

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Why *The Women on the Hill* Exists

*The true story of a Seattle women's club that has met every two weeks since 1894 —
told from its own million-word archive*

What it is

In September 1894, twelve women on Seattle's Queen Anne Hill founded a literary club. It never stopped. Through two world wars, the 1918 flu, the Depression, and the 2020 pandemic, the Queen Anne Fortnightly Club has met every other Thursday for more than 130 years — and it kept everything: 465 papers, minutes, letters, photographs, over a million words. This book is what was found inside that archive, told in thirteen short chapters. Every quote is real. Every woman was real. Everything happened.

Why it matters

Clubs like this one are disappearing from American life, and with them a very particular kind of friendship: local, patient, lifelong, in person. This club is living proof of what that kind of community does for the women in it — and of what gets saved when women write their own lives down. The women in these pages were not famous. They would all have been forgotten. Instead, because they kept a record and kept each other, a first woman principal is remembered, a mother's memoir survives her by half a century, and the first recorded call for a city ambulance in Seattle turns out to have come from a ladies' literary club, in 1899, in someone's parlor.

The stories readers repeat

- **The fishnet ceiling (1896).** The night before the club's first dinner for the husbands, a bathtub overflowed and the dining-room ceiling collapsed. The women covered the wreck in fishnets and ferns; a guest declared he doubted so many "uncommonly intellectual people" could be found anywhere else in the city.

- **The imaginary ship (1930).** During the Depression, the club spent a whole season sailing an imaginary ship around the world, parlor by parlor, port by port.
- **“We weren’t that kind of club” (1942).** Asked in wartime for a history of its accomplishments, the club considered it — and declined.
- **The resurrection (2019).** The club’s archivist found a forgotten member in the files — Adelaide Pollock, Seattle’s first woman school principal, dead for 81 years — and read her life back to the club that had forgotten her.
- **The letter (1987).** A member who had moved away decades earlier wrote back — holding her original 1947 invitation to membership in her hand, enclosing a check for her overdue dues.

“My fondest wish is that I could be in Seattle on a meeting day and so attend one more meeting. Oh, well...one can dream.” — Margaret Siegley, 1987

Who it is for

Women who have a circle of friends they treasure — and women who wish they did. Book clubs. Anyone from Seattle. Anyone who has ever kept a box of family letters and wondered whether it mattered. It is a short book: an evening or two.

The honesty behind it

The book’s promise is that everything in it happened — and the promise cuts both ways. It includes the club’s harder history (a 1901 minstrel-show party; the silence in the minutes while Seattle’s Japanese families were interned in 1942) told as plainly as everything else. The complete archive is published free alongside the book, so any reader can check any quote against the original page.

How it came to be

The club’s archivist opened the collection so it could be made searchable. Andrew Conru — a Seattle engineer and arts patron whose foundation runs a free public gallery downtown — digitized all of it, then spent a year, with AI assistance for the reading and cataloguing, turning the best of a million words

into a book. The women did the writing, over 130 years. He did the gathering.
All of it — book and archive — is free to everyone.

Read the book: **thewomenonthehill.com/book** · Browse all 465 papers:

thewomenonthehill.com/archive

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