A Community’s Favorite House

By ETHEL SIMMONS

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

The first annual maintenance cost for The Community House was $1,150, which included taking care of that black day.

Plans for a community gathering were made in 1920 by the Rev. Charles H. Mc-Curdy, 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-sectarian activities.

THE LEAGUE of St. James sponsored a variety of activities to raise $5,500 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 was built to take place of the late 20’s when more than 1,000 neighborhood meetings were held to promote the vote.

A dozen or so gift-givers had contributed $3,600 to $1,000 each for the acquisition of a parcel of land at the northwest corner of Bates and Townsend.

The present The Birmingham Theatre was held as a benefit for the proposed Community House. Other fund-raising affairs, directed by Mrs. Charles Shatt, netted $118,000.

The cornerstone was laid April 28, 1929, and on June the guests were Mr. and Mrs. Henry P. Dow. 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 re-conditioned and sold to the needy of the community.

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

Veinsa Sibley, executive director of The Community House since 1947, died in November, 1954, and was succeeded by Mrs. John E. Deeter of Edie Schaefer in January, 1955.

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

In 1958, the Birmingham Community House housed the Arts and Crafts Exhibit, as well as a joint operation with the Birmingham Art Association and the Festival. A studio and address tensor was inaugurated in 1959.

In 1959, Mrs. Schaefer resigned and Mrs. John E. Deeter, of F. Ward O’Rourke took over as executive director. A new logo and official name was changed to Community Action Association, Inc., Birmingham.

LAST YEAR executive director O’Rourke resigned and Bo Bogan became the current Community House director. Robert A. Thorn is serving as president.

In 1959, the annual meeting, a presentation was made on a new building proposal.

In the fall, the 28 adult and youth classes offered at The Community House broke an all-time record in registration.

THE BIRMINGHAM JayCee’s achieved a first among outside organizations, renting regular office space in The Community House.

Approximately 1,000 organizations used the facilities of Birmingham’s 14-year-old meeting center last year.

BY MARY ELLEN MEAD

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

From a handful of charter members in 1966, the roster now boasts 1,200, not including associate or non-resident members. An equal number is continuously tapped for new blood.

When the first letter went out soliciting membership in 1966 it read:

"... These Past few 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 to be to provide a unified social center for cultural, social, civic and philanthropic pursuits."

The first formal step was taken March 21, when the Village Women’s Club was incorporated and a temporary board of directors elected by the charter members.

The first board included Mrs. J. C. Novacek, president, Mrs. W. Sylvia Gilbreath, Jr., vice president; Mrs. Alton W. Jones, treasurer; Mrs. Frederick B. Booth, secretary; Mrs. Warren E. Booth, Mrs. Fred M. Brooker, Mrs. Brooks Marshall, Mrs. Fred J. Sanders, Mrs. Janice Shelnutt and Mrs. Thomas Van Drew.

As Birmingham-Bloomfield women started to respond, a club house site on the southeast corner of Chestfield and Woodward in Bloomfield Hills was chosen in 1964.

ARCHITECTURAL plans were drawn up and approved when it was discovered that no church was involved with the church of the Latter Day Saints (right across the street). The facility which the Village Women’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 900 strong, met at The Community House and approved purchase of the building on E. Long Lake for $100,000.

Although the house was organized with avowed educational and philanthropic purposes, little did members realize that the sidewalk that would be needed in those days during the first few years of its life.

LAST YEAR there were more than 20 different classes and a special event for members and the community. Almost daily the club is filled with women—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 ALICE MORGAN

Special Writer

Birmingham was 85 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 season opened on May 19, birth date of St. Dunstan (625-88). Bert A. McDonald became the first chairman of the fledgling group.

In its early years, St. Dunstan's Guild continued its efforts to one-act plays, staged in the meeting room at Brookside at Cranbrook. At the age of four, in 1906, 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 1934, the group bought a small house of its own, the building on Lone Pine Road then known as the Cranbrook house.

The Guild, happy about the change of events, nevertheless found itself facing the problems of ever-increasing membership. 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 theaer-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 show it off, and then settled down to use it to its best advantage.

Today, St. Dunstan exists para- rel with equal ease the funny and the tense, when dramatic, such as "The Matchmaker," a production few have forgotten.

During one period, an annual contest was held among the St. Dun- stan members, who wrote original works of less than 50 lines foracters to stage. Directors were professionals or chosen from among the group itself.

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

Perhaps one of the group's most popular productions was its annual Greek Theatre presentation in June at the Cranbrok