



## ...And Ladies of the Club

*Helen Hooven Santmyer*

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A #1 *New York Times* bestseller--and an American classic--now in trade paperback...

A groundbreaking bestseller with two and a half million copies in print, "...And Ladies of the Club" centers on the members of a book club and their struggles to understand themselves, each other, and the tumultuous world they live in. A true classic, it is sure to enchant, enthrall, and intrigue readers for years to come.

## **...And Ladies of the Club Details**

Date : Published January 21st 1987 by Random House Value Publishing (first published 1982)

ISBN : 9780517619742

Author : Helen Hooven Santmyer

Format : Hardcover 1176 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Classics



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## **From Reader Review ...And Ladies of the Club for online ebook**

### **Betty says**

Sometimes I wonder what it is about certain books - or parts of books that cause them to stay with us many years after we've read them. It's been at least 10 years since I read this book - yet I still remember details of it. There are a number of books I've read since that I'd be hard pressed to tell you much about at all.

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### **Kim says**

I really enjoyed this book despite it being long, with big pages and small print. I appreciated the passage through time with the changes in politics, fashion, and technology. I also enjoyed the variety of characters and their relationships. My favorite character was Anne. She experienced so much tragedy in her life, but managed to live life with a good attitude. I also liked the Rausches, Sally and Ludwig, who seemed to work well together as a couple. I especially liked the political side of Ludwig, and the way he cared about those who worked for him. The considerable interaction between couples, family members, friends, and associates was realistic. They didn't always get along, and the various temperaments kept the story interesting. Most of all I enjoyed the women's club, and the ability of those women to keep it going all those years.

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### **Emily says**

This sweeping saga not only entertains, but educates. I was sadly lacking in my knowledge of the post-civil war era, but after reading this book, I can no longer claim that.

The focus of the book on two main characters, their descendants, their friends, and their town provides a picture that is both intimate and broad. Basing the story in Ohio when most of the elected leaders hailed from that state gave national significance to the lives of the characters.

I was rather disappointed by the second half of the book. It just seemed very depressing and sad for quite a while there. I was also tempted to quit reading it, but fortunately, I did not. The last hundred pages or so really redeemed the second half. The amount of death and destruction in the second half was really just a realistic amount that I am not used to seeing in fiction, especially chick-lit!

I believe I caught a glimpse of the author, both in the main character, Anne, and in the young novelist, Tess Stevens. As the author wrote this book over a period of 50 years, Anne's meditations on growing old probably reflected Santmeyer's own feelings about her aging process. Tess notes that she wants to begin writing a sweeping saga in 1930...which is probably about when Helen began writing "...And Ladies of the Club." It would be gratifying to know more about the history of the author and find correlations between her real life experiences and that of her characters. Unfortunately, I have found little information about her thus far.

Ultimately, it was enjoyable to spend a month in Santmeyer's world.

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### **Scartowner says**

This epic spans the years immediately after the end of the Civil War to just before the meltdown of the

Depression. Three generations of women and their families make up the cast. I am relieved to have not lived in this little town. There are many characters, but only one decent human being in the bunch, Anne Cochran Gordon. The others are self-serving, bitter, racist, anything (but WASP) haters. At least one woman intentionally spread hateful gossip that led to a decent marriage falling apart. The conservative slant is so steep, one could worry about these folks sliding off the pages. As noted before, I read the book when it was published in the early 80s. The second read was disastrously unsatisfying. Plus I think I got tendonitis from holding this heavy 1200 pages for three weeks.

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### **Liz says**

I can't pin it down precisely, but I have always loved this book. Its mostly the longevity of it. Not just a book that ends with a wedding or a major climactic event. It follows women through their lives, from childhood friends through their developing relationships with each other and their time as wives, mothers, grandmothers, widows. And the characters really seem to evolve and develop and grow more definitive and rich as the time passes. So many books seem to focus on one main crisis with one specific solution or reaction by a character - and so many of them focus on crises in youth or young adulthood. As if the passage of time and the evolutions of a person were too complex for a satisfying story. The overall beauty of life is in the day in and day out scenarios and our trials don't come in bold media headlines but rather in slender, discrete tendrils that knit the overall fabric of our life. Life is so enthralling - at all ages. And Santmyer captures that very poignantly.

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### **DeB MaRtEnS says**

I finished this doorstop of a book! Having read about this supposed "Gone with the Wind" style epic which took the author fifty years to complete, I had to order it from a used book dealer to get a copy.

It is very dated, and its attitudes reek of the politics and biases of its eras... it did take fifty years to write, the author was born in the late 1890s, and the story itself begins as the American Civil War has come to an end and concludes prior to WWII. Although the author, a woman, created strong female characters, the misogyny demonstrated in her writing at times had me wincing.

I can't classify this book as the same kind of classic as Gone with the Wind. Both are historical fiction, both share an uncomfortable relationship with stereotypes, both illuminate a challenging time in American history and both tell in depth tales about a vast cast of characters. However, "Ladies" comes up short (Ha ha, this 1400 page book is wee bit short!). There were simply too many people to keep track of, and too little time to become attached to them. The broad universal themes of love, home, family, life and loss were parcelled out in bits and pieces, which unfortunately robbed the novel of any real chance of passion and drama.

At the end of many days, I'd walked through years of these ladies and their families lives, and learned much about daily life, etiquette, fashion, pregnancy, male roles, racial attitudes, gender beliefs, modesty, gossip.... and quietly, it was over.

An experience of an old novel, which hasn't held too well, to the tests of time... but a worthy challenge.

3.5 stars... Gawd, it is LONG!

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### **Diana says**

I enjoyed this book thoroughly. What I loved best was the passing of time in the characters' lives. We follow them from the time they are young women, on through adulthood and to their deaths. Mom recommended this book to me. I read this book ONLY on my lunch breaks as part of a bet because it was so long, one of my co-workers didn't believe I could finish it in a certain time period and only in 1 hour/work day. I won, he had to buy me a Coke or something like that.

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### **Jessica says**

I can't believe I haven't reviewed this book before.

Yes, it's almost 1,200 pages long. And yes, every one of those pages matters.

This magnificent book is a series of portraits of the changes in a small town in Ohio from the end of the Civil War into the 20th century. As the country moves into a golden age following the Civil War, the ladies of a small Ohio town (known for its women's college) decide to form an intellectual club for the women. Two of their charter members are Sally and Anne, best friends who have just graduated from the college and are about to be married to handsome, prosperous young men. The book follows them and the other ladies through marriage, childbirth, illness, losses and happinesses, grandchildren and beyond. You come to know and love all the members of the club, and it's fascinating seeing the changes that come over them and their families as the years pass.

Despite its length, the book is mesmerizing, and could not put it down. I adored Sally and Anne, and I found myself laughing and crying along with them. Simply put, this is a work of art, a beautiful book.

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### **Rachel M says**

....And Ladies of the Club was my whole world in the summer of '04. I drank in the lives of the characters, and then the characters' children. I loved quiet, introspective Anne Gordon because I saw my reflection in her, and I equally loved spunky, spirited Sally because I did not. Thomasina Ballard's romance with the piano teacher, and the spinsterly Eliza, the girl who first acts so well and then becomes a mother and scorns all women who act, "Shaney" and her unrequited love for Johnny Gordon; Johnny's love for his ice queen of a wife.... So many stories and people. Most of all, this novel set me up for life. I saw life lived from age 18 to age 86, and how the characters' perspectives changed with time. And I saw life mapped out. I read about heart-breaking tragedy and change, and realized that pain could also be beautiful. I consider this book a classic because this book is life, and the author put herself into it, I am sure; even though I don't know her story, I know this is her story.

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### **Angie Macy says**

My favorite book of all time. It's about everyday life in an Ohio town from the end of the Civil War through the Depression. The book covers the lives of the ladies and their families in a literary club. It deals with their personal relationships that seem so real, it makes you feel like you're there. A very long book with over 1100 pages, but well worth the read. When you are finished you are wishing for more.

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### **Bruce says**

Growing up only a few counties from the southwestern Ohio setting of this story added to my interest. I would love this book no matter where I was from. It's usually packaged to look like a romantic novel and there is an element of that, but this is a meticulously researched historical novel. The people and relationships are so realistic that it's a satisfying read for anyone. You'll laugh, you'll cry. Run, don't walk, to get a copy of this book.

Suggestion: Twice now, I've read Gone With the Wind, and immediately after finishing it, picked up Ladies. Wind covers 1861-1873, Ladies 1868-1932. Great double feature.

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### **Diana says**

It took me 5 and a half months of inconsistent reading, but finally, I finished And Ladies of the Club! And it was worth it.

All along, while I struggled to get through the pages, and frequently fell asleep after just a few, I \*liked\* the story. I liked the characters, and I liked the insight that the book gave me to the timelessness of women's relationships with each other. I recognized some of my friends and frenemies in these characters.

The women in the book were united at first only by their education, and their interest in joining together to form a club to learn about books and authors. Over the course of their lifetimes, members of the club come and go. Not everyone is a best friend. Some members of the club are just that - no greater relationship is ever formed. Some members are hard to get along with. Through it all, they stay together, more or less, and accomplish great things for their little town.

While I can't say that I will rush right back in and re-read this book, I could definitely see myself picking it back up and starting over 10 years down the road.

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### **The Library Lady says**

I know exactly where I was when I began to read this book. I was in Kensington Gardens in London on a long awaited trip to England. Yet, sitting there, I was already so engrossed I didn't want to put this book down!

Yes, it's long, and the action is limited. It's character study, not a Tom Clancy book. Give it a chance and you

will get involved with the characters.

I still find this as engrossing on re-reads as I did 20 years ago. Well worth the time.

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### **Sue says**

I read this book soon after it came out and still have my beat up hardback copy of the book. I know several people that were unable to get into this book, but it seems like if you like it, you actually love it. The author tracks the lives of two young women (recent graduates of a female academy in a small Ohio town) from shortly after the Civil War through the first decades of the twentieth century. The story of the women (as well as the small town) is told through the activities of a women's reading club. This is a book I've reread many times.

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### **Dianne says**

I finished reading the book this afternoon. What a totally satisfying read, both for the story and for the writing. I love English well spoken and these characters are set in a time when it was. By the time I got to page 1000 I was beginning to wish I wasn't so close to the end. Ironic when you think there were over 400 pages left and lots of the books I read don't have that many to begin with. But by then I was deeply involved in the story and cared about the main character, Anne.

The story covers 1868 to 1932 and manages the time span quite well. There was only one jump of two years that threw me off a little. I had to go back and re-read it to see what exactly had happened, but that's more a fault of my wandering mind than the story.

There are many families in the story and toward the end I wasn't able to keep up with who married who and all their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. I see that as a positive in this story. Anne's life was the core of the book and as she aged her world became more and more narrow while all that living went on around her. I think the author was ingenious in allowing the reader to share some of the isolation and confusion the main character was experiencing as her own life wound down.

Throughout the book there is seamless transitioning from one character, household and workplace to another. With so many characters it can't be easy to develop each one in a way that you feel you know enough about them. Santmyer has the enviable skill of leading you through their lives without even realizing you've moved on from one to another. By the time you wonder what's happening with someone, you're back into their lives and catching up.

American politics was a continuing background story in the book. I confess there were times when I skipped through a paragraph or two simply because I'm not an American and have no great interest in their political history. Having said that though, I have to say also that the political story is at times an integral part of the bigger story and in no way interfered with my enjoyment of it.

As I said in an earlier post, the Ladies Club is a literary club. I found their meetings fascinating just because they are so totally different than the meetings of the Book Club I belong to. Their club demanded far more from their members than mine does. To be assigned a topic and required to stand up and present an essay on

it would send most of us running. We choose books and though one person is assigned to lead the discussion, it is usually just a matter of telling a bit about the author and preparing questions to get the others talking. With over 60 years "in" the Ladies' Club however, I'm now intrigued with the idea of doing more. Maybe we should stretch ourselves a little and try something new.

I acquired a little knowledge about the Temperance Crusade from this book. I wasn't very familiar with how it affected ordinary people or how churches were involved. It was interesting to see how it fit into the lives of the characters and how important it was to some and how trivial to others.

Religion was at least a part of most people's lives in the time period the book covers, but as always, there was a wide variety of beliefs. Some characters were Christians, others called themselves Christians because they believed in God, and others wanted nothing to do with any of it. Many characters prayed and attended church, and yet were class conscious, with firm ideas about who was acceptable and who wasn't. Parents were appalled when their children chose spouses considered below them. Social occasions were for the acceptable classes only. As in many stories, Christianity is treated lightly and inaccurately. There would be no room for class consciousness or judgementalism in true Christianity, for Christians are instructed to consider others better than themselves, and invite to their dinners those who can't repay. I hear much about the decline of the church in this 21st century, but I see more acceptance of all people in today's believers than I read about in history.

When I came to the end of the book, I was satisfied. I had expected to feel badly about leaving all those people behind, but the story ended perfectly, not in the middle of a life, but at the close of it, leaving no wondering how things would work out if the story continued.

I will recommend this book to all the avid readers I know. I have one request to borrow it already. For anyone who's looking for a great read, absorbing and entertaining, this is it. I'm looking forward to reading the author's other novels.

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### **Melody says**

It's been years since I read this book, and I've been reflexively putting on list of favorites for years. I thought it time to re-read. This time, the poor editing and the plethora of typos drove me nearly to distraction. I went out and got a newer edition half way through the read, hoping against hope that it would be better. It was a little better, but, man, what a mess. That's the flaw, and for my money, the only flaw in this magnificent slice-of-life novel. Sure, some of the attitudes may strike today's reader as reprehensible, however, they ring true. The book begins with the two main characters' high school commencement in 1868 and proceeds to follow their lives and the lives of their families and neighbors until 1930. The place is Ohio, the fictional town of Waynesboro based on Santmyer's home Xenia. Nothing happens, and everything happens. Whole lives are played out, and one is part of them in intimate but not claustrophobic detail. I don't know if I can articulate exactly why I love this book so, but it has something to do with the way it brings the relentlessness of time to the forefront of my consciousness, and the way it grounds me in humanity.

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### **Liona says**

My mother had this fat book (more than 1,000 pages) on her shelf for years, so I grabbed it when I was at a

second-hand book sale with a \$2 bag I needed to fill in 15 minutes.

So far, it's been well worth the 50 cents or so I spent on the book. It's about a group of ladies who create a Women's Club right after the Civil War, and Helen Hoover Santmyer does a great job recreating the era and imagining the relationships among these women. I'm glad that I have another 700 pages that I get to spend with these women -- I'll let you know my rating when I finish the book.

O.K. -- I'm finally done. I was sad to leave the ladies behind, but the typos and editing errors were driving me crazy! Former copy editors should read this book with caution.

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### **Rayni says**

I finished this book in July 1985. I was on bedrest for my 2nd pregnancy, my first ended in miscarriage. It took almost my entire pregnancy to read this book. I would lay there on the couch, w/this big, fat heavy book resting on my stomach & the baby would kick it, so I would try to find another position. I loved this book & was sad when it ended.

I saw Ms Santmyer interviewed on TV from the rest home where she was living. She had got a new perm in honor of the occasion. She died in February 1986. She said that 90% of the hoopla was because she was such an old lady. She was 88 at the time the book was published as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection & died at the age of 90.

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### **Gail says**

This is a monstrously huge book. The standard paperback runs to over 1700 pages. I read the trade paperback which is a much larger page but with tiny print which got this one down to 1173 pages. There are several things I have to say about this book;

#1 Mrs Santmyer desperately needed a good editor. Not only was the book full of typos, it was just too long. Someone needed to step in and do some ruthless cutting.

#2 There was really not a story arc. While there was a primary and secondary set of characters, the book covered the lives of many people with their normal tragedies and triumphs, but not really one core story and certainly no climax or resolution.

#3 I have been struggling to come to grips with what this book was about. The author said it was about politics. Certainly there was a lot about politics in it. A very one-sided view of Presidential politics from the 1860's to the 1930's, but even that was not delved into very thoroughly. I would not even put it in the category of historical fiction because it touched so lightly on very important historical periods. World War I for instance only gets about one chapter, and the Great Depression is also skimmed over. The title and the beginning chapters would lead the reader to think it is a book about a book club or literary society (as it was called in those days.) However, it was not really about that either. The Waynesborough Womens Club was just the common thread that tied all the characters together. The next thought is that it is one of those long sagas about two families over several generations, which it is but still that is not enough in itself. In going over in my mind from the beginning to the end what stood out, I came to realize that this is a book about death. I have no desire to go through and count but there are at least 20 to 30 deaths. The rest seems to be

just filler between the deaths.

It was at least 300 pages before I began to care very much about the characters and even after that I could have put it down and walked away without regret. I finished this too long book because it was chosen as the summer read by the book group I joined about a year ago. They like a long book for summer.

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### **Sonya says**

Okay - this is a gem!!! Read it for the first time at 18 yrs. of age, re-read every couple of years since. Each time I like it for different reasons as the novel takes you through a few generations of families in the 1800's.

The women are really really well developed - not just the main character - ALL of them.  
Enjoy!

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