

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE YAKIMA OPTIMIST CLUB

On a Sunday afternoon in December, 1928 a group of six Yakima men met in the club rooms of the old First National Bank and formed a club which they called the Wednesday Luncheon Club. These six men were Darwin Fuller, Wesley McCullough, Ivie McKenzie, Roy Neilan, Frank Slasor and George Twohy. A formal Constitution and By-Laws were drafted and a few days later officers were elected. They were: President, Roy Neilan; Vice President, George Twohy; Secy.-Treas., Frank Slasor. The club started functioning about Feb. 1, 1929 with meetings first being held in the Tea Room of the Grand Central Market.

This young club prospered. The original six were thoroughly "sold" on the project, and its future, so they went out and recruited desirable members from their personal acquaintances. Of course such a new club could not offer much prestige to prospective members, but such prospects were offered the opportunity to share in the building of a fine club. Another inducement was the avowed intention of the founders to keep the costs of the club down, for you see there were two Scotchmen among these first six members.

The chief activity was to be the weekly meeting. Community service was to be encouraged and aided, but such service was to be in proportion to the time and means of the club members. For our first several meetings we were fortunate in finding a number of generous-minded people who were willing to appear before our club even though it was small. I shall always remember with deep appreciation the fact that the late Judge Milroy graciously agreed to give his very popular address on George Washington when we had only about a dozen members to listen to him.

At the outset only a local club was considered. Later it was felt that affiliation with a national group would give us broader contacts and acquaintances and the stimulus of other clubs working towards similar goals and bound together by close ties of friendship.

From a list of three large national clubs, the Optimist Club was selected, and it had two things that appealed strongly to our group. First, the inspiring philosophy of OPTIMISM as set forth in the Optimist Creed; and, secondly, in that its program of service centered around service to boys, the club's motto being "Friend Of The Boy".

The new Charter was issued December 23, 1929 with 28 Charter members, five of whom are still in the club: Darwin Fuller, Charles Kerslake, Ivie McKenzie, Roy Neilan and George Twohy.

Charter Night will always live in the memory of those present. Nothing like it had ever happened before in our club, nothing quite like it has ever happened since. In Seattle, at that time, there was a very large and live-wire Optimist Club and composed of, among others, practically all the political big shots of the Seattle City Government and the King County Government. Mayor Edwards himself was President that year. Some 20 of these fellows came over in a special car prepared for a grand time. And I have never at any other time seen so much whoopee in one afternoon and evening. These boys could sing, they could tell rare stories, they could recite poetry, they could make life most miserable for the waitresses, and HOW they could ROLL DICE!!

Probably the most vividly remembered incident of the evening was when President-Elect Vaara arose to welcome the visitors after the banquet. His mind went blank, he stood there for two minutes vainly trying to recall his planned speech, then dazedly sat down. However, old reliable Twohy took over and things went on smoothly.

The history of the Yakima Optimist Club since that exciting evening has been the story of kindred spirits who enjoy the companionship of like-minded men, cordial, frank, decidedly informal, imbued with no desire to reform the community or its habits, ready to help boys in need of a friend. Many of this group hold, and have held, important positions in the community's business and social life, but few have sought positions of leadership in governmental activities.

Throughout the years Yakima Optimists have participated in various civic campaigns that service clubs generally have taken part in. Early in the life of our club the American Legion used to have a Stunt Parade on Armistice Night, in which service clubs and others entered floats. In the four years we participated, our club won second prize money twice and first prize once.

In the fall of 1934, the Gyro Club sponsored a carnival at the Armory for the benefit of St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Along with other service clubs, we had a concession and raised a nice sum of money.

In the 1935 Pioneer Days celebration, we were called on to sell tickets at the dances and we took care of it in good shape.

Our club has participated in Community Chest Drives, Red Cross Drives, etc. Yes, we even have gone on the air and sung at command performances. However, our club has been conspicuous by the few times that we have endeavored to stage benefit shows, carnivals and concerts. For Yakima Optimists HATE to sell tickets. And they are not very much promotion-minded.

One of our enduring projects has been our work with boys. Someone has said, "In each and every man worthy of the name there is an honest, unashamed desire to be of helpful use to someone else". In our early club life, we formed a Junior Optimist Club. Joe Larson, Doc Bryant and Ivie McKenzie were early leaders. Later a Boy Scout Troop was sponsored by a committee headed by Bill Schultze. This was quite successful, including furnishing lumber for the boys themselves to fix up their meeting room. At one time, we sponsored a Junior Schoolboy Patrol and furnished the boys with their Sam Browne belts.

Of late years, we have concentrated on a Junior Club again. Jim Trindle, Paul Meyer, Don Rolfe, Gus Shinn, Jim Anderson, Ed Putnam have done a lot of swell work on this project. The boys have weekly meetings at which featured speakers appear to discuss subjects of interest to the boys. The evening's program also includes a work-out on the gym floor. The Senior Club furnishes the gym suits. For some years many of the boys have been sent to the "Y" summer camp. Lately the boys have been earning part of their expenses by selling popcorn at the "Y" smokers.

Also by an arrangement with "Gorgeous Gussie" Shinn, the boys have gone to the first camp period and earned part of their board by helping set up camp.

Early in the club's history, an arrangement was worked out with Judge Barnett whereby some of the boys who were wards of his Juvenile Court were paroled to Optimists. Also, an Uncle program was used whereby various boys were assigned to Senior Optimists to whom the boys could go for counsel concerning any problems they had. And an affair of long standing is our Annual Christmas Party for the Junior Optimists, which the Seniors enjoy very much too. And I could not pass without referring to the amount of real help two of our clothing members, Dave Davis and Harry Martin, gave needy boys in days gone by. All of these are efforts to be "a friend of the boy", and while no record has been kept of these boys as they have become men we do know enough of what they have become to be proud of having at one time given them a helping hand.

Of the various projects which we have undertaken, of course the two most noteworthy ones were the Iron Lung Campaign and the Junior College Pledge.

The Iron Lung Campaign, in the fall and winter of 1937-1938, was at once the most colorful, the most enthusiastic, and the most thoroughly enjoyable campaign I ever expect to participate in. When the project was first proposed to our Club by "Bonus Bill" Norgard, there were those who felt that meritorious as it was, it still was of such a magnitude that we could hardly hope for its success with our manpower available. However, much encouragement came from many sides at once, and we voted to launch the drive. Its appeal to all types of clubs and groups was instantaneous, and almost unbelievable. The press and radio of Yakima and other valley towns gave it wide and most favorable publicity. Then from far-off Hollywood that noted clown comedian, Joe Penner, sent his famous duck, Goo-Goo II, with a \$100.00 check for his personal contribution. Just the thought of a colorful Hollywood personality like Joe Penner boosting for us was worth many hundreds of dollars. Under the leadership of our committee of Cecil Smith, Bill Norgard and Don Rolfe, a parade in Goo-Goo's honor was arranged in which the city dads and other local celebrities participated with Goo-Goo being carried in the place of honor by some of our club members. The President's Ball Committee offered us their cooperation and by tying in our campaign with the Infantile Paralysis Campaign, a large share of the proceeds was earmarked to stay in Yakima. Fred Mercy put his theatres behind the drive. The skating rink joined in the fun. The Elks and the Eagles put on special dances. A benefit basketball game was played. With Goo-Goo being escorted everywhere by Bill Norgard and Hap Hinman, everything went over big. Something over \$3000.00 was raised. An Iron Lung and Baby Respirator were bought for St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and a Baby Incubator was bought for each St. Elizabeth's Hospital and the Yakima County Hospital.

For especial recognition in this Iron Lung Campaign, I want to pay tribute to Mrs. W. W. Richardson and Mrs. E. R. Van Leuwen for the immense amount of planning and organization work they did. As a tribute to Joe Penner, the club made him an honorary member and sent him a copy of our Creed. He acknowledged both with a very nice note of appreciation and later sent us a Christmas Greeting. When eight of us attended the International Convention in Los Angeles in 1938, through our friendship with Joe we got 300 tickets for delegates to use to attend Joe's broadcast.

Our Club's Junior College Pledge was not spectacular like the Iron Lung Campaign. On the recommendation of our own Bill Kelly, the amount of \$500.00 was pledged just after the announcement that a Junior College was to be built on the fine site donated by Mrs. Rose B. Larson and her son, Mr. Shirley Parker. Our Club made the announcement as a complete surprise to the public, hoping that it would stimulate other clubs to follow suit. All in all we raised something over \$600.00. Later, with the aid of the Junior College student body a series of dances was given and a substantial amount was raised for the College Library Fund.

Along with our attempts at community service our club has had some fun, a lot of fun, and that may be putting it mildly. For no gang ever got a bigger kick out of wise-cracking or trying to put a pal behind the eightball. Of course, some of the choicest bits of embarrassment cannot be divulged in recorded history. But some of us will never forget the night that Bill Schultze, now a feature writer on the Seattle P-I, kept blowing Sneezing Powder and Itching Powder in the air at a stag party. Bill

was finally taken in hand and ducked in a tub of ice water. Bill also staged a great Shakespeare drama at club one day, the theme of it being a novel way to prevent future wars. Then for a long time the club had a "Father Medal" that was awarded to a member whose wife brought him fame. We all recall the time that one certain lawyer arose and objected to a certain member receiving the medal and introduced a visiting fireman whom he claimed deserved the medal.

While recalling laughs of the past, who can forget the exhibits that Uncle Don Samson and "P-I" Jones introduced at a certain mock trial? Or the story that brought "pumpkin Twohy" his famous sobriquet? Many of us remember how one of our past presidents created a sensation by the speech he did not make. Then there was the time that the second Seattle Club was installed. What excitement when several things happened like the stimulated fight and shooting scrape, Ed Jones' ear trumpet getting on fire, etc.

We must of course pay tribute to the Ladies of our club. In times past, we have had an Opti-Mrs. organization whose assistance has been most valuable. Our Ladies were always very sympathetic to our stag-parties, which we periodically have had to stage for Bill Kelly. In fact, they have always been sympathetic EXCEPT the time we went over to install the Tacoma Club and left them behind although the Tacoma boys had their ladies present and the Seattle boys brought their gals with them. And to this day they have never accepted our explanation of this unforeseen and unexpected development. Our most enjoyable meetings have always been when they were present. To them we owe our beautiful dinner gong. And I (fain) would see the custom revived of having an Annual Spring Ladies Day. It was always the high-light program of the year. And it gave all the boys a greater pride in their club from the knowledge that there was so much beauty and charm that went along with our club.

Our inter-club relations have always been very enjoyable. Many of us have attended District Conventions. Some of us have attended International gatherings. Some of us have visited other clubs in various states and provinces. Some of our number have served as District officers. Don Samson served as International Vice-President. We have assisted in forming several new Optimist Clubs and we take special pride in the fact that we sponsored the original Portland Club which now ranks 14th in Optimist International.

Before closing, I want to pay tribute to our long-time Charter Member and Past President Wesley McCullough. Mac was one of the first six, and as such he exerted a strong influence on the early shaping of the club. He continued to wield this influence as long as he lived. He filled many offices in the club and all of them very thoroughly. He was a good friend of a boy that needed a friend. It is fitting that our Junior College Scholarship should now be known as the Wesley McCullough Scholarship.

To sum up my thoughts, I would say that the history of the Yakima Optimist Club is simply a revelation of what membership in a good Service Club can mean to anyone. First of all, it means an hour and a half each week of entertainment, instruction, or fellowship, and usually all of them. It means a lot of fun. It means wider acquaintanceship and broader contacts. It means the inspiration of the Optimist Creed. It means closer friendships.

The Yakima Optimist Club has been fortunate in that we have always had a pretty good degree of harmony and unity in feeling and aims. The credit for our growth and our accomplishments, modest though they be, should be given to all those who have served as Presidents, as Committee Chairmen, and to those who as fellow members have given the plans of their leaders such splendid support.

So I wish to close with the recording of those who, during our twenty years of Club life, have been the Presidents:

Helmar G. Vaara)		Wm. C. Kelly	1940-41
Edwin H. Jones)	1930-31	R. D. Lang	1941-42
Laurel E. Miller	1931-32	F. Stuart Foster	1942-43
Donald E. Samson	1932-33	Leslie M. McConnell)	
Wesley H. McCullough	1933-34	E. M. Keeper)	1943-44
Roy A. Neilan	1934-35	C. Darwin Fuller	1944-45
Ralph E. Davis	1935-36	Ivie J. McKenzie	1945-46
Don M. Tunstall	1936-37	Paul C. Meyer	1946-47
F. W. Norgard	1937-38	Gus W. Shinn	1947-48
LaMar B. Andrews	1938-39	Donald F. Rolfe	1948-49
George C. Twohy	1939-40	Oscar Soderstrom	1949-50

George C. Ivory 1939-40
Lester B. Andrews 1938-39
B. W. Workard 1937-38
Don M. Jannetelli 1936-37
Walter E. Davis 1935-36
Roy A. Weaver 1934-35
Healey H. McCallough 1933-34
Donald M. Gannon 1932-33
Lauriel E. Miller 1931-32
Edwin H. Jones 1930-31
Herman L. Davis

Oscar Robertson 1949-50
Donald E. Davis 1948-49
Ous H. Davis 1947-48
Paul C. Weaver 1946-47
Wm. L. McCallough 1945-46
Lauriel E. Miller 1944-45
L. Donald Jannetelli 1943-44
H. E. Davis 1942-43
Wm. C. Kelley 1941-42
1940-41

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was finally taken in hand and ended in a way of its own. Bill also created a front

Optimist Club History