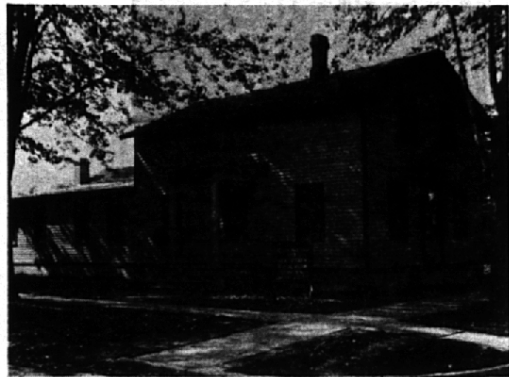


A Community's Favorite House



B'HAM'S FIRST COMMUNITY HOUSE IN 1924
On southwest corner of Bates and Maple.

One-Act Plays 1st St. Dunstan Venture

By ALICE MORGAN
Special Writer

Birmingham was 68 years old when one of its most healthy, popular children came into being.

Named for the patron saint of artists and craftsmen, including those in the field of drama, the group's first election was held on May 19, birth date of St. Dunstan (c925-88). Burt A. McDonald became the first chairman of the fledgling group.

In its early years, St. Dunstan's Guild confined its efforts to one-act plays, staged in the meeting room at Brookside, at Cranbrook. At the age of four, in 1936, members took the plunge and produced the first of many three-act plays.

THROUGH 14 years, which included the great depression and a world war, St. Dunstan's grew steadily, in spite of the fact that it had no permanent "home." In 1946 it "arrived" and had a home of its own, the building on Lone Pine Road then known as the Cranbrook Pavilion.

The Guild, happy about the change of events, nevertheless found itself facing the problems of every other home owner. Money was needed to bring the new home up to the requirements of its family.

Members took on the challenge, a stage was constructed and since that time theater-goers in the Oakland County area have looked forward to seeing four or five excellently produced, full-length plays every year.

DRAWING MEMBERS from throughout the country, the enrollment maintained a constant growth and, with it, the facilities of the Guild.

Today, St. Dunstan productions are staged under one of the best lighting systems of any amateur theatrical group in the country. Proudly its members showed it off, and then settled down to use it to the best advantage.

Today, St. Dunstan casts present with equal ease the funny and the tensely dramatic, such as "The Caine Mutiny," a production few have forgotten.

During one period, an annual contest was held among St. Dunstan members, who wrote original works for other members to stage. Directors were professionals or chosen from among the group itself.

Beside those, they have produced works for some of the world's most famous writers. Oddly, only one Shakespearean play, "Midsummer Night's Dream," has ever been presented.

PERHAPS ONE of the group's most perplexing undertakings has been its annual Greek Theater presentation in June at the Cranbrook

amphitheater.

Cast, production crew, technicians and audiences alike have been plagued by cold, rain, mosquitoes and other hazards of an early summer night. But, true to tradition, the show has gone on.

St. Dunstan's Guild, approximately one-third the age of its parent community, has become an integral part, a way of life for that community.

ESTABLISHED IN 1956

A Club for Village Women

By MARY ELLEN MEAD
Staff Writer

As phenomenal as a Walt Disney movie has been the streamlined growth of Birmingham's Village Woman's Club. As a matter of fact, no fairy tale bean stalk ever sprang into existence with more speed or singleness of purpose.

From a handful of charter members in 1956, the roster now boasts 1,200, not including associate or non-resident members, and a sizeable waiting list is continuously tapped for new blood.

When the first letter went out soliciting membership in 1956 it read in part:

"THESE PAST several months a group of women has been enthusiastically studying the possibility of establishing in this area a club for women of similar tastes and interests. The function of such an organization is to provide a unified center for cultural, social, civic and philanthropic pursuits. The first formal step was taken March 21, when the Village Wo-

men's Club was incorporated and a temporary board of directors elected by the charter members.

The first board included Mrs. J. J. Nance, president; Mrs. W. Synnor Gilbreath, Jr., vice president; Mrs. Alan W. Joslyn, treasurer; Mrs. Frederick E. Booth, secretary; Mrs. Warren S. Booth, Mrs. Fred M. Broock, Mrs. Brooks Marshall, Mrs. Fred W. Sanders, Mrs. John Shenefield and Mrs. Theron Van Dusen.

As Birmingham-Bloomfield women started to respond, a club house site on the southwest corner of Chesterfield and Woodward in Bloomfield Hills was chosen in 1958.

ARCHITECTURAL plans were drawn up and approved when it was discovered that zoning laws involving the Church of Latter Day Saints (right across the street) were not compatible with the facility which the Village Woman's Club planned.

Undaunted, the women set forth to sell the property and start all over again.

It wasn't long afterward—Jan. 26, 1961—that the group, now 300 strong, met at The Community House and approved purchase of Birmingham House on E. Long Lake for \$130,000.

Although the club was organized with avowed educational and philanthropic purposes, little did members realize the magnitude that would be reached in these fields during the first eight years of its life.

LAST YEAR there were more than 30 different classes and special events for members and the community. Almost daily the club is filled with women—and men—pursuing programs of study.

Frequently there are two or three classes operating simultaneously. Classes run the gamut—from languages, to music, to bridge, to history and religion, to flower arrangement, drawing and parliamentary law.

By ETHEL SIMMONS
Staff Writer

Back in those Charlestoning Twenties, a group of young people spent a lively evening dancing at The Community House, and their fast and fancy footwork caused the furnace pipes to collapse and the activities building to fill with smoke and soot.

The first annual maintenance cost for The Community House was \$1,500, which included taking care of that black day.

Plans for a community gath-

ering place were made in 1920 by the Rev. Charles H. McCurdy, rector of St. James Episcopal Church, and a group of Birmingham women.

Rev. McCurdy had discovered that only one out of five local women was active in church affairs and decided to inaugurate a meeting house usable for non-secular activities.

THE LEAGUE of St. James sponsored a variety of activities to raise \$3,500 to remodel an old frame house on the corner of W. Maple and Bates. This building was dedicated as The Community House April 28, 1923.

At first it was a membership organization, with the original board headed by Mrs. Frank Miller as chairman.

Gradually more and more Birmingham residents came to consider The Community House as their activities center.

A NEW COMMUNITY House dream began to take shape in the late 20's when more than 1,000 neighborhood meetings were held to promote the vision.

A dozen or so gift-givers had contributed from \$500 to \$1,000 each for the acquisition of a parcel of land at the northwest corner of Bates and Townsend.

The premiere of The Birmingham Theatre was held as a benefit for the proposed Community House. Other fund-raising affairs, directed by Mrs. Charles Shain, netted \$115,000.

The cornerstone was laid April 28, 1929, and among the guests were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford. Opening day for the new building was March 17, 1930.

IN THE Thirties, The Community House struggled along, operating a thrift shop where clothes were reconditioned and sold to the needy of the community.

The Forties and World War II added a new variety of meetings, including a blood donor bank, air raid wardens, motor corps and nurses aide.

Velma Isley, executive director of The Community House since 1947, died in November, 1954, and was succeeded by Mrs. Ewald (Effie) Schaffer in January, 1955.

IN 1956, NEW ceilings on the second floor; new draperies, fresh paint for the exterior and general repairs to the sidewalks, steps and landscaping were added.

In 1958, The Community House housed the Arts and Crafts Exhibit, as well as a concert in cooperation with the Bloomfield Art Association and its First Arts Festival. A mimeograph and addressograph service was inaugurated in 1959.

In 1961 Mrs. Schaffer resigned from The Community House, and F. Ward Ouradnik became executive director. The organization's official name was changed to Community House Association, Inc., Birmingham.

LAST YEAR executive director Ouradnik resigned and Bob Bogan became the current Community House director. Robert A. Thom is serving as president.

In 1963, at the annual meeting, a presentation was made on a new building program. In the fall, the 28 adult and youth classes offered at The Community House broke an all-time record in registration.

THE BIRMINGHAM JayCees achieved a "first" among outside organizations renting regular office space in The Community House.

Approximately 1,400 organizations use the facilities of Birmingham's 34-year-old meeting center last year.



COMMUNITY HOUSE AT BATES, TOWNSEND
Center of Birmingham's social activities.



MRS. J. NANCE (LEFT) AND MRS. W. GILBREATH
First president and vice president, respectively.



MRS. A. G. WILSON
Club president.