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The House That Generosity Built

By BILL HUTCHINS

The house that generosity built stands at Bates and Townsend.

The splendid two-story colonial known to every Birmingham resident as the Community House is not the oldest, nor handsomest, nor the most expensive building in town.

But it is the best loved.

This has been proven every year for 40 years at this time when funds for its operation must be raised. It is proven by the thousands of community minded people who have devoted endless hours to raising funds, planning events, managing affairs and giving of their talents.

It is proven again by its constant use as a center of activities of all kinds in which virtually the entire population participates.

THE COMMUNITY House was born of a need and love for Birmingham.

It all began in 1921 with the Women's Guild of St. James Episcopal Church. Members agreed that a community meeting place was needed. The church owned a house next door where the post office now stands. The women convinced the vestry to give the house to the community. That was the first act of generosity.

Then they and other public spirited people began a campaign to raise \$3,500 to renovate the structure. Numerous teas, fairs, card parties, rummage and bake sales provided the funds.

Between April 28, 1923, when the first Community House was opened, and 1926 when it became apparent that the original House was too small, Birmingham's population jumped from 3,500 to \$9,500. Plans were formulated to build larger quarters.

PROPERTY WAS purchased on the northwest corner of Bates and Townsend and a campaign to raise \$125,000 was launched.

Again, the bake sales and every other form of money raising venture proved the generosity and love of Birmingham people for their favorite gathering place.

On April 28, 1929, some 1,000 persons, including Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford, gathered in a drizzling rain on the sixth anniversary of the founding of the Community House.

They watched as Mrs. Charles (Ruth) Shain, one of the founders and president of the board of directors, traveled cement for the corner stone of the new House.

A year later, on St. Patrick's Day, a crowd estimated at 7,000 attended the formal opening. During that year 50,000 persons visited the House.

IN THE ENSUING years the Community House has become synonymous with activities that make Birmingham a vital, pleasant and progressive place to live. Regardless of one's interest, something is going on there that draws people to it.

To many the Community House brings back romantic recollections of their first dance, the place "we" met, their wedding reception and showers of rice.

To others it is a cultural center where they may have attended any of 87 different classes in arts, crafts and languages. Last year 1,680 persons were enrolled in such classes.

It is a gathering place which in 1950 saw 2,428 adult and 582 youth meetings which were attended by 123,000 persons. Another 35,800 persons visited the House for other reasons.

IT WAS AN eating place for

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46,300 persons last year. It was a place for hiring help with 8,800 men and women applying for jobs. It is a place where retired men and elderly women groups enjoy mutual interests.

Community House Section
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Without tax support, endowments or income from the United Fund, it depends solely on contributions, rental and class fees for its existence.

Nobody begs for it. The thousands of people who love it see to that.

REMEMBER! YOUR CONTRIBUTION IS TAX DEDUCTIBLE

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