were "looser," but at the same time, games were still played competitively and aggressively. The Gloamin' Gaels had their own pin, treasury, and dues. The group continued to grow, with many women curling both daytime and evenings and with new curlers signing on, so the Gloamin' Gaels expanded to a second night and started their own annual bonspiel.

As the demographics of the club continued to evolve, as divorce became more available, as more women found themselves widowed, the club discovered that there were increasing numbers of newly single women

who wanted to join. In 1986, in a pioneering shift, the Heathers changed their bylaws so that "Any woman shall be eligible for Heather membership."

The success of the Gloamin' Gaels was not without growing pains. Men, for whom the CCC had been their weeknight men's clubhouse, suddenly felt surrounded by women who were jockeying for ice time. Today, however, more than 20 years after the formation of the Gloamin' Gaels, evening curling is still going strong, with men and women sharing weeknights – and the clubhouse.



The Once and Future Heathers

In recent years, the Heathers and Gloamin' Gaels agreed to merge into one group to form a cohesive women's club with day and evening events. The new Heathers combine the traditions and individualism of both day and evening groups, each having had significant impact on women's curling at CCC. With this history and name-recognition, the name "Heathers" once again represents all women curlers at the Chicago Curling Club.

Every woman who joins the Club is a dues-paying member of the Heathers, whether or not she plays in women's events. Women's daytime and weeknight curling events offer terrific opportunities for camaraderie, friendship, and competition. Only by playing in women's events can a Heather be rated, a system that measures one's growth as a curler. Women's events also open the door to competition at the national and international levels, including the Olympics, which does not offer a mixed event.

The women's events offer new curlers the chance to meet many more members than they might do otherwise, participate in a broader selection of bonspiels, develop excellent curling skills, create lifelong friendships, and overall enrich their broader curling experience.

The Heathers of the Chicago Curling Club are a diverse, supportive, well-educated club that has been on the forefront of women's curling both locally and nationally, for the last 60 years. As curling grows in competitiveness and popularity, the Heathers will continue to be innovators and champions for women's curling.

– Sources: *History of the Chicago Curling Club*; Heather Minutes, 1948-63; Heathers Rinks and Events, 1985-86; Heather By-Laws, 1949-1986; Heather Constitution, 1949; Heather Scrapbook 1949-67; interviews with Casey Kremer, Marcia Arnold, Joan Miller, Willa Arntz, Karen Begley, Jim Miller, Cheryl West, Jim West, Liz Reid; "United States Women's Curling Association: A Brief History;" Happy Curtis Scrapbooks; Helen Erwin, "Scotch on the Rocks."





The United States Women's Curling Association

The USWCA, founded in 1945 in Milwaukee by member clubs Indian Hill, Wauwatosa, Exmoor, Skokie, and Appleton, works diligently to spread the sport of curling throughout the U.S. and provides invaluable opportunities for new and experienced curlers alike. Since 1949, the USWCA holds its annual National Bonspiel at one of its member clubs, in conjunction with the business meeting. An annual Senior Ladies Bonspiel for women over 55 was first hosted by the Heathers of the Chicago Curling Club in 1983. The USWCA also sponsored the Women's National Championship, until Olympic rules forced the ceding of that event to the USCA. Moreover, the USWCA has been an early and continuous champion of junior curling, providing not only bonspiel opportunities, but also downsized equipment, travel funds, pins, and trophies. The group also sponsors a Women's Challenge, for



five-and-under curlers who want "to develop skills in skipping by playing against their peers" in a regional bonspiel. The All-American at Chicago is a USWCA event, with pins supplied by the national organization. Any USWCA

member club is eligible to hold this event.

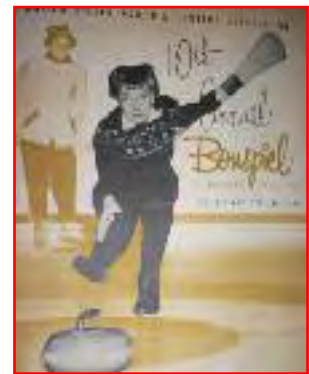
While the USWCA's biggest influence is on domestic curling, it is most famous perhaps for its international exchange programs. The Canadian Friendship Tour takes 16 senior women curling north of our border every four years. The Scottish Tour, begun in 1952, takes 20 North American curlers to Scotland every ten years, and brings Scottish curlers to this side of the pond as well. This highly competitive and exhausting event (women compete for 5 slots from each of the USWCA's four regions) brings together some of the best women curlers in the world for athletic and cultural exchange. Helen Erwin described a whirlwind of cocktails, curling, sightseeing, banquets, and a complete lack of central heating in her 1955 memoir, "Scotch on the Rocks." In her attempt to navigate haggis she wrote:

I am going to confess I tried hard to politely hide mine under the turnips. But I had a chance tonight to ease my guilty conscience when at dinner I sat between two men who could not agree on a choice of wine. One ordered red and the other white, and I sampled both without mentioning that I don't care for wine, hoping to compensate for my lack of enthusiasm about haggis.



The Heathers are delighted to host the 27th Annual Senior Women's Bonspiel, Nov 5-9. Come out and watch some great curling!

In their hosting of bonspiels, serving as officers, and curling enthusiastically in USWCA events, the Heathers of the Chicago Curling Club have had a strong and productive relationship with the USWCA for 60 years.



"The curling costume for the ladies took a dramatic change this year [1949]. It was no longer necessary to wear the heaviest of clothing in our comparatively warm ice area. Marshall Field and Co. had introduced a good looking navy blue serge suit designed by the famous designer of ski clothes, Margery Benedikter. The suit was complimented by glengarries or balmorals. As a group, on the ice we looked very smart in spite of the fact that the pants, by today's standards, looked somewhat like long bloomers." Elizabeth

Johnston, *History of the Chicago Curling Club*.

