



Ursinus College

## Digital Commons @ Ursinus College

---

Charles Rice Post-Graduate Research  
Fellowship

Harold C. Smith Program in Christian Studies

---

2021

### The Old Boys Club: Podcast Transcripts

Codi Yhap

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/charles\\_rice\\_fellowship](https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/charles_rice_fellowship)



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#), [Organization Development Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

[Click here to let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

---

## The Old Boys Club

### -Episode 1: The Old Boys Club-

Codi: Growing up a gen Z zoomer, I've had to decode my fair share of text. "LOL What a funny gif! ATM teach is grilling me SMH but I'll ttyl ily <3. mwah" I've added the mwah for dramatic effect but hopefully you get the point. Acronyms have immersed themselves into American culture. While most of us don't talk like this, at least I hope not, we have used this universal shorthand to help us communicate and make the phone bill more manageable for mom.

That's why I decided to ask some of my friends about the seemingly popular, yet elusive, meaning of YMCA.

\*Funny music cue\*

Codi: "What does the YMCA stand for?"

Person 1: "Youth Men's Club Activities"

Codi: "What does the YMCA stand for?"

Person 2: "Young Missionaries Country Accommodations"

Codi: "What does the YMCA stand for?"

Person 3: "Youngsters Made Christian Again"

Codi: "What does the YMCA stand for?"

Person 4: "You May Camp Association"

Codi: While creative, none of those answers were quite right. But if you put them all together you get...

Combination: "Young Men's Christian Association"

Codi: Now, I know what you're probably thinking, "Are we talking about the gym?" "Does that mean I have to be Christian?" "Are you referring to the song and dance that got me on the jumbotron for Aunt Gertrude's birthday?" Yes, no, and \*pause\* possibly? Really, it depends on who you ask and when which is why I'm here. Hello, my name is Codi Yhap and I'll be your host/ audio tour guide for the next few weeks as we dive into the history of the Young Men's Christian Association. Join me as we explore the organization's transformation from bible study group to one of the oldest and most recognized non-profit organizations. Welcome to *The Old Boys Club*.

\*cue theme music/ verbal montage\*

---

\*Horse and Buggy sounds\*

Codi: The history of the YMCA begins across "the pond", as some might say, in London, England 1844.

\*Industrial noises or intense music\*

---

Codi: It's the height of the industrial revolution and London is faced with two intertwined problems: 1) uncontrolled migration into the city and 2) poor living and working conditions in factories.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the rural communities most of these men we accustomed to, each factory was a community in and of itself; serving as workspace, dining hall, and dormitory. Yet, there was an important aspect of community life which was missing from these factories: a spiritual component.

\*Storytelling music in background \*

While the Christian faith underscored many social reform movements advocating for more suitable living and working conditions, incorporating religion in the workspace was not common practice. Born in 1821, George Williams, like other young man, came to the city in search of wages but felt that the shared living space could double as a meeting space for prayer and serve the men's spiritual needs. Hosting prayer meetings in his room in 1841 soon grew into hosting prayer meetings for the house by 1843. Even William's employer, George Hitchcock, joined the meetings and would be one of the twelve men to agree on the name...

\*More confidently\*

Collaboration: "Young Men's Christian Association".

Codi: on June 6, 1844.<sup>2</sup> Which aimed to improve the spiritual conditions of young men in drapery and other mercantile trades and later all young men.<sup>3</sup>

---

\*Change to detective music\*

Codi: And with this name the Young Men's Christian Association joined its fifty-six predecessors in history as another extracurricular Christian activity gone bust!<sup>4</sup> Done. End of Podcast. I'd like to thank- I'm just kidding we haven't gotten there yet. But I wasn't kidding when I mentioned the multiple previous and pre-existing organizations that existed before the YMCA.

The earliest examples being men and women attending mixed meetings on biblical instruction in the Netherlands in 1586, and the Young Anglicans in England which held weekly talks on the spiritual and moral state of the population in 1678. Though these "clubs" and "societies" often had short lifespans, they continued to pop-up around Europe especially during religious revivals.<sup>5</sup> So, why then was the YMCA unique?

Unlike its predecessors who primarily offered bible studies and prayer meetings *and* were attached to churches or lead by clergy (church leadership), the YMCA was a lay organization with and interdenominational foundation.<sup>6</sup> Meaning that the members of the congregation were guiding the organization and ultimately that provided a great deal of flexibility for the association. Among the 12

---

<sup>1</sup> Clarence Prouty Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1955), 27-32.

<sup>2</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 18-23.

<sup>3</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 22, 28-29.

<sup>4</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 23, 25.

founders there were four denominations present: Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Independent. Thus-

Shedd: church membership

Codi: From any evangelical church or

Shedd: “evidence of converted character”

Codi: were required for membership.<sup>7</sup> And, while this rule restricted other sects of Christian faith (i.e., Catholicism) from becoming full members, the association sought to expand its membership through other means. In 1848, the Mutual Improvement Society was founded within the YMCA to improve the spiritual conditions of working-class men and attract non-Christian young men to the association. Full membership was out of reach for non-Christians, but for ten shillings and six pence one could attain associate membership which provided access to library and reading rooms as freely as any full member.<sup>8</sup> Of course, this did not allow them to voice their opinions or vote on association matters BUT, it got people in the door. Being exposed to religious texts would hopefully encourage associate members to become full members should they convert to Christianity. Improving the spiritual conditions of young men meant converting those who were not Christian and supporting the faith and fellowship of those who were.

\*Should be a big swell with climaxing music somewhere in here\*

And it didn't stop there, full religious services were being held in twenty homes by 1846 and two branch associations stemming from the London association were established between 1845-1847.<sup>9</sup> A lecture series at Exeter Hall in London was open to the public inviting speakers from all increasing the popularity of the association in terms of community sentiment toward the association and membership. Increasing the number of members from seventy, prior to the first meeting in 1844, to one thousand by 1848.<sup>10</sup>

\*end of music\*

---

Codi: The YMCA wasn't organizing your average bible study/prayer meeting. Unless you attend a mega church or participate in a Zoom bible study that is. The organization was turning into quite the evangelizing force.

Unbeknownst to London, the YMCA's international presence began in Kooronga and Adelaide, Australia by London members who migrated away.<sup>11</sup> The issue being correspondence. These were the days before phone calls, internet, or texting. Letters were the primary means of long-distance communication. And before you ask, no, they did not have Amazon Prime's coveted same day shipping.

Codi (fast): Results may vary please blah blah blah blah.

---

<sup>7</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 31.

Codi: So, how did the YMCA gain international recognition?

\*Music\*

Codi: From May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1851, to October 15<sup>th</sup>, London's Hyde Park became a packed microcosm within an already bustling city. The Great exhibition of 1851 was one of the first in a series of world's fairs; showcasing culture and technological advancements from around the world.<sup>12</sup> Over the next six months, six million people would visit and with great crowds comes great... publicity! The YMCA took full advantage of the event to spread literature about the association handing out 352,000 tracts of literature outlining the associations aims and purpose.<sup>13</sup> As reporters returned home recounting the spectacle of the crystal palace and other industrial wonders some shared news of an organization which aimed to improve the spiritual conditions of young men.

Codi: And that's how happened. Born from *a small-town boy living in a, seemingly, lonely world for Christian men in the mercantile trade*, the YMCA integrated themselves into the London community, took advantage of the international grapevine that was the Great exhibition and lived on forever as a song by the Village people. Wait, that last part was a jump. The song doesn't come out until 1979. That's over a century of information without information on the YMCA! But never fear. The Old Boy's club is here, to fill you in on some YMCA history and investigate how the organization has changed.

I'd like to thank the Harold C. Smith Foundation for funding this project. I would also like to thank project supervisor Christian Rice and Angela Upright the program coordinator. This podcast was made possible by the Rev. Charles Rice Fellowship at Ursinus College. If you have questions about the sources, please find transcripts of the episodes on the website. Thank you again, and please join us for next week's podcast.

---

<sup>12</sup> "Great Exhibition" Wikipedia, January 7, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Exhibition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Exhibition).

<sup>13</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 31.

-Bibliography-

Shedd, Clarence. *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*. London: SPCK, 1955.

"Great Exhibition." Wikipedia. January 7, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Exhibition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Exhibition).

## The Old Boys Club: Eclipsing confederacies (Episode 2)

\*Typewriter sounds\*

William Chauncy Langdon: "At length, kindled from an English Shrine, the torch was uplifted in Montreal and a few young men, [November 1851], organized a Young Men's Christian Organization." <sup>1</sup>

\*fade\*

Joseph Gilbert: "The first meeting of our society was in November 1851. We were five. Of whom two were from Geneva, our brother Mercier and I: three others..." <sup>2</sup>

\*fade\*

Henri Dunant: "There are at Geneva a considerable number of young Christians who met together for the purpose of worshipping and praying to the Lord Jesus, whom they love, and whom they desire to serve and glorify. The disciples of Jesus are very numerous..." <sup>3</sup>

Codi: News of the YMCA made its way around the world and back to London. Letters from William Chauncy Langdon in Washington D.C.,

Langdon: Hey hey (quiet)

Codi: Joseph Gilbert from Paris, France-

Gilbert: Bonjour (quiet)

Codi: and Henri Dunant from Geneva, Switzerland-

Dunant: look up hello in Swiss (quiet)

Codi: Were among the firsts to inform London that the bonds of Christian brotherhood extended beyond England, sharing the aims and name Young Men's Christian Association. Codi: The first North American YMCA was founded in Montreal Canada, 1851. David Naismith came over from Scotland and established the Young Men's Society and City Mission work a few decades prior. Unfortunately, Naismith's societies were often short lived as they lacked organization and leadership without Naismith present.<sup>4</sup> This was true of Montreal's society which began in 1831 and ended in 1839. After receiving news of the Exeter hall lectures, and the copy of the London associations constitution, former recording secretary for the Young Men's Society in Montreal, John Holland, along with former London YMCA

---

<sup>1</sup> Harold C. Cross, *One Hundred Years of Service with Youth. The Story of the Montreal YMCA* (Montreal: Southam Press, 1951), 22-25, quoted in Clarence Prouty Shedd, *History of the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations* (London: SPCK, 1955), 68.

<sup>2</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Seventh Report of the YMCA*, (London, 1851), 37, quoted in Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 88.

<sup>4</sup> Auguste Senaud, "'YMCAs' Before the YMCAs" in Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 6-8.

member Francis Grafton, T. James Claxton, and William G. Milne stopped establish the first association on the continent with Boston following soon after.<sup>5</sup>

The second YMCA in North America and first in the States was founded in Boston Massachusetts.<sup>6</sup> As L.L. Doggett put it, “the simplicity of the colonial days had gone.” Boston was the 4<sup>th</sup> largest city in the U.S. at the time. A city with a history of “intense religious earnest” with a rapidly growing industrial scene and population to boot.<sup>7</sup> A letter from New York University student Geroge M. Van Derlip to the *Watchman and Reflector* would spark the YMCA conversation in the states on October 20, 1851.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly enough, Van Derlip’s letter was originally pigeonholed by the paper’s editor but later released at the request of Captain T.V. Sullivan, or aka the marine missionary.

\*Funny music cue\*

Codi: The 51-year-old sea captain was already performing missionary work at the ports in Boston but, upon reading Van Derlip’s account of the Gresham Street YMCA in London, wanted a similar organization in Boston.<sup>9</sup> Going into stores, and homes to tell people about his dream once might say he was the T.V. before television playing the same programming all day: YMCA.

Having the *Watchman and reflector* publish Van Derlip’s account would not be the last time Sullivan would utilize the power of the press. Proposing to form an association of young men from evangelical churches on December 15<sup>th</sup> and drafting a constitution a week later, the Boston YMCA was formally established on December 29, 1851, and immediately let their presence be known via “press and post” as more than 10,000 copies of their constitution and 5000 copies of the first address in roughly 18 months.<sup>10</sup>

Boston constitution (background): “ A young man who is a stranger finds find it difficult to obtain access to Christian families or in any way satisfy the demands of his social nature except in places that are dangerous to his morals often leading him to his ruin....We intended to make this social organization of those in whom the love of Christ has produced love to men...by thus making his social atmosphere a Christian one, we believe that the allurements to evil may be stripped of much of their power.”<sup>11</sup>

Codi: This led to a series of YMCAs to spring up including the New York YMCA, and Washington D.C. YMCA.<sup>12</sup> Enter William Chauncy Langdon.

\*Intermission\*

---

---

<sup>5</sup> Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 68; C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, (New York: Association Press,1951), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> L.L. Doggett, *History of the Boston YMCA* (Boston,1901),4, quoted in Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 69.

<sup>8</sup> Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*,70; Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946*, (University of Kentucky Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*,70; Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Doggett, *History of the Boston YMCA*, 17 in Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 70-71,121; Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Doggett, *History of the Boston YMCA*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 73.



Aside from Henri Dunant, William Chauncy Langdon, a 21-year-old patent clerk was the second most influential person to the Paris Conference. Soon after receiving a copy of the Boston constitution Dr. Clement M. Butler, a Chaplain of the U.S. senate, asked Langdon and Thomas Dunning if, " ... such an organization could be effective here." And indeed, it was. Responsible for D.C.'s correspondence, Langdon was soon in contact with 30 YMCAs including Montreal, Paris, Geneva and London and maintaining a circular letter.<sup>13</sup>

Codi: With news of the Jünglingsvereine alliance in West Germany, the Union of the French Association and Branch organizations in London, Langdon began to ask himself if such organization could be effective in North America. By which I mean an American confederation of YMCAs. In 1852, Langdon purposed that the Boston or New York YMCA should lead the budding collective. After all, these were the twin giants of the North American YMCA world at the time. Yet they both refused. As we heard in the first episode, the associations foundation stems from local YMCAs. Remember, it wasn't the London association who sent representatives to start international branches rather former London members independently established associations or existing organizations renamed themselves Young Men's Christian Associations, making the idea of a confederation a bit unsettling. Many feared that the confederation would become a governing entity and limit local autonomy. So after two years of debate, delegates agreed that the confederation would have a central committee responsible for organizing annual meetings and NOT oversee participating organizations.<sup>14</sup> Still, the "true crisis of the confederation" was upon them.

\*Change in music\*

Codi: Debates over slavery continued to escalate in the 1850s with the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin in 1852 and later Dred Scott Decision in 1857.<sup>15</sup> Amidst the conversation surrounding the confederacy, John Holland, president of the Toronto association, would be the first to address the elephant in the room. At the first meeting of the Buffalo convention, Holland asked the delegates to recognize that "in Christ Jesus, there is neither bond nor free" inviting "all Christian young men, of whatever degree or condition in life, to an equal participation" in the YMCA and was essentially met with silence as it was pigeon-holed to the business office never to be reported.<sup>16</sup> Locally, YMCAs were discussing the slavery along with the rest of the country. The New York association banning Uncle Tom's Cabin in 1853 and petitioning the Kansas-Nebraska Act the following year caused quite a stir along with D.C.'s banning all political and partisan topics after a "southern member" purposed a banning of, National Era, an abolitionist paper.<sup>17</sup> It seemed as though "there could be no legitimate divorce between religion and politics when moral issues were at stake," as the Young Men's Republican Union later put it.<sup>18</sup> Because after Holland raises the issue of slavery to at the convention in buffalo it kept coming up.

\*Text message noises\*

---

<sup>13</sup> Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 73-75.

<sup>14</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 10; Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 76-77

<sup>15</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 10-11 citation 14,16.

<sup>17</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 11-13.

<sup>18</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 12-13.

Brooke: "the rights of Christian slaves to become members of the association."<sup>19</sup>

Nina Mjagkij (or should it be the central committee?): The central committee has met and "acknowledged the autonomy of local YMCAs and therefore ha[s] no authority to issue binding policies on slavery or any other issue."<sup>20</sup>

YMCA Official: "You have check-mated Toronto and saves us all trouble."<sup>21</sup>

Brooke: "It was thought desirable that our delegate should present a resolution to the convention, not on the subject of slavery, but on the right of all to the privileges of the Alliance notwithstanding any social differences. You may think this in expedient, *We think otherwise....* it was with difficulty that the Association was brought to accept the basis of the Alliance... in the hope that the committee... would have accommodated the matter, by either adopting such a sentiment in their constitution... or by some sentence in one of their circulars... *that hope proving groundless*, there was only one course to pursue, that of withdrawing from the Alliance."<sup>22</sup>

\*A lot of starting to type sound but no sent messages\*

Computer Karen: *Toronto has left the chat. Rhode Island has left the chat.*

Pittsburgh: "... a condition of attending the coming Convention, that [we] should be free to bear [our] conscientious testimony against what [we] believe to be a national sin."<sup>23</sup>

Central committee: To all those interested in the 1856 annual convention please note: "the confederated existence is intended, *in no way, at no time, under no circumstances, and in no relation*, whether as a Convention or as a Central Committee, to advance upon the local character of *any association*." "Any difference of opinion on other subjects, however important to themselves, but not embraced by the specific designs of the associations, shall not interfere with the harmonious relations of the Confederated societies (1859)."<sup>24</sup>

Codi: Unfortunately, the committee's attempt to bypass the debate over slavery proved ineffective.

\*Sound of Many texts coming in at once\*

Montreal: We cannot approve of "Southern Associations which reject Christian young men of colour."<sup>25</sup>

Computer: *Montreal has left the chat*

Richmond: "the separation of the South from the North is irrevocable, and the sooner this great fact is acknowledged by the nations of the earth the better it will be for the interests of humanity."<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 11 citation 21.

<sup>22</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 11-12 citation 23.

<sup>23</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 14 citation 25.

<sup>24</sup> Mjagkij p.13-14; p.13 citation 32

<sup>25</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 13 citation 31.

<sup>26</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 14.

Noble Heath, Jr (NY): "Slavery is wrong, you have determined to defend that wrong... may God forgive you; your position is utterly false and my heart bleeds that men calling themselves Christians can connect themselves with so wicked a cause... Your Christians will meet ours in battle."<sup>27</sup>

Codi: Striving for unity, Langdon had feared the discussion of slavery would alienate southern association and unravel the confederation before it got off the ground when Holland first mentioned it in 1852. And though opposed to slavery recognized "... that the danger came from the opposite direction" as Northern associations asked the organization to take a stance on the issue.<sup>28</sup> The formation of the confederate states of America would also mean the dissolution of the confederation of YMCAs as Christian's did indeed meet on the battlefield. The result? Well, you'll just have to join us next time to find out.

\*Outro Music\*

Codi: I'd like to thank the Harold C. Smith Foundation for funding this project. I would also like to thank project supervisor Christian Rice and Angela Upright the program coordinator. This podcast was made possible by the Rev. Charles Rice Fellowship at Ursinus College. If you have questions about the sources, please find transcripts of the episodes on the website. Thank you again, and please join us for next week's podcast.

---

<sup>27</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 14 citation 33.

<sup>28</sup> Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness*, 11 citation 20.

Bibliography:

Cross, Harold C. *One Hundred Years of Service with Youth. The Story of the Montreal YMCA*. Montreal: Southam Press, 1951.

Doggett, L.L. *History of the Boston YMCA*. Boston, 1901.

Senaud, Auguste. "YMCAs" Before the YMCAs. In *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, edited by Clarence Prouty Shedd, 6-8. London: SPCK, 1955.

*Seventh Report of the YMCA*. London, 1851.

Shedd, Clarence Prouty. *History of the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*. London: SPCK, 1955.

Hopkins, C. Howard. *History of the YMCA in North America*. New York: Association Press, 1951.

Mjagkij, Nina. *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946*, University of Kentucky Press, 2003.

7/12/2021      The Old Boy's Club Episode 3: His House upon a Rock

Codi: Last episode, Things weren't looking too good for YMCAs in North America. Tensions around the country had climaxed into Civil war and the confederation of Northern YMCAs has been eclipsed by the southern confederacy. Noble Heath, Jr claim that-

Noble Heath, Jr: "Your Christians will meet ours in battle."<sup>1</sup>

Codi: Was soon proven true from the start of the war. But Mr. Heath wasn't done there.

Noble Heath, Jr: The 7<sup>th</sup> regiment of New York... The 12<sup>th</sup> and the 71<sup>st</sup> as well; and tomorrow the 9<sup>th</sup> take others... God will require an account of everyman who abets the treason of the South. I cannot pray for the Southern confederacy."<sup>2</sup>

Christian regiments formed primarily of YMCA members were already established like the Ironside regiment from New York and the 72<sup>nd</sup> Illinois volunteers from Chicago. But recruitment of soldiers also meant a decrease in members as twenty of the two-hundred YMCAs we said to be "active and prosperous" by the Spring of 1862.<sup>3</sup>

George Stuart: "Men of the country Associations were entirely broken up, almost every member responding to all of Abraham Lincoln" <sup>4</sup>

Codi: It was around this time that the loyal, union, states and provinces were invited to the Chicago convention of 1863 to rekindle the YMCAs confederation. <sup>5</sup> And yes, I said loyal states and provinces as this excludes southern associations like Richmond and St. Louis which never retracted themselves from the confederation in the first place. In fact, calling a meeting in the first place was an assumption of authority by the presiding central committee leader George Stuart from Philadelphia-

George Stuart: hey hey (faint)

Codi: Thus, ending the first national alliance of North American YMCAs. <sup>6</sup> Which was technically international, but Canada had already withdrawn from the original so... yeah. National for a couple of months. At the 1863 convention not only was a new alliance formed but, the structure of the YMCA begins to take shape and the Monroe doctrine approach aka remaining neutral on all things outside the realm of the YMCA (instead of the western hemisphere) was broken.

George H. Stuart, was the chair of the central committee *and* the United States Christian Commission (USCC) which provided furnished supplies, medical services and religious literature to soldiers. <sup>7</sup> While the prayer meeting revivals of 1857-1858 made aid via Christian commission common place before the war, what

---

<sup>1</sup>Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946*, (University of Kentucky Press, 2003), 14.

<sup>2</sup>C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, (New York: Association Press, 1951), 87.

<sup>3</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 84-85.

<sup>4</sup>*Hundred Year Book*, 1862 quoted in C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, (New York: Association Press, 1951), 85.

<sup>5</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 71.

<sup>6</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 71.

<sup>7</sup> Hamlin, M. Cannon. "The United States Christian Commission," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38, no. 1. (1951): 61-80; Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 71.

this meant for the YMCA was that they would involve in the civil war directly.<sup>8</sup> Volunteering to fight in the war is indeed a direct way of getting involved but the union was now backed financially by the association through cash, goods, and volunteering. On Nov 14-15, 1861, 15 YMCAs would join the USCC and ask local associations to raise fund.<sup>9</sup> Soon there were visits to the Navy yard by Brooklyn, devotional services held by Chicago, care package crafting with the Ladies Christian union in Cleveland, and new testaments handouts from D.C.<sup>10</sup> The Government offered accommodations for religious services and later gain Lincoln's approval and more army clearances.<sup>11</sup> Accruing \$1,300,000 in cash and slightly less in contribution of books and store by 1864.<sup>12</sup> Now with interest today that equals... a whole lot of cash.

\*cha-ching noise\*

Codi: So when they say "virtually every association that was not forced to disband carried on such a program."<sup>13</sup> They mean, every association that was not forced to disband was holding it down. For the North that is. Southern associations were virtually wiped out by the Civil War with only Richmond and Charleston lasting throughout the war. There is no recorded effort to form a Southern federation of YMCAs.<sup>14</sup> However, Richmond was able to supply aid via hospitals, medical services, and chaplains amounting to ~\$500,000 for the confederate capital. However, this wasn't even a quarter the amount of funding the USCC raised plus, the city was burned down as that's just how Tecumseh Sherman rolls.<sup>15</sup> And though Charleston provided rooms until 1863, most of its members were sent to support the confederacy on the front lines. Selling fixtures and combining with the Ladies Christian association to keep the YMCA alive though it closed its doors in 1863 only to reopen them in 1866.<sup>16</sup> A few new YMCAs were created, one at Johnson's Island in Ohio by southern youth of all ranks and in Georgia and Mississippi brigades.<sup>17</sup> But like I said we don't have many records as they were likely set ablaze.

Now that the war was over, Northern YMCAs appeared stronger than ever while Southern YMCAs were close to extinct. But as Charles Hopkins explains the surviving YMCAs had become 'disciplined and mature... anxious to rebuild their national unity, to compose their purpose, and their yet unmeasured energies.'<sup>18</sup>

Codi: In order to regain national unity, new and existing issues would have to be reconciled. The end of the civil war was the end of the confederation era for the YMCA. Not just because the first one fell apart but also because the aims of the overall organization remained relatively ambiguous. For example, what were the limits of evangelism within the YMCA? they were, after all, an organization of churchgoers not

---

<sup>8</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 84.

<sup>9</sup> R.E. Thompson, ed., *The Life of George H. Stuart* (Philadelphia: J.M. Stoddart & Co., 1890), In Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 89.

<sup>10</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 88-89.

<sup>11</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 89,91.

<sup>12</sup> Lemuel Moss, *Annals of the U.S. Christian Commission* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1868), 293, in Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 91.

<sup>13</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 89.

<sup>14</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 94-95.

<sup>16</sup> *Half a century in Charleston 1854-1904* (Charleston, S.C.: 1904), 14-15 in Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 96.

<sup>17</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 96-97

<sup>18</sup> O.E. Pence, *The YMCA, and Social Need; A study of Institutional Adaptation* (New York: Assn. Press, 1946) in Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 94.

clergy. If they overstepped into the church's domain, they might have the book thrown at them. Or worse, lose the churches support financially and socially. You also have to remember and respect the autonomy of local associations. Because, if you try to implement a top-down approach where a central committee oversees the associations no one will agree to it as we saw with the formation of the confederation. So, what do you do... You figure out who are, as and organization, by asking yourself what you've done up until this point.

\*Music cue\*

Codi: Seeing that the aims of the YMCA were not clearly stated by all associations presented the first obstacle on the road to unity: the church. Having multiple denominations housed under the one organization raised suspicion among churches as differences in doctrine would surely, and often did, cause disputes. Some even suspected that the movement would break off and become a new denomination.<sup>19</sup> However in the eyes of the YMCA the issue was twofold. The conclusion of the Civil war left the YMCA semi-dependent upon the church for goods, ministers, and you guessed it, finances.<sup>20</sup>

Random Person: Cash Cash Cash      Mula baby      The Green      Cheddar

Codi: But aside from the tangible benefits the church provided, having the churches blessing could turn the YMCA from an everyday young men's improvement group to a major American institution.<sup>21</sup> If they wanted to be the notorious YMC...A, then they needed to find themselves in the good graces of the church and cement their place within the protestant lifestyle. The only thing left to do was...

Church (in Interviewer/therapist voice): start by defining your theology and ecclesiastical intentions.

Person: ummm (head scratch)... I'm just here to deliver the pizzas...

Codi: Apologies, it seems I have to grab and with that a short break.

---

Codi: What were we chatting about? Oh yes! The theology and ecclesiastical intentions of the YMCA. Well, up until now, the evangelical aims of the YMCA were not quite unanimous. Despite agreeing that- "A YMCA was... to be 'a society which has for its object the formation and development in Young men of Christian character and Christian activity.'"<sup>22</sup> Qualification for active membership was debated.

At the Cincinnati convention of 1855 this was made apparent when a proposal to have all active members be in fellowship with evangelical churches was... well proposed.

\*Here comes the bride music\*

Codi: Langdon immediately rejected this.

\*Music winds down and out of key\*

Codi: Based on the earlier ratifications made at the Buffalo convention, there was no authority for conventions to legislate as this would infringe upon local authority.<sup>23</sup> But, also because Langdon

---

<sup>19</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 361.

<sup>20</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 361-362.

<sup>21</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 362.

<sup>22</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 66.

<sup>23</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 65.

believed the unknown extent of the YMCAs general religious work could interfere with the work of the church.<sup>24</sup>

Langdon: “there is a danger before us in America... great societies which have so long and so harmoniously united Christians of various communions, have done so because they have clearly defined object and sphere to which they are limited... The Young Men’s Christian association is not an institution for the general promulgation of the gospel [cricket], but an institution [two crickets] to fit young men [crickets multiply and grow louder] to be in the spheres which was divinely appointed for that work...”<sup>25</sup>

Codi: Needless to say, that’s not how the majority of YMCA leaders felt. A majority of YMCAs following the example from the Boston Association in 1851, had adopted the evangelical test which at the time meant affiliation with a church was for full membership and was later modeled after the Paris Basis from the first World Alliance of YMCAs<sup>26</sup>. According to Paris Basis-

Paris Basis: “The Christian associations have for their object the union of those young men who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Saviour according to the scriptures, desire to be His disciples in their doctrine and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of his Kingdom amongst young men.”<sup>27</sup>

Codi: Meaning all *young Christian men*, you see what I did there? should be eligible for membership. However, United states associations had emphasized, and would continue emphasize because of the pressure from protestant churches, doctrine over faith as this was the million-dollar question for the church.<sup>28</sup> In the midst of the civil war when the convention of 1863 called for all loyal states to convene not only was the confederation disbanded but the Articles of confederation that included things like ratification of the Paris basis was nullified.

So, we’re back to square one and its now 1868. We need to set the record straight here.

\*change music\*

Codi: 60% of the associations are still implementing the evangelical test, 30% have “Good Character” aka are you a moral individual? tests, and 8% require church membership without specifying denomination.<sup>29</sup> Knowing this, the executive committee asks delegates at the Detroit convention to provide a list of requirements for membership. It’s to be a resolution, not law as the executive committee has no power to make rules for all YMCAS but in theory, it should provide a clarification/foundation on the YMCAs intensions by both appeasing the church with a clearer understanding of the organization and avoiding the toes of autonomy by having the local associations dictate membership requirements. And it eventually works. The evangelical denominations are happy

---

<sup>24</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 68-69.

<sup>26</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 363.

<sup>27</sup> “Report of the Gen. Conf.,” held in Paris, Aug. 1855, *Occasional Paper No. III* (London: Y.M.C.A., 1856), 21 in Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 77.

<sup>28</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 363.

<sup>29</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 363-364.



about the resolution in 1868 and defining “evangelical churches” as those who maintain the scripture for faith and practice and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation<sup>30</sup>

\*Intense music\*

But now the YMCA was plagued with yet another issue: expanding the kingdom of God. This was, after all, the second charge of the Paris Basis and would have huge implications for the YMCA’s future. With the membership already decided, programming to appease and promote Christian ideals was needed for to have one without the other would not work. So, after Langdon’s thoughts on the evangelical test there was a compromise.

Many Men: “While we should work specially on behalf of Young men for the sake of our associations, as well as for the sake of our master’s course, we should be ready to enter upon any work which He shall open before us.”<sup>31</sup>

Preacher: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

\*Music comes to a crescendo and stops suddenly\*

Codi: Next episode we will find out what doors have been opened.

Paris basis: The Young Men’s Christian Associations seek to unite those young men who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Savior, according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be his disciples in their faith and in their life and to associate their efforts for the extension of his Kingdom amongst young men.”<sup>32</sup>

Codi: I’d like to thank the Harold C. Smith Foundation for funding this project. I would also like to thank project supervisor Christian Rice and Angela Upright the program coordinator. This podcast was made possible by the Rev. Charles Rice Fellowship at Ursinus College. If you have questions about the sources, please find transcripts of the episodes on the website. Thank you again, and please join us for next week’s podcast.

---

<sup>30</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 366-367.

<sup>31</sup> Convention of 1859, 99, in Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 70.

<sup>32</sup> “Paris Basis 1855” World YMCA, <https://www.ymca.int/about-us/ymca-history/paris-basis-1855/>

-Bibliography-

Hamlin, M. Cannon. "The United States Christian Commission," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38, no. 1. (1951): 61–80.

*Half a century in Charleston 1854-1904*. Charleston, S.C.: 1904.

Hopkins, C. Howard. *History of the YMCA in North America*, New York: Association Press, 1951.

Moss, Lemuel. *Annals of the U.S. Christian Commission*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1868.

Mjagkij, Nina *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA. 1852-1946*, University of Kentucky Press, 2003.

"Paris Basis 1855" World YMCA, <https://www.ymca.int/about-us/ymca-history/paris-basis-1855/>

Pence, O.E. *The YMCA, and Social Need; A study of Institutional Adaptation*. New York: Assn. Press, 1946.

"Report of the Gen. Conf.," held in Paris, Aug. 1855, *Occasional Paper No.III*. London: Y.M.C.A., 1856, 21.

Thompson, R.E. *The Life of George H. Stuart*. Philadelphia: J.M. Stoddart & Co., 1890.

#### -The Old Boys Club Episode 4: The Body of Christ-

Codi: “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also, is Christ” - 1 Corinthians 12:12. Now this might seem like a stretch, but the YMCA was starting to shape up similarly. With the issue of membership resolved, the question changed from “who was a member?” to “how can we expand our membership?”

The evangelical test increased interest in evangelical Christianity (which made the church happy), attracted able and wealthy laymen (which made the YMCA happy), and kept the organization from becoming a specific sect or denomination.<sup>1</sup> Acting as a steppingstone that would lead to the church’s doorstep, both parties were happy and local associations kept their autonomy. But defining membership, which subsequently unified the YMCAs stance on members was only the beginning. Depleted membership and programming still plagued the organization during reconstruction.

Paris Basis (ethereal): “expand the kingdom of God”

Codi: You might remember these words as they were part of the Paris Basis aka the primary focus of the YMCA. Yet, for more reasons than one, the YMCA was struggling to expand. The Civil War drastically reduced the number of members and associations. The corresponding secretary from New York wrote that ‘scarcely twenty’ of the two hundred associations could be names ‘active and prosperous’ by the Spring of 1862.<sup>2</sup> Even the ever-popular New York association had seen a decline from 1,600 to 160 members during the war.<sup>3</sup> But with the war ending, talks of adding adjunct programs to compliment religious work were being discussed to attract more young men. It started with Rev. Henry Codman Potters address at the convention of 1864. The address emphasized work for the “whole man” and seeing how gymnasiums were becoming popular in the city, adding physical programing seemed like a nice incentive to attract new membership.<sup>4</sup> Physical fitness would become more popular as sports like baseball, cycling, football and even cricket and croquet along with gymnastics caught the attention of the public.<sup>5</sup> This was supposed to be, “...an innocent pastime [that] will also be a source of revenue and will attract many within your influences who would otherwise be unreached.”<sup>6</sup> And it was doing a great job attracting folks. The New York association adopted “physical” to their definition of purpose in 1866 and the gymnasiums in New York and San Francisco had grown quite popular.<sup>7</sup> But other associations in the U.S. and Canada were slow to adopt physical programming.

---

<sup>1</sup> Glen Kassimer Shurtleff, *The evangelical test: a statement of opinions*, (Cleveland: 1907), 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 85.

<sup>3</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 85,106.

<sup>4</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 246.

<sup>5</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 245.

<sup>6</sup> *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of Boston Y.M.C.A.* (1878), 52, in Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 246-247.

<sup>7</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 246-247

For starters, there was no programming or regular instruction.<sup>8</sup> The idea gym superintendent who possessed natural leadership/organizational skills (whistle), was grounded in the bible (whistle), and worked with individuals on salvation of their souls as “Christian gymnast” (whistle) was rare.<sup>9</sup> The retired acrobats and prized fighters who were available to be instructors were contemptuous of the association ideals and general secretaries lacked the physical instruction.<sup>10</sup> This made it nearly impossible to like the physical work with religious work not to mention the separate memberships and entrances that folks often used.<sup>11</sup> Paired with the fact that sports along with card playing, and dancing were deemed worldly attractions ‘fraught with evil’ that would compromise Christian integrity or the efforts of the association in the eyes of some members, making physical work a non-starter for many associations.<sup>12</sup> Without regular instruction, some link that would connect physical work and religious work while somehow disrupting the stigma surrounding the church the YMCA would never gain the membership it hoped to evangelize. They needed to bring Christ into the gym.

\*Some Music Break\*

Codi: The first step would be to establish proper programming for the gymnasium and body building, invented in 1872 at the Boston YMCA, provided just that. It was a mixture of light gymnastics and heavy exercise that was safe for beginners, beneficial to one’s general health/well-being, and pleasurable due to the variety of exercise utilized each class.<sup>13</sup> Body building was intended to strengthen the middle third of the body, then one’s weak points, and then adapt to meet the aims of the individual, and lastly, improve overall health via diet, ventilation, bathing, and sleeping. This not only served the YMCAs target audience by being more general rather than specialized but also avoided the competition and exhibition that were associated with sports. In four years, the Boston YMCA saw an increase from 49 to 680 people as it gained popularity across the country.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. J. Garden Smith: “The Gymnasium, properly directed, is an integral part of the fundamental four-fold purpose of the Association. Physically, the gymnasium should be a distinct department of our work; morally, it should be conducted on the purest principles of the Association; intellectually, it should be made educational; spiritually, it should be a place where active and associate members meet and where Christian influence prevails.”

Codi: The ideology of Muscular Christianity, which originated in England in the 1850s and made its way to the U.S. by the 1870s, was began to gain traction from the 1880s to the 1920s. The Christian religion was experiencing a huge gender imbalance. Women had dominated the American congregation for some time. A predominantly female congregation can be seen as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> The first Baptist Church of Baltimore reported a staggering 80:20 female to male ratio in 1851 and even a more

---

<sup>8</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 247.

<sup>9</sup> W, XIII (July, 1887), 185 in Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 248.

<sup>10</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 248.

<sup>11</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 249.

<sup>12</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, p.381

<sup>13</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 249-250.

<sup>14</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 250.

<sup>15</sup> Brett and Kate McKay, *Muscular Christianity: The Relationship between men and faith* (Semper Virilis Publishing, 2018), 2.

recent Pew Research poll saw a 61 to 39 gap despite age demographics across the U.S. Yet, 95% of protestant and 100% of catholic clergy are male.<sup>16</sup> So why the imbalance in Christianity?

According to Brett and Kate McKay, the presentation of Jesus as gentle, warning others to beware of pride, was in direct contradiction to manliness. Manhood was about pride and praise in the public eye, and “us. vs. them” dynamic.<sup>17</sup> Despite the “lion side” of Jesus with his quick wit in debate, and unwavering attitude in conflict, not to mention him being a rebel of his time, men were still not making their way to the pews and the predominately female congregation only grew in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>18</sup>

Howard Allen Birdman: “Only one young man in twenty in this country is a church member, and seventy-five out of every hundred never attend church.”<sup>19</sup>

Codi: Other factors that likely lead to a gender imbalance were 1) bridal mysticism: the idea that communion with Jesus as a marriage with the church but also the individual, 2) the industrial revolution separating men and women to separate spheres of work where purity is assigned to women and the church offers power and influence where society does not, and 3) lastly the faiths disconnect from the physical.<sup>20</sup> Muscular Christianity served to reconnect the two as a Christian commitment to health and manliness.<sup>21</sup> For all the reasons previously stated, men like Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley believed the Anglican church in England to be “soft” and “effeminate.”<sup>22</sup> Two decades later mainline protestants adopt this mindset and intend to make church culture action-oriented, vigorous, and practical in ethos.<sup>23</sup> Mistreatment of the body was now equivalent to hindrance in living the gospel. Physical strength was supposed to be used for the service of others. It was also moral training as athletics training equated to willpower to avoid temptations while teaching the mind to obey the body as the mind obeys the soul. Yet, despite the advent of body building and the newly adopted philosophy of muscular Christianity, there were still those that opposed physical work especially in the form of sports.

For example, boxing was viewed as “carnal” though those entering the ring on London’s east end would often find their way to the pews. Though this time there was more pushback to include sports in physical work.

Rev. A.O. Jay: Boxing gloves are neglected weapons in the church’s armory. “I will venture to inform you there is one thing more carnal than the use of boxing gloves, and that is to do what you do, neglect the sheep simply and you call them black because of their utter inability to understand your narrow shibboleths.”<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> McKay, *Muscular Christianity*, 2,4; Jessica Elfenbein “An Aggressive Christian Enterprise” in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, ed. Nina Mjagkij and Margret Spratt (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 22.

<sup>17</sup> McKay, *Muscular Christianity*, 6- 8.

<sup>18</sup> McKay, *Muscular Christianity*, 1,9-10,18.

<sup>19</sup> McKay, *Muscular Christianity*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> McKay, *Muscular Christianity*, 19-22,33.

<sup>21</sup> McKay, *Muscular Christianity*, 39.

<sup>22</sup> McKay, *Muscular Christianity*, 43.

<sup>23</sup> McKay, *Muscular Christianity*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> McKay, *Muscular Christianity*, 42.

Minister in Troy N.Y.: "... the Devil has no patent right on these athletic recreations, and it is only pusillanimous in us to yield to him and exclusive privilege, when he has no claim that can stand. I do not mean that everyone should make it a point to get the muscle of a stroke oarsman, or the agility of an acrobat in a circus; but I do mean that everyone should remember that it is as much a duty to cultivate the body as to cultivate the soul, and without this twofold and harmonious triangle, religion would become irksome, and study a weariness to the flesh."<sup>25</sup>

Codi: It was around this time that Dr. Luther Halsey Gulick provided principals to not only bridge the philosophies of the church with sports but all physical work. Dr. Gulick was the assistant physical instructor at Springfield College the 1886-1887 academic year. He worked under Robert J. Roberts, founder of body building and primary physical instructor of Springfield at the time. The school was designed to train YMCA secretaries and other religious work leaders for the future with intelligent, Christian teachers that had undergone Bible + association work previously.<sup>26</sup>

The Three principals were: Unity, Symmetry, and Development. Unity of the body, mind, and spirit was intended to emphasize the importance of each department. Symmetry of form and function focused on the whole body rather than skills, strength, or endurance. Development as continual growth left room for improvement and kept things fresh and attractive for young men.<sup>27</sup> Symbolized as an upside-down equilateral triangle representing man in three parts: body, mind, and spirit.<sup>28</sup> You may recognize this same symbol at your local YMCA today.

Luther Halsey Gulick: "It does not aim to express three distinct divisions but to indicate the individual while he may have different aspects is a unit... the triangle stands... for the symmetrical man, each part developed with reference to the whole, and not merely with reference to itself... It is scriptural... 'Thou shalt love the lord they God with all they heart and soul and mind and strength,'... Then we are told that the body is a member of Christ?'- that {the body} is a 'a temple of the Holy Ghost,' that it is eternal."<sup>29</sup>

Codi: Gulick's Principals would be key in finally bridging the gap between sports and the YMCA. The YMCA had a few sports programs by the early 1890s, but the evils of excessive specialism, intense excitement and competition had to be weighed against the benefits of body building, and attraction of young men to the Y rather than the saloon.<sup>30</sup> Excessive specialism and overstrain were viewed as the #1 evil and dander of sports. This made them unsuitable for the association. That is until Gulick provided alternatives.<sup>31</sup> The Greek pentathlon provided athletics without the evils or dangers the international committee feared. Everyone competed in all events and points were awarded based on merit. Moreover, it was a test of one's strengths rather than a contest where multiple golds, silvers, and bronze medals could be awarded should the individual meet the point threshold. Cycling, cross country

---

<sup>25</sup> Boston *Young Men's Magazine*, II (April, 1889), 7, in Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 248 !9

<sup>26</sup> L.L. Doggett, *A Man and a School* (New York: Association press, 1943), 48, in Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 251 !15; Hal Lynch *The epic of Springfield College*, (Springfield College Alumni Relations, 1970-05), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 254-256.

<sup>28</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 256.

<sup>29</sup> Era, XX (Jan. 18, 1894), 14, in Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 256-257 !19

<sup>30</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 259; Luther Halsey Gulick, "The Legitimate Place of Athletics," Springfield College (1894): 1.

<sup>31</sup> Gulick, "The Legitimate Place of Athletics," 2.

runs/walks, relays also viewed as less competitive yet healthy.<sup>32</sup> This persuaded the international committee to endorse athletics as sports m=became a means to attain a good body and health and required no directors or gyms and were already widely popular to the point that they would attract new members.<sup>33</sup> From there you have the invention of Basketball by Dr. James Naismith at Springfield college, Volleyball which was created as a less strenuous substitute by W.G. Morgan and the introduction of Field Hockey to America by J.H. McGurdy.<sup>34</sup>

The YMCA then transforms from athletics greatest skeptic to its #1 supporter. From 1880-1900 roughly 400 new gymnasiums appear with 1/181 Americans and 1/3 college students as associates or active members of the YMCA.<sup>35</sup> By 1910 the YMCA along with other individual church fraternities and clubs join forces to promote muscular Christianity nationwide as the Men and Religion Forward Movement as a revival reserved for evangelizing men<sup>36</sup> Now the “ Gentle Barbarians” with their physical power are intended to control/ direct that power towards good and exemplify Christian character.<sup>37</sup> Physical work had become physical education where the building of the body was also the building of the mind.<sup>38</sup> Train the body to obey the mind. The mind then needs to receive training too, to be alert and efficient. The gymnasium...

The Watchman: “... used to be considered a wicked place, a place for pugilist to get a muscle, a training school for manufactured heathens. Now what do you see there? College professors swinging dumbbells, millionaires turning somersaults, lawyer upside down, hanging by one foot, doctors of divinity with coats off punching a bag, sending blows as if in a controversy, and the bag an opposing bishop.”<sup>39</sup>

Codj: I’d like to thank the Harold C. Smith Foundation for funding this project. I would also like to thank Springfield College Archivist Jeffery Monseau and Benjamin Morales for his help with this week’s episode. I would also like to thank this project’s supervisor Christian Rice and Angela Upright the program coordinator. This podcast was made possible by the Rev. Charles Rice Fellowship at Ursinus College. If you have questions about the sources, please find transcripts of the episodes on the website. Thank you again, and please join us for next week’s podcast.

---

<sup>32</sup> Gulick, “The Legitimate Place of Athletics,” 3-4.

<sup>33</sup> Gulick, “The Legitimate Place of Athletics,” 5.

<sup>34</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 260,263.

<sup>35</sup> McKay, *Muscular Christianity*, 46.

<sup>36</sup> McKay, *Muscular Christianity*, 62.

<sup>37</sup> McKay, *Muscular Christianity*, 45.

<sup>38</sup> Luther Halsey Gulick, “Our New Gymnastics”, Springfield College (1889): 1.

<sup>39</sup> Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, 248.

-Bibliography-

*Boston Young Men's Magazine*, April 1889.

Doggett, L.L. *A Man and a School*. New York: Association press, 1943.

Elfenbien, Jessica. "An Aggressive Christian Enterprise" In *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and YWCA in the City*, edited by Nina Mjagki and Margret Spratt, page range. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

Gulick, Luther Halsey. *Our New Gymnastics*. Springfield: Springfield College, 1889.

Gulick, Luther Halsey. *The Legitimate place of Athletics*. Springfield: Springfield College, 1894.

Hopkins, C. Howard. *History of the YMCA in North America*, New York: Association Press, 1951.

Lynch, Hal *the Epic of Springfield College*. Springfield: Springfield Alumni Relations, 1970-05.

McKay, Brett, and Kate. *Muscular Christianity: The Relationship between men and faith*. Semper Virilis, 2018.

Shurtleff, Glen Kassimer. *The evangelical Test: A Statement of Opinions*. Cleveland: 1907.

*Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of Boston Y.M.C.A.* 1878



## The Old Boys Club Episode 5: The “Girl Problem”

Codi: The last 50-60 years for the YMCA have proven to be quite fruitful. The mercantile bible studies of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century have turned into full-fledged associations around the world. And just when it appears that issues of autonomy, membership status, and alternative forms of evangelism have been settled within the YMCA, the 20<sup>th</sup> century rolls around to challenge the essence of the organization once more.

The separate spheres of masculine and feminine culture deemed “separate and complimentary” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century are starting to disappear.<sup>1</sup> The primary catalyst of this being WWI. During the war is when we start to see educated women earn a place in the public arena as wage-earning women. Youth culture has given rise to new ideas of marriage, family life, leisure and.... Oh yeah! single sex organizations/relationships are met with skepticism as fear of homosexuality is on the rise.<sup>2</sup>

\*Dog barking\*

Codi: What’s that boy? Jonny fell into a well!

\*Dog continues barking\*

Codi: Oh, people are afraid of any opposition to heterosocial norms and heterosexual ideals. Yes, yes, they are. But of course, the question which is looming in everyone’s mind right now: what did this mean for the YMCA?

With the push for more coeducational activities becoming more popular, the YMCA began to alter its mission from “whole life of the boy” to “whole life”. Co-ed activities would satisfy the new societal perspectives, increase revenue, and support heterosocial relationships between Christian men and women.<sup>3</sup> However, it would challenge the very foundation of the movement that began back in 1844 as it seemingly mitigated the M appeared to fade from their acronym.

While women and girls work became a focal point for the YMCA in the 1920s, women have always been involved in the YMCA. During the Civil war, the Charleston YMCA combined with the Ladies Christian Association to stay afloat, Addie Hunton, wife of William Hunton the first black secretary, helped edit the messenger circular and wrote correspondence letters for her husband William Hunton before he had any assistance running African American work, and Women Auxiliaries in the 1880s and 1890s were key promoters of boys work during the time.<sup>4</sup> The YMCA also provided women and girls with physical

---

<sup>1</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Women’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835*; Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America*; and Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County* in Jodi Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit of a Partnership between the Sexes: The Debate over YMCA Programs for Women and Girls. 1914-1933” *The Journal of American History*, 78, no. 4 (1992):1324, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2079345>.

<sup>2</sup> Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1324-1325.

<sup>3</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America and George Chauncey Jr., “Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War One Era in” Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1325.

<sup>4</sup> C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America*, (New York: Association Press, 1951), 96!81, 202 !66; Nina Mjagkij, “Growth and Centralization under African American Leadership, 1891-1898” in *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946*, (University of Kentucky Press, 2003) 48.

equipment, clubs, bible studies and activities at their request leading to programming specific to women and girls work at the Pennsylvania association.<sup>5</sup> But as Christian brotherhood was under scrutiny, as sex institutions like the YMCA were viewed as abnormal and said to facilitate homosexual relationships, introduction of women and girls work would help combat these narratives and continue to be a social center in cities.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, it meant that the YMCA find itself at odds with the YWCA.

The YWCA much like the YMCA, also began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century offering religious instruction, Christian solidarity/unity, and shelter.<sup>7</sup> Yet unlike the YM which decided against all political action, the YW focused on public action against controversial issues and women's identities.<sup>8</sup> With the YMCA expanding into women and girls work the YWCAs autonomy and commitment and womanly solidarity was threatened.

YM commentator: there should be no women's organization; rather, "women of queenly character chosen for their personality and their poise may be called upon for occasions which demanded service."

\*Silence followed by a thunderous commotion of women's voice objecting\*

Codi: Now, the idea of nixing women's organization completely was not widely favored though each organization was reserved in having co-ed programing. The YMCA felt that Women's Auxiliaries and YWCA had failed to support and promote ideas of a Christian home.<sup>9</sup> But if the YMCA assumed the responsibility of women and girls work, they would be able to strength family ties and husband wife relationships.<sup>10</sup> Plus the example of the Philadelphia YMCA success with women and girls flourishing with 10,000 to the men and boys 30,000, YM secretary Walter Wood proposed an amendment for equal membership in 1931.

Walter Wood: Women are said to be better social workers than men, they have inherently the spirit of service, and that is being transmitted to the men. It is not so many years the secretaries could count on the fingers of one hand the male members available for service work. But now... we find it necessary to keep a definite record of their names, because they are so many that nobody could remember.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Chambers et al., "Activities That Unite Young Men and Young Women." in Vandenberg-Daves, "The Manly Pursuit," 1324; Vandenberg-Daves, "The Manly Pursuit," 1328.

<sup>6</sup> Chauncey, "Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion?" 189-211; and Quincy A. Ames, *Co-operation between Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations* (Chicago, 1929), 3. in Vandenberg-Daves, "The Manly Pursuit," 1331.

<sup>7</sup> Vandenberg-Daves, "The Manly Pursuit," 1324.

<sup>8</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York, 1984), 155-158 In Vandenberg-Daves, "The Manly Pursuit," 1333-1335. 136,37; Randon, 6 1994, 36 in Martti Muukonen, "Framing International Aid: A Case of the YMCA" (Oslo, 2006) 7.

<sup>9</sup> Vandenberg-Daves, "The Manly Pursuit," 1332.

<sup>10</sup> George W. Broden, "Outline of Answer to Questionnaire on Work for Women and Girls, *Physical Training*, 17 (Oct. 1920), 477, YMCA Archives and Chambers et al., "Activities that Unite Young men and Young Women" in Vandenberg-Daves, "The Manly Pursuit," 1332.

<sup>11</sup> William A. McGary, "The Y.M.C.A. in Philadelphia," *Association Men*, 49 (Sept. 1923), 23. In Vandenberg-Daves, "The Manly Pursuit," 1336-1337.

Codi: Though a feminization of the YMCA post WWI was in complete contrast to the ideas or re-maculating Protestantism that muscular Christianity and Men and Religion Forward Movement promoted.<sup>12</sup>

YM: “within twenty years we will have a woman-led movement for within that time 75% of the employed leadership will be women, and we will cease to attract any considerable number of strong men into the Association secretaryship.”<sup>13</sup>

Codi: But what about the YWCAs feelings on the topic? A 451-page study of YM-YW relations by Herbert Shenton showed that more than 50 percent of YMs conducted women and girls work yet less than 50 were cooperating with YWs. The main issues being “Methods of Work” and “Domination”. According to Shenton’s study, “Methods of work were listed 42 times by the YW and 6 times by the YM and 39 of the 380 “cooperative” relationships were said to have some form of male domination according to YW women.<sup>14</sup> To put the sentiments of man YW women simply...

YW Secretary: The YWCA is not a glorified auxiliary. Cooperation does not mean waiting tables.<sup>15</sup>

Codi: The lack of cooperation did not stem from having the co-ed activities. In fact, The YW apparently affirmed this ideal more fervently than YM men according to Shenton’s study.<sup>16</sup> But the paternalistic mindset the YMCA had taken toward the YWCA during WWI, when they began their own women and girls work, was the root of their tension.<sup>17</sup> The YWCA was...

YW: “not a program for women. It is an organization of women... Work done by a Young Men’s Christian Association among women and girls is done within a structure for which women are *not* responsible.”<sup>18</sup>

Codi: And with missionary societies and educational institutions consolidating and typically resulting in less leadership possibilities for women the YW made it clear:

YW Secretary: “We believe that it is important for women to work with men. But not until they have learned to work with women.”<sup>19</sup>

Codi: But in the end the YMCA wouldn’t have to learn work with women, at least not the ones from the YWCA. Finances, program preference, and geographic range were the primary factors that put the YM in a position to move forward with their women and girls programming. After promising to 1) “share in management/ control by women 2) provide provisions for development and responsibility among women. And 3) protect YWCA interest in work or in the community” in 1929, an amendment calling for the “recognition of the rights and responsibilities for both sexes in all affairs of the National Council,”

---

<sup>12</sup> McKay, “Muscular Christianity” 62.; Hopkins, “History of the Y.M.C.A.” 565, in Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1337.

<sup>13</sup> Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1338.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Shenton “Reconnaissance Study,” 275 in Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1339.

<sup>15</sup> Shenton “Reconnaissance Study” 291, 276, in Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1339.

<sup>16</sup> Shenton “Reconnaissance Study” 291, in Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1339.

<sup>17</sup> Mary S. Sims, *The Natural History of Social Institution: The YWCA* (New York, 1935), 72 in Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1335.

<sup>18</sup> “Relationships with the Young Men’s Christian Association” Feb. 23, 1928, published in the biennial report of the National Board of the YWCA, box 1195, YMCA Archives in Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1340.

<sup>19</sup> Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1340.

was proposed in 1931.<sup>20</sup> Despite the YWCA being unconvinced by the gesture of 1929, The promotion of women and girls work was continued in communities as they were requesting this programming. The YM could provide programming beyond the city where the YW could not and cases of “cooperation” between the two were primarily due to financial needs of the YW.<sup>21</sup> With public opinion unconvinced that women and girls work called for separate facilities, the expertise the YM lacked, from differing physiques to the methods and approaches, could be resolved by the hiring women of women to train young women and girls.<sup>22</sup>

Still, this did not equate to “provisions for development and responsibility among women” which the YW was already unconvinced of. Begging the question:

Mabel Head, YM Secretary: “Do the supporters of this amendment want an officially recognized Ladies Aid Society in the Y.M.C.A., or are they wanting equally able women presidents, women administrators, women program builders, women budgeteers, etc., to take their places besides the men with equal recognition and equal pay?”<sup>23</sup>

Codi: Because for the YMCA it appears that equal membership was a means to an end. Claiming a partnership between sexes allowed them to gown down in history as a male institution and having equal membership for sexes could not change that fact.<sup>24</sup> But then again that seems to be how the YMCA rolls. Look at the last 90 year of history we have covered. The organization branched out from religious work with the development of the Mutual Improvement Society when they first allowed associate membership. The bottom-up structure of the YMCA has made it so there have been so many ideas to attract young men to the organization that they have reached in many directions. Which as we have heard has led to reconsider membership, and in doing, reconsider how they have interpreted their mission. Sports and physical work have changed from worldly to religiously manly and now we are seeing a departure from male only programming.

I think that you are starting to follow the direction that the YMCA is headed. Founded as a laymen movement it is bound to the court of public opinion, in this case public protestant opinion, and therefore changes with the ideals of the time. The transition towards a general service organization appears to have started soon after its conception. The foundations for this began when the YMCA decided to venture outside of Christian young men and attempt to attract/evangelize young men in cities. This of course is not where the story of the YMCA ends but for the time being it is where we will be stopping for a while. But I want to thank you for listening (reading) and hope that you’ve enjoyed this case-study history podcast that has described the history of the YMCA.

---

<sup>20</sup> “Proposals Making Possible Identical Status” in Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1339; “Check List of Factors” in Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1341.

<sup>21</sup> Shenton “Reconnaissance Study” 291,276, in Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1339.

Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1338. Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1341.

<sup>22</sup> A.G. Knebel, “Informal Statement Regarding Visit to Westerly, Rhode Island,” April 4, 1928, box 1195, YMCA Archives; “The Women and Girls Question,” 25, and Agnes R. Wayman, “How Y.M.C.A. Directors Can Help in Establishing Proper Standards and Ideals of Athletics Participation for Girls and Women,” *Journal of Physical Education*, 29 (Sept.1931), 9-11, YMCA Archives in Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1335-1336.; Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1341.

<sup>23</sup> “Proposals Making Possible Identical Status” in Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1341.

<sup>24</sup> Vandenberg-Daves, “The Manly Pursuit,” 1343.

I'd like to thank the Harold C. Smith Foundation for funding this project. I would also like to thank project supervisor Christian Rice and Angela Upright the program coordinator. This podcast was made possible by the Rev. Charles Rice Fellowship at Ursinus College. If you have questions about the sources, please find transcripts of the episodes on the website. Thank you again, and I hope you enjoyed listening to The Old Boys Club.

## -Bibliography-

Ames, Quincy A. *Co-operation between Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations*. Chicago, 1929.

Broden, George W. "Outline of Answer to Questionnaire on Work for Women and Girls, *Physical Training*." 17 (Oct. 1920), 477, YMCA Archives.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America." *Signs*, 1 (Autumn 1975), 1-29.

Chambers et al., "Activities That Unite Young Men and Young Women."

"Check List of Factors"

Cott, Nancy F. *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*. New Haven, 1977.

Epstein, Barbara Leslie. *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America*. Middletown, 1981.

George Chauncey Jr., "Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War One Era in." *Journal of Social History*, 19 (Winter 1985), 189-211.

Giddings, Paula *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. New York, 1984.

Hopkins, C. Howard. *History of the YMCA in North America*, New York: Association Press, 1951.

Knebel, A.G. "Informal Statement Regarding Visit to Westerly, Rhode Island," April 4, 1928, box 1195, YMCA Archives; "The Women and Girls Question."

McGary, William A. "The Y.M.C.A. in Philadelphia." *Association Men*, 49 Sept. 1923.

Mjagkij, Nina. "Growth and Centralization under African American Leadership, 1891-1898" in *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946*. University of Kentucky Press, 2003.

McKay, Brett and Kate. *Muscular Christianity: The Relationship between men and faith*. Semper Virilis Publishing, 2018.

Muukonen, Martti. "Framing International Aid: A Case of the YMCA" Oslo, 2006.

"Proposals Making Possible Identical Status"

"Relationships with the Young Men's Christian Association" Feb. 23, 1928, published in the biennial report of the National Board of the YWCA, box 1195, YMCA Archives.

Ryan, Mary P. *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*. Cambridge, Mass., 1981.

Shenton, Herbert "Reconnaissance Study."

Sims Mary S. *The Natural History of Social Institution: The YWCA*. New York, 1935.

Vandenberg-Daves, Jodi. "The Manly Pursuit of a Partnership between the Sexes: The Debate over YMCA Programs for Women and Girls. 1914-1933." *The Journal of American History*, 78, no. 4 (1992):1324-1346. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2079345> .

Wayman, Agnes R. "How Y.M.C.A. Directors Can Help in Establishing Proper Standards and Ideals of Athletics Participation for Girls and Women," *Journal of Physical Education*, 29 (Sept. 1931), 9-11. YMCA Archives