



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Shown above left is the pool and above center is the chapel, both in new YWCA. Above right is a reproduction of a pen and ink artist sketch of the proposed new YWCA. Photos courtesy of the Lycoming County Women's History Collection.

A woman's place is in the Y: First years at 815 W. Fourth St.

Williamsport Women



By JANET McNEIL HURLBERT
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The new Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) building was dedicated on June 30, 1929, and was open for business on July 1. Citizens of Williamsport already had received a preview of the state-of-the-art headquarters through an article in the local L.L. Stearns & Sons publication "Store and Home News." Superlative adjectives described the "up-to-the-minute" gymnasium equipment and the natatorium — "one of the most beautiful in the country."

The swimming pool boasted a filtration system that ensured "absolutely pure water." There would be a large reception parlor on each side of the front entrance, as well as eight club rooms and two classrooms complemented by an outdoor patio for use during mild weather. The dining room with an adjoining well-equipped kitchen would start serving breakfast at 6:30 a.m. and end the day with dinner until 7:30 p.m. Permanent guests with sleeping rooms on the third and fourth floors would have access to a kitchen, laundry facilities and parlors. Transient visitors would be housed on the second floor. Office space, a board room and a chapel completed the amenities.

every state in the Union, Canada and London. A promotional brochure, "Come Once, and You Will Come Again," informed readers that the new building possessed "spectacular beauty" and a home-like atmosphere. Women not only secured a safe place to stay, but also found "good times, self-development, new friends, inspiration and opportunities for service." Giving shelter to women who were experiencing financial difficulties always was a priority, which proved especially significant during the 1936 flood in the Williamsport area.

Stay at Home Camp for Girls

The early 1930s brought the Stay at Home Camp for Girls. The day began at 9 a.m. with devotions and singing, followed by folk dancing held outdoors. Dramatics and swimming preceded a hot lunch and a rest period, with cots provided. Strenuous outdoor activities such as tennis, baseball and archery began the afternoon, followed by a quiet time of storytelling, handicrafts and the singing of camp songs. A final "plunge" and races in the pool concluded camp at 5:00 p.m.

Speaker's Bureau

In 1933, the YW formed a new department called the Speaker's Bureau. Its purpose was to serve the community with interesting and free speakers. It also would be a method of marketing all the YW services, by first attracting people to these well-publicized lectures. Topics ranged from local folklore and history to birds and nature, with frequent book reviews. One guest speaker addressed "The American Negro," and another talked about "Americanization and Immigration."

Depression years

The YW was not immune to the economic struggles of the 1930s. Unfortunately, the Depression meant that not all donors could honor their pledges for the construction of the new YW. In order to cover larger-than-expected mortgage payments, members organized many rummage and baked goods sales, held card parties, and sold tickets to events.

From the very beginning, the board realized the need to establish an endowment and also encouraged donors to memorialize loved ones by paying for the interior decorating of rooms in the new building. In a tightened economy, memberships decreased, at one point dropping to half of the previous year's total. In order to survive, the YW had to cut salaries and slash operating expenses by 40 percent.

The YW discontinued funding for the Walnut Street Branch, which served African-American women and girls. Through all this economic turmoil, the YW commitment remained the same: "Working together in harmony, the volunteers and staff will study the needs of the girls of the city and provide for them in every way possible."

A statement near the end of the 1930 annual report summarized the spirit of the YW during this time of expansion and challenge: "Some of you may think of the YWCA as a residence, or a swimming pool or gym or as a dining room, or merely as a building which is architecturally beautiful. It is so much more than any of these — it is the greatest women's movement in the world. To be a part of such a movement — to be one of the millions who are sharing its work — is truly a privilege."

For a history of the Williamsport YWCA during this period, consult a research paper by Brenda L. Gearhart, written in 1990, for a senior capstone history class at Lycoming College. It is available through The Lycoming County Women's History Collection at www.lycoming.edu/orgs/lcwhc/.

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In this photo courtesy of the Lycoming County Women's History Collection, are the elected YWCA officers for 1930 Mrs. William Hunter, Mrs. Ed Wein, Mrs. Ed Ludley, Mrs. F.E. Manson, Mrs. L. Maynard and Mary Megehan.

The first year

As the first year of operation drew to a close, the local newspaper ran an editorial that read: "The YWCA program has become a vital, important and necessary force in the religious, civic, economic and social life of the city."

The YW's annual report for 1930 was more than 30 pages long. Each page outlined information about the activities and outreach of the many committees, which included both staff and volunteer members.

The health committee published a brochure titled "More Joy, More Health and More Spirit" — advertising all the fitness offerings.

For \$3, a woman could use the gymnasium facilities once a week for eight weeks, provided that she was a YWCA member, completed a physical and brought her own gym suit. The calendar included basketball practice and listed times for the Sunday School Basketball League, composed of eight teams.

A "Business Girls' Gym" class offered "an hour of healthy living fun," and a class called "Watch That Shadow" encouraged weight reduction. A "plunge" in the pool was included in many activities, and there was a long list of swimming classes. The dance schedule offered everything from tiny tots rhythms to ballroom dancing.

Outreach and social service

Outreach included visits to homes, factories and stores to promote the YW message of service. The Business Girls' Spring Banquet and the first All Industrial Spring Banquet were a few of the many community dinners held at the YW. Volunteers supported the Tuberculosis Society and delivered 43 May baskets to shut-ins. There were taffy pulls, fudge parties, holiday events, theatrical productions, tureen suppers and mother-daughter events.

The Committee on Colored Work, which included "an equal number of white and Negro women," often met to discuss interracial relations, though African-American women and girls were not welcome at activities held at the Fourth Street location.

A newly created Social Workers Roundtable brought together many city agencies so that resources and support services could be unified. The World Fellowship Committee worked to promote good relations between the children of the United States and those of other countries. One project was to send treasure chests containing information packets to schoolchildren in the Philippine Islands at a cost of \$2.50 per chest.

Transient guests

Statistics for the first year listed accommodations for 1,140 transient guests. The women came from almost