

# Late W. O. Brigg's \$1,000 Check Got Community House Under Way

"This sure is the dearest town," said 'Rippy' in 1921. "My gosh, there isn't no place to go that's decent". Rippy was a character in a play written by Mrs. Charles Shain in 1921 when she was persuading the 5,000 people in the village of Birmingham that the young people needed a general meeting place.

Interviewed this week at her home on Pierce street, Mrs. Shain remembered that in 1921 children were either sent off to prep schools and summer camps or stayed home in a 'dead' town, sometimes to get into trouble.

Then Mr. Charles McCurdy, rector of St. James Episcopal church, appeared before our Women's Guild of about 40 women and suggested that we might do something to serve the community at large," Mrs. Shain recalled.

With Mrs. Frank Miller, president of the Guild and Mrs. Shain, vice president, the Guild got the idea of a Community House, repaired and repainted a little old house on the Southwest corner of Maple and Bates belonging to the Episcopal church and the town's Heart began beating.

A TREMENDOUS FETE on the Walter Morley estate, opposite the present Brookside school, with Morris dances on the green, horse events, a gymnasium, and a supper on tables down by the brook, brought out all of the town and

earned \$3000 to furnish and staff the little house. It was dedicated to the village April 30, 1923 and a symbol of its ownership was handed to Harry McBride, president of the village.

The town continued to grow, the Village Players were strong enough to build their own hall and the little Community House was bursting.

"In 1926 the Community House board, hatched this great idea of building a real Community House," said Mrs. Shain.

"For three years I talked to groups of three and four in homes and to all the town organizations—in all to 1935 meetings! It was the first big, all-Birmingham project. Folks knew each other pretty well. Every organization had a representative on our planning board to tell us what they wanted in a meeting house."

THEN CAME ONE of the most thrilling nights in Mrs. Shain's life. The Birmingham Theater was set to open November, 1927. Mr. Kuhn-



MRS. CHARLES SHAIN

sky, the owner, agreed to a pre-opening night to tee off a drive for a Community House. The committee, many of whom still are active in Birmingham, were Mrs. Iva Marlette, Mrs. Whiting Raymond, Mrs. Graham John Graham, Mrs. Cecil Whalen, Mrs. Roland Mann, Mrs. Raymond Reilly and Mrs. Shain.

They had secured some of the Gorgeous Girls from Earl Carroll's Varieties, the Orpheus Male Chorus was to sing, there was to be a

movie and Mrs. Shain would present the dream of a Community House.

But the week before Mrs. Shain caught her hand in the wringer! Nevertheless, bandaged as it was, she was prepared.

"I had memorized my speech thoroughly and I had the fan to hide my hand behind," she said. The movie house was filled at \$2 a ticket.

WEARING "a gorgeous, green, velvet dress, short in some places and long in others" and with a side-pleat of real rose-pointe lace, Mrs. Shain addressed the audience of Birmingham and Bloomfield residents. And before her speech was over an usher brought up a note from Walter Briggs, Sr. He pledged one thousand dollars!

"That started it!" Mrs. Shain exclaimed. "Before the evening was over ten business men, pledging a thousand dollars each, had bought us our land outright. Mr. Huston, Mr. Bell, Mr. Bingham and Mr. Shain were among them."

"We had daily luncheons, cheer leaders, song leaders, skits, and high-priced advertising men like W. A. P. John doing our soliciting. In the drive that followed we had \$120,000 pledged!"

Next week the history of the Community House continues. Called by some "too big" and "too beautiful," Ruth's Folly was built. Three months later came the Great Depression. To close or not to close?

## In U of M Program

Margaret Kausch, Birmingham, is one of the University of Michigan students who took part in the second Laboratory Playbill presented by the speech department last

Friday and Saturday in the Lydia Mendelssohn theater.

Miss Kausch was the quarter-master in "The World We Live In."

Society deadline is 3 p.m. each Tuesday.

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