

YMCA of Western North Carolina

Yesterday and Today

In 1889 Asheville was little more than a village, with a population of about ten thousand, no paved streets, no parks or playgrounds, and not much for young men growing up in the city to do that might not eventually land them into trouble.

A group of upstanding young men - led by one R.U. Garrett - had been meeting regularly to talk and pray about the situation, and as attendance at their meetings increased, they urged the formation of a local Young Men's Christian Association.

That fall, at a small, but enthusiastic gathering in the Central Methodist Church that was attended by members of all the city's denominations, our YMCA was born. Mr. H.T. Collins was the first president, and rooms were rented in the Harkins Building on Patton Avenue.

Mr. H.P. Anderson was selected as the first General Secretary (the forerunner of today's Executive Director) and arrived in Asheville in October of 1889. He set about enlisting the support of the churches, citizens and the press, who gave the new enterprise their hearty support.

The Women's Auxiliary was perhaps the most significant group in the early history of the Y - raising funds, furnishing the rooms, and providing music and refreshments for meetings.

By the turn of the century membership was up to 350, and the Board of Directors decided it was time the Association should own its own building. In 1901, under the leadership of the new General Secretary Mr. O.B. Van Horn, the YMCA did what had been considered impossible. A building on Haywood Street was purchased, and, by 1909, membership had increased to 658. The Y remained at that location until 1920, when the building was sold to the Citizen Company.

In 1920 the Y purchased a new building on the corner of Woodfin and Broadway - the former home of wealthy landowner Nicholas Woodfin. Built in 1840 and enlarged to twice its original size in 1922, the magnificent Woodfin mansion served as the home of the YMCA for nearly 50 years.

During that time the Y was the host to countless programs and personalities. Thousands of servicemen were entertained at the Y during World War II. After the war, Y clubs were formed for local school children. The Good Life Club - directed by Seth Parkinson - survived the Depression and touched the lives of many youngsters. Mr. H.S. Chapman presided over the building of an athletic field and tennis courts, and the Market Street branch actively served the black community.

The modern, comprehensive facility the YMCA now enjoys just a few yards from the old site didn't come easy. The rejuvenation of the Asheville association was the dream of Henry Burts, who became the Director in 1962. Under his leadership, and with help of

men such as Met Poston, Jim Glenn, Foster Aldridge, and many more, the dream was realized in 1970 with the construction of the new facility at a cost of one million dollars.

Later in 1986 the YMCA added its second indoor pool to the facility. In 1997 the YMCA enjoyed the renovation of a new Wellness center and the addition of the Buddy Patton Youth Wing.

In addition to the downtown location, the YMCA operates a Community Services Branch on Beaverdam Road, providing a wide range of programs and services. These include childcare for school age children, leadership development and a wide range of outreach services for at risk youth.

In 1998 YMCA volunteers and staff took steps to expand services outside its two facilities. With a desire to be more inclusive to the region the Board voted to change the corporate name to the YMCA of Western North Carolina and initiated communication to provide services in the surrounding counties. Communications were quickly established in McDowell County, which resulted in the planning for a new YMCA in collaboration with the Corpening Foundation. This YMCA opened in March of 2003. At that same time the Board of Directors finalized discussions with Biltmore Farms to construct a new family YMCA in south Buncombe County. Thanks to a \$2 million lead and challenge gift made by the Janirve Foundation and a successful \$6 million capital campaign, the new Reuter Family YMCA opened its doors in April of 2003. It was a very busy spring.

Although the YMCA of Western North Carolina has changed over the past century, its purpose of improving the spiritual, mental and physical conditions of those it serves has remained the same. As a Board member of this YMCA, you are joining a long history of volunteers who have made a difference in the City of Asheville and the growing areas of Western North Carolina. We as an organization are proud and blessed to have you contribute your time, talents and resources to this worldwide organization.