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GROWING WITH HOUSTON:
A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF
THE YMCA OF GREATER HOUSTON, 1886-1986

by

ADAM BRUCE ARNOLD

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

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GROWING WITH HOUSTON: A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF THE YMCA
OF GREATER HOUSTON, 1886-1986

BY

ADAM BRUCE ARNOLD

ABSTRACT

Since its founding in London in 1844 and its arrival in Houston in 1886, the Young Men's Christian Association has always been a social service agency, attending to the needs of its clientele. Though the types of services the YMCA has offered have changed over time, its commitment to social service has not. In the first one hundred years in Houston, the association's emphasis on the spiritual, physical, mental, and social aspects of life has remained steadfast. This study will attempt to demonstrate that while applications of the aims have changed, the basic goal has not.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Professor John Boles of Rice University and Mr. Martin Caldwell, vice-president for institutional development of the YMCA of Greater Houston, deserve all credit due for my involvement with this project. I am tremendously grateful to them for allowing me this opportunity.

My gratitude also extends to the multitude who expressed their interest in my work and its eventual completion, which seemed as though it would never come. Mr. Caldwell has exhibited a quality that transcends patience in his wait for this history of his organization. As I originally intended to complete this project early in 1986, Mr. Caldwell has had quite a bit of time to anticipate the end result of my work. I want to apologize most profusely for any inconvenience that I caused him. Professor Boles and Professor Ira Gruber of the Rice history department both deserve some sort of commendation for their endurance as well. I am also thankful to Professor Niels Nielsen of the religious studies department, who graciously accepted the task of reviewing my work at the very last minute. Credit for any literary style contained herein should go to the committee, which labored long hours in its editorial endeavors. On the other hand, any factual errors in this thesis are mine and mine alone.
This thesis could not have been completed without all of the assistance rendered me by the attorneys and staff of Vinson & Elkins, as well as that of my friends outside the Firm, my family, and my wife, Lois. Their kind encouragement and confidence made the difference.
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PREFACE

Since my grandmother enrolled me at the age of thirteen in swimming lessons at the Kirkwood YMCA near Saint Louis, it seems that the YMCA has always been a part of my life. The summer after I learned to swim, I moved to Estes Park, Colorado, site of what was claimed to be the world's largest YMCA camp. I had no idea at the time that the camp was historically significant; I just knew that I could go to rollerskating rink on winter weekends, if the road to the camp had been plowed. Upon my departure to graduate school, my mother gave me a copy of C. Howard Hopkins's History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America. I had no idea at the time the impact that book would have on my life.

I used that book almost constantly over the course of my research. Along with the YMCA of the Greater Houston Area's fund of source materials, I used the Hopkins book every step of the way to examine changes in the YMCA movement since its founding in 1844 and its arrival in Houston in 1886. Hopkins pointed out obvious avenues for inquiry: the constant controversy surrounding the evangelical basis for membership, growth in programs and plant, and YMCA participation in World War I, to name just a very few.
Hopkins and I are in fundamental agreement: though the methods of the YMCA have changed over time, its essence has not. The YMCA still attempts to help every member grow socially, mentally, physically, and spiritually. My research through the mass of source materials housed at the Metropolitan Staff Offices of the YMCA of the Greater Houston Area, as well as my informal contact with staff members, confirms this as still being the mission of the YMCA.

The source materials, of course, also told me how the Houston association has grown along with the city over the past hundred years. Because both the city and the association grew so steadily and so quickly, after about 1950 reports and minutes become a blur of branches, programs, and finances. At this point it became necessary for me to rely more heavily upon individual documents, rather than comprehensive minutes and reports, to demonstrate how the YMCA continued to grow with Houston.
CHAPTER ONE

A CALLING FOR MEN

Victorian London, with a spirit of moral uplift in the face of urban decay, provided an ideal breeding ground for the birth of the Young Men's Christian Association. In this environment a tight-knit group of devout, middle-class, evangelical young men fulfilled their own wish and created a setting to provide the opportunity of Christian surroundings to others of their own status. Led by a draper's apprentice named George Williams, the small band on June 6, 1844, founded the same YMCA that flourishes worldwide more than 140 years later.1

Dedicated and driven in both their work and their religion, Williams and his fellow apprentices gathered in the rooms of Hitchcock, Rogers, a successful draper's firm. Though obligated to an occupational master, Williams and his associates felt a stronger duty to the call

of Christ as they found Him in London's evangelical churches. As a draper's apprentice, Williams entered the world of women's fashion. As an evangelical Christian, he stepped into the service of his fellow man in Jesus' name.

The drapery business held the possibility of a more genteel existence for a youngster from a common family possessing little education. With retail and wholesale elements ranging from fabric purchases to the sale of finished goods, women's fashion could prove lucrative for the ambitious apprentice. By the time of his death in 1905 at the age of 84, Williams had proven his ambition, having come not only to own Hitchcock, Rogers, but to be knighted as well.

Befitting such a self-made virtuous man, Williams's career had developed after a seemingly unfortunate happenstance. The son of a Dulverton yeoman, legend has it that Williams abandoned farming after he overturned a wagon load of hay. So in 1836, at the age of fifteen, he found himself apprenticed to a draper in nearby Bridgewater.

Williams's skill was such that he landed an apprenticeship with the more prestigious firm of Hitchcock, Rogers in London in 1841. Though the hours were long and the conditions comparatively harsh, Williams found time
to become involved in London's Dissenting churches.\textsuperscript{2} No government sanction sponsored these independent churches, unlike the Anglican Church; divine authority alone, as revealed in the conversion experience, stood as a test for membership. Only if an individual was "born again" might he be admitted to full status in London's Dissenting evangelical churches.

Evangelicalism, or a deep sympathy with it, played a major part in the lives of those close to Williams and the early YMCA. Williams' close friend, Edward Valantine, was, like Williams, an employee of Hitchcock, Rogers and strongly evangelical. Valantine also had an important role in the founding of the association.\textsuperscript{3} George Hitchcock, the man to whom Williams and Valantine were apprenticed, encouraged their church attendance and heartily approved of their infant association's meeting on his premises. He also approved of Williams's more secular activities, and Williams became his son-in-law as well as business partner.

Closely tied to London's evangelical churches were a number of societies that promoted a variety of good works. Their activities included ecumenical missionary

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., p. 23.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., pp. 112-20.
work, tract distribution, work for the city's street children, and burials for the destitute. There were even several organizations, both before and after the birth of the YMCA, whose purpose was to provide a variety of Christian programs for London's young men.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 100-106.} Williams and Valantine participated in a number of these ventures. Philanthropy such as this became a cornerstone of association work.

Such work was the rationale for the creation of the YMCA. Historical accounts of the movement's founding, best summarized in Clyde Binfield's George Williams and the Y.M.C.A., all agree that the association was born out of a desire to provide a structured outlet for the Christian strivings of a handful of devout young men to promote the spiritual welfare of other young men. To state the case accurately, the sources disagree about the place and date of the YMCA's initial meeting, the number of men present, even about the precise roles of Williams and Valantine. However, it is reliably known that the young men in attendance at the first associations meetings were intensely concerned with the Christian welfare of others. That the first YMCA members were reacting to conditions in Victorian London is also well
established. There was never any question that the YMCA was not only of, but for, young men.\textsuperscript{5}

The evangelical nature of their religious devotion was essential to the plans of the new association. Just as the conversion experience was the prerequisite for evangelical church membership, that membership itself was a condition for belonging to the YMCA. As will be seen later, this tie to church membership would be of monumental importance to the YMCA's development in America.

Word of mouth and occasional circulars gave Williams' group enough publicity to attract interested young men to coffee houses, teas, and other affairs sponsored by the drapers. By fall 1844 meetings had to be moved to more spacious surroundings in London hotels. The YMCA's growing clientele soon forced the association executive committee to appoint a permanent secretary to manage programs and business. Whether Williams served as a committee member or had any great influence after the very earliest days is unknown, though he did provide generous financial gifts for the YMCA and several other groups as he became more prosperous.\textsuperscript{6}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., pp. 121-25.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., pp. 126-29.
\end{flushright}
The association's growing popularity soon served to render the early hotel quarters inadequate. Enthusiasm for the new organization was not limited to the St. Martin's Court area where Hitchcock, Rogers and other drapers were located. Other areas of London set up YMCAs based on the model formed by Williams and his companions. By early 1846 branches had appeared in other English cities such as Manchester and Leeds. Men throughout England immediately grasped the YMCA's goals, and clamored for associations of their own. The growth resulted from the movement's easily understood purpose -- to provide for the religious needs of England's young men through both religious and secular methods. These methods included prayer meetings, social teas, Bible studies and reading rooms. A man's intellectual and social needs had to be tended to in addition to the needs of his spirit. Providing for a man's social and intellectual life would in fact build his spiritual, Christian character. This has remained a basic tenet of YMCA programs even to today.

Many Americans were aware of the evangelical and philanthropic fervor burning in Great Britain. Revivals erupted in the United States during this period as part of a larger emphasis on religious and secular activity aimed at a wide variety of social issues. In this context, the time was ripe for the arrival of the YMCA. The
London World's Fair of 1851 kindled one of the primary sparks for the movement's ignition across the Atlantic. George H. Stuart, a Philadelphia businessman, met with Williams during the fair to pray and discuss the association. Thoroughly convinced of the efficacy of the movement, Stuart helped lead the rise of the movement in Philadelphia, from the beginning a leading YMCA city in America.  

Combined with other less immediate contacts with the British association, the idea of the YMCA -- based on the London model -- sprang up in several northeastern U.S. cities in late 1851. An article in the Boston-based Baptist weekly Christian Watchman and Reflector caught the attention of sea captain-turned-missionary Thomas V. Sullivan. Along with a number of his fellow tract distributors, Sullivan founded the Boston YMCA in December 1851.  

Unknown to the Boston group, Christians in Montreal had established a YMCA just a few weeks prior. Therefore, though Boston can claim the first association

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in the United States, Montreal has the distinction of the earliest one on this continent.

Nevertheless, the Boston association had a tremendous influence on the growth of the American YMCA movement. Boston sent literally thousands of copies of its constitution, based on that of the London YMCA, to interested groups.\(^9\) Between this and the seemingly spontaneous emergence of other YMCAs, the movement mushroomed in America. By 1853 associations could be found from Portland, Maine, to San Francisco. A year later, they stretched from St. John, New Brunswick, to Natchez, Mississippi.\(^10\) Though most were found in the Northeast, the YMCA proved immediately popular across the continent.

Because of its early effort, Boston's association was the leader at the start. Since Boston followed the London example, its full membership was limited to members of evangelical Christian churches. In the United States this helped rather than hindered because so many Americans did belong to evangelical denominations. Still, those who fell outside of the evangelical boundaries --


Unitarians, Universalists (especially in New England, the center for those two denominations), Catholics, and Jews, to mention the most obvious -- could be admitted to associate membership. This allowed use of facilities and participation in programs but did not permit voting, committee, or board membership privileges.¹¹ This membership standard effectively kept non-evangelicals from determining policy. Most, but not all, early YMCAs followed this plan.

Widespread and often directionless growth aroused concern for some sort of union of YMCAs. Many associations sprang to life in a flurry only to die just as quickly as they had begun. Strong programs and stable finances were essential for continued existence. Lacking either one of those elements, an association failed. But by 1854 several strong local YMCAs had developed. These included Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. These YMCAs served the largest metropolitan areas in antebellum America. For the movement to prosper in smaller locales, some sort of mutual aid network had to be formed.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 19; Zald, Organizational Change, pp. 54-55. Generally, the following denominations fulfilled the evangelical requirement: Baptist, Congregationalist, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian.
William Chauncey Langdon, a co-founder of the Washington, D.C. YMCA, pushed for a meeting of all thirty-two associations known to him. At this convention, Langdon hoped to form a confederation of the American and Canadian associations. He proposed that this confederation be "a union of independent, equal but co-operating Associations . . . ." Though several YMCAs saw the plan as a threat to their autonomy, the Buffalo Convention of 1854 adopted the Articles of Confederation, which twenty-two local associations ratified soon thereafter.\textsuperscript{12}

The Articles of Confederation displayed three major themes. First of all, the YMCA confederation was to have no control over local associations. Secondly, the convention would appoint an eleven-man central committee composed of men of different evangelical denominations to oversee confederation affairs between conventions. Thirdly, these affairs comprised information dissemination, correspondence, promotion of expansion, and advice to individual associations. This advice could not extend to authority over the individual YMCA, nor could the committee "assess any pecuniary rate upon them without their consent." Still, many associations shunned the confederation even though it sought to strengthen weaker

\textsuperscript{12} Pence, The Y.M.C.A. and Social Need, pp. 32-33.
YMCA's and advance the movement in general. The central committee strived to provide the service it was chartered to promote through the early 1860s. Committee correspondence stressed the need for interdenominational evangelism and "[t]he promotion and support of benevolent and Christian enterprises to advance the spiritual and temporal welfare . . . of fellow men."13

Development continued until the Civil War. The early 1860s were a period of boom and bust for the movement. A number of strong southern associations, including those in Richmond, Charleston, New Orleans, and Galveston, were forced to shut down. Quite a few of the weaker northern associations closed as well. Perhaps worst of all for the movement was the dissolution of the confederation itself. In terms of programs, however, association men found that they could provide greatly needed services in the war effort. Delegates from fifteen northern associations met informally in New York in November 1861 to form the United States Christian Commission. Though disorganized early on, the USCC won endorsements from President Lincoln and a host of religious, political, and business leaders. Patterned roughly after the United States Sanitary Commission, the USCC worked on the battlefields

13 Ibid., pp. 35-36.
and in the hospitals. Volunteers primarily served as "ambassadors for Jesus," much as they did in peacetime. Their duties ranged from the spiritual to the mundane as they preached, distributed tracts, and supplied coffee, among other things. After the USCC disbanded in February 1866, association men returned to their peacetime agenda of revivals, missionary work, and campaigns against the scourges of liquor and vice.  

From the end of the war until the end of the century, American cities grew as never before. During this time, frontier towns such as Denver and San Francisco developed into full-blown cities. Across the country, expanding urban centers lured young men from the hinterlands to economic opportunities available through city businesses and industry. In other words, the United States found itself in the same situation England had faced a generation or so earlier. The predicament of homeless, impressionable young men easily tempted by whatever novel urban influences touched them first was tailor-made for the YMCA.

The next several decades saw the movement expand at a phenomenal rate. During this growth period associations

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examined their goals, implemented them, and created new ones as the movement became a more stable part of American life. One manifestation of this stability was the campaign of building and construction which served to further ingrain the image of the YMCA in the minds of urban dwellers. Buildings were erected not only for young clerks and professional men, but myriad other groups as well. These buildings also served YMCA members in new ways. Associations provided gymnasiums and natatoriums so that the whole man could be served -- the physical as well as the intellect, social, and spiritual. These structures, more than just buildings to serve members, symbolized the permanence of the institution in the community.

It was the development and proliferation of the four-fold program within these buildings that indicated the internal stability of the movement itself. The four-fold program -- meaning the conscious nurturing of a man's physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual growth -- received its first formal, consistently accepted treatment from Luther Gulick. Gulick, responsible for the widespread adoption of YMCA physical work in the 1880s and 1890s, considered these four elements necessary
for the complete man. Before his time associations had debated the relevance of physical exercise to social, intellectual, and spiritual growth, which had never had their efficacy questioned by the YMCA.

Nevertheless, the Christian growth of its members remained the foremost purpose of the association. YMCA leaders -- not just the professional secretary who implemented programs, but the laymen (voting members, committee men, directors) who authorized programs and oversaw operations -- felt that the Kingdom of Heaven should be the culmination of their efforts for each member. Obviously, this had been the feeling of George Williams and the other founders. To facilitate this explicitly religious purpose, the first London group as a matter of course made evangelical church membership a requirement for full YMCA privileges. Put simply, only those men known to have given their lives to Christ were accorded full benefits. After all, the YMCA had been started specifically to serve these men. For the associate member, the associations granted full membership only upon his joining an evangelical church. This policy came to the United States intact and was reflected in the

15 Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A., pp. 255-56. Gulick invented the YMCA triangle symbol, the equilateral sides of which represent unity, symmetry and development. He also helped his wife to found the Camp Fire Girls.
constitutions of the Boston YMCA and those that followed Boston's lead. However, there were quite a few local groups that did not have an evangelical qualification for full membership.

From the birth of the YMCA confederation the uniformity of the evangelical test was a source of constant debate. William C. Langdon, the father of the confederation, in fact left the YMCA over this issue, as he opposed such a test.16 Though no such qualification was in force across the board during the confederation period, supporters of such a plan gained power in the last years before the Civil War.

The foundation of the postwar YMCA was the "Portland Basis" of 1869. As young men were again available to serve each other in pursuit of Christ rather than in pursuit of war, the YMCA regained its antebellum strength. In the interim a biennial convention had taken the place of the confederation's annual meeting. By the time 635 delegates from 226 associations gathered for the 1869 convention in Portland, Maine, enough support existed to make evangelical church membership the unconditional test of association membership. The brief

16 Ibid., p. 367.
resolution was only half as long as its preamble. It stated

Resolved, that the Associations organized after this date shall be entitled to representation in future conferences of the Associated Y.M.C.A. Associations [sic] of North America, upon condition that they be severally composed of young men in communion with Evangelical Churches (provided that in places where Associations are formed by a single denomination, members of other denominations are not excluded therefrom) active membership and the right to hold office be conferred only upon young men who are members in good standing in Evangelical churches.17

Thus all facets of YMCA activity now had to be based upon the decisions of evangelical leadership. Evangelicalism and an emphasis on winning souls for Christ remained the movement's primary objective. YMCA leaders, hoped, of course, that these souls would be won as the result of YMCA programs. Gradual shifts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from private philanthropy to combined public and private initiatives, along with the movement's own overwhelming increase in programs and new theological outlooks, brought about the decline of the Portland test. The emergence of the social gospel in religion and social outlook along with joint programs and fundraising with secular social welfare

agencies expanded the movement's outlook in almost every way. These changes combined with the boom in urban populations from the late nineteenth century forward, simply caused the evangelical test to become too restrictive. These shifts are best exemplified by the movement's service during World War One, and will be covered more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

Though membership was restricted, this restriction did little to hinder growth in a country made up mostly of evangelical Christians. The International Committee (successor to the confederation's central committee) sent secretaries out from its New York headquarters across the nation and around the world. Urban businessmen were not the only group catered to by the movement. Railroad workers, college students, blacks, American Indians, school boys and service men also attracted the YMCA's attention. Though boys' work was incorporated into city associations, other groups had their own specially designed programs and buildings.

By 1880 the three largest Texas cities -- San Antonio, Galveston and Dallas -- had associations. The leading men of these cities promoted their YMCAs in hopes of providing and benefitting from a Christian atmosphere in which young men could be led to Jesus. Houston, some fifty miles up the bayou from Galveston, began to show significant evidence of increasing stability some forty
odd years after its founding in 1836. Churches, banks, fraternal orders, business enterprises -- institutions George Williams would have recognized even on the Texas plains -- spoke for Houston's approaching maturity. The bayou city's 20,000 people might have had no institution of higher learning and no paved streets yet, but the young city's boom and bustle provided all the qualifications, from Christian leadership to moral pitfalls, to merit its own YMCA.
CHAPTER TWO

FRONT RANKS AND IMPORTANT FACTORS

By the 1880s Houston had reached "a period of municipal adolescence." Economic development followed the first railroads into the city in the 1850s. With rail service to carry raw materials, the local economy thrived. Now that transportation was available, cotton, both for its fiber and oil, became especially lucrative. Lumber, though readily accessible, did not offer the same profitability as the white staple until milling began on a huge scale locally in the 1890s. Petroleum did not have an impact on the city's economy until the Spindletop field came in in 1901. As one scholar wrote, "Cotton offered virtually the only opportunity for a major economic breakthrough in nineteenth-century Texas."¹ From the 1870s until the early twentieth century, cotton reigned over Houston as well as the rest of the state.

Enough local investment and interest in cotton existed by 1874 to cause entrepreneurs to establish a Houston cotton exchange. According to one observer, exchange members were "always found in the front ranks of those working for the advancement of the city." Thomas W. House, a banker, lawyer, and astute businessman, presided over the exchange in its first year. The next year, William D. Cleveland, Sr., a well-heeled grocer and cotton factor, served his first of six terms as president. William V. R. Watson, another grocer, also spent a year as chief officer during the exchange's early period.  

Interestingly, all three of these men were involved with Christ Church, Houston's most prominent Episcopal church. From the 1870s on House attended services and made donations, while Cleveland and Watson served as vestrymen and Sunday school superintendent and assistant superintendent, respectively.  

William Christian, another associate of House's, also belonged to the vestry, as did Rufus Cage, a well-to-do insurance executive.

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House did not limit his religious activities to Christ Church during this period. Shearn Methodist Episcopal Church counted him not only as a contributor, but as an officer as well. Nor was House the only professional man associated with Shearn Church. James F. Dumble, a crockery merchant, Stanley F. Carter, a banker, Jacob V. Dealy, a printer, and Paul W. Horn, superintendent of Houston's public schools, were all counted as members in the 1880s.4

Successful in business and active in church, these men found time to participate in other religious, social, and business groups. Cleveland and Watson oversaw Christ Church's operation of the DePelchin Home for children with working mothers, and with Cage, presided over the Houston Philharmonic Society. Dumble acted as treasurer of the Sunday School Superintendent's Association of Harris County; E. L. Dennis, a Baptist realtor, headed this ecumenical group and Young M. Langdon, a Presbyterian lumber merchant, served as recording secretary. Langdon also sat as treasurer of the Young Men's Christian Social Union, a group founded in 1882 by Shearn Church minister S. H. Werlein. When not at his

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4 Mrs. I. M. E. Blandin, History of Shearn Church, 1837-1907 (Houston: 1907), pp. 171-72. Shearn Church is now known as First Methodist Church.
lumberyard, or with the other Sunday school superintendents, or with the YMCSU, Langdon might have been found with Cleveland, Christian, and Cage at the Cotton Exchange. The extent to which Houston's business and church leaders of the 1880s mixed both religiously and secularly cannot be overemphasized. Nor can their concern for the spiritual and worldly well being of others, especially young men. This was witnessed by their involvement with both public and Sunday schools and other organizations such as the DePelchin Home and the YMCSU. It was no coincidence that these men, so intimately connected through their business, religious, and social activities, played major roles in the establishment of the Houston Young Men's Christian Association.

Houston's YMCA had a variety of antecedents. As early as the 1830s there was a "Young Men's Society" that had grown out of a debating club. According to C. Howard Hopkins in his History of the Y.M.C.A., there had even been a YMCA in Houston during the association movement's first boom in the early 1850s. Obviously, it must have

5 Johnston, A Happy Worldly Abode, pp. 126, 128; General Directory of the City of Houston, 1886–87 (Galveston: Morrison & Fourny, 1887), pp. 346-47.

6 Andrew Forest Muir, "The Intellectual Climate of Houston During the Period of the Republic," SWHQ, 62 (January 1959), 313.
collapsed almost as soon as it was set up. By the 1880s Houston's populace enjoyed a variety of both secular and religious organizations. These included the Young People's Literary and Musical Society of the First Baptist Church, a Lyceum, a number of German vereins, the YMCSU, and a Chautauqua. Though the YMCA resembled the vereins in its emphasis on fitness, and literary societies in its social attempts to stimulate the intellect, the most direct predecessor of the YMCA in Houston was the YMCSU of Shearn Church. The Reverend S. H. Werlein, the church's pastor, inaugurated the YMCSU in May 1882 out of his twin convictions that Houston would be a good field for Christian (i.e., evangelical and/or missionary) work and that Christians should be concerned with the welfare of the general population and not "complacent of their own virtue." The preamble of the Union's constitution acknowledged that the group would advance "undenominational Fraternity and Brotherly Love, embracing Social Intercourse with Young Men," help newcomers find employment, and promote temperance. Werlein intended that the social aspect of the organization would be for religious and not secular purposes. The literature and counsel revealed in the Bible would effectively enough serve the Union's

intellectual and spiritual aims. Considering the YMCSU's goals, its activities followed logically: interdenominational sermons, a Sunday school, and hospital visitations. With this in mind it should come as no surprise to learn that by August 1886 most Union members had joined the seven-month old YMCA. By 1887 the YMCSU had been "well nigh absorbed by the Y.M.C.A., which had been organized or reorganized." 8

The first date that can be relied upon in regard to the Houston YMCA is January 20, 1886. According to the Houston Post of January 21, 1886, a Board of Managers for the YMCA had met the previous day at the Cotton Exchange. The membership committee, chaired by William Christian, reported that $2000 necessary to cover operating expenses had been raised. The Board then formed another committee charged with finding quarters. Within three weeks a secretary from the YMCA International Committee, Henry E. Brown, arrived to oversee the effort and help to secure a permanent general secretary for the new association. I. W. Goodhue's appointment to the position was announced at the February 7 Board meeting held at Shearn Church. Buoyed by a crowd described as large, supportive and interdenominational, but still without rooms of its own

8 Blandin, History of Shearn Church, pp. 116, 202-205, 122.
to assemble in, the association held its first public meeting at Pillot's Opera House in April 1886. The YMCA finally opened its facilities in the Brown Building at the corner of Main Street and Texas Avenue on May 7, 1886.9

From the start the YMCA offered a number of activities. The Brown Building quarters featured a reading room and gymnasium when the facility opened with a parlor and lecture hall in use soon thereafter. During the first year 350 members took advantage of the association. This included two nights per week of physical training with physical director Lloyd Snyder, a Tuesday night Bible class taught by William Christian, song sessions on Sunday afternoons, and meetings of the YMCA literary society. In other words even the association's earliest programs emphasized physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual development. Secretary Brown's presence indicates that the Board meant to square its initial YMCA

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9 Harry O'Kane, "History of the Houston Young Men's Christian Association" (unpublished, 1948), p. 1. Secretary Brown is best remembered for his work with blacks. Carroll, Standard History of Houston, pp. 164-65. There is an utter dearth of material on the Houston YMCA from 1886 to 1894. Association records apparently perished in the 1894 fire; the Houston Post is unavailable (either extant or on microfilm) for the period from Spring 1884 to January 1887. O'Kane's typescript, though poorly written, inconsistent, and lacking in factual accuracy, provides the most complete information on the association in this period.
activities with the prescribed program of the International Committee, the American movement's preeminent body.  

Through the association's first years the programs remained relatively simple. The reading room, Bible classes and physical work stood as the basis for more widespread projects. One committee supplied hotels with leaflets listing church locations, the names of pastors and service times. In keeping with the YMCA's Christian mission, a "song service group . . . was organized for the specific purpose of evangelism."  

To make sure potential staff members would be theologically equipped to confront weightier spiritual problems, Secretary Gcoe taught a special Bible class to six students in a workers' training course. Though only thirteen men worked full time for the twenty-two YMCAs in Texas in 1890, training for present and future employees was a focal point for International Committee work. Sporadic efforts had been attempted since the 1870s, but the first concrete training programs began during the summer of 1885 at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Out  

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11 O'Kane, "History of the Houston Y.M.C.A.," pp. 4-5.
of the Lake Geneva program other facilities for aspiring
YMCA professionals sprang up in Massachusetts and North
Carolina. While these summer sessions continued to train
association workers, the movement established full-
fledged colleges in Springfield, Massachusetts, and
Chicago. For the YMCA to keep up with current trends in
American society, professionalization was necessary. The
efforts of Secretary Goodhue with his small circle may
seem unsophisticated, but they nevertheless reflected
contemporary YMCA policy and attitudes in America. They
also served to maintain the program in Houston, as
Goodhue could count on his class of hopefuls to use their
training (such as it was) to support the association. 12

Other programs also branched off from the standard
emphasis on the reading room, gym, and Bible class. As
with the training course, these efforts still maintained
a close relationship to the normal fare. The primary
purpose of these activities was to attract new members.
Along with the hotel committee, other committees sought
to make the YMCA more visible throughout the city.
Association members visited the sick at home and in
hospitals, while the secretary tried to help young men
newly arrived in Houston find jobs. Since the association

12 Ibid., p. 5; Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A.,
pp. 171-75.
performed these services for nonmembers as well as members, it can be inferred that the association hoped that those men who regained their health or found work might return the favor by taking out a membership. Other methods, such as the annual New Year's reception or asking local clergy for the names of likely members, were more overt. In the case of the reception the association had the chance to highlight its facilities and programs at their source, and this was surely more effective for recruiting than a flyer in a hotel room.\(^{13}\)

Data from City Directories of the period show that membership declined the first year but then stabilized. Some 350 men joined the association in 1886, but only 250 are mentioned each year through 1894. According to one source, the chairman of the membership committee said at the first annual meeting that "[t]imes have been hard, money scarce, and we have had to be a little indulgent with our members in arrears." With members behind in their payments, stimulating membership should have been the top priority. Instead, the 350 members enlisted in the first years dropped off by 100. Fewer members meant

\(^{13}\) O'Kane, "History of the Houston Y.M.C.A.," pp. 4-5.
less revenue (from those who could or would pay), which meant curtailed programs to keep expenses in line.\textsuperscript{14}

It does seem strange that Houston's leading businessmen and church laymen did not set a more enviable example. With civic pacesetters such as William D. Cleveland, Sr., Rufus Cage, and E. L. Dennis at the helm of the YMCA, it might have been expected that members of their respective congregations would want to emulate church leaders, especially if prompted by their minister. One explanation for this failure is an author's statement that the YMCA "occupied very humble and inadequate quarters." Depending on just how inadequate the Brown Building rooms were, membership actually could have been at capacity, or the inadequacy of the facilities could have discouraged all but the most zealous prospective members from signing the roll.\textsuperscript{15}

In any case, the YMCA was forced to find new quarters in September 1894. Smoke coming out of a third-story

\textsuperscript{14} City Directory 1887-88, p. 55; City Directory 1890-91, p. 65; City Directory 1892-93, pp. 68-69; City Directory 1894-95, p. 69; O’Kane, "History of the Houston Y.M.C.A.," p. 3. City Directory figures have been accepted over the numbers cited by O’Kane because it is unlikely that O’Kane's sources cited audited membership data. It is more likely that the YMCA would have given a corrected tabulation to the Directory.

\textsuperscript{15} Carroll, Standard History of Houston, pp. 164-65.
window on the evening of September 18 alerted passersby to a fire in the Brown building. By the time firemen extinguished the flames, the second and third stories that housed the YMCA had been badly damaged. Association Board members William Childress and Edward W. Taylor, partners in an insurance agency, had covered the building for $7000, but the YMCA had carried only $1700 on its belongings. The fire destroyed all of the gymnasium equipment and only 350 books from the 11,000-volume library survived the blaze. Even with sympathetic underwriters $1700 would not go far towards replacing all that had been lost. Fear of further setbacks in membership to match those in finances could not have been far from the minds of Board members or general secretary S. P. Luce.16

The YMCA had started hopefully in 1886. Houston's most influential men had initiated it, a prominent International Committee secretary had overseen the organization, the leading newspaper had supported it editorially, and the citizens appeared enthusiastic. The founders must have been confident when they read in the Post of February 13, 1886: "The Association starts out with practical Christian gentlemen in charge of its affairs and the public may rest assured their trust will

16 Houston Post, September 19, 1894, p. 6; O'Kane, "History of the Houston Y.M.C.A.," p. 5.
not be betrayed. There is no more important factor in the future of this city that the influence this Association can and will exert if supported by the people in whose interest it is engaged." Early members had to have been impressed with the Houston association's attention to the latest developments in YMCA programs. Having a training course, however small, showed Houston at least attempting to be at the cutting edge of association programs; offering Bible classes to members when only one-third of all YMCAs did likewise demonstrated adherence to International Committee recommendations. 17

Disappointment, however, must have set in quickly. By the second year, membership had dropped almost 30 percent, and a string of general secretaries came and went. Secretary Goodhue stayed only a year and a half before he left September 15, 1887. His successor, E. M. Heroy, lasted until September 1 of the next year. D. A. Gordon remained for three years until 1891, when C. C. Porter replaced him. By the time of the fire in 1894, S. P. Luce held the position. Board of Management leadership was slightly more stable. Cleveland served as the first Board president, but the next year members elected R. F. George, who served from 1888 until his death in 1894.

George, along with Christian and Dennis, was the only Board member elected from the founding group to consecutive terms that covered this eight-year period.\textsuperscript{18} Both secretaries hired during George's tenure lasted three years, an improvement over the brief stays of Goodhue and Heroy. Nevertheless, the years from 1886 to 1894 were marked by low membership, tenuous finances, and poor housing. The fire could only have doused what flickers of hope there had been.

\textsuperscript{18} O'Kane, "History of the Houston Y.M.C.A.," pp. 1-5.
CHAPTER THREE

A MORE LIBERAL SUPPORT

Faced with tremendous problems after the fire, the YMCA somehow managed to stay afloat. The association had hurdled the most difficult obstacle, finding new housing, by the time the September 19, 1894, Houston Post went to press. The newspaper's coverage of the fire mentioned that the Cumberland (Presbyterian) Church, which had been destroyed in the fire, would continue to meet with the YMCA at its new quarters in the Smith Building. The YMCA's new address, 1011-13 Texas Avenue, was just a few doors away from its former residence at the Brown Building.¹

Over the next few months the association appeared to overcome, at least in part, its membership shortage. Whether through sympathy or increased space in the new rooms, 450 men -- more than double the number of current members -- joined, swelling the ranks to 700. There were

¹ Houston Post, September 19, 1894, p. 6; General Directory of the City of Houston, 1895-96 (Galveston: Morrison & Fourny, 1896), pp. 68-69; City Directory 1897-98, p. 104.
even hopes of 1,000 members by January 1896. According to a summary of the year's work from July 1894 to July 1895, "The fire last fall threw us out of just two months work ... we have many things for which we should rejoice." Increased membership was no doubt one of these many things.

Despite the thankful attitude, serious matters confronted the YMCA. One area of concern was what was called Houston's rampant vice, considered a threat to every Christian gentleman. Shearn Church minister George Rankin observed open gambling and absorbed ridicule from the tippling participants. Even worse was one Variety Theatre, a "disreputable and low flung manufactory of vice immorality and crime [where] there are more young men in this city and surrounding country traveling straight to hell than along any other route now open to the public." The YMCA, which pledged to bring the city's young men "under moral and religious influence," believed it had to provide wholesome activities to counter such diversions as the Variety Theatre.³

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² City Directory 1895-96, pp. 68-69; YMCA Board Minutes (hereinafter Minutes), July 1, 1895.

³ David G. McComb, Houston: A History (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 106; Houston YMCA Constitution, 1894, Art. III. This document is handwritten in the front of the minute book that is the (Footnote Continued)
In response, the YMCA did attempt to reach out and touch the lives of more men. This expanded outreach included adolescents as well, as the by-laws provided for boys' work for those under the age of sixteen. The association also urged its members to bring in area men working for the railroads. For all of these groups, admittedly, there was little that the YMCA offered in the year after the fire that it had not before. There were two exceptions to this trend. One was the orchestra organized by "Professor" Jesse L. Taliaferro, who proposed a ten-instrument ensemble of strings and woodwinds. The Board approved the orchestra on the condition that "[n]o expense . . . be incurred to the Association." The other activity was new to Houston and quite recent to the YMCA movement. "A new game -- basketball -- has been introduced during the month [April 1895]." James Naismith, an instructor at the YMCA's Springfield College in Massachusetts, devised the game in December 1891 to provide indoor, team-oriented recreation for his students. In Houston as well as around the world the game caught on quickly and became a sport for all seasons. Regardless of interest in music or sports, the YMCA's

(Footnote Continued)
record of transactions of the Houston YMCA Board of Managers/Directors from September 24, 1894 to October 8, 1908.
motive was to bring in more young men and to uplift them by whatever healthful means necessary, and to counteract the influence of "moral cesspools" such as burlesque and vaudeville houses.⁴

Older programs experienced growth during the same period in 1894 and 1895. In a comparison of the months June 1894 and June 1895 several measures of the association's strength showed improvement over time. Attendance in the rooms shot up 375 percent from an average of 48 per day in June 1894 to 180 per day a year later. Gymnasium use rose more than 600 percent from 5 members per day to 31 per day. In addition the YMCA sponsored night school lecture courses, Bible classes, and devotional meetings that it had not the year before.⁵ Obviously, increased membership along with outreach to new groups explains some of this growth. In light of adversaries such as the Variety Theatre, some motivation must have come from a desire on the part of the YMCA to promote the proper Christian atmosphere for Houston's men and boys.

Unfortunately, the association could not combat financial woes as easily. Hints of trouble were apparent

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⁴ YMCA By-Laws, 1894, Art. IV, Sec. IX; Constitution, 1894, Secs. II-III; Minutes, September 5, 1895, May 2, 1895.

⁵ Minutes, July 1, 1895.
by January 1895 when the Board set up a special committee to settle a problem with former General Secretary C. C. Porter. The Board's Minutes never explicitly mention the source of contention, but it becomes clear that Porter resigned after going unpaid for quite some time. The Board hoped to settle quickly but evidently felt that a subscription canvass was necessary to cover Porter's back pay and other debts. This first campaign and another two months later in April collected some money but not enough to erase the $1,200 deficit. By September the outlook was bleaker yet. The Board resolved

In view of our financial condition, being considerably in debt and having had to borrow money for our current expenses, we see the necessity for the strictest economy in the expenditures. We feel at this time as if our fixed charges are too large as compared with our income. It is hoped that our citizens will soon realize the value of the institution and accord it a more liberal support. With present conditions, the Board recommends as follows: That the Secretary, Assistant Secretary and Physical Director shall put in as much time as possible (without injury to inside work) in canvassing for memberships and subscriptions.

This was a drastic measure for several reasons. First of all, the Board could have raised regular membership fees from five dollars per year to generate revenue, but instead imposed this rather Draconian reform. Secondly,

6 Minutes, January 28, 1895, February 25, 1895.
7 Minutes, May 2, 1895, September 5, 1895.
only under the most trying conditions would a Board have its employees, the secretarial force, canvass for memberships and subscriptions. Usually the Board and the general membership took these responsibilities while the secretaries implemented and administered Board policies. This statement also displays an uncharacteristic overt frustration with the public. Simply because the YMCA had to have the public's interest in order to prosper, the Board could ill afford to imply that Houstonians displayed insufficient gratitude for the services that the association rendered. Though the sentiment was dangerous, it was probably correct, as membership dropped steadily for the next several years.

The association offered various incentives to spur membership. Prizes went to individuals who enlisted the most members. Inter-association contests pitted Houston against Galveston in a battle for membership recruitment. Though Houston won most of the time, long-term success was limited. By May 1896 the Board had formed a committee to "confer with the Minister's Association and ask their help in presenting the work of the Association to their congregations and helping to raise funds for our work."⁸

⁸ Minutes, November 12, 1895, January 2, 1895, February 6, 1896, May 1, 1896.
Efforts to cut the debt were weak at best. Secretary Luce hoped in December 1895 to reduce the deficit from $1,571.28 to less than $1,000 by the new year. As of December 30, when the Board approved the 1896 budget of $6,950, the debt remained virtually unchanged. Two of the largest items comprising the budget were promissory notes, one made out to Thomas W. House for $400, the other to former secretary Porter for $130. Six months later the debt had decreased by less than $150.  

The Board had a simple plan to ensure enough money to pay for at least the association's office supplies: not pay the secretaries or the landlord. Porter was not the last secretary to go unpaid, as records show that of $2,390 allocated in 1897 to pay salaries, only $1,994.94 was paid out. On top of this, the Board again asked the secretaries to recruit members. They were to persuade the fire and police chiefs to organize their men into gymnasium classes. There is no mention of these classes ever being held, much less of their success. Like so many of the Board's other schemes of the period, this one was also bound for failure.

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9 Minutes, December 5, 1895, December 30, 1895, June 5, 1895.

10 Minutes, September 7, 1897, November 4, 1897, January 6, 1898.
In this context landlord D. C. Smith's distress warrant in September 1897 requesting payment of $753 in back rent was not unexpected. At a rate of $110 per month, this indicates that the YMCA had not paid its rent in full for more than six months, since February 1897. In response, the Board decided to force collection of outstanding subscriptions and appointed its president, Elbert Crawford, to see Smith "about a lower rent for the ensuing years." Crawford still had not spoken to Smith by January 1898. As a result, the budgeted rent stayed at $110 per month. This, along with a deficit of nearly $2,000 -- more than a quarter of the $7,330 budget for 1898 -- prompted three Board members to decline the presidency. W. B. Jones, S. E. Tracy, and Jacob V. Dealy all refused, "each of these gentlemen declining with better words than reason." Nominated a second time, Dealy reluctantly accepted.\textsuperscript{11}

Dealy's administration fared no better. The gymnasium committee had to raise its own funds rather than be included in the budget. By June 1898 Physical Director R. E. Bartlett had to ask "that the Board give him some expression as to their satisfaction with [his performance], and as to [the] probability of his being retained

\textsuperscript{11} Minutes, September 7, 1897, November 4, 1897, January 6, 1898.
another year." Since he had not been paid for two months, he assumed that he had somehow displeased the Board. He resigned two months later, claiming that he owed creditors $250 and that he had to be able to pay them. Generously, the Board voted to pay Bartlett his back salary.12

Every bit as frustrated, General Secretary Luce also resigned during the summer of 1898. As part of the standard agreement between the Board and the secretaries, secretaries received time off for attendance at summer training institutes. The night before he was supposed to leave for Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, the Board asked Luce to wait ten days so that a portion of $400 back salary owed him could be raised. The next morning, July 6, he resigned. The Minutes explain that "inasmuch as so much notice had been given [the] Board of his intention to leave, he felt hurt that the Board had not promptly met his request." The Board promised its support and urged Luce to withdraw his resignation. The secretary said he would answer in about two weeks, and that he wanted $150 of the $400 promised him. More than a month later, in a letter postmarked Chilton, Wisconsin, Luce replied that

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12 Minutes, January 6, 1898, June 7, 1898, August 9, 1898, September 6, 1898.
his resignation was final. As late as March 1899, the Board still owed Luce his back salary.13

President Dealy's 1898 remark that "the Association was in that condition that required strenuous efforts to be made to put it in better repute with its creditors" certainly had a ring of truth to it. Outside of the secretarial staff, the Board had to deal most often with its landlord, Smith. At one meeting Board members tried to convince Smith to lower the rent to ninety dollars per month. At another, Board member Tracy and Secretary Luce attempted to persuade Smith to sign a Board-prepared contract and tear up his own. Smith merely wanted his money. He settled the matter by leaving his own signed lease for Dealy to endorse. This adversarial relationship between Smith and the YMCA continued until the association moved out four years later in 1902. The general secretary at that time, S. A. Kincaide, received instructions from the Board to write Smith to thank him for "his kindness and leniency with this association while owing him so much on rent." Possibly as a final gesture, Kincaide discounted Smith's claim of $1,400 by half, but

13 Minutes, July 5, 1898, July 6, 1898, August 16, 1898, March 7, 1899.
he also issued him a lifetime membership in return for what can only be termed exemplary Christian fortitude.14

Somehow, even with the constant financial turmoil of the period, the YMCA developed several new activities. As early as 1894 the association offered evening lectures from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. on week nights. Except for the cancellation of the spring 1900 term, the YMCA held some sort of course as long as minimal demand existed. The Board supported these efforts in bad times as well as good. In the wake of Secretary Luce's resignation the Board voted to prepare lecture series for fall 1898 and offered a discounted rate of fifty cents per lecture to early registrants. Those who enrolled late had to pay the normal rate of two dollars per session. Lecture costs were probably offset by the fees, but the Board's decision to give a discount during this particular period of financial trouble signifies its commitment to the courses.15

Many other new programs originated in the physical department. Athletic members petitioned the Board for permission to organize a football team. The Board granted

14 Minutes, August 2, 1898, May 3, 1898, June 7, 1898, July 5, 1898, April 11, 1902.

15 City Directory 1895-96, pp. 68-69; Minutes, April 13, 1900, August 29, 1898.
the petition on the following conditions: that all players be members in good standing, that no Sunday games be played, and that the physical director not "play in the line but . . . coach simply." A YMCA Cycle Club was reorganized in 1896, reflecting the national popularity of biking at the time. The club had eighty-four male members and sixty honorary female members. Necessarily, because women could not belong to the YMCA, their membership in the group had to be token. Still, the bicycle club represents the first documented activity in which men and women could participate together. The only other activity for women in the YMCA, the ladies' auxiliary, worked for, rather than with, the YMCA even after the Board constituted it in 1901. Not until the Young Women's Christian Association arrived in Houston in 1907 would the city's women have a similar organization for themselves.16

Despite the popularity of football and the cycle club, not all additions to the physical department program met with Board approval. The Board denied an 1896 request that the association sponsor boxing and wrestling.17 "Common knowledge" recognized that these

16 Minutes, October 8, 1896; City Directory 1899, p. 1362; Minutes, December 4, 1895, November 17, 1901.
17 Minutes, December 5, 1896.
diversions were often accompanied by gambling and other vices. Therefore, the Board could not allow these related influences to tempt the men and boys of the YMCA.

The Board's concern with the effects of the gambling and vice associated with boxing and wrestling on men and boys indicates that distinctions between men and boys had grown sharper in this period. The constitution classified any male between the ages of ten and sixteen years as a boy, though any member fourteen years or older could join the men's department. As a member of the men's department, a youth had greater access to association facilities such as the gym and the reading room. The association added a junior department in 1896 for boys age ten to fourteen years, but had no special program for youngsters in the fourteen-to-sixteen bracket, nor did it appear to offer any boy much more than a Sunday gospel meeting. By 1900 the physical director submitted that no boy under the age of twelve years be allowed to use the gym unless he met minimum height and weight requirements. This requirement suggests that in the four-year span between 1896 and 1900 the scope of boys' activities had grown larger; but since a systematic boys' program had not yet developed in Houston, it took the physical director to realize that gymnasium activities for men might be too rigorous for most preadolescents and that further departmental
delineation was needed.\textsuperscript{18} In this respect the YMCA was ahead, both locally and nationally, of schools and other institutions in regard to the special needs and interests of preadolescent and adolescent boys. When noted psychologist G. Stanley Hall pronounced his similar viewpoints just a short time later, the YMCA movement heartily endorsed Hall's ideas.\textsuperscript{19}

Until the turn of the century the YMCA managed to expand its offerings in spite of the perpetually dismal financial picture. Still the association failed to retain old members or attract new ones. Moreover, it failed in a city that doubled its population between 1885 and 1900 from almost 25,000 to more than 58,000. Increased cotton production, a burgeoning lumber industry, and after 1901, petroleum, all combined with increased public services and reform-minded city leadership to make Houston attractive to both the prospective entrepreneur and to laborers. Because of their positions as top businessmen and civic titans, YMCA leaders must have been beside themselves with their own inability to capitalize on the steadily rising pool of potential members. As has been

\textsuperscript{18} Constitution, 1894, Art. II, Secs. II, V; Minutes, December 21, 1900, January 11, 1901; City Directory 1897-98, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{19} Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A, p. 463.
noted before, the unsystematic and sporadic membership drives stalled even as they started. Caught in an endless spiral of too few members and too little revenue, the association's strategies to improve itself seemed fruitless.

The ultimate solution for the YMCA's woes was to own its own building. As early as 1895 the Board formed a committee comprising Board members Risdon Gribble, Edward Taylor, Jacob Dealy, Secretary Luce, and Shearn Church pastor George Rankin to approach key clergymen and ask for their help to raise "money enough to buy a lot for this Association and thus put us in a fair way to at some future time come into possession of our own building." They would first price a few well-located lots before approaching outsiders for financial backing. The pivotal contact, the Reverend Sam Jones, nixed the idea. He "felt that the opportune time had not come," and the plan fell through.  

Understandably discouraged, the board waited more than five years before looking again into buying property. At the March 15, 1901, meeting the Board suddenly authorized a five-man canvass committee for the purpose of using the funds to purchase a lot. Within two months

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20 Minutes, November 12, 1895, December 5, 1895.
the Board decided "that the Association purchase the site on the corner of Fannin and McKinney at the best price possible." The Board counseled Edgar Watkins to see the owners, "get their best figures and make the purchase." Six months later, in November 1901, the Board again decided to try to close the deal for the lots, collect the money for its purchase at once. The Board urged that "the canvass . . . be continued rigorously."

As late as January 1902 the deal had not been struck, but on March 20 the Board held its first meeting in one of several houses on the Fannin and McKinney location. The primary item on the agenda was a resolution of thanks to Watkins, who bought the property with his own money and donated it to the association. Though Watkins held the deed for the YMCA, he agreed to turn over rental payments from the cottages on the three lots. Reflected in Watkins' purchase was that the YMCA remained on thin ice financially. The Board's request to Secretary Kincaide that he should remember "the general policy of economy and the undesirability of expending much money on houses which will be moved away when the new building is erected" as he repaired the houses for

21 Minutes, March 15, 1901, May 10, 1901, November 8, 1901.
22 Minutes, January 3, 1902, March 20, 1902.
rental purposes further supports the view that the Board felt it necessary to keep expenses to an absolute minimum. The Board told Kincaide to raise the rent on the house fronting McKinney to fifteen dollars per month and to charge another tenant one dollar per month for the installation of city water.\textsuperscript{23}

The Board did realize that the YMCA's financial predicament was by no means solved by the acquisition of the new property. Aware of its own deficiencies the Board requested that a state YMCA official come to Houston to help raise funds. To promote economy, the Board went so far as to allow members to use the baseball only in match games. The situation decayed so badly that the Board voted Watkins the power to mortgage the lots to cover the debt. Instead of looking to the future, past due bills forced the Board to face what should have been behind them. It was the "sense of the Board" at its February 1903 meeting that "all energies be bent toward a canvass on an out-of-debt fund."\textsuperscript{24}

Debts sank the first proposal for a YMCA building on the Fannin and McKinney site. If the association could raise $10,000 to meet its deficit, a "Mr. Moodie"

\textsuperscript{23} Minutes, March 20, 1902, April 11, 1902.

\textsuperscript{24} Minutes, July 18, 1902, December 15, 1902, January 9, 1903, February 13, 1903.
(probably William Moody, the Galveston insurance magnate) would donate a $100,000 building. The Board had Kincaide arrange a canvass to be completed by November 1, 1903. If the money had not been raised by then, the Board planned to sell the corner lot to even its accounts. Five months after the end of the canvass the necessary total had not even been subscribed, and the Board was still just considering the sale of the key lot. When no one offered $6,000 for it, the Board decided to borrow the money to cover the debt. More than a year had passed and nothing had changed. Not even with a building as a goal -- and no association could claim to be first-rate without one -- could the YMCA wipe out its deficit. The pattern of ineffective canvasses followed by loans to pay obligations persisted. Professional canvassers sent by the state YMCA committee could not break the cycle. Finally the Board borrowed $10,000 from American Bank and Trust, using the property as collateral.25

After eight years of running the Houston YMCA on a shoestring, Secretary Kincaide resigned his local post in March 1906 to become state secretary. Kincaide remained in Houston since the State Committee opted to let him

25 Minutes, July 23, 1903, October 6, 1903, April 8, 1904, June 17, 1904, November 11, 1904, October 23, 1905.
stay as long as he felt necessary. As state secretary, the Houston Board now asked Kincaide to coordinate State and International Committee resources in order to start a concrete building fund. Kincaide arranged for Bruno Hobbs, one of the International Committee's top domestic secretaries, to come to Houston. Meeting at the home of James A. Baker, one of Houston's wealthiest and most influential citizens as well as a YMCA member, Hobbs outlined a detailed eight-point plan that would supposedly raise between $100,000 and $150,000. Just at this informational meeting the Houston YMCA raised more in subscriptions than it had in its first twenty years: eight donations totalling $40,000.26 Finally the association would conduct a building campaign with a solid foundation, at least partly because Kincaide had resigned to take a more influential position. Two other leaders, Baker and Hobbs, played roles that were just as important as Kincaide's, if not more so. Baker's involvement helped to generate the enormous subscriptions. His participation demonstrated to others of the same financial stature that the association was worthy of their own significant investment. The presence of Hobbs to lay out the details of the plan must also have been a major factor, as he

26 Minutes, April 14, 1906.
managed to persuade Baker's guests that the International Committee's fund raising techniques were effective.

Hobbs' plan covered practically every contingency. Committees made up of the various segments of YMCA membership would carefully solicit from the corresponding non-member group in the community. An executive committee would in turn oversee each of the committees to make sure they maintained and scrupulously kept track of pertinent information and, most importantly, collected their assigned share of subscriptions. The campaign itself ran from May 12 to June 5, 1906, and in the three-and-a-half week span it netted almost $190,000. For the first time ever the Board had enough money to pledge a subscription of its own, and it sent $400 to the International Committee as a token of thanks.27

The Board suspended YMCA operations in October 1906 until the building was completed. In the next twenty months the Board and the new general secretary, W. A. Scott, former secretary of the venerable Washington, D.C. YMCA, worked closely with Sanguinet, Staats and Seutter, the architects, and the various contractors and subcontractors. Bids on the five-story structure ranged from $134,256 to $196,000. These estimates did not include

27 Minutes, April 14, 1906, August 10, 1906, June 25, 1906.
extras such as heating, plumbing, wiring, or the elevator, which totalled an additional $25,000. Ten thousand dollars more were needed for furniture and supplies.  

Having the largest YMCA building in the Southwest justified the expense. The new quarters would provide 66,000 square feet built to International Committee Building Department specifications for a YMCA in a medium-size city. Plans included a bowling alley, swimming pool, a variety of meeting and special purpose rooms, and ninety-one dormitory rooms. In the years that followed the Brown Building fire, this sort of bounty had been hoped for and yet undreamed of. More than twenty years in "very humble and inadequate quarters" at last had come to an end.  

The Houston YMCA now had the means to escape from the trap of low membership and had no excuse if just this situation did not arise. It is important to realize that this advance occurred only after the association managed to tap into the State and International Committees and their resources. If the Houston YMCA had continued to utilize solely local support, it very probably would have folded. The choice of James Baker to help with the

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28 Minutes, September 18, 1906, April 23, 1907.  
campaign was one of the best that could have been made. Outside of lumber baron John H. Kirby and financier Jesse Jones, Baker was probably not only the wealthiest, but the best connected man in Houston's financial, social, and philanthropic circles.

The novelty of the building campaign was obvious to all involved. In much the same way that the world adopted basketball from the YMCA, fund raisers also borrowed the movement's solicitation techniques. When Bruno Hobbs came to Houston in 1906, the intensive fund-raising campaign -- which the YMCA invented -- was little more than a year old and had first been used by the Washington, D.C., YMCA (from where Secretary Scott had come). Other philanthropic and non-profit organizations, such as churches, hospitals, and colleges, quickly adopted the new plan. The Houston association has used variations of this method for every major campaign since.

Between 1894 and 1907 the association had continuously floundered between the twin pillars of low membership and little revenue. This combination kept the YMCA from ever putting together a substantial, integrated program. In its new building the YMCA would slowly

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surmount these obstacles and come closer to its original purpose: to provide a broad range of programs that would contribute to the physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual well being of Houston's young men. Since its founding more than twenty years before, the association had tried desperately to provide this breadth by offering what it could from the standard YMCA program and by acceding to most member requests for new activities. This accommodation had been mostly for naught in terms of actually enlarging the association. Now with expanded facilities the Houston YMCA could give its members more.

Houston's first YMCA building went up in the most intense building period in YMCA movement history. Apparently this city's association was not the only one that realized how essential a building was to initiate growth. Somewhat ironically, one author wrote of the era, "[s]uch tremendous developments necessarily rested upon unquestioned conviction not only regarding the permanence of the Association, but also regarding the nature of the general program."\(^{31}\) For Houston's YMCA the new building, rather than symbolizing the community's convictions about

the association, served gradually to cement the program and the institution in the city's life.
CHAPTER FOUR

FROM SALVATION TO SERVICE

When the Houston's Young Men's Christian Association opened its new building in 1908, everybody involved hoped for better things, but nobody expected the expansion that actually took place. Most concerned parties assumed that the association's new, larger quarters would allow for a greater variety of activities -- everything from bowling alleys to dormitories -- that would bring in the potential members who had not yet joined. Some development did occur because of just these factors. Of course, the tremendous growth of Houston's population provided a rich field for the cultivation of new members. More than anything else, however, World War I allowed the YMCA to take advantage of these situations and take root deeply and permanently in Houston. The needs of soldiers forced the association to deal with a volume of people -- both civilian and military -- and new areas of program extension that had been unthought of previously.

The association's old fears did not die with the new building. In the months before the new quarters opened, Board members became nervous about the $185,000 raised in
subscriptions. The Board asked general secretary W. A. Scott to call the International Committee's canvasser, Bruno Hobbs, back to Houston to help raise additional funds. After several postponements Hobbs's visit was cancelled. The Board, probably realizing that more donations were unlikely to come, opted for a $15,000 loan. Scott also followed up on all subscribers who had moved from Houston. Meanwhile the Board contacted the large subscribers and asked them to speed up their payments. It also formed a committee to approach the Rice Institute trustees for another, larger, loan. The plan was to use the money to cover expenses originally accounted for by delinquent subscriptions. When the committee reported that the Rice trustees offered $50,000, the Board told the committee to ask for $75,000. After three weeks of negotiation, in February 1908 the trustees raised the amount to $65,000 and then to the requested $75,000. A major factor in the success of the application was James A. Baker, who presided over the Rice trustees and, next to Hobbs, had played the most important role in the YMCA's building campaign. His involvement with both groups surely eased any difficulties there might have been. ¹

¹ Minutes of the Board of Directors, November 18, (Footnote Continued)
To pay operating expenses and to generate additional revenue, the Board raised membership rates to fifteen dollars per year for men and eight dollars per year for boys. A dollar discount was provided for each successive year of membership to encourage renewal. "Sustaining" memberships remained at twenty-five dollars per year. The Board discontinued limited permanent memberships that excluded gymnasium privileges but later reinstated them for a limit of six months, with a fee of two dollars per month. Undoubtedly, the Board had made earlier increases in membership dues, but this was the first recorded hike since 1898, when the Board raised the rate from five dollars to six dollars per year.\(^2\)

By the time the new facilities at Fannin and McKinney opened to the public on June 2, 1908, the YMCA had made sure at least that the building would be paid for, even if it meant paying with borrowed money. The Board also had the foresight to make sure enough cash would come in to keep the association operating. As the large subscription payments finally did come in, the Board

\(^{2}\) Minutes, March 23, 1908, November 27, 1908.
managed to pay off its creditors. Even though the Board took out more loans in years to come, mostly from Lumberman's (later First National) Bank, there was never any risk of the YMCA losing the roof over its head. Board member Stanley F. Carter, president of Lumberman's, could be expected to be sympathetic, and the YMCA's credit remained rock-solid at Carter's institution. When expenses mounted, the Board did not hesitate to raise dormitory rates or manipulate membership fees (through special offers, discounts, etc.) to the association's advantage and thereby remain able to pay the secretaries. The financial problems of the 1890s and the early 1900s were indeed behind the Houston YMCA.³

With more space to serve a broader clientele, membership soared. Less than two and a half years after christening the new quarters, the roster listed 1,205 men. Membership Secretary C. O. Michaels felt disappointed with such a low total, even though it was the highest ever. Michaels had wanted 1,500 by January 1911. Undaunted, he set a goal of 2,000 for the start of the next year. Only 1,300 had joined by November, and the

³ Minutes, March 23, 1908, November 27, 1908.
target had to be lowered to 1,500 for the new year, with 2,000 members to be reached by May 1, 1912.\footnote{Reports of the Membership Secretary, January 1911, January 19, 1912.}

To induce membership the association bent its rules, aimed at certain groups, and offered promotions. Forty-nine employees of the International & Great Northern Railroad who transferred to Houston from Palestine, Texas, were allowed to switch their YMCA affiliation as well. Normally, associations did not permit this, but occasional exceptions such as this arose. Other out-of-town members, such as students from the Texas A & M and the University of Texas college YMCA's received free use of the facilities during school holidays and reduced rates at other times. Special prices applied not just to these men, but even to likely prospects. In one membership campaign, anyone who joined would get two free months in addition to the year's membership at the quoted price.\footnote{Membership Secretary, September 15, 1911, December 15, 1911, August 8, 1911, November 17, 1911.}

The association hoped to garner new members from the "Many . . . stores, shops, offices and wholesale houses [that] have shown a great deal of interest in the Association and have cooperated very heavily with us in giving
us names of their employees." These were the sorts of men who had always made up the YMCA, and their interest must have been a reassurance to the Board and secretaries. Another perennial source of new blood was the churches. At the same time the employee rosters came in, a list of students in the Mehtodist churches' Baraca (religious and Bible study) classes arrived. With these men in mind, a "considerable amount of printed matter, guest passes, etc., was mailed to prospective members." YMCA officers and secretaries also distributed literature at a number of industrial sites, which at the time was something of a departure in recruitment methods.6

Though the association continually tried to widen its base and enrollment figures did climb, membership never did grow as quickly as expected. Membership did not reach 1,500 until July 1913. The hope embodied in the slogan "2,000 members for Houston, the biggest Association in the Southwest" was not realized until 1916. This growth was not steady, as it fluctuated widely. From May 1914 to April 1915 the number of members dropped from 1,591 to 1,261. Membership secretary Horace A. Lee attributed the shrinkage to "financial crisis" and to "probably one-third of our adult 'regular' members having

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6 Membership Secretary, April 19, 1912.
left the city." In the midst of this, a jump to 1,782 in July 1914 during the annual summer bargain rate period raised false hopes. Not until army troops came to Texas to suppress a potential border war with Mexico in the summer of 1916 did membership go over 2,000 for the first time. Declines sent the tally back down as low as 1,753 in 1918, but this variation had more to do with the constant ebb and flow of men in and out of the armed forces, first with the border action and then with World War I, than with any other factor.7

Despite the constant fluctuations experienced from month to month, the YMCA inevitably grew over the years. Isolated influxes of men in the armed forces obviously added to the roles, but more important was Houston's population boom between 1900 and 1920, which had a significant impact on membership. In this twenty-year span the city's population increased nearly 140 percent, from 58,203 to 138,276. Most of this jump can be linked to the tremendous booms in commerce and industry, particularly the petroleum, railroad, and shipping (after the completion of the Ship Channel in 1914) industries. More workers in an urban area meant a need for more services

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7 Reports of the General Secretary, July 11, 1913, July 14, 1916; Membership Secretary, May 29, 1914, April 30, 1915, May 1, 1916, February 1, 1918.
that, when tied to the initial expansion, meant still more employment. As far as the YMCA was concerned, these increases in Houston's business and population should been a constant golden opportunity for membership growth. And, over the long run, it was.\(^8\)

Once a member signed the register, myriad activities became available to him. But no matter what the apparent nature of the program, its ultimate purpose almost always grew out of the YMCA's religious outlook. Association secretaries made this plain in their reports. The religious works committee quite accurately stated that "[t]he Religious Work is not confined to any one department." A bit more grandly the committee exclaimed that the aim of the YMCA was

\[\text{to bring as far as possible to every man in Houston the claims of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To train men for Christian service and to relate them to active church membership. To organize young for the purpose of helping other young men, beginning in Houston and extending even unto young men of non-Christian lands.}\(^9\)

All of this was written with at least the implicit awareness that the evangelical basis of the Houston YMCA and the movement in general had started to crumble. On

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\(^9\) Policy for the Religious Work Department, Spring 1911.
the national level, some persons had always opposed the evangelical basis of membership (i.e., no man who did not belong to an evangelical Protestant church could be a full voting member, or a committee or Board member of the YMCA), and by 1907 objections had become more vocal. The spreading practice of admitting Catholics undermined the standard, but not to the same extent as the influence of social gospel proponents. These people saw the ultimate Christian crusade as being one of social reform in the sense that the economic struggle of life on earth had to be eased and justice sought before any heavenly existence could be properly considered. Locally, the Houston YMCA conceded that "The standard of membership in the Houston Young Men's Christian Association is not religious, not social, not financial. It is simply moral." Hopkins explained in History of the Y.M.C.A. that as World War I ended

[p]ersonal evangelism came to be defined as a life process rather than a single momentary commitment: "It is a growth and as such must include a series of daily responses which tend to perpetuate habits that will lead to real Christian character." (footnote omitted). Group evangelism and Bible study fell almost entirely out of the Associations' program . . . .  

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10 C. Howard Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America (New York: Association Press, 1951), pp. 513-14, 518; General Secretary, July 14, 1911, March 14, 1913; Minutes of the Membership Committee, October 7, 1912; Reports of the Boys' Secretary, December 6, 1910.
It appears, in the case of Houston anyway, that the evangelical emphasis also fell victim to the association's success in drawing new members. As the association's roll boomed, secretaries and members lost the intimacy available in a smaller YMCA. With such a glut of men secretaries simply didn't have the time or physical capacity to evangelize on a one-to-one basis anymore. Under the circumstances it becomes easy to understand why the shift in YMCA from a Christianity of personal evangelism to one of broad social concern took place.

The YMCA movement had entered a transition period. During this time the Houston association as well as the movement at large started to make the change from an agency of evangelism to an organization "devoted to the betterment of community life." Sixty percent of the members were not affiliated with evangelical churches, and boys' extension work programs openly approached the Jewish high schoolers' Olympus Club. Indeed, the Boys' Department framed its religious policy so as not to make it "uncomfortable for any boy who [is] a Catholic or Hebrew." Despite the changes, some of which the association had brought upon itself, the Houston YMCA in many ways still clung to its evangelistic, Bible-bound past.
and would for many more years. 11 Nevertheless, the practical impact of the Portland Test dwindled more and more as time passed.

The association's involvement in the Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911 and 1912 demonstrated that that the movement's religious views were in transition. An interdenominational, multi-organizational campaign spearheaded by the YMCA in more than ninety cities, MRFM stressed personal evangelism while at the same it emphasized the compassion of Christianity. People's basic physical needs -- decent food and shelter -- were, the MRFM recognized, as integral a part of life as Christian conviction. Though MRFM fizzled locally and nationally, the idea of piety with dignity -- fundamental to the concept of social gospel -- caught on and became a central factor in the Houston association's extension work. 12

Though departments strived to maintain separate, distinct programs, the association's evangelical zeal served to blur departmental distinctions and meld programs together. The boys' secretary, physical director,

11 Boys' Secretary, December 6, 1910, May 3, 1912; General Secretary, July 14, 1911; Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A., pp. 481-82.

educational secretary, and religious works committee all felt that their programs progressed unimpeded by the rest of the association's departments. Close examination of the record indicates that the lines of authority and responsibility were sketchy at best. Nevertheless, the utter lack of even a hint of discord or ill will in secretarial reports suggests genuine good will among the staff.

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this lingering evangelical emphasis was the innumerable Bible classes taught in every department. The physical department's senior leaders group included Bible study as part of its program, while the dormitory men discussed "Why a Young Man Should Be a Christian," "Shall I Join the Church," and the "Young Man's Duty to Spread His Religion" with the guidance of the physical director. The intermediate and junior leaders clubs also had Bible classes. Through these groups association leaders hoped that the example of manly Christian leadership would filter down among the other members, especially the younger ones.\(^\text{13}\)

Considered even more important than reaching men through the physical department was influencing the

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\(^{13}\) Physical Director, January 5, 1912, May 23, 1911, September 7, 1911, September 3, 1912.
members of the boys' department. "We are arranging the work of the Boys' Department with a view to making as far as possible everything focus toward our Bible Classes," the boys' secretary wrote. The YMCA sponsored nineteen different Bible classes for boys alone from May 1911 to April 1912. High school boys had four classes, as did employed boys; junior members (ages ten to sixteen years) had ten, with one teacher-training course for older boys. The classes apparently rated highly, for more than 350 boys (out of a total junior membership of not more than 375) attended. These courses did not include Bible study done during the YMCA summer camp, where secretaries emphasized conversion as much as canoeing. The general secretary reported that at the 1911 camp "every boy expressed the determination to take a stand for Christ."

Into the 1920s the YMCA seemingly never missed an opportunity to expose the youths to Bible study. The association hoped to inculcate the boys with Christian virtues provided by Scripture before their attitudes gelled with age.14

Between the opening of the building and the end of the association's war work in 1919, the YMCA did provide

14 Boys' Secretary, December 6, 1910, May 3, 1912; General Secretary, July 14, 1911; Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A., pp. 481-82.
more than just Bible classes. The physical department managed an incredible number of athletic and recreational activities. Basketball, bowling, and indoor baseball commanded intense competition. A typical winter month show eighty men in five bowling leagues, rolling 4,000 games; ninety men in four basketball leagues; a six-team Baraca basketball league; and sixty-eight gymnasium classes in calisthenics, rhythmic dance, volleyball, and swimming. The major summer activity was "The Teaching Houston Boys to Swim Campaign." Though most leagues and classes were for members only, the swimming campaign truly intended to teach every boy in Houston the "art of swimming." The association even allowed "such boys as the settlement house in the 5th Ward can assemble for the purpose" to take advantage of the program. While swimming was the centerpiece of summer work, the physical department also managed to stage gymnasium classes, handball leagues, a tennis club, and boxing and wrestling lessons. Once subject to the Board's rejection, the association allowed boxing and wrestling in 1911 on the condition that the instructors be "Christian gentlemen."\(^{15}\)

In addition to exercise and sports programs inside the building, the physical department also took an

\(^{15}\) Physical Director, February 2, 1911, February 5, 1912, May 23, 1911.
interest in what is today called preventive care. Every man and boy received a physical examination before he was allowed to use the department. Though Houston had grown into a sizable community by this time, it is likely that by requiring physicals the YMCA performed a vital public service, at least in terms of hygiene. Recognizing the chance for disease, the association also abandoned the public drinking cup and common comb at this time. Likewise, first aid classes came under the auspices of the physical department, and with good results, as the Houston association merited citation in this area in the International Committee report of 1911.\textsuperscript{16}

Outside of the building the physical department demonstrated the same range of activity. Physical director L. Theo Bellmont crusaded vigorously for a city park and playground and devoted much time to physical education in the public schools. Bellmont first proposed an all-purpose athletic field at the same time as the Board of Education considered the idea in October 1911. Since the 1880s the YMCA movement had used the national popularity for organized physical activity to lead American males to other aspects of the association's program: namely, its religious emphasis. This still applied in

\textsuperscript{16} Physical Director, January 5, 1912, May 23, 1911, September 7, 1911, September 3, 1912.
Houston in 1911, and Bellmont realized that YMCA-operated fields would dramatically increase the association's visibility and attractiveness, and therefore possibly increase membership, with the end result of more men and boys steered to Christian influences by the steady hand of the YMCA. Seeing the number of possible benefits, Bellmont asked, "[w]hy should not the Association step in, and provide a field . . . ? A good sized field adopted for base ball, soccer ball, foot ball, tennis, volley ball and general athletics would be a great drawing card for all local men who love the out-door life to join the Association." Despite the myriad uses for the field, the plan fell through. Even with the combined efforts of the Association, the city, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Rice Institute (which wanted to donate the land), the physical department mentions no regular outdoor activity until the summer of 1916.17

Bellmont, in his assumed role as community athletic liaison, worked directly with school children. The YMCA directed most of its outdoor activities towards them. Two activities put Bellmont in close contact with Houston's children: one was a YMCA-sponsored ward school athletic meet and the other a structured recess play program. It

17 Physical Director, October 3, 1911.
disturbed Bellmont that during their morning break youngsters "without supervision . . . wander aimlessly about seeking but hardly ever finding, the recreation they so desire." With the permission of school superintendent and YMCA Board member Paul W. Horn, Bellmont initiated his morning recess program. In a matter of weeks it was not unusual "to have as many as 150 to 200 children engaged in spontaneous play at one time." Aside from the pleasure derived from the directed play sessions, the students were also "furnished exercise [they] wouldn't have otherwise." This activity, according to Bellmont, also served to strengthen the association position in the community, expose boys to the YMCA, and "agitate a general movement for supervised programs."18

The ward school games, an annual event, first took place in April 1911. Athletes turned out from all of the city's schools to race, jump, and throw. The meet generated enough excitement to earn two full columns and a photograph in the Houston Post. True to form, Bellmont took the opportunity to record all the boys' names in order to recruit them later for the YMCA. The games, an

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18 Physical Director, October 31, 1912, December 5, 1912.
immediate success, became an annual spring fixture for both the city and the association. 19

Another boys' activity introduced in 1911 easily overshadowed the popularity of the ward school games. Summer camping cemented itself as an integral part of the junior program in its first season. The annual foray immediately became a favorite activity for the secretaries as well as the boys. No other aspect of the total Houston YMCA program received the undeniably warm praise that camping did from all involved. By the time the local association adapted it, YMCA camping was already a tradition dating back to 1886 in New York state. The first year the Houston association pitched its tents near Rollover Bridge on the Bolivar Peninsula east of Galveston Island. Slated for Rollover again in 1912, a tidal wave cut the outing short after four days. A railroad sent a train to rescue the campers, but the water destroyed all of the equipment. Fortunately, "the boys took it philosophically." When the camp revived the next summer on higher, dryer ground near Wharton, the association went planning to hold five different sessions. Two were scheduled for junior members, another for Sunday School boys, one for newsboys, and one for men. The

19 Houston Post, April 16, 1911, p. 20.
program would last ten weeks with a total attendance of 250 to 300. Lack of participation dimmed the first three terms, but fifty newsboys, five leaders, and twenty girls livened up the fourth. "How the young ladies got into it I have not yet learned as that was not the original plan," reported one surprised secretary. Nevertheless, the girls were allowed to stay. According to Boys' Secretary Herbert Crate, the girls belonged to the newsboys' Sunday School club. The whole affair pleased Crate, as he felt "[i]t was wonderful to hear these boys of the street talk to God in prayer in broken English, in the slang of the street, and the stammering tongue of the foreigner" and that "[t]he friendships formed between these little street Arabs and the older cultured Christian young ladies will be one of the biggest results of the year." The YMCA focused a good deal of attention on the newsboys, although the newsboys were generally kept separate from the junior membership. The association offered them special swim lessons, workouts, banquets, apprentice classes, and Bible courses apart from the usual boys' program. Enough interest developed that by the end of the decade the Board formed a separate
"Newsboys' Club" branch, staffed by its own secretary with its own rooms at Commerce and Main streets.  

Quite in keeping with the association's taste for the outdoors was its early support of the Boy Scouts. Like the YMCA, the Scouts had come to the United States from Britain. Developed by Boer War veteran General Robert S. S. Baden-Powell in the first decade of this century, scouting arrived in the United States in 1910. International Committee Boys' Secretary E. M. Robinson helped Chicago publisher William D. Boyce tone down scouting's military message to make it more suitable for American boys. Still, the Scouts suffered from the stigma of militarism. Under the direction of the YMCA, scouting did become more acceptable in just a few years. The Boy Scouts drew most of their members from YMCA boys' departments, though this subsided as scouting gained its own character.

The Boy Scout movement made it to Houston late in 1910 and quickly established a "substantial nucleus"

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20 Owen E. Pence, The Y.M.C.A. and Social Need: A Study of Institutional Adaptation (New York: Association Press, 1939), p. 70; General Secretary, July 14, 1911, June 9, 1912; Boys' Secretary, August 17, 1912, December 1919.

that took many "successful outings." Because of the Scouts' martial reputation, the YMCA did not plan to publicize the group until a local council had been formed. After the council was organized in 1914, Scouts still participated in YMCA physical, religious, and outdoor camping activities, but not to the extent they had previously. The YMCA's continued welcome to the Scouts was predictable, as Board member William Childress headed the council and General Secretary W. C. Paige served as a council member. However, as the Scouts assumed an identity separate from the YMCA, this dual affiliation gradually ended.22

To complement the outdoor experiences of camping and scouting, the YMCA provided its boys with a decidedly indoor activity: summer school. When the association offered classes in 1911 to help boys catch up or advance in the intermediate and upper elementary grades, summer school was new in the city. More than fifty boys attended -- almost as many as the boys' department attracted to camp. Within four years the public schools started their own summer programs, inevitably cutting into YMCA enrollment. Rightfully pleased by its own efforts, the association must have felt bittersweet about the competition:

22 Boys' Secretary, December 6, 1910; General Secretary, February 13, 1914.
the public schools were undoubtedly better equipped to provide this valuable public service, but at the YMCA's expense of losing sole control of a pet program. The loss of this small portion of boys' work was insignificant when compared to the scope of the entire junior program. Indoor activities such as Bible and gymnasium classes coupled with the surprising array of outdoor offerings allowed the YMCA to provide a widely varied but almost always structured Christian atmosphere for Houston's boys.

The educational department had more to offer than the summer school program. From 1908 on this department offered a steady, systematic array of night classes designed for the young businessman who wanted to improve himself. Prior to this the association had presented classes, but most of them had been lecture series rather than formal classroom sessions. Practical talks, as the lectures came to be known, remained; courses for the man who wanted to get ahead included "English for Foreigners," "Bookkeeping," and "Salesmanship." All became night school mainstays. More esoteric subjects such as "Architectural Drawing" and "Structural Engineering" were added

23 Reports of the Educational Secretary, October 14, 1914; General Secretary, July 14, 1911, July 13, 1915.
as their popularity demanded. Perhaps the most significant curricular addition was that of law courses in 1915. From a few introductory courses that spring, these classes eventually developed into a separate YMCA night law school in 1923, the South Texas College of Law. It is worth noting that the association played an important educational role in Houston in the 1910s. Except for the fledgling Rice Institute and a few business colleges, the YMCA provided one of the only opportunities for higher education -- such as it was -- during this period.\(^{24}\)

In terms of providing education, recreation, preventive health care and ecumenical Christianity for the city's boys and men, the YMCA clearly stood at the forefront. Some institutions might offer one aspect of these programs, but none could match the association's variety of activities. Certainly this must have been the Board's vision while it worked to get the new and larger building. These were the sorts of programs that big-city YMCAs engaged in, and these activities demonstrated to Houston's association men that both the city and the YMCA were becoming more prominent. An informal survey conducted by General Secretary Paige in 1914 showed

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\(^{24}\) Harry O'Kane, "History of the Houston Y.M.C.A." (unpublished, 1948), p. 13; Educational Secretary, October 14, 1914; General Secretary, January 8, 1915.
Houston's YMCA to be well above average in several areas, including membership and plant value. The average association reported 1,135 members as compared to Houston's 1,502; the average building carried a value of $183,000, while the local facility was assessed at $300,000. In another survey later that year, Houston ranked better than average in city population, building value, membership, athletic participation and Bible class enrollment. Undeniably, regardless of fluctuating membership and intermittently tight finances, the Houston YMCA, like its city, was on the rise.25

Two factors helped keep the association moving forward in the mid and late 1910s: aggressive outside extension work and the influx of troops into the city from the time of the border dispute in 1916 until the veterans returned home from the World War in 1919. YMCA programs were, of course, designed for its own members, but the association reached out to non-members as well. Admittedly it hoped that these men and boys would respond by joining. Occasionally the association sponsored public speakers who gave presentations in the larger church halls or, after 1918, in the city auditorium. Nationally known figures such as baseball executive Branch Rickey or

25 General Secretary, July 24, 1914, November 13, 1914.
YMCA International Committee physical work secretary Dr. George Fisher were invited to Houston not just for the benefit of association members, but also to speak to the public. Successful events such as these were based on a YMCA principle as old the American movement: all associations would promote events for the public welfare, but no association would allow discussion of partisan, political, or denominational issues. In line with this, the Houston association cited guidelines in its 1894 constitution and again in 1908 regarding the groups that could or could not use YMCA rooms. Originally, the movement had adopted this policy to keep slavery debates from disrupting association activities in the years before the Civil War. In the early twentieth century the movement maintained the policy to avoid incidents that might have arisen over temperance and prohibition. Both tradition and statute thus demanded that associations refrain from any semblance of partisanship or controversy. When an association or someone connected to it crossed the line, it became a matter of principle to uphold YMCA standards.26

26 Physical Director, March 10, 1915, May 31, 1915; Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A., p. 51; Constitution, 1894, Art. VIII, Sec. VI; Minutes, June 16, 1908.
This issue precipitated perhaps the Houston YMCA's worst public embarrassment. Unwittingly, the association drew itself into the dilemma of either pleasing the public or adhering to its values when it invited evangelist Len Broughton from Atlanta in April 1911. Broughton had witnessed all over the country for YMCAs and at revivals and earned fame as an excoriator of liquor. Set to speak on April 19 at the City Auditorium, the Houston association pulled out as a sponsor the night before when it learned that Broughton planned to endorse certain Prohibition-related political groups. Understandably angry, Broughton's statement in the next morning's Post suggested that he had planned to speak only generally on Prohibition. Broughton also claimed that he had first heard of the YMCA's withdrawal from reporters. By the next day, the Post had pilloried the association editorially and the Methodist ministers voted to rescind their support of the YMCA hours later. After a nine-hour meeting the YMCA Board offered a three-point response. The Board declared first of all that it avoided denominational, partisan, and political controversies; secondly, that no offense was intended to any group but that it was only meant to uphold a long-standing principle; and thirdly, that it "considers the saloon and the liquor traffic one of the greatest evils that young men have confronting them." After the issuance of the statement
local Baptist ministers as well as Broughton called the association cowardly for this stance.\textsuperscript{27}

Fortunately, this public relations disaster was only temporary, and relations with the Baptists and Methodists mended quickly. In less than a year Methodist Baraca classes had their own basketball league and Physical Director Bellmont took an opportunity to speak to the Baptist Young People's Union. Nevertheless, this episode demonstrates that the Board -- some of the city's highest profile businessmen -- willingly suffered public embarrassment (if only for a short time) rather than compromise YMCA principles.\textsuperscript{28}

As has been seen, the Broughton affair did not keep the association from bringing in name speakers, nor did it stifle participation in city-wide projects. Often these activities emphasized religious themes tied to social issues. Broughton and the Men and Religion Forward Movement best exemplified the combination. Though the association had difficulty supporting aspects of the temperance movement, the YMCA did endorse some MRFM interests more heartily. Two of the major areas of mutual

\textsuperscript{27} Houston Post, April 9, 1911, p.11; April 10, 1911, p. 6; April 11, 1911, p. 3; April 12, 1911, p. 16; April 13, 1911, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{28} Physical Director, February 5, 1912, May 2, 1912.
concern for the YMCA and MRFM, work with organized labor and foreign missions, thrived through the efforts of the association when spurred on by the latter movement. Industrial work (especially with railroad workers) and foreign extension work had been major YMCA movement projects even before the association arrived in Houston. Now with proper guidance, the local association made its entrance into those fields.

The health of Houston's craft unions made the early contacts with industry and labor easier. As a contemporary source noted, "Public sentiment and feeling towards union labor in this city and community is very favorable, and all important work is done by union labor." Local industrial management concurred and believed that union men were an "integral part of the community." By 1912 more than 8,000 men -- 85 percent of all skilled laborers -- belonged to unions and had negotiated wage increases while at the same time cutting hours.29 This atypicality in labor relations of the period helped the association in a number of ways. First of all, with management's enlightened views on unions, the YMCA could peacefully

work with both while alienating neither. To damage relations with management would seriously harm the YMCA's staple constituency of white collar businessmen. On the other hand, the need of the working class for what the association had to offer them -- namely, evangelical shop meetings -- could no longer be ignored. Secondly, the apparent rapport between labor and management defused the potential conflict with the YMCA's policy of non-involvement in controversial issues. Except with owner-sponsored railroad associations, the non-controversy policy had kept the movement from embracing labor more warmly earlier,\textsuperscript{30} though several cities did have Industrial YMCAs.

The association apparently did not at first attempt more than noon-hour religious meetings in the Fifth Ward industrial section. Still, attendance was acceptable, with most shops sending about thirty men to the weekly meetings, and requests came in steadily from other sites.\textsuperscript{31}

YMCA leaders calmly accepted that events beyond their control might sometimes disrupt their work. "On account of a strike [at a railroad shop], the meetings

\textsuperscript{30} Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A., p.228.

\textsuperscript{31} Reports of the Religious Works Secretary, February 1, 1912.
will not be continued there for the present, but we hope to begin again as soon as the strike is over and conditions are satisfactory." In the meantime the work would continue elsewhere. The religious works secretary felt that of all his department's efforts, this work might produce the most good. "Perhaps the best work of the year has been the shop meetings," he wrote. "Not only has the Gospel been preached to men who do not attend church, but it has brought into the work a number of laymen [YMCA members] who have experienced great joy in this labor of love."32 A quiet success, shop meetings quickly became a fixture of extension work and led to more fully developed industrial programs in the future.

In contrast, fanfare accompanied the start of Houston's foreign work. Three reasons explain this. The first is that in the person of the foreign secretary, the YMCA could vicariously visit exotic lands. The association first sponsored Lloyd Snyder as foreign secretary for Seoul, Korea, in 1911. His duties were to run the new Seoul operation -- which meant hands-on missionary work -- and to act as an exchange director between Houston and Seoul. In this latter role, Snyder sent regular reports and arranged the visit to Houston of Shizuka Suzuki,

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32 Religious Works Secretary, November 4, 1911, October 3, 1911, June 3, 1913.
director of the Korean revenue bureau. The second reason for the program's popularity was simply that it was the centerpiece of the International Committee's work. All of the great International Committee secretaries of the generation, John Mott among them, had made their reputations overseas. Hence it was very prestigious for a city association to sponsor such work and a sign that the association was a substantial operation. Lastly, it was the work of all members to collect for and donate to the foreign work subscription fund, which amounted to more than $2,000 per year. For members to know that the money they raised went to support this respected work must have been a source of incentive and pride for them. Agreement must have been strong with the sentiment "that every member of the Association should be given the privilege of subscribing to this fund." After five years Snyder left Seoul because of his wife's health problems. Instead of replacing him, the association sent Philip Conard to Montevideo, Uruguay. Conard had pioneered this field in 1909 after serving as secretary of the college association at the University of Illinois. Within two years after receiving Houston's support, Montevideo had the most expensive YMCA building in Latin America, valued at $25,000. Surely the International Committee contributed as generously as the Paraguayans, but in a sense the Houston association could feel that a piece of that
building was as much their own as the one at Fannin and McKinney. 33

By 1915, as has been pointed out, the Houston YMCA had tried to give a part of itself to men and boys outside the building whether they were across town or around the world. The association recognized that the building was not accessible to all who could profit from its centralized program, while others who might need the YMCA might not be able to afford it or have time for it. To combat the first problem, the association sponsored the ward school games, night school extension courses, and shop meetings. The meetings and classes, along with programs such as the Newsboys' Club, also show partial solutions to the second problem. More than any other factor, however, Houston's growth from a town to an urban center first began to isolate the association physically from its constituency. YMCA leaders had not failed to notice developing areas such as Houston Heights just north of the city proper. Incorporated in 1892 as a separate community, "the Heights" evolved as a satellite of its larger neighbor but still had its own commercial

33 General Secretary, October 11, 1912, April 14, 1916; Religious Works Secretary, April 4, 1911; Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A., p. 671.
and industrial areas in addition to schools and churches. 34

Starting in 1912, YMCA extension work in the Heights concentrated on boys. The Oriental Textile Mills were "an opportunity for a splendid piece of extension work," as it employed nearly forty boys who rarely got out of sight of the factory. The boys' department quickly planned to start club work that would offer "religious, social, physical and educational lines" to their lives. Boys' secretary Herbert Crate's father, Harry, who owned the mills, favored the work and led it himself until his death in November 1913. 35 As the first extension work undertaken in the Heights, this year of activity set the stage for more concentrated efforts that culminated in the development of a Heights branch after World War I.

Meanwhile, General Secretary W. C. Paige agitated for an Industrial YMCA on the North Side. Increasingly popular industrial shop meetings had grown from religious discussions into organized sports leagues and other activities that mirrored the typical YMCA fare. This activity led to the establishment of a branch in that


35 Boys' Secretary, August 7, 1912; General Secretary, October 11, 1912, November 14, 1913.
area in May 1915. Will Miller accepted the appointment as North Side secretary and found himself "busily engaged in getting the work on the North Side started." Rather than organize the work into an independently controlled Industrial association, control of the "community branch" remained partially in the hands of the Board. Three Board members and two other Downtown YMCA members plus seven men from the North Side formed the committee of management. Rented quarters at North Side Junior High School and McKee Street Methodist Episcopal Church housed the Branch's activities. Gym classes and a game room were available at the school, which also hosted the Boy Scouts and the Olympus Club. The church took in the reading room and any lectures or classes. At the end of 1915 interest and attendance were good at the school but disappointing at the church. After the church-based activities moved to the "Social Center," enthusiasm for those programs became "everything that could be wished," even attracting a "better class of young working men." Since the branch ran on a very limited budget -- fees were just ten cents per month for boys with the adult rate a nominal two dollars per month -- the North Side had to depend on the goodwill of its landlords to lend equipment occasionally and schedule activities such as singing sessions and prayer
meetings to keep costs down.36 In terms of budget and facilities, the start of the North Side branch roughly matched that of the central branch's initial costs.

Though the North Side and Heights extension programs continued, YMCA documents mention these burgeoning fields only between February 1916 and February 1919. General Secretary Paige noted only that "special provision" should be made for the men and boys of the North Side and Heights.

Like so many other aspects of association activity, the priority of extension work was diminished by the military buildup of 1916 for the border skirmish, followed almost immediately by World War I. As things started to return to normal in early 1919, International Committee Secretary Frank Ritchie arrived to investigate the extension work. An expert at starting programs without buildings or even rooms, Ritchie hoped to resuscitate the projects. The secretary breathed new life into the Heights work with the help of $5,000 in subscriptions for a Heights branch, which began its work a few months later. Despite its apparent early success, the North Side branch fell through. Nevertheless, extension work did

36 General Secretary, May 11, 1915, September 14, 1915; North Side Reports, October 1915, December 1915, February 1, 1916.
continue in the area though no longer on an organized basis.\textsuperscript{37}

The military activity of the mid and late teens cut deeply into the Houston association's work but produced an unparalleled boom for the YMCA generally. Support of the armed forces had been a wartime feature of the movement since the days of the United States Christian Commission during the Civil War. The movement renewed its efforts at the time of the Spanish-American War of 1898, which prodded the construction of army and navy associations. By 1914, when the First World War broke out in Europe, service to soldiers and sailors had become a standard feature of association work. After the war, and the expenditure of more than $152,000,000 in support of Allied forces, service to fighting men dwarfed every other project the YMCA had ever undertaken.\textsuperscript{38}

In Houston, YMCA work with the military started a year earlier than America's entry into World War I. During the first two weeks of July 1916 more than 2,000 soldiers visited the association. Most of these men took

\textsuperscript{37} General Secretary, May 24, 1917; Minutes, February 6, 1919, April 11, 1919; Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A., p. 464; O'Kane, "History of the Houston Y.M.C.A.," p. 19.

\textsuperscript{38} Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A., pp. 453-55, 485.
advantage of the swimming pool and baths. The sudden influx generated community support, as the Chamber of Commerce donated 300 towels. Aid also came in the form of $335 to help offset the YMCA's expenses.39

The work of 1916 paled in comparison to what commenced the next spring. Though the opportunity for service was obvious, these expectations matched concerns for the fates of association members and, by extension, the association itself. Some members enlisted soon after Congress declared war in April 1917. The situation was unsettled enough that the membership secretary remarked, "It is impossible to foretell what effect the war is going to have [on the association] ... but we trust to hold our own for some time at least." Many men wavered about maintaining membership as they were unsure of whether or not they would be drafted. General Secretary Paige kept a firm resolve. "No matter what may happen, there will still be an urgent need to serve men and boys of whom there will be thousands left regardless of the number that may be called to war," he wrote in May 1917. Paige did not realize that the proposed local YMCA Army

39 General Secretary, July 14, 1916.
Cantonment would be a "tremendous additional responsibility." 40

In the next few weeks the city geared up to serve the country's fighting men. Houstonians made surgical dressings by the ton, sold Liberty bonds, supported the Armenian relief, worked to improve morale, aided fatherless families, and raised $430,000 in a campaign designed to net $325,000. For their part, 613 association members fought in the war. Secretary Paige went to France at the request of the International Committee as an executive secretary to oversee an armed forces canteen, probably the most widespread aspect of the movement's European war work. The boys' department promoted the Patriotic Service League and Boys' Working Reserve, two youth auxiliaries for the war effort, and urged YMCA boys to join. The summer camp also adopted a military purpose. The state boys' secretary wanted thirty older boys to spend their vacations at Orange, Texas, building ships, with other boys going to Athens, Texas, to pick fruit. 41

40 General Secretary, April 13, 1917; May 13, 1917; May 24, 1917.

41 Mrs. W. M. Gaines, ed., Houston's Part in the World War (Houston, 1919), pp. 11, 31, 35, 45, 157; Membership Secretary, May 22, 1919; General Secretary, December 14, 1917; Boys' Secretary, [Summer] 1917, April 1918.
Even more important than the work of YMCA members in war-related pursuits was the welcome the association gave to the soldiers themselves. Many soldiers stationed locally at Camp Logan or Ellington Field came to the YMCA for recreation. The physical department was a major drawing card. For twenty cents, a non-member soldier received use of the gym and was provided soap and a towel. Low fees however did not deter soldiers from joining the association as full members rather than remaining as guests. By October 1917 quite a few had taken advantage of a special three-months-for-five dollars membership plan. The popularity of the YMCA among soldiers can best be seen in physical department statistics. For the year ending April 30, 1917, 62,743 men and boys, 172 per day, used the department. A year later the tally had risen to 86,382 males -- 27,914 of whom were soldiers -- a daily attendance average of 236. Without the fighting men, 4,000 fewer visits would have been recorded in 1917-1918 than the year before, as only 160 per day would have used the facilities. In other words, fewer of Houston's men and boys used the department in the year ending in 1919, but the swarm of soldiers caused the overall attendance figures to skyrocket. Clearly, military personnel made a substantial impact on attendance in the physical department. Surely these men commanded special attention from the physical director and his
assistant if only because of their number; their requests for special activities undoubtedly affected the rest of the membership as they comprised such a large percentage of the total using the department.42

Important, YMCA officials never forgot that their primary responsibility was to the men and boys of Houston. Braced to be overrun by the arrival of the Illinois National Guard in September 1917, Secretary Paige reminded the Board of its duty "to protect" regular members. Five months later while Paige was at a YMCA hut in France, the acting general secretary, Guy Burnett, admonished the Board not to forget "[o]ur real work is with the young men of our city." He then pointed out that other cities had met success with men in the twenty-one to thirty age range and suggested this group as a target for work here in Houston. The boys' department used the war to drive home a moral lesson. A new department policy written especially for wartime counselled that youngsters be taught "[t]he resistance of any tendency to hatred in the[ir] hearts . . . by a new emphasis upon Christ's teachings concerning love, which, when given right away will eliminate all strife in home, in industry, and

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42 General Secretary, August 28, 1917, October 12, 1917; Membership Secretary, March 25, 1918; Physical Director, June 3, 1918.
between countries." With this outlook the department's membership figures show that it attracted new members during the war years. While senior membership remained more or less even at this time (which means that those who were drafted were replaced), the boys' department jumped from 500 in May 1917 to 751 two years later. Though no major program changes took place in this period with the exception of the introduction of Hi-Y groups (see below), local boys increasingly joined the YMCA.⁴³

The YMCA building was not the only location for association activities with service men. The International Committee set up a hut at Camp Logan for the 32,000 National Guardsmen posted there. Secretaries wrote 243,000 letters, sold more than $18,000 in postage stamps and almost $30,000 in money orders, and lent out nearly 4,500 books. Reading and game rooms were available at the War Work Council building downtown. The YMCA, as an agency of the council, was happy to share the field since the association could by no means handle all of the off-duty personnel. As collective activity sponsors, the groups that comprised the War Work Council -- the YMCA, Young Women's Christian Association, Salvation Army,

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⁴³ General Secretary, August 28, 1917, February 1918; Policy for the Boys' Department, [Spring] 1917; Membership Secretary, May 4, 1917, May 9, 1919.
Knights of Columbus, and American Library Association —
were also joint beneficiaries. In a campaign to raise
support funds, the groups mustered $430,000 to offset
their individual costs in providing for soldiers in the
Houston area. 44

Activities for veterans after the armistice proved
to be as important as the services that the Houston YMCA
rendered during the war. The most vital function of the
special "reconstruction work secretary" was to help the
16,000 soldiers returning to Houston to find jobs. In
cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce, the United
States Employment Bureau and the Red Cross, the associa-
tion managed to set up employment files on many veterans,
arranging 325 interviews in the first two weeks of
February 1919 alone. In addition to employment counsel-
ing, the secretary secured overdue bonuses and discharge
papers, filed claims on Red Cross insurance, and offered
financial assistance. For men still stationed at Camp
Logan, the secretary scheduled entertainment and reli-
gious meetings. Nationally the YMCA began to receive
criticism for alleged mismanagement of its European war

44 Frederick Harris, Service With Fighting Men: An
Account of the Work of the American Young Mens' Christian
Association in the World War, 2 vols. (New York:
Association Press, 1922), v. 1, p. 388; Baines, Houston's
effort, but the efficiency of the Houston reconstruction work "helped to dispel local criticism."

World War I and its aftermath caused the Houston YMCA to examine an issue it had neglected for years: a branch for the city's blacks. Local blacks first approached the YMCA in 1911. General Secretary I. E. Munger discouraged them, pointing out that branch organization would be frowned upon "until we have assurance of a building to give dignity, permanency, popularity, and efficiency to the work." Munger did mention the offer of Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald to donate $25,000 for every $75,000 raised by the black community to build its own separate, segregated facilities. In years to come, blacks in several cities -- including Washington, D.C., New York, and St. Louis -- benefitted from Rosenwald's proposition, though blacks in Houston did not. Munger further dampened hopes by nixing "any unwise or premature" subscription canvasses.

To a smaller degree than with most potential fields of special activity, the association did conduct extension work for blacks. The physical department ran the

45 Reports of the Reconstruction Secretary, January 27, 1919, February 14, 1919, March 3, 1919, May 9, 1919, May 22, 1919.

46 General Secretary, March 7, 1911; Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A., p. 458.
majority of the work, which consisted mostly of religious
talks and athletic events for Houston Colored College.
The department also coordinated the annual "Black Mammy
Field Day," a variety of races and athletic contests
equivalent to the ward school games, except that these
were for black elementary school children. Until 1919
these few programs remained the basic range of YMCA
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thetic. Some of this sympathy can be attributed to Board
members' recognition of the important role of blacks,

47 Physical Director, February 28, 1912, May 2,
1912, December 5, 1912.

48 General Secretary, February 9, 1917.
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47 Physical Director, February 28, 1912, May 2, 1912, December 5, 1912.

48 General Secretary, February 9, 1917.
both as soldiers and civilians, in the war effort. An estimated 3,000 Houston blacks served their country. Another factor was that the large-scale demands of service with fighting men had forced the Board to participate in activities with groups it normally would not have, and for the most part these efforts had been successful. The strongest influence was probably personal. Two leading national black YMCA officials, E. L. Gordon, the State Colored Secretary, and H. K. Craft, a black International Committee secretary, along with H. P. Carter, the candidate for local secretary, arrived in Houston in the spring of 1919 to run the reconstruction work for blacks and to try to form a YMCA branch. Most likely this came at the invitation of the War Work Council, which oversaw and partially funded various local veterans' programs. Both Carter and Gordon attended Board meetings and were well received, at least professionally. Perhaps this acceptance persuaded the YMCA that the time was right.\footnote{Minutes, March 14, 1919, April 11, 1919.}

The effort to organize the black branch was not without trials. Paige believed in March "that the time has come to encourage such a movement," but he reported the next month that "unless special provision is made the
good work the Association is doing for colored men will . . . have to stop July 1." He balked at this, feeling that "it will be a fine investment for the Association to continue Secretary Carter," even if the War Work Council sent no more financial support. Two and a half weeks later, shortly before the deadline, the Board assented. Realizing "that something should be done by our Association for the colored people of our city" and believing "that this is the time to begin such work," the Board authorized a monthly appropriation of seventy-five dollars to start September 1, 1919. To demonstrate its interest, the black community had to raise a matching amount each month. After more than eight years of deferment and two years of military service by 3,000 Houston blacks, the YMCA crossed the color line.50

In the twelve years since the construction of the building at Fannin and McKinney, the Houston YMCA had managed not only to make good use of this facility but also to cultivate the interest of Houstonians outside the initial boundaries of association contact. Working boys, union men, and blacks were all groups that the YMCA of 1898 or 1905 would never have considered serving. Once

50 General Secretary, March 14, 1919, April 30, 1919; Minutes, June 13, 1919; Colored Reports, September 1, 1919.
membership, and with it revenues, started to rise with the new building, so did the association's interest in helping those who did not fit the normal members' characteristics -- white, Protestant, church members, who were business or professional men (or their sons). As membership figures show, despite occasional declines, the city's men flocked to the YMCA. The most ambitious project of the era, service with soldiers, crowned the extension work while at the same time bringing in more members than ever before. Another reflection of this growth in staff is that around 1900, the association employed three secretaries -- a general secretary, his assistant, and the physical director. By 1916, thirteen full-time secretaries worked for the YMCA in fields such as boys' work, membership, or religious work. The stability of the Board of Directors indicates that the members felt the association was well managed. This continuity also indicates that the directors no longer dreaded service on the Board, as they had in the late 1890s. William A. Wilson served as Board president from 1904 until 1925, and Jacob Dealy, Edward W. Taylor, and William D. Cleveland, Jr., served nearly every possible term during that period. Stability, so elusive during the
association's first twenty years, had finally been captured.  

Secretarial longevity -- or rather its absence -- was another matter. Debilitating and sometimes deadly illnesses such as tuberculosis, malaria, and influenza seemed to strike with regularity and force convalescence in the healthier climes of West Texas. General Secretary Munger left after a nervous breakdown in 1913, having suffered a number of other illnesses before his departure. Possibly tied to this trend was the youth of many secretaries recruited out of the senior ranks of the boys' department and the additional possibility that some of the problems were stress-related. Munger's replacement, W. C. Paige, had notably good health, as did the physical directors. Paige had run the Louisville, Kentucky, YMCA before he arrived in Houston and therefore realized some of the pitfalls of the work. Unfortunately, no information can be found to make any further detailed comparison with Munger. Though physical directors had a great deal of responsibility, the perennially growing popularity of their departments removed some of the strain that might have weighed upon the secretary of a less prominent department. Turnover, whether because of

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illness, unspecified grounds of resignation, or transfer to another association, was as much a feature of the association of the time as Bible classes.

Paradoxically, much of the membership growth the YMCA experienced was unaccompanied by administrative change. This is not to say that the association did not adjust to fit what the members wanted or expand to try to include more of the rising population. It was more a reluctance to face certain issues without prodding. Though little remembered by anyone today, the Men and Religion Forward Movement effectively enlarged the field of vision of the Houston YMCA. As a result of MRFM pressure, the first organized extension work for those outside the association's traditional scope started. These previously untouched segments of the populace quickly showed interest in what the YMCA had to offer.

World War I had a tremendous impact on the YMCA in Houston. More than any other cause up to this point, the YMCA's war work secularized the YMCA in the sense that evangelism and personal salvation substantially began to lose their place as the heart of the association purpose. Increasingly, the emphasis lay more on how the greatest number could be served. This meant combined efforts by several local philanthropic agencies to help as many of Houston's residents as possible. In the case of the YMCA, this broadened outlook was best exemplified
by the Board's realization that to be truly Christian, it must serve all groups, even blacks. Though the movement's evangelical requirement for membership was not repealed until 1931, the shift from a Christianity of salvation to one of service for all had begun.
CHAPTER FIVE

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In many ways the novelty of growth that started in the 1910s for the Houston YMCA became habit for the association in the 1920s. Whereas the failure of a major project in the previous decade might have led to larger letdowns, setbacks during the twenties most often caused the association merely to plan more carefully for the future. The successes of the Houston association -- and there were several -- put it without a doubt at the forefront statewide, and began to gain it notice in national circles.

Through the 1920s the YMCA continued its most ambitious work of the post-World War One period: branch extension work. Unfortunately some efforts were not as successful as others. The Heights branch fell through after a hopeful start and the black branch seceded from the control of the white Board of Directors after a dispute over the appointment of its Committee of Management. A new branch for the outlying rural communities in the county folded because of purported secretarial incompetence. As will be seen, these situations occurred
for a variety of reasons and did little if anything to hinder the greater triumphs and aspirations of the same period.

From its start in 1919, the Heights branch had been something of a pet of the central Board of Directors. Board members had heartily supported a $5000 campaign in addition to monthly Board support to kick off the branch. At the same time the black branch had to make do with $150 per month, half of which came out of the Board's budget with the other half from community support. Personal familiarity between the members of the Board and the Heights Committee of Management surely contributed to the warm relationship. Robert Cole and A. H. Kennerly, two members of the first Heights Committee of Management, went on to serve long terms on the central Board. No doubt this intimacy -- which blacks did not enjoy -- had something to do with the Board's interest in the Heights branch.1

With this support, the Heights branch seemed to lead a charmed existence. Secretaries Herbert Sone and Fred Metts (who replaced Sone in early 1920) met little opposition from the Board or the community over any of their plans. Though headquartered over Fulton's Drug

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1 Reports of the General Secretary, March 14, 1919; Minutes of the Board of Directors, June 13, 1919.
Store at Nineteenth Avenue and Ashland, most of the work took place outside the rooms at the area's schools and playgrounds. Under the slogan "clean character, clean mind, and clean athletics," the Heights branch sponsored Hi-Y, a very popular program for high schools boys; this was the largest YMCA service for teenagers. Association-supervised public tennis courts as well as playgrounds with YMCA-sponsored movies, croquet, and volleyball attracted large numbers of Heights residents during the summer months. Greater utilization of the branch's indoor facilities took place during the winter months when boys and girls would come to the rooms to listen to the phonograph, sing with the piano, or read in the library. The Red Cross and Boy Scouts also participated. By the spring of 1920, secretary Metts was out visiting churches and schools to organize play groups and picnics. He also led shop meetings at Houston Structural Steel, in neighborhood fire stations, and at the Price-Booker Pickle Factory. Nothing in the Heights escaped the touch of its YMCA branch.²

Within another year, in cooperation with the city, the branch set up a $4000 extension of the public library

² General Secretary, April 30, 1919; Minutes, February 13, 1920; Reports of the Heights Branch, June 3, 1919, April 9, 1920, August 8, 1919, September 12, 1919, December 12, 1919.
on the second floor of Heights Senior High School. Increasingly connected with the city, the branch obtained permission to move into the old Heights water works. More space was available here as well as the old water settling basins, which, with the help of the Park Board, could be converted into swimming pools. On top of all this, Metts also found time to serve as secretary of the Heights Amusement League, act as master for the Heights' scout troop and lead the Heights high school football team in pre-game prayers.3

Obviously the ultimate failure of the Heights branch did not arise from any lack of effort on Metts's part. The largest contributing factor was the inability of Heights' residents to continue to generate financial support. Regardless of program success and municipal cooperation, funds did not come in as they had during the well-supported canvass of 1919. In the midst of reports of new activities, there were signals that trouble awaited. As early as May 1920 Metts noted that the bills were paid, but only $850 remained in the bank account, and subscriptions came in only slowly. Five months later delinquent pledges totalled $2,000. A year later in October 1921 Metts reported a balance due of $668.79 and

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3 Heights Branch, February 10, 1921, September 9, 1921, June 10, 1921.
that money unpaid to him personally added up to more than $450. Five weeks later the Board discontinued operations, explaining later that the Heights was not "interested enough to justify further work." Because there had been so much hope for the Heights, it would seem natural for the Board to express its disappointment at its closing. On the contrary, except to note that Metts would not be replaced and that the equipment would be stored for safety, the Board had little left to say about the Heights branch. 4

The same lack of emotion cannot be ascribed to the breakoff of relations with the black branch. Organized just a few months after the Heights branch, blacks in the Houston YMCA suffered from the above-mentioned disadvantages of lack of personal and financial support. Somehow though, branch management put on a program very nearly as varied as the one in the Heights. Bible classes, athletic teams, Hi-Y clubs, plant meetings, and veterans' counseling were all among the activities run out of the Lincoln Theatre building at 711 Prairie. 5

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4 Heights Branch, [for] May 1920, October 15, 1920, October 14, 1921; Minutes, November 18, 1921; General Secretary, November 18, 1921.

5 Reports of Colored Branch, April 20, 1920, February 12, 1920, November 16, 1920, December 2, 1920; General Secretary, May 20, 1920.
Unbridled enthusiasm marked the reports of branch secretary H. P. Carter. "From all appearances the Y.M.C.A. among our group is here to stay. Other organizations have not hindered our work. It seems that they have inspired it," Carter wrote early in 1920. Later that spring Carter expressed his wish to the Board to make the secretaryship his life's work. A review of Carter's accomplishments attested to his merits, and the Board paid for him to attend the summer session at the Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, Training School for Colored YMCA Secretaries. After he returned from the courses, Carter oversaw a $3,000 fund raising effort, business college classes and a rapidly expanding extension program. Daily noon meetings were held at the Southern Pacific Railroad units at Katy, the Freight House and Union Station. For the many black men and boys in industry there was a "crying need," Carter explained. "This is a needy work and the men with their Bibles and song books have formed strong organizations that will mean much to the men of my race." 6

However much it meant to black males in Houston, the resignation of the entire branch committee of management, followed by that of Carter, effectively halted the work

during the spring of 1921. The center of contention was the Board's refusal to approve the appointment of C. F. Richardson, editor of the Houston Informer, the city's black newspaper, to the branch committee of management. In almost every other case, the Board merely rubber stamped these slates, both for the Heights and the black branches, though there had been a case several years earlier in the North Side branch where the Board vetoed the appointment of a committee member because he did not belong to an evangelical Christian church. In this case, at least, the objection seemed to be based upon other criteria. The Informer held this view, writing that the break was "due to big stick methods resorted to by the whites, who, besides cramming down the throat of the colored board a set of rules and a working agreement more harsh than the terms of the armistice imposed upon the Germans by the allies, have also demanded that certain race men shall not serve on the board, despite their peculiar fitness for the work." The article also suggested "that there are certain members of the white board holding membership in Houston's new type of "'invisible government'" -- the Ku Klux Klan.\footnote{Letter, H. P. Carter to W. C. Paige, May 1, 1921; Houston Informer, May 7, 1921, pp. 1, 4.}
For its part the Board responded by donating whatever equipment the branch already had, "and then sever[ed] every relation existing between our Association and the Colored Branch," which continued to operate separately. Despite the injunction, over the next several years -- until the black branch reunited with the whites in 1930 -- the Board occasionally allowed secretaries to assist black fund raising and program efforts in an unofficial capacity.\textsuperscript{8}

The third expansion project to go sour during the decade was established by the State Committee in 1924. The State Committee intended for this branch to serve outlying communities in Harris County such as Baytown, Goose Creek, and Magnolia Park. County work was similar to community branch work as it emphasized work with children in their schools and playgrounds and strong relations with local agencies such as recreational boards. Ideally, the county branch, quickly "annexed" by the Board from the State Committee, would stimulate interest in the YMCA and provide programs for the larger towns in the county until Houston swallowed them. At that point the Board would initiate more specific extension work for each community. Nationally, however, county work

\textsuperscript{8} Minutes, May 15, 1921, March 20, 1925, October 15, 1930.
did not depend on ultimate absorption by a larger urban entity, but instead attempted aggressively to develop programs with the available rural resources.\(^9\)

The scattered reports on the county work constantly mention that it progressed sporadically at best. "The launching of the new County Branch was undertaken at an unfavorable time, and the progress has been slow," noted General Secretary W. C. Paige in January 1925. Within the month though the Board hired a county secretary, C. McGeath. With his help, the branch raised its own budget of $4,000 in a subscription canvass to go with $2,500 in support from the Board. Typical reports, however, called the program "pretty hard sledding," and Goose Creek "one of the most needy places in the county as well as the most difficult."\(^10\)

By early 1927 the Board and new General Secretary Frank Fields traced the problem to one source: County Secretary McGeath. "In the interest of more efficient development of our County Work," county work committee chairman J. O. Webb recommended that the Board ask


\(^10\) General Secretary, January 9, 1925, February 20, 1925, October 26, 1926; Minutes, January 16, 1925.
McGeath to resign, "although . . . other reasons could well be offered." A report on a visit to McGeath by Fields and Webb revealed that the county secretary was extremely reluctant to step down and became quite angry at the suggestion. On top of this, a number of his supporters petitioned for his retention -- without Board supervision. McGeath's partisans had also been "active in arousing antagonism and promoting opposition," making it impossible to replace him for another six months, when the new school year began in September. From the reports of the participants, it can be assumed that McGeath's contentiousness and defiance were among those "other reasons" that Webb had mentioned. 11

On the other hand, studies showed that the city was quickly encroaching upon these towns anyway. As Houston took them in, the responsibility for the work would transfer from the county branch -- if it remained operational (it did not) -- to the boys' department, since "practically all of our county work has been carried on through the schools." Whether McGeath had been agreeable, either personally or professionally, ultimately would not

11 General Secretary, March 18, 1927; Minutes, February 18, 1927, March 18, 1927.
have mattered because Houston's growth in itself would have eliminated the need for his position.\textsuperscript{12}

Indeed. In this period Houston achieved urban maturity. Though the major components of people, finance, transportation, and industry had all been in place or gathering steam for some time, it was not until the 1920s that these cogs meshed to thrust Houston toward a position of prominence nationally and internationally. Between 1923 and 1926 population estimates surged from just under 140,000 to almost 285,000. At the end of this decade Houston had established itself as a major shipping center, thanks not only to the Ship Channel -- the sixth-busiest port in the country -- but also to the city's position as the American oil and cotton capitol. These developments necessitated the availability of tremendous amounts of money. Inevitably the growth in all these areas meant that the city itself had to grow, absorbing communities such as Houston Heights to the north and west and Harrisburg to the south and east.\textsuperscript{13}

None of this growth was lost on the YMCA. Keenly aware of what was happening around it, the association kept in step or caught up with what the city and the

\textsuperscript{12} General Secretary, March 18, 1927.

national YMCA movement were doing. Typical YMCA reactions to concerns such as boys' work, adult education, industry, finances, and the local association's relationship to the national movement all manifested a recognition that the city and the local association could aspire to a leadership role in meeting the problems of urban growth. Whether they would or not was another matter.

Through the 1920s, boys' work grew from a successful building-based program to a literally city-wide program that attempted to reach every male between the ages of nine and seventeen years. While the building-based activities of structured games, sports, and Bible classes remained as popular as ever, it was the department's work in the public schools and Newsboys Club that brought the YMCA to so many more youngsters than it had ever reached before. Through all of its programs in and out of the building, the department estimated that it contacted more than 5,000 "in actual program groups" and felt that this number was conservative.14

Public school work centered upon Hi-Y clubs for junior high and high school boys. Nationally Hi-Y and its emphasis on "clean speech, clean sports, clean

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14 Membership Policy for the Boys' Department, ca. February 1926; Reports of the Boys' Department, May 20, 1927.
scholarship and clean living" started in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in 1911. When it arrived in Houston eight years later, it quickly met with success. Central and Houston Heights high schools adopted Hi-Y first among the city's six white senior high schools, while blacks lobbied to organize a group for their own high school. By February 1920 Hi-Ys had been installed in all the white high schools, the black high school, and three junior high schools.15

Hi-Y's obvious popularity lay in its simple strategy: to provide wholesome activities in a familiar environment of "natural groupings" of boys. To ensure better membership, clubs were not activated until after the football season ended each fall. Postponing the start of Hi-Y activities eliminated any division of loyalties that might have come about, but it also implicitly admitted that football might have commanded more respect. In this setting, typical association activities such as group athletics, Bible classes (counter to national trends), and educational tours filled most of the schedule. Hi-Y, in cooperation with Rotary and other civic groups, also took the time to offer these boys on the edge on manhood

15 Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A., p. 467; Policy for the Boys' Department for the year ending May 31, 1919; Boys' Department, February 11, 1920.
personal and group vocational guidance. Whether in the building or in the field, the YMCA through Hi-Y attempted to prepare boys for the reality of the workday world that awaited most of them upon their high school graduation.\footnote{Hopkins, \textit{History of the Y.M.C.A.}, p. 551; Reports of the Boys' Secretary, April 10, 1919; Boys' Department [for] October 1920, December 15, 1928.}

Parallel to Hi-Y in intent were the Employed Boys Brotherhoods. Brotherhoods had the same fundamental program as Hi-Y, but stressed vocational guidance, thrift, school attendance if possible and good relations with employers. Sponsorship for the brotherhoods fell upon the employers. Because employers did not show the same level of interest in sponsoring the brotherhoods as the association did in supporting Hi-Y, the employed boys brotherhoods did not meet as regularly or participate in the variety of activities that Hi-Y did. "Hundreds of 'Human Interest' tales," however, attested to the uplifting character of the brotherhood. A characteristic tale related the story of a sixteen-year-old bellhop victimized by liquor in Prohibition-era Houston. "A source of great grief" to his widowed mother, he drunkenly stumbled into a "Club meeting" one evening. Because the boy was unable to get home safely alone, the secretary had to drive him. At the very next meeting the young man showed
up sober and participated in a discussion on the virtues of thrift. As a result the prodigal opened a bank account with money saved instead of squandered on drinking and used his savings to buy a small house for his mother and himself. He even planned to join a church in the near future. Admittedly not every brotherhood member experienced such a profound conversion, though the purpose of such stories was to demonstrate just how valuable association activities for working boys could be. 17

Despite the brotherhood's worthy accomplishments, the Newsboys' Club proved more consistent in its assistance of Houston's working youngsters. Though officially an entity of the boys' department, the club's administration was self-contained in that it operated in many ways like a branch. It had its own secretary and rooms as well as a separate budget. From the outset membership grew, climbing steadily over the years. While the rest of the association might occasionally face a membership plateau in this period, the Newsboys' Club never did. Seventy-nine joined in the first month, and this rose to almost 400 by the end of 1920. By the start of the next decade this number had swelled to nearly 1,500 boys. Financial support came not only from donations of the

Board, which seemed to regard the club as a pet project, but also from the Post, Chronicle, and the city of Houston. On top of the usual boys' program, the newsboys -- a designation that also included bootblacks, errand boys and servants -- received medical attention and a place to sleep if needed.\footnote{Boys' Department, [for] December 1919, [for] October 1919; Reports of the Newsboys' Club, February 4, 1921, February 12, 1920, December 2, 1920, [for] October 1926; Policy Program for the Newsboys' Club [for 1927]; Report of the Expansion Committee, May 17, 1927.}

The association used many of its normal activities for the newsboys but in the interest of their special needs, modified or enhanced the program. While all boys' groups might hear lecturers, the newsboys were treated to figures such as Ernest Thompson Seton, one of the first advocates of specialized boys activities, and to cowboy philosopher Will Rogers. Like every area of the association, the Newsboys' Club held scores of Bible classes and religious meetings. This group of boys, however, did not flock to these events with the same apparent eagerness as others. "We do not believe there is a religious leader or speaker in Houston who could get these boys out on Sunday afternoon without either a feed, a picture show, or a promise of a swim," the secretary declared. He did not want to break the Sabbath, but he felt that maybe a
"Sunday swim might help religious work." No other report reviewed in any department approaches this one in terms of such a suggestion (which the Board failed to note in its minutes). Nevertheless the Board remained committed to the Newsboys' Club and probably gave its worthiest service through it.  

More expansive and very nearly as worthy were the hopes placed on Camp Ross S. Sterling, Jr. After years of contemplation about a permanent camp site, the Board finally pursued the matter in the early 1920s. Potential sites included San Leon and Bay View, just below Kemah on Galveston Bay. The owner of the Bay View plot even offered the property as a gift, but the terms, which included assuming several thousand dollars in loans, were unacceptable. In October 1923 Board member Ross S. Sterling solved the problem by donating sixteen and a half acres on Houston Point near Cedar Creek in the Baytown area as a memorial to his late son. Subsequent gifts from Sterling along with surplus supplies from the army's Camp Logan equipped the camp with buildings and the necessary hardware.  

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20 Minutes, May 12, 1922, October 10, 1923, May 15, 1924; Boys' Department [for] May 1922; General Secretary, September 14, 1923.
Opened in the summer of 1924, the camp was an immediate success. Typical seasons lasted from June until late August. As in previous years, the camp had sessions for boys' department members, newsboys, and other groups. Isolated outbreaks of serious diseases, including polio, curtailed attendance in two seasons, as did the opening of an Episcopal church camp. Still Camp Sterling overcame both disease and competition to retain a strong and faithful following. Two factors account for this, one being the generosity of association friends, the other being the camp's program. Sterling himself gave quite liberally and frequently, usually land and buildings. The camp also never lacked for boats, kitchen equipment or even horses. All of these items magically seemed to appear for the camp's disposal. With such equipment the association easily put on a first-rate program. Until the association purchased another site for its primary camp in the late 1940s, Camp Ross Sterling Jr. remained a showpiece for the Houston YMCA.²¹

Equally as impressive as the association's devotion to wholesome recreation was its continuing commitment to education. Efforts to serve men and boys met with varying degrees of success, but all attempts demonstrated a

²¹ General Secretary, September 21, 1928, March 16, 1928, June 13, 1924; Boys' Department, June 12, 1925.
tendency toward increased institutionalism. Classes were no longer enough; any attempt to mold minds had to be through an organized school.

A preparatory school was the least successful of these efforts. From 1920 to 1923 the association controlled a private preparatory high school on a year-to-year basis. Like other YMCA failures of the period, it showed some potential and died from low enrollment and mounting debt. The Board hoped to avoid the latter cause by placing responsibility for the school's finances on the shoulders of a superintendent, but it could not find men skilled both in education and management. Though attendance peaked at forty-one, headmasters probably found it difficult to balance accounts with more typical enrollments of fourteen students.22

Classes for adults proved more popular. Mainstays such as salesmanship and public speaking brought in ever increasing numbers to the Houston School of Technology and the School of Commerce. These institutions, of which the School of Technology was dominant, grew out of the YMCA's position as an educational force in the city and also as a reaction to loss of control over the local

22 General Secretary, May 14, 1920; Minutes, April 9, 1921; Report of the Prep School Headmaster, April 14, 1922; Reports of the Education Committee, December 15, 1922.
University of Texas extension course program. After the university ended its two-year affiliation with the association in 1922, the educational department responded by offering its own business administration curriculum through the School of Commerce. Though the relationship between the more broadly-based School of Technology and the commerce school never seems to have been explicitly stated, the latter apparently absorbed the former.  

The YMCA's most important educational development of the era was the creation of the South Texas School of Law. The association had offered law courses since 1915, and by 1923 enough demand had developed to justify a law school. As with the schools of commerce and technology, the law school was designed for working men who wanted to improve their situation. "The school will make its appeal to those young and ambitious men who desire a high grade legal training but are unable to give up their employment and spend three years in a University." Instead students would spend three nights per week over a four-year period to attain an LL. B. degree. Thus aspiring attorneys could continue to work while staying in Houston instead of having to go to the University of Texas at Austin or

23 Education Committee, September 13, 1922, August 30, 1922; Reports of the Education Department, July 1923.
Baylor University in Waco, then the only other law schools in the state. 24

The Houston association followed the example of other law schools and YMCAs in establishing South Texas School of Law. Similar programs in the Minneapolis, Cincinnati, and Detroit associations used prominent local lawyers as instructors and accepted only those students who had at least graduated from high school. Special cases for admission could be judged by the dean. In Houston the faculty and Board of Governors included the city's best known jurists. Federal judges J. C. Hutcheson and T. M. Kennerly and attorneys William A. Vinson and James A. Elkins all offered their services to the school. The school's dean, John E. Townes, had been a professor and dean of the law school at the University of Texas. By 1928 this group had guided students so well that the Texas Supreme Court exempted South Texas School of Law students from the state bar examination. This action put the school on a par with the University of Texas, a comparison that spurred applications as well as pride,

24 General Secretary, January 8, 1915; Education Department, July 1923; Proposal to Launch a Law School in Connection with the Houston School of Technology, ca. Spring 1923.
"plac[ing] us before the world as a first class school."\textsuperscript{25}

The educational department was in some ways the most innovative branch of the association. This is particularly true in regard to the role of women. The earliest discussion of women in department classes came in 1920, when several women enrolled in the University of Texas extension courses. Some Board members felt "such a move was a departure from the fundamental basis of [the] Y," and recommended that the women take similar courses at the YWCA. Within the next year though, women gained admission into a broad range of YMCA courses and were also recruited by the law school from the start. However, except for reports urging greater cooperation between the YMCA and YWCA, these courses remained the limit of YMCA work with women during this period.\textsuperscript{26}

Education and boys' work were not the only programs to expand during the 1920s. Industrial extension work blossomed from the noon shop meetings of the previous decade into a two-secretary department serving 8,000 workers in fifteen plants. Houston Compress Company, a

\textsuperscript{25} Law School Proposal; Education Department, May 11, 1923, December 12, 1928.

\textsuperscript{26} Minutes, September 17, 1920, September 9, 1921; General Secretary, August 27, 1920; Education Department, August 31, 1923.
cotton processing plant owned by Board member and Clayton-Anderson co-founder Ben Clayton, asked the Board to hire a secretary to work with that firm's men. Robert G. MacLennan of Standardville, Utah, joined the staff in August 1923 in this capacity. The secretary found the work difficult. White foremen and office workers as well as Mexican and black laborers were openly suspicious, "looking for the 'nigger in the woodpile' from the start." While trying "to promote the spiritual, economic, social and physical welfare of the employees and of the plant as a whole," MacLennan found the only "community of interest" among "a very small minority of the men who can consider their positions as having the possibilities of being permanent." He noted that for most employees "leisure time, at least, is applied to the endless task of weighing and reweighing . . . chances of surviving the next cut in the pay roll." With a huge turnover because of the seasonal nature of the cotton industry, the number of employees ranged from 500 to 1200. Before he could successfully implement "a four square 'Y' program," MacLennan had to gain employee trust, and this he accomplished by actively assisting in employment placement for as many as twenty-five employees per week. With trust
gained, the secretary could establish the industrial program.27

For the most part, MacLennan followed the prescribed program of the International Committee. This blueprint stressed the importance of athletics, "Americanization" for foreign-born workers, noon-hour educational meetings, religious work and music for employees. A network of volunteers, mostly Board members and compress foremen, coordinated the effort. "As the men naturally fall into three distinct groups -- American, Negro and Mexican -- activities will be duplicated as far as possible in each unit," and were, with "appropriate" variations in program content. These differences reflected both MacLennan's personal outlook and the popular views of the day. Anglo-Saxon whites, for example, organized into Foremen's clubs that had their own athletic leagues and leadership discussion groups. For Mexicans, with their "child's conception of economic values" and "very little initiative," thrift campaigns were too advanced for the moment, though English courses and sports worked well. With blacks, on the other hand, savings plans worked well, though MacLennan believed "the South's diagnosis of the

27 Reports of the Industrial Department, April 22, 1927, December 12, 1923; Report of the Houston Compress Company Secretary, November 25, 1927; General Secretary, August 14, 1923.
negro mentality is comprehensive." To take advantage of this supposedly shiftless, carefree, but innately rhythmic nature -- that of the "Sambo" depicted in contemporary historical and sociological literature -- the secretary planned more athletic teams and musical ensembles. Other basic features such as Bible classes, educational lectures, and social meetings were common to all groups, though there were few common interracial interests. Once basic suspicions relaxed, the program proved successful. By late 1924 MacLennan had been promoted to city-wide industrial secretary, while Houston Compress continued to support its own secretary.28

As the program spread to other plants, the activities first attempted at Houston Compress remained mainstays of the program, as did the initial suspicions and distrust. Though "[t]he attitude of industry as a whole is increasingly favorable," MacLennan faced opposition at most new sites. By showing concern for occupational

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stability and safety through "Eye Conservation Weeks" and "Safety First" campaigns, the secretary gained the confidence of workers. With their support he implemented the typical aspects of the four-fold program. With these successes management felt comfortable granting its assent. "Noon-day meetings are of inestimable value," wrote Louis Stadler, president of Magnolia Paper. Stadler noted the positive effect the meetings had on plant morale and improvements in production and efficiency, emphasizing "we are all 100% for the Y.M.C.A."29

Outside of the plant, MacLennan promoted extension work for the residential areas in the Fifth Ward industrial section. As always, the major portion of the extension work was conducted among boys. More than 100 youths joined the Fifth Ward Knot Hole Gang, a group that sponsored children's admissions to Houston Buffaloes minor league baseball games. Thirty-three neighborhood Boy Scouts hiked and camped out, while twenty boys and girls attended the Sunday Evening Junior Young People's Service League of Christian Endeavor. Much greater numbers turned out for area social gatherings. MacLennan reported that as many as 1,000 of the 3,000 people in the

29 Industrial Department, period ending January 21, 1927, January 18, 1928; Letter, Lewis Stadler to Gavin Ulmer, May 8, 1928.
Fifth Ward came to the Friday afternoon parties at Hennessy Park. Obviously the industrial department managed to break down the "stubborn opposition" it had come up against in the past in "this most inexhaustible and fertile field."\(^{30}\)

Undoubtedly, enlarged service to a steadily rising pool of potential constituents is the key theme for the Houston YMCA's development during this period. Those members served in the building continued to be a central concern, but simply touching the lives of as many people as possible shared the spotlight. The industrial work might reach 8,000 in fifteen plants, but there were still almost 60,000 more men employed in nearly 600 other plants. Along the same line the boys' department counted more than 5,000 participants in its various programs, though it felt that this total could easily be doubled. Unlike the industrial department, the boys' work had competition from other agencies such as the Boy Scouts, Young Men's Hebrew Association, and the boys' department of the Catholic Young Men's Association for the more than 20,000 boys in the city. Most likely the YMCA was the most popular agency, as indicated by its own statistics,

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\(^{30}\) Industrial Department, April 23, 1926, October 20, 1926, period of January 15-February 18, 1926, period of March 4-18, 1926.
or at least the best known. One measure of this was attendance reports from the annual YMCA-sponsored city-wide "Father and Son Week" gatherings. Started in 1919 to promote closer father-son relationships, the program grew from twelve banquets held by various service clubs to more than 100 observances in 1928. Held in service clubs and churches and among blacks, Catholics, and Jews, as well as white Protestants, estimated attendance totalled nearly 60,000 men and boys -- more than 20 percent of Houston's overall population for both sexes. Clearly, the YMCA made itself a part of a great many boys' and men's lives during the 1920s.31

Yet, for all of this incredible outreach, there was deep disappointment, especially on the part of the general secretary, that this expansion was not symbolized by the construction of a new central building and several smaller branch buildings. As early as 1924 General Secretary W. C. Paige realized that

[t]he Association is better known in the city today than it ever has been in its history and is touching the lives of more men and boys of the city through its many activities than ever before. Furthermore it is becoming recognized more and more as a leader among the Associations of the state and nation . . . ."

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As a leader of YMCA movement training schools in Estes Park, Colorado, and Hollister, Missouri, Paige met prestigious and progressive secretaries, such as Robert E. Lewis of Cleveland. Lewis pioneered in the industrial work, helped develop father and son events and played an important role in the transition of movement leadership from the International Committee to the National Council. Among leaders such as Lewis, Paige could not help but see that for all of its successes the Houston YMCA could accomplish even more than it had. As far as Paige was concerned, there was no reason the local association should not move into more modern quarters and place branch buildings strategically around the city. Not only was this possible, it was necessary if the association was to keep up with the local population boom.32

The need had become obvious. With building membership stabilized between 2,500 and 3,000, space was at a premium. Two new gymnasiums were added in 1922 and members taxed them to capacity as soon as they opened. Facilities in the boys' department were so run down that they supposedly kept boys from joining. All of this pointed to what General Secretary Frank Fields in 1925 called "the inadequacy of our present equipment, provided

for a city of less than 100,000 people to meet the Christian character-building needs of a city of 250,000." 33

Board members, however, could not bring about the improvements the general secretaries desired. From the time of Paige's statement on the local and national position of the Houston YMCA in 1924 through the end of the decade, the Board mulled over a variety of building campaigns. Only inaction resulted from Board efforts. When Paige suggested that Houston's association take on a campaign comparable to ones that raised $3,000,000 in Saint Louis or $5,000,000 in Detroit, the Board only hesitantly agreed that maybe the time had come for something similar here. Paige's resignation in 1925 to become a National Council secretary probably came about in part because the Board failed to assert itself, thus losing out on property offers and missing promising campaign opportunities. 34

Until his departure Paige served as a constant source of admonition to the Board. His reports regularly accused the Board members of "contracted vision." "A

33 Minutes, April 25, 1922; Boys' Department, January 21, 1927; General Secretary, November 27, 1925.

34 General Secretary, December 12, 1924, September 18, 1925.
progressive growing city like Houston is a constant challenge to an organization like the Y.M.C.A. to broaden its vision and speed up its program of service," he wrote. This statement set up his question: "[s]hall we rise to our obligation and opportunities in this great day?" Paige's final injunction to the Board was for it to have the foresight to expand in "the name of our Lord."35

Frank Fields, Paige's successor, took up where Paige left off. As associate general secretary prior to his promotion Fields knew with whom and what he was dealing. "If I am able to judge the mettle of this Board at all it is not a backward looking Board . . . . In brief, I understand you expect to go forward and occupy the field in this astonishingly fast growing city." Slowly but sporadically the Board crept forward. By 1927 it had become "the sense of this Board that we set about at once to devise plans for a definite development this year." That spring an expansion committee reported that a campaign with a goal of between $1,200,000 and $1,700,000 would take place in the spring of 1928. The committee also recommended that another committee be appointed to approach Board members Ross Sterling, co-founder of Humble Oil (now known as Exxon) and publisher of the

35 General Secretary, August 21, 1925, May 27, 1925, October 16, 1925.
Houston Post, and local business magnates Ben Clayton and Will Hogg to lead the drive. With luck the association would at least be able to visualize a new branch building and one or two branch buildings within the foreseeable future.36

Predictably, snags developed. Not until January 1928 did the Board discuss the impact of the upcoming Democratic National Convention. With much local money normally available for a campaign tied up in the convention, some Board members questioned the advisability of a canvass. Meanwhile, no one had contacted Will Hogg about leading the campaign. Just a few months later William A. Wilson, Board president for twenty-five years, died suddenly. None of the several men elected to succeed him accepted, leaving Board vice president Gavin Ulmer as acting president for the next four years. Needless to say, these circumstances pushed the campaign back even farther. Despite the setbacks E. L. Mogge of the National Council still agreed to supervise the campaign, as he had since 1924.37

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36 General Secretary, November 27, 1925; Minutes, March 8, 1927; Expansion Committee Report, May 17, 1927.

37 Minutes, January 20, 1928, March 6, 1928, June 25, 1928, September 14, 1928, September 21, 1928, October 19, 1928; General Secretary, June 22, 1928.
To the chagrin of the Board, the spring of 1929 arrived as scheduled with the fundraising campaign still struggling. M. C. Williams, head of the National Council Financial Service Bureau, had several recommendations for the impending campaign. First of all, the Board should reaffirm that it indeed wanted to go ahead. Secondly, the Board had to decide on a building site and purchase it. After these items had been taken care of, large gifts should be quietly canvassed. Finally the popular campaign would start in early 1930. As far as Williams was concerned, the association was in good shape except for the "inadequate and largely worn out" building. Moreover, business conditions appeared strong, the Board seemed enthusiastic and the campaigns of the Faith Home and Saint Paul's Methodist Church would only interfere to a limited extent. But the Board was unwilling to proceed without Will Hogg, who was in Europe. While the association waited, the Board instructed Fields in August 1929 to write Mogge that his services would be needed in March or April 1930. Hogg, still overseas, did not reply to association cables. In October Fields met with Jesse Jones about leading the campaign. The Chronicle publisher and financial kingpin said that he was interested, but "expressed doubt whether this was the opportune time to launch such a project." In a few more weeks, the great Crash of 1929 removed all doubt. No "opportune time"
presented itself for a campaign for the next five years. In the early 1930s the Houston association -- and the YMCA movement -- worried more about survival than it did expansion.\footnote{38}

For the better part of a decade the Board had let chance after chance for campaigns slip away. By the time it got around actually to organizing a canvass, the financial disaster of the Depression made the attempt impossible. Perhaps the YMCA was actually better off not having conducted a drive in 1928 or 1929. Very probably subscriptions pledged in those years would never have come in, leaving the association in a worse position than it actually was in by the start of the new decade.

Ironically, all these years of indecision occurred during the first great boom of centralized multiorganizational community fund raising. Community Chests, serving as a central fund raiser for local relief, charity and service organizations, developed as the peace time successor to the cooperative fund raising efforts of World War One. The YMCA at first avoided inclusion in the Chest. Many leaders feared that such an affiliation would inhibit the movement's ability to conduct its own campaigns and compromise the associations' financial

\footnote{38 Minutes, February 15, 1929, February 20, 1929, August 16, 1929, October 18, 1929.}
independence. Nevertheless, by 1925 YMCAs in seventy-seven of 101 Chest cities participated in the program.  

Secretary Paige first mentioned the possibility of a Community Chest program in Houston in January 1921. When this fell through, the association organized its own $30,000 drive. After two more abortive attempts in January and October 1922, the Chest finally successfully launched a $350,000 campaign in December 1922. The association participated eagerly as the recipient of $39,500. Paige urged the Board to support and work with the Chest, as he believed that "it will be profitable from the Association standpoint to render this service." Two-and-a-half years later in the summer of 1925 Paige felt that this service was about to pay off since "with two of our directors on the Board of Trustees of the chest, the YMCA ought to be assured of considerate treatment this coming year."  

Obviously, the Houston YMCA had seen the advantages of supplementing its fund raising through participation  

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40 General Secretary, January 14, 1921, October 13, 1922, December 15, 1922, August 21, 1925.
in the Community Chest and felt few of the qualms that associations elsewhere did. At least part of this willingness can be attributed to Paige's relationship with Robert Lewis, secretary of the progressive Cleveland YMCA. Lewis was one of the movement's few advocates of federated fund raising in the late 1910s and early 1920s. After meeting with Lewis in Estes Park in the summer of 1920, Paige pushed the Board to adopt several programs that Lewis advanced. With this in mind it becomes clear why Paige encouraged the Board to participate in the local Community Chest.\textsuperscript{41}

The Chest's success, though initially retarded, suggests that Houstonians regarded philanthropy as worthy of their consideration and money. Considering the $30,000 or $50,000 campaign the Board always seemed to be attempting, the Board must have believed that residents would give to the YMCA above and beyond what they gave to the Chest. One source on giving during the period demonstrates that increased public awareness of social needs and opportunities for philanthropy did stimulate donations despite competition between federated and individual programs. These circumstances make apparent that the

\textsuperscript{41} Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A., p. 601; General Secretary, September 10, 1920.
Board wasted years of opportunities to organize and execute its building canvass.42

Tremendous accomplishments -- and failures of equal magnitude -- marked the performance of the Houston YMCA in the 1920s. Yet the failures did not discourage the association. While branches and campaigns fell through, the YMCA solidified its programs and reached more Houstonians than it ever had before. The success of an organization that could even claim to reach some 60,000 residents out of 280,000 through one program alone must be acknowledged regardless of its shortcomings. And in the face of different frustrations, the Houston YMCA overcame the difficulties of this decade.

42 Cutlip, Fund Raising, pp. 208, 213.
CHAPTER SIX

FROM RETRENCHMENT TO EXPANSION

The reality of the Depression cleared any illusions about achievements and failures that the association might have had in 1930. Strict attention to financial detail over the next several years, however, allowed the YMCA first to contemplate and then to realize its wish since the 1920s: a new central building. In the meantime the association had to consolidate its existing programs as well as absorb the impact that the Depression had upon it and Houston. Because careful management during the Depression actually strengthened the association's financial position, the YMCA was able to initiate significant extension work in the years before World War II. Acutely aware that the Depression could destroy it, the association adopted conservative policies in terms of its outlook, programs, and finances in order to weather the maelstrom around it.

Some of this upheaval resulted from gradual but profound shifts and stresses in the YMCA movement. From the time of World War I through the early 1930s the movement examined itself both structurally and
philosophically. This led to two epochal events in the history of the American movement: first, the National Council replaced the International Committee, and second, the movement repealed the evangelical test as the basis for membership. Though the latter change had a potentially greater effect than the former on the Houston association, both deserve at least brief discussion.

Pressures between the growing urban associations and the seemingly static International Committee culminated in the creation of the National Council at the 1923 convention in Cleveland. Over time the International Committee had lost touch with many of the larger and increasingly more independent city associations. These larger YMCAs in turn resented the lack of intercourse with an unresponsive and unwieldy central organization. It was inevitable that these conflicts would have to be resolved.

The International Committee developed out of the executive committee that succeeded the Confederation at the outset of the Civil War. In this way it became the closest thing the movement had to an information clearinghouse and program consultant. Befitting such an agency, nationally prominent laymen determined its policies and selected a staff from the cream of the secretarial force. The International Committee eventually assumed responsibility not only for the initiation and
oversight of the multitude of domestic programs but for association foreign work as well. As it collected pledges donated by local associations and from important businessmen and committee members (including John Wanamaker and Cornelius Vanderbilt), the committee could afford to increase both its programs and manpower. Consolidation of its lay support, secretarial staff, and financial strength allowed the International Committee to increase its influence over almost all aspects of association work. However, as its power increased over time, it became more departmentalized with little communication between the various operations. This splintering led not only to internal divisions but also to creeping stagnation by the turn of the twentieth century.¹

Meanwhile, many of the larger city associations prospered, relatively unconcerned with the International Committee. Located in cities such as Chicago, Saint Louis, Philadelphia, and New York (which, ironically, housed the committee for several years), these YMCAs did their own very successful extension work. Starting with New York in 1887, associations gathered their growing number of branches into metropolitan organizations.

Usually this meant that the controlling Board of the central building assumed authority over the outlying branches. Although much of the attention of the period focused on the YMCA's foreign work, 74 percent of the total membership belonged to domestic city associations. These associations felt more and more that their concerns were unheard by the International Committee and the annual conventions, which the International Committee dominated. In addition, many laymen felt that the secretarial force exercised too much control over the movement's affairs instead of merely implementing and supervising the various programs. Many laymen felt that planning growth and direction was more their concern than that of the secretaries. World War I postponed planned reforms that the committee meant to assuage the city associations and laymen, leaving the reforms to be dealt with at some future date.\(^2\)

The issues of communication in the movement and lay versus secretarial control came to a head in the early 1920s. The International Committee had been severely criticized for supposed profiteering in the operation of

\(^2\) Ibid., pp. 419, 421-26, 437, 439. This overview of the National Council's evolution is admittedly superficial and treats only the most obvious issues. For an exceedingly thorough review, see Hopkins, chapter 10, pp. 408-51.
YMCA canteens in France during the war. This criticism caused the committee to evaluate itself and its operations and helped open the channels for input from the outside. Conditions were now conducive to discussion of what amounted to the fate of the International Committee. After a few years of intense study of the issues involved, and with the future control of the movement, participants at the 1923 convention in Cleveland adopted a new constitution. The document provided for greater participation and power for city association laymen in the new National Council and at conventions. It also streamlined the organization of the domestic work, foreign work, secretarial and program services. Though the new setup did not please everybody, it has persisted as the fundamental outline of the YMCA movement's operation since its ratification.\(^3\)

The new constitution and system of governance did not include immediate revision of the evangelical membership standard. Some schemes did attempt to link the governance system to the membership standard, but none of these plans succeeded. The evangelical test did outlast the International Committee, but not by long. As noted previously, the evangelical basis for membership had

\(^3\) Ibid., pp. 437-38, fn. 78, p. 770.
eroded under such influences as the social gospel, the impact of World War I and urban population growth. Though the Houston association tenaciously clung to its commitment to evangelism, local secretaries had admitted since the 1900s that as a standard of membership, evangelism had lost its validity despite its continued emphasis in practically all programs. Nationally, the movement recognized the obsolescence of the Portland Test by the early 1920s. By this time many associations had started to experiment with new bases of membership. After several years of consideration about how to develop a new statement of purpose, the movement chose the following formulation:

The Young Men's Christian Association we regard as being, in its essential genius, a world-wide fellowship of men and boys united by a common loyalty to Jesus Christ for the purpose of building Christian personality and a Christian society.

Overwhelmingly adopted at the Cleveland convention of 1931, this statement remains the foundation of YMCA work. Two years later the National Council affirmed "that each Association might determine the qualifications of its voting members and Boards of control, provided only that such members 'be in accord with the purposes, ideals and spirit of the Y.M.C.A.'" The new standards by no means

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4 Ibid., pp. 520-21.
divorced the movement from Christianity. Instead, the new formulations removed the requirement of evangelical church membership for full participation in the association. Christian emphasis would remain by trying to serve more men in the name of Jesus.

Shortly after the Cleveland convention accepted the new statement of purpose, the Board of Directors of the Houston association explicitly reaffirmed the older evangelical test.\(^5\) Despite twenty-five years of local secretarial testimony to the contrary and the movement's new mandate, the Board nevertheless adhered to its belief in the legitimacy of the evangelical basis of membership. Indeed, retention of the Portland Test was an allowable choice for the Board. Though much narrower than the new basis and policies, the local choice was undeniably among the Board's options. The movement had not decreed that all associations must open their membership, but simply that they could. For all of the tumult, both in the movement and throughout society at the time, this reaction on the part of the Board provided the local association with an anchor of continuity in a storm of change.

Concurrent with its decision to retain the substance of the Portland Test, the Houston Board of Directors

\(^5\) Minutes of the Board of Directors, March 31, 1932.
adopted equally conservative measures to face the harsh financial realities of the Depression. The onset of the Depression brought with it prompt recognition of the need for financial restraint as well as the unpleasant possibility of the association's ultimate demise. For 1929 the Board budgeted $145,280 in income, more than $49,000 of which it had earmarked from Community Chest funds. The association also had an accumulated debt of $8,400. Two years later the budget remained practically unchanged. A comprehensive financial analysis conducted in September 1931, however, projected only $135,798 in income with a deficit ranging between $1,000 and $1,500.\(^6\) In other words the association saw its actual income reduced by 6 percent over a two-year period.

All areas of operation faced cuts of some type, but the professional secretarial force and other staff members felt the budget contractions most severely. For the fiscal year 1932 the association axed total salaries paid from $62,386 to $52,214 — more than 16 percent.\(^7\) Part of this was the result of YMCA compliance with Community Chest guidelines specifying salary cuts among member agency staff members, but the association mandated

\(^{6}\) Minutes, January 18, 1929, May 24, 1929; Analysis Financial Study January - August 1931.

\(^{7}\) Minutes, October 23, 1931.
further cuts on its own. The association discontinued industrial work at this time, both because of the expense and the lack of industrial workers to serve. With these measures in place the association could apply the savings toward its two largest needs, operating expenses and debt retirement. The association felt the impact of the measures quickly. By January 1932 the finance committee reported that it was pleased with the way the association was conducting its business but realized that maintaining such strict budgets for years to come would be impossible and that necessary repairs to both plant and equipment, such as patching and painting cracks in walls, had already become a luxury. 8

In the midst of restructuring the budget, the Board agreed that the white association should reabsorb the black YMCA. The black association had operated independently since its rejected the Board's oversight in 1921. Over the intervening period the Board of Directors of the white YMCA had occasionally authorized secretarial assistance but denied any formal sanction of the black YMCA's activities. The few reports available for the period indicate that the black YMCA had a rather meager existence trying to provide a full program with extremely

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limited resources out of a building at Bagby and Dallas. By 1930 there was seemingly mutual agreement that the black association (to be known as the Bagby Street branch from then until it moved to new quarters twenty-five years later), should come back under the Board's sponsorship. The Board conditioned the terms by insisting that the Community Chest maintain its support of $400 per month to the branch, which it apparently did. There is little doubt that without support from the Board and Community Chest the black YMCA would have folded. 9

Though healthy enough to take in the black branch, the association quite obviously felt the financial constrictions. In this way the Houston association's problems mirrored those of other social service agencies. Almost all depended on wealthy individuals to lead and contribute to fundraising. Many benefactors grew reluctant to donate time or money, and this had a predictable impact on canvassing. Agencies such as the YMCA were doubly bound in that not only had their income plummeted, but the public continued to demand more from them in services. Before the implementation of the myriad New Deal

programs, the prevailing worldview held that relief efforts were a private, local matter outside the realm of the federal government. Dropoffs in traditional programs proved as debilitating to the YMCA as the growing disparity between increasing expectations and decreasing income. The Board remarked in December 1930 that membership, and with it the physical department and dormitories, had "suffered seriously from the industrial and business depression in the city." Though statistics indicate that men's membership dropped only by eighteen, boys' memberships fell by nearly ninety and almost all income-producing programs lost ground. The decline totalled more than $5,300 for the first eight months of 1931.10

Despite its own hardships in the early 1930s the association was not insensitive to the miseries of others. The YMCA tried to continue to offer the same range of programs that it always had as well as deal with the economically and physically displaced, although the work with the Depression's victims did not occur immediately. In November 1930 the Board decided that "the

Association should not modify its position as a character building institution and take up the cause of relief" for Houston's homeless men. Ten months later the association had modified its position. The Board's minutes reflect that the association was losing income by having twenty to fifty dormitory rooms empty every day. Additionally many beds that were slept in were unpaid for by "those who were taken in as charity or good will patients and those whose accounts became bad -- frequently due to loss of employment." As part of a plan on the part of a Mayor's Committee the association agreed, subject to its own terms, "to share this winter [1931-32] in the problem of transient young men." General Secretary Frank Fields also recommended that the association issue memberships "to bonified [sic] Houston men who are unemployed." Clearly, the YMCA recognized its role as part of the solution to the problems of the Depression.11

Much of the retrenchment witnessed by the association seems at odds with the standard interpretation that Houston never "felt the full force of the national business recession." Houston as a whole may not have experienced the brunt of the disaster, but YMCA secretaries came into contact every day with men who had no beds

11 Minutes, November 8, 1930, September 22, 1931, November 22, 1932; Analysis Financial Study.
and no jobs. Simply because Jesse Jones was influential enough to keep the banks afloat did not mean that average Houstonians did not suffer. At the time YMCA dormitories had the reputation of being "homes away from home," where a young man making his start as an office worker or professional -- the same group the association targeted for membership -- could establish a base. These men were not the typically down and out but the hopefully up and coming. If the Depression had such an impact on this group, its toll upon the already impoverished must have been devastating, even in a city where all the banks survived. As late as 1937 the Board reported that the Community Chest had difficulty providing the association with its full allocation because a portion of the funds was needed for community relief efforts. This suggests that not only did the Depression have an impact on Houston, but that it lingered as well.12

The Houston association managed to overcome the crises that the Depression presented because of its determination to endure. Its willingness to make do with less was the key to the YMCA's survival. The austerity programs allowed the association to continue its basic

programs while also helping in the retirement of debts. The elimination of unnecessary expenses and drastic salary cuts allowed the association to keep its budget under control and restore the YMCA to financial health. By June 1934 the Board was able to record that "for the first time in years the current bills of the Association were all paid up to date." To show its pleasure with the spartan management regimen of the past several years, the Board considered "salary adjustments" for the secretarial staff. At the end of that summer the outlook was rosy enough that not only did the Board restore all pay cuts, it also approved expansion plans. The Board budgeted for four new secretaries: one for young men and assistants for the boys, newsboys, and education departments. The black branch also pulled through the Depression. As early as June 1933 Dr. F. F. Stone, chairman of the Colored Branch Management Committee, reported that Bagby Street "showed commendable progress in all phases" as its finances were in "reasonably satisfactory condition" and it had also held a successful drive for 500 new members. The branch had even managed to open its own summer camp at Spring Creek the previous year. For the Houston YMCA the worst of the Depression had passed.13

13 Minutes, June 15, 1934, August 29, 1934, June 30, 1933, May 25, 1933.
Financially the YMCA was as healthy as it had ever been. For the first ten months of 1934 income exceeded expenses by almost $8,000 and the dormitory was filled to capacity. Membership climbed back to 2,549 by January 1935, an increase of 20 percent over the same time in 1933. After years of privation the Board was eager to give more attention to the association's future instead of its past. Decisions and discussion regarding the association's financial matters had dominated the Board's minutes since 1930. For a few years after the Houston YMCA's return to relative prosperity the minutes did record more accounts of the activities of the departments. In the six year period between 1934 and 1939, the minutes usually mentioned that the Houston association's volleyball team had captured the national YMCA championship for another consecutive year, although the Board usually seemed confused as to how many straight titles the squad had actually won. Details such as these dot the minutes, but after the Board accepted that the recovery was permanent, most of its effort went into new building and expansion campaigns. 14

Sometimes events involving other matters did catch the Board's attention, though it usually took some sort

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of emergency or chronic problem to spur the Board to action. Of the association's programs, the Newsboys' Club branch probably suffered most from the Board's preoccupation with fiscal affairs. The steadily increasing membership at this branch had started to overburden the facilities as early as 1929. The various suggestions for new quarters that came up from time to time met lukewarm receptions at best. Even after the city nixed renovation plans after the club burned down in April 1932, the Board hesitated to act. More than a year passed before any more discussion of the matter took place, and that entry in the minutes merely noted "unsavory conditions" existed in the facilities the branch rented. Even the county probation officer "urged that better quarters for the boys be secured." Meanwhile the Newsboys' Club committee requested $3,000 to establish another center on Rusk Avenue for Mexican boys, who now comprised 75 percent of club membership. Not until 1938 did the Board acquire a new site for the Newsboys' Club, on Buffalo Bayou near the coliseum. This facility served the branch until 1942, when it moved to a location on Dart Street near the original Jefferson Davis hospital building.15 In this

15 General Secretary, May 24, 1929; Minutes, May 6, 1932, June 17, 1932, November 2, 1932, November 24, 1934, April 15, 1938, March 27, 1942.
case, despite the demonstrated need, the Board's reluctance to deal with the issue caused the problem to linger unresolved for years.

Other association operations appear not to have needed the same sort of attention that the Newsboys' Club did. Camp Ross Sterling, Jr., continued to be a source of pride, although by 1932 the Board started to show more concern about the camp's annual deficit. Though this had not been perceived as a problem in the Twenties, a deficit in any program was a concern in the early 1930s. The Board expressed the need for a management and operation study to determine why the camp ran at such a large loss compared to other YMCA camps, most of which at least came much closer to breaking even. Proposals arose to open the camp to weekend groups during the offseason to generate more revenue. The Board's desire for weekend camping and management studies apparently subsided after totals for the 1933 season showed a $900 surplus, after large expenses for insurance and repairs. Following a $1,000 loss for the summer of 1936, the Board did not renew plans for reports or weekend outings. As long as the summer session drew a good turnout, the Board had few qualms about the camp's operation.  

16 Minutes, September 23, 1932, August 18, 1933, September 15, 1933, September 11, 1936.
Other programs, such as the South Texas School of Law, that were self-sustaining caused little trouble for the Board. The minutes mention the law school substantively in one case when a Texas Supreme Court ruling necessitated some sort of Board response. Typically before the 1930s admissions standards for institutions of higher learning were much less restrictive than they later became. For instance, it was not unusual for someone holding a high school diploma to matriculate in law school. In its revision of certain state bar requirements in 1936, the Texas high court ruled, retroactively, that all law students must have completed one year of college before attending law school. When the ruling was originally promulgated, the Board expected that the ruling might cut into law school attendance, as many students and prospective students had only graduated from high school and bypassed college to work. As expected, registration dipped a little for the fall 1937 term. The real impact hit in December 1937 when the Board discovered that the State Board of Legal Examiners denied some recent graduates licenses because they had not met the college attendance requirement. Edgar E. Townes and A. L. Turner, administrators for the law school, traveled to Austin to meet with the legal examiners. Apparently the parties settled their dispute, as there are no subsequent references to the matter. The decision ultimately had
little effect on the school's attendance, as the school experienced no noteworthy declines in enrollment.17

Interestingly, displays of weak moral character either inside or outside the association merited nearly as much comment from the Board as standard programs. The YMCA had always seen itself as a character building organization, whether in promoting wholesome activities or reacting to external moral dangers. Since the 1910s the YMCA had promoted healthy morals more through its own programs than through explicit attacks on vice in society. Two events before World War I, the embarrassment caused by the fiasco with temperance advocate Len Broughton in the spring of 1911 and the arrival in 1913 of general secretary W. C. Paige, an extremely dynamic, visionary, and nationally prominent secretary, probably had quite a bit to do with this. But by the mid-1930s the Houston association readopted a strong anti-vice stance. Local vice conditions reported by Board member C. F. Carter so disturbed the Board that it suggested investigations by a grand jury and the Council of Social Agencies. The Board even teetered on the edge of political partisanship by endorsing Attorney General James V. Allred for governor on the basis of promises to enforce

17 Minutes, September 15, 1933, October 16, 1936, August 27, 1937, December 17, 1937.
gambling and liquor laws. Internally the Board appointed a committee "to restudy [an] old question to bring our policy up to date, both in dancing and the use of cigarettes in the Association building." The Board also formulated rules for groups participating in physical department activities stating that "no teams [shall be] permitted to appear under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A. which represents or wears [sic] the uniforms of a business institution selling a commodity which is in conflict with the ideals of the Y.M.C.A." 18

One explanation for the association's attack on these social sins is that the Board felt a need to demonstrate that the YMCA was indeed a character-building institution concerned with the morals of society at large. It had for the most part avoided such issues for almost a generation. Now the association felt an urge to show a sense a social responsibility in a more traditional and familiar way than housing the homeless. The Board accepted that homeless men needed what the association could provide. However, the notion of providing direct charity was quite alien for the movement as a whole, and the Houston YMCA was no exception. The Board always felt (and continues to feel) that its primary obligation was

to build Christian character through its programs, not to supply food and shelter. In this context it becomes easier to understand the Board's reaction to the city's vice conditions.

Although it confronted Houston's perceived moral laxity or the isolated problems of the Newsboys' Club or the camp or law school, the Board devoted the bulk of its efforts to launching a new building and expansion program. Initial activity occurred in fits and starts. Board President Gavin Ulmer stated his desire for expansion "in the near future" in January 1935, and a few months later General Secretary Fields reminded the "Board to keep constantly in mind the need for a new building." In the meantime the Board made arrangements with the Community Chest so that the association could pay off its mortgage and make improvements to the existing building. As the mortgage shrank, plans began to grow for a new building campaign.19

The Board unveiled its "Program for the Future 1937-1941" in April 1937. The plan called for new buildings for the central branch, Bagby Street, and a new Heights-West End branch, two buildings for Camp Sterling,

staffed community centers for the North Side-Heights neighborhood and blacks on the North Side; three softball fields; and major increases in the secretarial force for the central branch and for extension projects. Other goals included boosting membership in the central building to 5,000, generally strengthening the South Texas Schools of Law and Commerce, developing a local training center for association secretaries and generating $100,000 in bequests to the association by 1941. Without a doubt the Board's "Program for the Future" outlined the most ambitious and best organized plan the association had devised to that point both in terms of program and plant expansion, and all this despite the lack of any funding proposal. Certainly the Board had not forgotten the results of poor planning from the previous decade. This time the Board already had a concept of how it wanted to expand even if had not put a price on the project. Rather than raise the money and then put it to use, the Board wisely opted to have its master plan in place before soliciting at all.20

The Board quickly put the plan into action. The next request for Community Chest funds included a detailed rationale of proposed expenditures totalling $12,600

20 Minutes, April 28, 1937.
relating to expansion plans. These costs covered the secretarial and program budgets for the extension programs. Shortly following the funding request, the association started searching for candidates to fill the secretarial positions. Both the Board and the chest expressed their pleasure with the "excellent progress" on the part of secretaries at work in the Heights, West End and East End by the fall of 1938.\(^\text{21}\)

In the space of seventeen months, from the original plan to final execution, the association had managed to accomplish what years of wishing had failed to do in the decades before: to extend successfully the YMCA in a formal way into neighborhoods outside of the downtown area. Hi-Y and other groups had reached the children in these parts of Houston and continued to do so, but no program had been able to survive while trying to serve the entire community. The extension work started in the East End in 1938 is now known as the Cossaboom branch, while the West End project is now called the Northwest branch. The Northside extension work did not achieve branch status until 1947 under a subsequent expansion program. The branch now bears the name of M. D. Anderson,

\(^{21}\) Minutes, August 27, 1937, October 29, 1937, September 13, 1938.
whom the association honored in 1956 for his significant contributions to the branch's facilities.\textsuperscript{22}

Fundraising for the capital projects started in earnest in September 1938. Lyman Pierce, one of the movement's patriarchs of fundraising after nearly fifty years in the work, recommended that the main campaign start the next spring. Pierce felt that this would give the association adequate lead time and also pointed out that business leaders across the country forecasted a much stronger business year in 1939. The Board then appointed a building site and campaign policy committee. Board president Gavin Ulmer, attorney Edgar E. Townes, Humble Oil co-founder Walter W. Fondren, Houston Lighting & Power executive Hiram O. Clarke, and businessmen George Simpson and C. F. Carter comprised the committee. The Board charged the committee to formulate an overall campaign strategy as well as coordinate the selection of building sites and arrange for the disposal of the building at Fannin and McKinney. By the end of 1938 the

\textsuperscript{22} Historical Fact Sheet, ca. 1978; Ned Kemp and Clifford Smith, "Report of a Study of the Branches of the Young Men's Christian Association of Houston and Harris County" (unpublished, 1962), p. 20.
group had already started the work to launch its effort.  

The committee wasted little time getting down to business. It found a buyer for the old building at the price of $375,000. The Great Southern Life Insurance Company put up $100,000 in cash with the balance due upon possession of the property. The terms allowed the association thirty months to vacate the premises with an option for twelve more months if necessary. While the committee negotiated the terms of the building sale, Fondren challenged the other members to meet his goal for the fundraising campaign: $1,000,000. Fondren himself pledged $100,000 toward that objective. With this standard in front of it, the committee developed its strategy for generating the funds.

Only weeks after making his offer, Fondren died. Despite this tremendous loss, campaign planning continued. The committee contracted the Financial Service Bureau, the National Council's fundraising arm, to consult on general matters while the committee set out the details. Clarke strongly urged "all Board members to


24 Minutes, December 13, 1938, December 22, 1938.
pledge liberally" and arranged the support of local businessmen Burke Baker and James A. Baker, Jr. This was the second generation of Bakers involved in Houston YMCA building campaigns, as Captain James A. Baker, Sr., had spearheaded the the 1906 effort for the facilities at Fannin and McKinney.25

In addition to soliciting selected friends of the association, Clarke suggested more widespread canvassing techniques. Clarke and the committee overlooked few opportunities. High school boys, who had grown up with the neighborhood Gra-Y and Hi-Y programs, worked the East End and Heights communities. This solicitation strategy showed some perception, as the boys in these areas probably had a better idea of what the YMCA had to offer than adults did, since the localized programs had emphasized work with school children for quite some time before the formation of formal extension and branch work. This technique was also a typical and proven method of attack, as those most familiar with an area or a particular group took responsibility for that portion of the canvass. Blacks solicited in the black community; businessmen approached other businessmen for subscriptions; association Board members and secretaries met with the

25 Minutes, January 6, 1939, February 6, 1939, February 20, 1939, February 27, 1939.
association's allies in local churches. Indeed, after only two Church Cooperative Committee meetings, one with ladies' auxiliaries and another with clergy, the committee had compiled an 8,000 name subscription list.26

These techniques produced tremendous results. Initial reports in May 1939 stated that the campaign had generated more than $1,300,000 in pledges, with more than $1,000,000 in actual subscriptions. Surprisingly, the committee listed only one group as even being close to its fundraising quota. Blacks raised 120 percent of their goal, but other teams made only 81 percent and initial gifts reached only 59 percent. Though well beyond Fondren's goal, the committee decided to raise $50,000 more to cover all of the items on its wish list, which totaled $1,600,000. This sum included a lot for a completely furnished new building at a cost of $1,125,000; $75,000 for new buildings for the East, West and North Side branches; $185,000 for the new black branch building; $10,000 each for a Newsboys branch building and improvements to Camp Sterling; and $70,000 to cover various contingent and collection costs. When no large gifts appeared forthcoming, the committee scaled down its

26 Minutes, January 6, 1939, February 6, 1939, February 20, 1939, February 27, 1939; Hopkins, History of the Y.M.C.A., p. 600.
plans, leaving only the central and black branch buildings. Nevertheless, the committee still saw a "healthy state of affairs" as far as the campaign pledges and collections.\(^{27}\)

With the fundraising effectively finished, the committee shifted its attention to site selection. For the central building, any lot had to be able to hold a building of dimensions ranging 125 feet by 200 feet to 125 feet by 250 feet. After investigating more than forty possible locations, the committee narrowed the choice to three. Sites at Calhoun and Fannin, Travis and Leeland, and Clay and Milam ranged in price from $80,000 to $100,000, and all interested the committee. Soon after the committee drafted this list of finalists, it started negotiating with the Houston School Board for the purchase of the Taylor School on Louisiana Street. For $55,000 plus $19,500 in escrow payable upon the improvement of Smith Street, the association bought the eight acre tract bounded by Smith and Louisiana, with Leeland providing an additional boundary after its eventual

\(^{27}\) Minutes, March 2, 1939, May 20, 1939, May 25, 1939, June 9, 1939; July 5, 1939.
extension. The association would cover the cost to pave Louisiana in front of the new building. 28

Knutson Construction offered the lowest construction bid, $742,477, for the new building. The committee selected a domestic "adaptation of the Italian Style" of architecture that would rise ten stories above the basement. These floors would house dormitories with capacity for 270 men, an assembly hall, a banquet room, club and class rooms for nineteen different groups, two gymnasiums, a seventy-five foot swimming pool, six handball courts, a health club, social areas for young men, underprivileged boys, and boys involved with standard building programs, various utility rooms and offices. The association was also among the first institutions in Houston to install air conditioning. Two proposals received consideration, one for a system for the entire building and the other for certain heavy traffic areas. Because air conditioning for the entire building would cost nearly $65,000, the Board opted to allot $16,500 to pay for a cooling system in the dining room and barber

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28 Minutes, September 15, 1939, October 20, 1939, November 6, 1939, November 30, 1940.
shop along with duct work and piping to allow for additions later. 29

Great fanfare accompanied the building's opening on September 8, 1941. Governor Coke Stevenson, presented to a banquet audience of 350 by Hugh Roy Cullen, spoke on "The Institution and the Democratic Hope." After the governor's speech, Methodist Bishop A. Frank Smith dedicated the building followed by the benediction by Bishop Clinton S. Quin. The banquet crowd then joined 10,000 Houstonians outside to watch the review of 1,200 Texas Defense guard troops that included a flyover by the guard's aviation unit. Following the review the association received the crowd for an open house in the new quarters. The Houston Post praised the new building as "rank[ing] with the finest Y.M.C.A. buildings of the great cities of the country" and as a "fine new structure." The newspaper added that the new building had been "more than earned by the association during its more than half century of Christian and social welfare service in Houston." 30

29 Minutes, June 17, 1940, February 16, 1940; Reports of the Building Committee, December 12, 1939, February 16, 1940, March 8, 1940.

30 Houston Post, September 7, 1941, sec. 1, pp. 1, 5; September 8, 1941, sec. 1, pp. 1, 6; September 9, 1941, sec. 1, p. 1.
Within three weeks the Board reported that there was already a parking problem and that all of the beds in the dormitory had been rented. By November attendance had tripled over figures from the old building. The consensus grew that the city had to install a stoplight to control the overflow traffic and that bus service should be extended "from the Y.M.C.A. to the heart of the city."\(^{31}\) More than fifteen years had passed since General Secretary W. C. Paige had first recommended larger quarters, but at last the association had facilities that would be hard to outgrow. The building, located at 1600 Louisiana, has been radically renovated over the years to ensure that space would be available for growth. The structure still houses the Downtown branch as well as offices of the Metropolitan branch staff.

The opening of the new building accomplished the major goal of the association's campaign. The YMCA now had a central building able to withstand increases in membership and programs for the next several decades. Despite the tremendous prestige gained from the success of the new building, the Board had to face some tough problems. For the first time since the Depression, the YMCA accumulated a deficit. Even as it prepared for the

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\(^{31}\) Minutes, September 26, 1941, November 14, 1941.
new building's opening, the Board found itself forced to discuss a looming $14,000 shortfall. 32

While the Board attempted to overcome its debts left over from the campaign, it appeared to have reneged on its promise to provide the Bagby Street branch with a new building. The association's obligation to execute this project became a common topic of discussion, creating some dissension among Board members. The Board at one point planned to complete fundraising for the other building projects during the spring of 1944 but had to abandon the canvass because of the urgency of the war effort. By the end of the war the association's financial outlook had improved, but several plans to launch comprehensive building campaigns failed due to apparent lack of organization. On several occasions the Board did reaffirm its commitment to Bagby Street for a new building. Though the Board was undoubtedly sincere in its sentiments, the black branch had to wait until the conclusion of the next major campaign in the early 1950s for a branch building. 33

32 Minutes, March 21, 1941.
Despite its financial and branch relations problems, the YMCA managed actively to serve fighting men during World War II. The association arranged to retain possession of the building at Fannin and McKinney to house the United Service Organizations for Defense Inc., better known simply as the USO. "Created by the special war-born needs of the armed forces and workers in defense industries," the USO provided recreation, entertainment and other services to those involved in the war effort. By the summer of 1943 the association estimated that between 80,000 and 100,000 men used the facilities every month. Many soldiers who took advantage of the USO also exercised and relaxed at the YMCA, leading to a surge in membership by the end of the war.\footnote{Minutes, April 25, 1941, June 18, 1943, October 19, 1945; Nathan Edward Cohen, Social Work in the American Tradition (New York: Dryden Press, Inc. 1958), p. 230. The National Jewish Welfare Board, National Catholic Community Service, National Travelers' Aid Association, Salvation Army, National Council of YMCAs and National Board of YMCAs comprised the USO.} 

The association put in extra effort to cater to those service men still stationed in Houston and to returning veterans. Veterans flocked to the association both for its housing and its educational opportunities. More than 100 men, nearly one-third of the students enrolled in the South Texas Schools of Law and Commerce,
had recently returned from the service. Twice this number put their names on the waiting list for dormitory rooms. Rooms were so scarce that even with an increase in weekly rents, the association had to set an age limit of thirty-five for dormitory residents. These trends continued even after the veterans had had a chance to readjust to civilian life, and the central building remained very busy helping these men handle their return to the everyday world.35

The years immediately following the end of World War II marked a major transition period for the Houston YMCA. Not only was the association trying to help veterans reintegrate into society, the association was also coming to grips with its own situation. Frank Fields died after a brief illness in May 1946, having served as general secretary for more than twenty years. Fields' death in itself ended an era. Fields had led the association through more changes than any other secretary before him.36

The YMCA Fields left behind bore little resemblance to the one he had taken over. Instead of just one central program with a few flimsy extension projects for a

36 Minutes, May 17, 1946, June 4, 1946.
70-square-mile city of fewer than 300,000, the metropolitan operation included the central building and several solid branches serving an urban area of nearly 900,000 that had spread over nearly 150 square miles. Along with the Board, Fields had seen the need and opportunity for expansion and had acted to carry it out. Methodically, the association placed volunteers, normally working with a secretary, in an industrial plant or in a school-based program such as Hi-Y in the target community. Once the operation developed solid support among the workers or school children, the association worked to bring the other constituencies in the community. If this succeeded, the Board established a branch to run the program. The scope of these branches, serving areas of up to 75,000, exceeded that of the central building until 1920.37

The Board realized by the late Forties that the institution had grown to the point where the structure of the entire Houston program had to be reorganized. A Board of Directors with a primary responsibility to the central branch just could not effectively manage a city-wide network of branches. A new Metropolitan Board of

37 Houston Post, September 7, 1941, sec. 6, p.3; Research Division, Houston Chamber of Commerce, "Houston Facts: Current Facts Concerning the Nation's Sixth Largest City" (brochure, 1975); McComb, Houston, p. 139.
Directors, comprised of many of the former directors of the central branch and leading members of the other branch committees of management, assumed control of the Houston YMCA. Houston's population, which had risen steadily for years, would mushroom in the near future. As more people came to the city, the association would have to assess their needs and provide programs accordingly. It would be up to the Metropolitan Board to make sure that the YMCA could keep up with and adapt to the needs of a rapidly changing city.\footnote{Meeting of Committee on Constitution and By-Laws, March 24, 1948.}
CHAPTER SEVEN

GROWING WITH HOUSTON

As Houston boomed in the late 1940s, the YMCA made every effort to keep pace. The area's population began to sprawl over southeast Texas, with the city's boundaries spreading like ink on a blotter trying to keep up with the people. By the beginning of the next decade, the number of residents in the metropolitan area had reached almost one million. The association followed aggressively, establishing branches wherever the spreading population justified. When Frank Fields died in 1946, the association consisted of five branches: the central building, East End, West End, Bagby Street, and the Newsboys Club. The South Texas Schools of Law and Commerce, Northside extension project and the camps had yet to reach branch status. At the time General Secretary Robert Maloney stepped down in 1972, sixteen branches and numerous extension projects served almost two million Houstonians.

The association expanded conceptually as well during this period, as it made great strides to become more inclusive in its membership policies. Although the
association attained many of its aims, growth did not occur without setbacks, as debt nagged at the YMCA for almost the entire period. In other instances, the association actually suffered from its own success. Regardless of the chronic financial malaise during this period, the YMCA strived to provide its services to the growing metropolitan area, and more than doubled in size as a result.¹

On an institutional level, the replacement of the evangelical standard of membership in 1953 represented perhaps the most significant change in the Houston YMCA's existence to that point. Lamar Fleming, an executive with Clayton Anderson Company, proposed the change with a second from local investor Wendel D. Ley. Fleming proposed the following standard of membership for addition to Houston Association's constitution:

The qualifications for Voting Membership in this Association shall correspond to the rules and regulations for member associations as laid down by the National Council of Young Men's Christian Associations of the United States of America, as existing at the date of the adoption of this constitution.

Only those members eighteen (18) years of age or over who are members in good standing of their churches are eligible for voting membership.

¹ Research Division, Houston Chamber of Commerce, "Houston Facts: Current Facts Concerning the Nations Sixth Largest City" (brochure, 1975); United Way Proposal of the YMCA for 1977, Exhibit B.
No member shall be eligible as a Director who is not a member in good standing of his church in Harris County, Texas, and should a Director thus eligible when assuming office, later cease to be a member of a church in Harris County, Texas, he shall cease to be a Director.²

Even though the new standard still required membership in a house of worship, it no longer excluded non-Christians. The Houston YMCA would now admit any man to membership who gathered with those of his faith, regardless of what that faith might be.

Predictably, the proposal provoked controversy. Edgar Townes, a long-time Board member and law school official, led the opposition. Townes "respected all religious faiths, but . . . felt that [the association] should go out and witness for Christ." He wanted to exclude only Jews and Catholics from the Board; groups, he said, that already had their own organizations. "If we destroy the Christian phase of the Association," Townes argued, "we destroy the Association." Fleming responded forcefully. First, he pointed out that the national YMCA movement had expanded the membership standard to include non-Christians more than twenty years before. The Dallas association had no trouble with Jewish members, and Fleming knew

² Minutes of the Board of Directors, October 17, 1952.
of two other Christian organizations "led by very devout men" that had representatives from other faiths on their Boards. Fleming finished by declaring "an institution does not cease to be Christian if there is a small minority of non-Christians working with them. The Y.M.C.A is not a church." The vote was anticlimactic, as the assembled members voted by a margin of forty to seven to adopt the National Council's membership standard.³

Though the Houston YMCA had now passed beyond the evangelical test, Christianity remained an integral part of its identity. The association had not renounced its beliefs but rather adopted a new emphasis on Christianity. Instead of promoting a religion stressing evangelism, revelation, and conversion in the name of Christ, the Houston YMCA chose to attempt to serve all people in the spirit of Jesus. Practically, the association had shifted to the latter outlook several years before, and the constitutional change -- though significant -- served only to formalize what had become obvious.

Other barriers to membership also fell. The association affirmed its commitment to serve women and girls shortly after it restated the membership criteria. The Board realized that as branches developed, programs

³ Minutes, January 16, 1953.
directed at females would be required. Tri-Hi-Y programs, developed along the same lines as Hi-Y but aimed specifically at school girls, as well as other activities, had been in use at the branches for years. To keep in line with its stated goal of developing programs to serve the entire family, the association accepted the challenge of including women and girls in all aspects of the YMCA program. The association made it clear that "the special interests and needs of men and boys should not be jeopardized," but that "in no case should girls and women be used for the sole purpose of providing 'partners' for men or boys." Anticipating necessary changes in programs, staffing, and equipment, the Board provided the necessary policies to allow this transition to occur. Some branches adapted to this change more slowly than others, and in some cases for unusual reasons. The Downtown branch was the final holdout, admitting Mayor Kathy Whitmire to membership in 1982. One anecdote explains that a few of the more uncompromising older male members opposed the change because it would end the tradition of swimming naked in the branch pool.


Starting just a few years before the local association's constitutional revisions, the YMCA made changes nearly as significant in its geographical range of services as it had in terms of its theology and membership standards. The association announced the first of its many postwar expansion plans in October 1947. The Board wanted to establish several branches, expecting that most locations would emphasize boys' work. In addition, the Board hoped to celebrate Camp Sterling's upcoming silver anniversary with $25,000 in improvements. Funding for the projects would come from the Community Chest. The chest endorsed the new branches but left no recorded comment on the camp costs. New General Secretary Elwood V. Rasmussen supported the expansion, although he felt that the money to refurbish the camp could be spent better retiring the association's $93,000 debt left over from the central building construction expenses.6

Concurrent with the start of the expansion program, the association officially adopted the Metropolitan plan of organization in 1949. As discussed earlier, the new metropolitan structure called for a central Board of Directors to oversee the operations of all the branches rather than a Board overseeing the extension work of the

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6 Minutes, October 17, 1947; November 21, 1947.
central building. Many of the same men who had previously comprised the Board continued to do so, although the leading directors from the branches were selected. New General Secretary Robert Maloney joined the staff shortly after this change took place. The change immediately led to the creation of three new branches. The new building became the home of the Downtown branch. The South Texas Colleges and Camp Ross Sterling, Jr., also gained branch status at this time. With the Metropolitan Board in place, the association had a central coordinating body to oversee operations and to delegate responsibility for Houston YMCA operations. 7

The Board approached expansion very carefully and deliberately. According to its Extension Services Policy Statement, the association wanted to focus on boys and girls ages nine to eighteen and the problems facing them. Programs were to emphasize Christian experiences to help develop the faith to live by, training for citizenship and community participation, interracial understanding, "world-mindedness," and education for "sound physical and mental health" as well as "for family living

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including adequate sex education." With these goals in mind, the Board set several conditions for extension. After a written proposal had been accepted by the Board, the applicant had to provide seven other written requests for YMCA service. Further, the plan had to include a specific statement of requested services, proof of adequate facilities and supervision, and financial support. Any extension program had to work with a YMCA branch, create its own management structure, and "become mutually responsible with YMCA [sic] in selection of capable part-time or professional staff leadership." Other standards included establishing relationships with the various levels of YMCA staff and leadership outside the branch, accepting the ultimate authority of the Metropolitan Board, and supporting the basic purposes of the YMCA. Under these guidelines the association went forward with its plans to expand into those areas where there was demonstrated, responsible desire for YMCA programs. Essentially, association expansion continues today subject to rules derived from this plan.  

The branch plan continued to go forward under the Board and its policy. The Northside extension became a branch and also absorbed the Newsboys' Club. The

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8 Extension Services Policy Statement, Houston-Harris County Y.M.C.A. (ca. 1953).
association gained control of the defunct Emma R Newsboys' trust fund, applying it to the branch. The branch also received a 250-by-250-foot site from Houck Realty on the conditions that the site be cleaned up and that a building be erected within three years. The Southwest branch grew out of summer programs in the West University and Bellaire area. This branch emphasized activities such as home vacation camps, special swim classes, arts and crafts, and playground games. The East End branch, with Metropolitan support, began supervising a recreational program for Galena Park. The municipality's government also offered its support, giving office space, phones, and a recreation hall. Galena Park schools donated other facilities. Per the extension policy, all of these programs served children primarily and attempted to offer activities consistent with those that the policy recommended.9

The first wave of expansion ended with the planning of a major capital campaign in May 1950. Several existing branches had clamored for better facilities and threatened to circumvent the Board and raise their own funds if no assistance was forthcoming. With this challenge

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hanging over its head, the Board scheduled the campaign for the spring of 1951 with a stated goal of two million dollars. In the meantime, the Board looked into the situation of the camping branch. Camp Sterling had fallen into disrepair and required major improvements, and the association had to send its campers to a camp near San Antonio for the summer of 1950. Having solved the crisis temporarily, the Board then started looking into other camp sites. Camp Savoy, near San Marcos at Wimberley, 178 miles from Houston, was available for $35,000. The association purchased the seventy-eight acre site with hopes of having it ready for the 1951 season. With renovation, Camp Sterling remained in use until 1961, when Hurricane Carla made the site unusable. The association held the camp site for several more years until the property was sold in 1967.  

Camp Wimberley, as the second camp eventually became known, remained in operation until its sale 1969. The next year, U.S. Plywood-Champion Papers gave a 450-acre site on Lake Livingston for a new, much larger camp. Southland Paper donated an additional thirty-three acres two years later. Originally known as Camp Livingston, the

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association changed the name to Camp Cullen to honor the Cullen Foundation's gift of $300,000 toward camp improvements. This camp continues to serve the association.11

Though the campaign originally planned for 1951 did not start until 1952, it marked the point from which the Houston YMCA has never really stopped expanding. Temporary pauses have occurred several times during the intervening years, but once this campaign started, the number of branches and extensions steadily increased. Newly elected Board President Edward Mosher decreed in June 1951 that the first order of business would be "to raise the funds needed for the Bagby Branch building by the end of the year." The entire Board was aware that the Bagby Street branch, which served Houston's black community, had been promised a building during the 1939 campaign. By November 1951 the Bagby Street building situation had been termed "acute." The Board gave assurances that the problem had not been forgotten and that action would be taken soon. Early in the new year, the association did agree to purchase a camp site for Bagby Street, as long as the cost did not exceed $60,000 and branch members would "raise their fair share." The Board did concede that "acquiring this property in no way

relieves us of our responsibility to provide a suitable building for the Bagby branch." Located in Spring, the camp was originally named for long-time branch supporter E. H. Holden. The facility is now known as Camp Pine Tree.

The Board meant it when it promised that the camp would not relieve the Board of its responsibility provide a building for the branch, and the Board attempted to move quickly. On January 8, 1952, Howard Tellepsen moved "that the Board conduct a citywide campaign and that Bagby Street Branch have first priority on any monies raised." This measure passed unanimously and began a fundraising process that never really stopped.\(^{12}\)

As revised, the campaign plan called for pledges of $2.5 million from a maximum of 10,000 subscribers. This fundraising would provide money for much needed branch buildings, including the often discussed black branch. Members of this branch once again met their quota and waited for results. After a period of several months, Lamar Fleming told the Board that he owned property on

Scott Street between Texas Southern University and the University of Houston that would be a "fine location for [a] Bagby Street Branch building." Because of competition for the site with the University of Houston, which wanted the land to build fraternity houses, the Board selected property on Wheeler. Fleming ended up donating the Wheeler location for the Bagby Street branch's use. Plans for actual construction of the building progressed slowly, but the South Central branch, rechristened to reflect its new building's location, moved into its new quarters in 1955. The facilities included dormitories, indoor swimming pool, gymnasium, and social rooms. These accoutrements also came with the East End, Northwest, and M. D. Anderson buildings, which had the same architect and were funded by the same campaign, along with Southwest building.\textsuperscript{13} After a wait of sixteen years, Houston's black community had finally received the building it had been promised and had raised money for twice. The other branches had also endured for quite some time in their outdated quarters, but had never been promised so much and given so little as the black community branch.

\textsuperscript{13} Outline Proposed Young Men's Christian Association Building Campaign, Spring 1952; Minutes, June 30, 1952, August 8, 1952, November 21, 1952, March 20, 1953, April 24, 1953.
Even with plans for the campaign of the early 1950s still on the drawing board, the association started to investigate establishing branches in the Northeast portion of the city and in the Northshore area developed through the Galena Park extension work. The Northeast branch grew out of a Northside branch extension project started in 1955. Primarily, the work consisted of children's activities and recreational programs. After a six-year wait, Northeast achieved branch status in 1961. At Northshore, the Board questioned whether to continue to share the work in the area with various municipal and private agencies or to organize a branch. By 1953 the Northshore site, now an established YMCA extension operation, offered rich opportunities for further extension into Channelview, Galena Park, Greens Bayou, and Jacinto City. The Board considered the issue for two months before deciding to establish the Northshore branch. The Board rationalized that the time had come for the city of Galena Park to set up its own recreation program, although the association would continue to offer its services until the city could administer the work. As Northshore grew, extension work eventually did go into
Channelview in 1967, with a branch being established there ten years later.¹⁴

The association established the Baytown branch in 1957. Hi-Y groups from the East End had been active in the area since the 1940s. By the time the Baytown branch started, its activities extended into Mont Belvieu, LaPorte, Lakewood, Brownwood and McNair. Like Northeast, Baytown's operations consisted mostly of children's programs, with the majority of programs occurring away from the branch building. Extension work started the same year in for what became the Conroe branch also started in 1957. The work took place in the Conroe public school recreation center for more than fifteen years until the branch moved into its own building in 1973.¹⁵

When not actively pursuing branch or extension development, the Houston YMCA invested its efforts in expansion research. In its 1965 long range study, the association surveyed projected population growth and change, school population, median income, city recreational facilities, school dropout and juvenile

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delinquency statistics, as well as other youth agencies with building centered programs. Using these data, the association attempted to determine where its facilities would be most needed in the years to come.

Several extension projects did start as a result of the study, including what is now the Bay Area branch in 1966. Westland and Post Oak organized in 1967, and these are now two of the most heavily used branches. Bay Area serves the Clear Lake-Webster area southeast of downtown Houston. This branch appears to have been a direct result of the long range study. The report identified the Clear Lake area as having the potential for tremendous growth because of NASA's presence, and the branch started its programs in 1966 from the Clear Lake City Recreation Center. The Westland branch area in southwest Houston experienced terrific growth, as the long range study suggested it might. Within two years of the start of the Westland extension, the operation achieved branch status in 1969. Post Oak started as an extension of Downtown for the River Oaks-Memorial area. By 1972 the project had become a branch. As the YMCA moved into the 1970s, Houston's demographic shifts provided more substantial evidence to support the speculations of the 1965 long
range study. Houston's growth to the southeast and the southwest demonstrated the validity of the report.

Not all extension during this period started as a result of the long range study. Some work started in already established areas of Houston because of factors unrelated to population growth projections. Two new branches developed during the period independent of the study, Dad's Club in 1964, and San Jacinto (originally named Pasadena) in 1967. San Jacinto, like Baytown, grew out of an East End extension project. Dad's Club, now located on the Katy Freeway, evolved from a local swimming club organized by fathers of the participants that had lost its outside sponsorship and struggled along until it petitioned the YMCA for branch status. It is the only branch that did not have its origins as a YMCA extension project. Ironically, it has been quite successful with its own extension work. Extension work started at Spring Creek in 1968 achieved branch status in 1978, and is now known as the Cypress Creek branch. Dad's Club has also initiated the Cy-Fair extension. 

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17 1977 United Way Proposal, Exhibit B.
Along with the branch expansion and the organizational and institutional changes from the late 1940s to the late 1960s, the Board overhauled and eventually jettisoned most of its educational offerings. The end of the YMCA's involvement with formal education started, ironically, with the creation of South Texas Junior College and the creation of the South Texas Colleges branch in 1948, and ended with the severance of the branch in 1968. Before the founding of the junior college, the YMCA supported two institutions: South Texas School of Law and South Texas School of Commerce, an accredited senior college that suffered from slipping enrollment and a curriculum limited to business courses. What the association hoped to accomplish with the junior college was to establish a general education counterpart to the South Texas Schools and possibly attract attention to the law school and school of commerce. Both the law school and the business school would continue to operate as they had before the addition. The Board insisted that the new school support itself, which meant that a minimum of 200 students had to enroll to generate the necessary $35,000 to cover operating costs.  

18 Minutes of the Executive Committee, April 30, 1948; Report of the South Texas School of Commerce, March 19, 1952; Report of the South Texas College of the Houston YMCA, October 1, 1952.
The junior college's popularity caught association officials by surprise as they quickly found themselves running out of room at the Downtown branch to house the South Texas schools. The Board reacted to the schools' booming enrollment by looking for quarters outside the building. Attempts to locate larger quarters started in 1952, but ultimately proved fruitless. Negotiations with the Houston Independent School District to purchase the Taylor School, adjacent to the Downtown branch, started in the spring of 1952, only to drag on into the next decade. Remarkably, considering the premium on space, the Board reneged on the purchase of a site for the schools on Leeland after the transaction had been completed. In explanation, a Board member pointed out that the association had accumulated $900,000 in mortgages on the Downtown and East End buildings and had little hope of liquidating the debt. Though the Board had arranged corporate status for the colleges so that they could incur their own indebtedness, the plan to repay the purchase costs with "tuition and other revenues" glossed over "some rather obvious items of expense." The law school ultimately moved to a location on Polk Street,
though the junior college remained in the Downtown branch until the end of its affiliation with the YMCA.\textsuperscript{19}

Skyrocketing attendance, usually a sign of institutional success, was the major factor leading to the schools' problems. Junior college attendance in general boomed from the late 1940s on with the enactment of the G. I. Bill. Obviously, the South Texas Colleges experienced both the side effects as well as the benefits of veterans using their new privileges. Attendance figures show a doubling of the number of students in the five-year period between 1952 and 1957. This growth occurred despite the phasing out of the commerce school in 1955. The tremendous rise in attendance in so short a period caused the colleges to absorb increasing amounts of already overtaxed building space at an alarming rate. With so little space available for the growing number of students, the schools had to turn away some applicants, a policy the association had always avoided.\textsuperscript{20}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[20] South Texas College Reports, October 1, 1952, March 9, 1955, May 5, 1958; Letter, W. H. Randolph to Gavin Ulmer, August 9, 1957; Recommendation of the General Secretary to the Joint Building Committee of the Central and South Texas College Branches of the Y.M.C.A. Regarding Shared-Space in the Central Building, December 18, 1956.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Accrediting agency requirements compounded the problem. Areas for improvement included upgrading the law school's library and adding study areas and classroom space. To attempt to correct the situation, the law school held classes in the junior college library, which in itself constituted an infraction of accreditation standards. As attendance continued to rise, attempts to comply with the rules often fell short. Student to faculty ratios exceeded acceptable norms, library acquisitions were inadequate, and the schools made no claim to "be adequately supported and housed so as to make possible efficient work on the part of both students and faculty." (Emphasis added). Because of the severity of the limitations, W. H. Randolph, director of the college branch, declared as early as 1955 that the "college is not able to offer courses that will allow us to render a community service."21

Almost inevitably, the South Texas Colleges became too big for the association to administer properly. As the schools admitted more and more students every year, physical limitations demanded that changes be made. The

21 Report on Compliance with Standards of Approval of Law Schools Set Forth by the Supreme Court of Texas, (ca. 1959); South Texas College Reports, October 7, 1955, January 30, 1956, February 4, 1957; Memorandum, John R. Rodell to Mr. R. J. Maloney, July 9, 1959.
schools' accreditation, and with that their survival, depended on their getting more space. The law school attempted holding lectures in the Taylor School auditorium, but this proved infeasible because of the room's design. In the early 1960s South Texas School of Law moved to a new location at 1221 Polk. Outside the Downtown YMCA building, the law school grew institutionally as well as physically separated from the association. South Texas Junior College quickly filled the vacated space, thus putting the association right back in the position it had been before the law school left. The cost of running accredited schools had also become prohibitive, with budgets approaching $400,000 per year.22

The severance of the Houston YMCA from the South Texas Colleges occurred in 1968.23 Communications between the Board and school administrators had deteriorated seriously. Unhappily, the Board decided to relinquish control of what had been one of its most outstanding programs for nearly fifty years. South Texas School of Law became an independent institution that in some ways


23 Rogers, Historical Overview of the Houston YMCA, p. 4.
still maintained its philosophical connections to the YMCA. It still catered to the working student who saw night law school as a way toward a more successful career. South Texas Junior College evolved into the University of Houston-Downtown campus, part of the senior college, after its move into the M & M building at One Main Street. Though no longer a part of the association, both schools continue to preserve the intentions of the institution that founded them -- schools that serve students who might not have the chance to attend college or law school.

The loss of the South Texas Schools deprived the YMCA of its ability to offer any sort of traditional educational program. However, the association's tremendous growth over the years since the founding of South Texas Junior College so greatly increased the association's opportunities to serve as many Houstonians as possible in so many different ways that the YMCA quite easily overcame any deficiency it might have faced from the loss of the colleges. The association's ability and willingness to locate new branches in the communities in and around the city spoke for its dedication to principles of service. The institutional changes that the Houston YMCA deliberately made at the beginning of this period -- specifically, to expand membership beyond the confines of evangelical Christianity and to admit females
into its programs -- were essential to the association's successes. Of course these changes were a recognition that society was changing as well. But without that recognition, the YMCA would not have been able to look forward with as much clarity as it did. By the early 1970s, Houston's metropolitan area had a population of some two million people spread over a six county area of almost seven thousand square miles.\textsuperscript{24} The YMCA's vision for the changing social and physical characteristics of its constituents along with its ability to absorb various setbacks allowed the association to keep up with Houstonians as they passed beyond the 1960s.

\textsuperscript{24} Chamber of Commerce, "Houston Facts."
CHAPTER EIGHT

THE MOVEMENT CONTINUES

As the 1970s began, the Houston YMCA attempted to continue the expansion it had pursued since the late 1940s. More and people streamed into the city, presenting the association with the needs to meet and the opportunity to develop new programs of outreach. By the time the YMCA of the Greater Houston Area achieved its centennial in 1986, it stood fourth in the number of members nationally.¹ This corresponded exactly to the Houston area's population, which, at 3.5 million, ranked fourth in the United States. Typically, the Houston association's response to the population growth was to plan extension projects, allow them to gain area support, and upgrade the extension to branch status. The association came more and more to emphasize work with children and families. Association growth since the 1970s, both in new extension

¹ YMCA of the Greater Houston Area, "Annual Report 1983 - 1984." The title of the association's chief administrator has evolved from general secretary to general director to president. The presiding officer over the Board is the chairman.
work as well as in established branches, has centered on these groups. No longer its it exclusively or predominantly an organization for young men.

When Bev Laws assumed the position of General Director of the association in 1972, he presided over an organization that had expanded greatly under his predecessor, Robert J. Maloney. Though Maloney had guided the area YMCA staff through more than twenty years of steady growth, the association had not prospered financially during his administration. As noted earlier, tremendous debts had accumulated on the properties housing the various branches, as well as from other projects. This pattern of expansion and debt, for all practical purposes, stopped under Laws. Many YMCA insiders felt that Laws had primary responsibility for the fiscal "turnaround" the association experienced in the 1970s. Under Laws, expectations for the branches' fiscal soundness increased. Balanced budgets along with annual cost studies became a matter of course. All branches would contribute to general building and maintenance funds and well as develop their own funds for these purposes. In addition, each branch would develop its own operating reserve. These measures did not eliminate all debt, but they did
dent the quarter-million dollar deficit Laws faced when he assumed the directorship.  

With the branches assuming a greater share of the economic burden, the Houston association as a whole benefitted. Better financial management and individual branch fiscal responsibility gave the association a defense against the perception that United Way funds and program donations went toward debt retirement and capital expenses rather than to programs. The association steadfastly refuted this, stating that such funds went only toward annual operating costs and in no "way offset the Y's capital need." Financial responsibility helped to counter this belief and actually helped to put the YMCA in a better position to focus on the challenges offered by the changing needs of its growing number of constituents.

Extension development provided one response to the growing population. As mentioned previously, in the late 1970s the association installed several branches that had

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grown out of older branches. Additionally, the YMCA formed several new extensions. Residents in the Fort Bend County, Alief, South Montgomery County, West Houston, Lake Houston, and Pearland areas all received extension services. Subsequently, the association added the Ponderosa extension in far northwest Houston. As of January 1986, the Alief, South Montgomery (centered in the Woodlands), and Lake Houston (centered in Kingwood) locations had been granted branch status while the Fort Bend, West Houston, Pearland, and Ponderosa sites had retained their extension operations. The name "YMCA of the Greater Houston Area" was certainly appropriate. By the time the association reached its centennial in 1986, its services spread out from Harris County to Montgomery, Fort Bend, Brazoria, Chambers, Galveston, Waller, and Liberty counties and had the direct potential to reach into Grimes County. As it always had, the YMCA took full advantage of the opportunity that metropolitan population growth presented to offer the association and its programs to area residents.\(^4\)

Actual programs and the interaction between people continued to undergird the YMCA expansion during this

period. The standard, or "core" programs remained the staples of association work. Youth sports, parent-child programs, health and fitness, informal continuing education in everything from guitar to ceramics, older youth programs, camping, and aquatics -- especially swimming lessons -- provided a base of reference that so anyone, whether native Houstonian or recent transplant, could relate instantly to the YMCA. New additions to the core programs included child care services that provided fully licensed day care.

Core programs by no means constituted the extent of activity. The association also offered a variety of specially developed programs that focused on areas new to or redeveloped by the YMCA. Many of these directly involved youth. The Y Alternate Living Program allowed the association to serve as a temporary foster-care and counseling facility for homeless teenagers. The youth employment program attempted to provide teens with skills, counseling and job placement; "Youth in Government" allowed high school leaders to participate in model governments; and Hi-Y continued to reach more than a thousand high schoolers. The association also attempted to reach the elderly through a variety of educational and recreational activities. YMCA International Services helped African and Southeast Asian refugees adapt to American life and resettle in their new homeland. Working from concepts
that had catapulted the YMCA movement into worldwide prominence more than a hundred years before, International Services developed an ongoing information and delegate exchange with the Belo Horizonte, Brazil, YMCA.\textsuperscript{5} Overall, through programs in its branches spread over the entire metropolitan area (and arguably, throughout the world), the YMCA reached out, attempting to have a positive impact on the lives of as many Houstonians in as many ways as possible.

From the time of its founding in 1886 until its one hundredth anniversary, the population of Houston increased by roughly 1700 percent, from 20,000 to more than 3 million people. YMCA participation changed similarly over the same span of time, and not only in the increased gross number of people served. In 1886 the phrase "Young Men's Christian Association" was simply understood: it was an association of white, evangelical Protestant, usually professional or white collar young men, that provided its members with physical, social, educational, and spiritual activities. More than any other aspect of the YMCAs image, the meaning of "Young Men's Christian Association" has changed over the past century. So many new groups have become beneficiaries of association

services that many people believe that the apparently meaningless acronym YMCA is a more appropriate name for the institution than Young Men's Christian Association.

A survey of the expanded list of groups served by the movement and the local association does lend support to this assertion. The national YMCA movement recognized the needs of boys by the 1870s and the Houston association broadened its programs to include boys by the 1890s. By 1919 the Houston YMCA allowed blacks to participate, albeit separately. During the 1910s and 1920s, the Houston YMCA served laborers in various shops and plants throughout the city, men the association would not have considered working with at the time of its founding. More radically, the association had made token overtures to women by the turn of the twentieth century. However, women did not participate substantially until the rise of formal association education programs in the 1920s. The Houston association did formulate membership standards to include females in all activities in the 1950s, though women did not achieve full membership status in all metropolitan YMCA operations until the 1980s. It is now estimated that nearly half of the participants in Houston YMCA activities are female and that an equally large portion is under the age of eighteen. Obviously, the image of white, evangelical, young men as the typical
YMCA patron is obsolete, and little remains that distinctively defines the YMCA as a "young men's" association.

The question of whether or not the YMCA has maintained the Christian emphasis implicit in its name is as provocative as whether or not the association still focuses its efforts on young men. Admittedly both the YMCA movement and the Houston association long ago abandoned militantly evangelical tactics to lead participants to salvation. The aggressive proselytizing mission of the YMCA faded with the realization that American society no longer accepted traditional dogmas regarding salvation, and the YMCA mission came to serve the larger society, not some evangelical subset of it. The entire society has become far more secular as it has become more urban, better educated, and linked nationally via modern modes of communication. Had the YMCA continued its overt evangelical emphasis it would have effectively cut itself off from the growing majority of the nation. In the sense that the YMCA chose to discontinue its explicit evangelical efforts, it did jettison its Christian purposes and accommodate itself to the modern secular worldview. The primary purpose of the association as envisioned at its beginning by George Williams -- interdenominational witness and salvation -- had been cast aside.

Nevertheless, as even Williams would have recognized, there are other avenues of Christian service,
providing a range of opportunities for individual rest, recreation, and self-improvement in a clean, virtuous environment. As the displacement of evangelicalism occurred gradually from the 1900s forward, the YMCA movement grew to accept a more subtle form of Christianity manifested by service to others. As evangelism lost its validity in urban America, the YMCA more closely examined principles of the social gospel that emphasized the Christian's moral obligation to serve the whole spectrum of his fellow man's needs, spiritual and physical. As early as 1911 and 1912 the YMCA movement and the Houston association participated extensively in the Men and Religion Forward Movement. MRFM, as noted previously, focused within a Christian context on the issues of "piety with dignity" and the need to adhere to Christian relationships revealed in principles such as "loving thy neighbor" and the Golden Rule. At least since the days of MRFM, an emphasis on the dignity of the individual and the obligation to serve others had quietly replaced the Christian mission to minister solely for the salvation of men's souls. Despite the abundance of Bible classes offered by the Houston YMCA through the 1920s, it was obvious by the time of World War I that the commitment to old-fashioned spiritual evangelism had waned. The constitutional change of 1953 allowing non-evangelical church members to participate fully in the Houston YMCA was
nearly forty years overdue considering the reality of local religious attitudes.

Predictably, as the Houston YMCA's constituency and religious aims changed over time, so did association programs. Activities no longer revolved around the gymnasium, the reading room, and the Bible class. Geographical and ideological expansion demanded that the association revise its programs to fit the needs of new groups in new areas. Dad's Club branch, which began primarily as a swim club, probably best exemplifies the association's willingness to expand its program to accommodate a particular group. As YMCA participants have become increasingly younger and female, association activities reflected these changes. Throughout the metropolitan area, women's aerobics is currently among the most popular programs. The association works intensively with children of all ages, ranging from infants in day care facilities to teenagers in foster-care programs. However, not all program expansion has ultimately been successful. The association created branches that routinely failed through the 1910s and 1920s, and one of the association's successful programs, the South Texas Colleges, broke away because it became too large to be properly administered by the YMCA.

Methods of support for these activities has changed as much as the programs and people themselves. For the
assocation's founding board members, funding depended on their personal commitment and membership fees. Revenue generation has become increasingly complex since that time, with the development of the general fundraising campaign, the emergence of the United Way, and the creation of special donations for specific program areas. Almost all funding for major projects and general support comes from the public, while participant program fees cover the cost of activities ranging from health club memberships to child day care.

Strong, visible leadership during the twentieth century has been vital to the survival and growth of the Houston YMCA. Three general secretaries, W. C. Paige, Frank Fields, and Bev Laws, deserve mention in this regard. Paige, who served from 1913 until 1925, guided the association through its infancy as a major YMCA outpost. Under him, the Houston association attempted to emulate the larger YMCAs throughout the country in terms of extension, boys' work, foreign work and educational programs. Through his relationship with innovative secretaries such as Robert Lewis of Cleveland, Paige worked hard to bring Houston up to the cutting edge of movement activities. Like the other two secretaries, Paige did not hesitate to voice his opinion to the Board on any issue. In particular, Paige recognized and reported that the time had come to include local blacks in
association activities, an almost radical idea in Houston in the late 1910s. Before his departure to work with the National Council, Paige also left no doubt that he felt the building at Fannin and McKinney had outlasted its usefulness, some sixteen years before the completion of the present building.

Paige's successor, Frank Fields, continued Paige's efforts for a new building and had actually prodded the board to the edge of conducting a capital campaign before the stock market crash of 1929. With the survival of the association, rather than its expansion, becoming the focus of attention, Fields kept his staff relatively intact and continued the the association's everyday operations despite drastic pay cuts and a skeletal budget with which to conduct programs. After the association regained its financial health in the mid-1930s, the board did follow through on the building and expansion campaign that Fields had urged for years.

Bev Laws came to the Houston YMCA in 1973, after the association had been expanding almost nonstop for more than twenty-five years with insufficient regard for fiscal planning. With Laws as president the association continued to expand, but it did so within specified financial guidelines. Branches assumed more responsibility for their own financial health, making themselves, and in turn the Houston association, stronger and better able
to face the growing needs of its members. This regimen ensured that local YMCA growth could continue.

Lay participation has been as impressive and as essential as secretarial leadership. Certainly, the involvement of James A. Baker, Sr., or Ross Sterling or Lamar Fleming or Wendel Ley stands out. Community leaders such as these men have always given generously to the association of their time and resources. These men gave so much not for themselves, but to make the YMCA an institution that could serve more Houstonians in more ways. Yet it was not just these giant names that gave the association its characteristics. The population at large must have seen the benefits the YMCA had to offer or the demand for association would have dissipated long ago. Along with the Sterlings and the Flemings, unnamed thousands have volunteered to do everything from canvassing for building campaigns to coaching girls' soccer teams. It is these nameless people who have worked to ensure that the YMCA continues to serve the hundreds of thousands of people who participate in association programs.

The fundamental changes in the association's character since its arrival in Houston in 1886 have allowed it adapt to local conditions and ultimately reach more Houstonians over the intervening years. Most of these changes resulted from conscious decisions on the part of
the Board of Directors in response to a perceived need in the community, such as service to blacks or women. Other transitions, such as the shift away from evangelical Christianity, occurred as the association gradually recognized that a particular area of emphasis no longer fulfilled a need for members. The world has changed and the YMCA has changed apace. Essentially, it has been this ability to recognize that change must occur in one form or another that has allowed the YMCA to continue to grow with Houston.
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