



LIBRARY & ARCHIVES TREASURES

By David R. Grinnell, Chief Archivist

The Federation of Independent School Alumnae and “The Charity Ball”

Uncommon Women was the title of the publication launched during the Federation of Independent School Alumnae’s 90th-anniversary celebration. Organized by Anne Burgwin Scully, Madeline Laughlin Alexander, Louise Kay Ebbert, Marjorie Rea Laughlin, and Helen Blanche Rauh, the Federation (now the FISA Foundation) provided post-hospitalization health care for women and their infants regardless of social status or an ability to pay in the early 20th century. Later, when demand for convalescent care declined, the organization reinvented itself and its facility at Harmarville as one of the leading rehabilitation centers in the nation. A unique aspect of the organization is that the women from the Federation not only provided funding and leadership for their institution, but also created an avenue for their members to work directly with patients on a variety of activities. *Uncommon Women* is an appropriate title to describe the energetic women whose uncommon activities made them visionaries in first the field of convalescent and then rehabilitation care.

Fundraising activities were essential to the success of the organization’s mission-driven work at Harmarville. As early as 1916

the women of the Federation organized the Charity Ball, an annual event held for nearly 50 years at the William Penn Hotel. Examples of the elaborately designed program books and photographs for the event are found in the records of the FISA Foundation in the Heinz History Center’s Archives. Interestingly, women from the Federation volunteered as models for many of the photographic advertisements that appeared throughout the program book.

Pictured here is the cover from the 1926 Charity Ball program. Artwork created by local designer Verner S. Purnell accompanied photographs by Parry Studios featuring Federation members Eleanor H. Rowe adorned in jewelry from Hardy and Hayes, Mary Louise Johnson sporting the latest fashions from Maguire, and Eleanor Longenecker showcasing the latest from the Studebaker dealership. These images illustrate the dedication needed to make their charitable efforts a success, even serving as fashion models! The photograph shown here is only an example of the material housed in the records of the FISA Foundation, which document the impact of the organization on the lives of so many individuals throughout

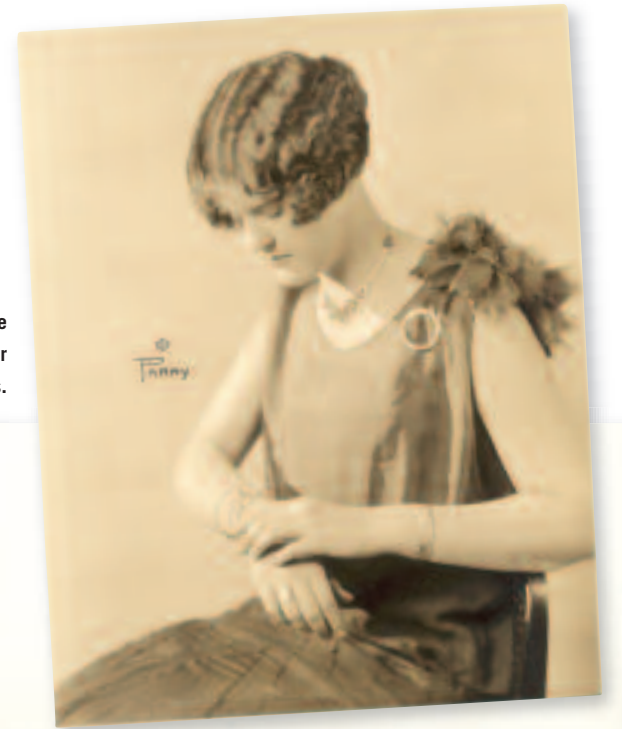


The cover of the 1926 Federation of Independent School Alumnae Charity Ball program book designed by Verner S. Purnell. All HC L&A, MSP #472.

the years, and which continues to address the needs of women and children in Western Pennsylvania.

The Library & Archives collects material related to the history and culture of Western Pennsylvania. The Library & Archives Reading Room is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. To view materials from the L&A collections online, go to the Historic Pittsburgh Website: <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

Eleanor H. Rowe models jewelry for Hardy and Hayes.



Eleanor Longenecker showcases Studebaker’s Big Six Victoria model.