

# History of the YMCA Movement

## Beginnings in London

The Young Men's Christian Association was founded in London, England, on June 6, 1844, in response to unhealthy social conditions arising in the big cities at the end of the Industrial Revolution (roughly 1750 to 1850). Growth of the railroads and centralization of commerce and industry brought many rural young men who needed jobs into cities like London. They worked 10 to 12 hours a day, six days a week.

Far from home and family, these young men often lived at the workplace. They slept crowded into rooms over the company's shop, a location thought to be safer than London's tenements and streets. Outside the shop things were bad -- open sewers, pickpockets, thugs, beggars, drunks, lovers for hire and abandoned children running wild by the thousands.

## George Williams



George Williams, born on a farm in 1821, came to London 20 years later as a sales assistant in a draper's shop, a forerunner of today's department store. He and a group of fellow drapers organized the first YMCA to substitute Bible study and prayer for life on the streets. By 1851 there were 24 Ys in Great Britain, with a combined membership of 2,700. That same year the Y arrived in North America: It was established in Montreal on November 25, and in Boston on December 29.

The idea proved popular everywhere. In 1853, the first YMCA for African Americans was founded in Washington, D.C., by Anthony Bowen, a freed slave. The next year the first international convention was held in Paris. At the time there were 397 separate Ys in seven nations, with 30,369 members total.

The YMCA idea, which began among evangelicals, was unusual because it crossed the rigid lines that separated all the different churches and social classes in England in those days. This openness was a trait that would lead eventually to including in YMCAs all men, women and children, regardless of race, religion or nationality. Also, its target of meeting social need in the community was dear from the start.

George Williams was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1894 for his YMCA work and buried in 1905 under the floor of St. Paul's Cathedral among that nation's heroes and statesmen. A large stained glass window in Westminster Abbey, complete with a red triangle, is dedicated to YMCAs, to Sir George and to Y work during the first World War.

## Civil War times

In the United States during the Civil War, Y membership shrunk to one-third its size as members marched off to battle. Fifteen of the remaining Northern Ys formed the U.S. Christian Commission to assist the troops and prisoners of war. It was endorsed by President Abraham Lincoln, and its 4,859 volunteers included the American poet Walt Whitman. Among other accomplishments, it gave more than 1 million Bibles to fighting men. It was the beginning of a commitment to working with soldiers and sailors that continues to this day through the Armed Services YMCAs.



Only 59 Ys were left by war's end, but a rapid rebuilding followed, and four years later there were 600 more. The focus was on saving souls, with saloon and street corner preaching, lists of Christian boarding houses, lectures, libraries and meeting halls, most of them in rented quarters.

But seeds of future change were there. In 1866, the influential New York YMCA adopted a fourfold purpose: "The improvement of the spiritual, mental, social and physical condition of young men."

In those early days, YMCAs were run almost entirely by volunteers. There were a handful of paid staff members before the Civil War who kept the place clean, ran the library and served as corresponding secretaries. But it wasn't until the 1880s, when YMCAs began putting up buildings in large numbers, that most associations thought they needed someone there full time.

Gyms and swimming pools came in at that time, too, along with big auditoriums and bowling alleys. Hotel-like rooms with bathrooms down the hall, called dormitories or residences, were designed into every new YMCA building, and would continue to be until the late 1950s. Income from rented rooms was a great source of funds for YMCA activities of all kinds. Residences would make a major financial contribution to the movement for the next century.

Ys took up boys work and organized summer camps. They set up exercise drills in classes -- forerunners of today's aerobics -- using wooden dumbbells, heavy medicine balls and so-called Indian clubs, which resembled graceful, long-necked bowling pins. Ys organized college students for social action, literally invented the games of basketball and volleyball and served the special needs of railroad men who had no place to stay when the train reached the end of the line. By the 1890s, the fourfold purpose was transformed into the triangle of spirit, mind and body.

## Moody and Mott



John Mott (second from left), a leader of the YMCA movement in America, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946. Mott's award was in recognition for the YMCA's role in increasing global understanding and for its humanitarian efforts. Mott himself was a student of the YMCA movement, and he was a major influence on the Y's missionary movement. Through the influence of nationally known lay evangelists Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) and John Mott (1865-1955), who dominated the movement in the last half of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries respectively, the American YMCAs sent workers by the thousands overseas, both as missionary -- like YMCA secretaries and as war workers.

The first foreign work secretaries, as they were called, reflected the huge missionary outreach by Christian churches near the turn of the century. But instead of churches, they organized YMCAs that eventually were placed under local control. Both Moody and Mott served for lengthy periods as paid professional staff members of the YMCA movement. Both maintained lifelong connections with it.

The U.S. entered World War I in April 1917. Mott, on his own, involved the YMCA movement in running the military canteens, called post exchanges today, in the United States and in France. Ys led fundraising campaigns that raised \$235 million for those YMCA operations and other wartime causes, and hired 25,926 Y workers -- 5,145 of them women -- to run the canteens.

It also took on war relief for both refugees and prisoners of war on both sides, and worked to ease the path of African American soldiers returning to the segregated South. Y secretaries from China supervised the Chinese laborers brought to Europe to unload ships, dig trenches and clear the battlefields after the war. Y.C. James Yen, a Yale graduate working with YMCAs in France, developed a simple Chinese alphabet of 100 characters that became a major weapon in wiping out illiteracy in China. Funds left over from war work helped in the 1920s to spur a Y building boom, outreach to small towns and counties, work with returning black troops and blossoming of YMCA trade schools and colleges.

## **Buddy can you spare a dime?**

The Great Depression brought dramatic drops in Y income, some as high as 50 percent. A number of associations had taken up direct relief of the poor beginning in 1928, as employment mounted before the stock market crash of 1929. When direct relief was taken over by the federal government in 1933, it released YMCAs and other nonprofits from their welfare tasks.

Forced to reevaluate themselves by hard times and by pressure from militant student YMCAs, community Ys became aware of social problems as never before and accelerated their partnerships with other social welfare agencies. Programs and mission were reviewed as well. Some results were joint community projects, renewed emphasis on group work and more work through organized classes and lectures. Ys were forced to prove to their communities that both character-building agencies and welfare agencies were needed, especially in times of stress.

Between 1929 and 1933, Bible class enrollment fell by 60 percent and residence use was down, but exercise and educational classes were both up, along with vocational training and camping.

A typical Y program of the day was the Leisure Time League in Minneapolis. It drew thousands to that YMCA in 1932 to "unite unemployed young men who desire to maintain their physical and mental vigor and wish to train themselves for greater usefulness and service to themselves and the community," reported the association. The program offered a wide range of free services such as medical assistance, physical programs, school classes on a dozen subjects and recreation. As conditions improved even slightly, they went back to work. A few were left behind -- in most cases, those considered unemployable. The YMCA offered them vocational training.

The idea spread widely and YMCAs discovered they could survive handily if they served a large number of people and had low building payments. In fact, the Chicago Y was able to organize a new South Shore branch in the depths of the Depression.

## **Wartime challenges**

During World War II, the National Council of YMCAs (now the YMCA of the USA) joined with Ys around the world to assist prisoners of war in 36 nations. It also helped form the United Service Organization (USO), which ran drop-in centers for servicepeople and sent performers abroad to entertain the troops. Ys worked with displaced persons and refugees as well, and sent both workers and money abroad after the war to help rebuild damaged YMCA buildings.

After more than two decades of study and trial YMCA youth secretaries in 1944 agreed to put a national seal of approval on what was already widespread in the movement to focus their energies on four programs that involved work in small groups. They became known as the "four fronts" or "four platforms" of Youth Work: a father-son program called Y-Indian Guides, and three boy's clubs -- Gra-Y for those in grade school, Junior Hi-Y and Hi-Y. (There would eventually be all-female and coed models as well.)

## Times of change

At the close of the war, the Ys had changed. Sixty-two percent were admitting women, and other barriers began to fall one after the other, with families the new emphasis, and all races and religions included at all levels of the organization. The rapidly expanding suburbs drew the Ys with them, sometimes abandoning the old residences and downtown buildings that no longer were efficient or necessary.

In 1958, the U.S. and Canadian YMCAs launched Buildings for Brotherhood in which the two nations raised \$55 million which was matched by \$6 million overseas. The result was 98 Y buildings renovated, improved or built new in 32 countries.

In what could be called the Great Disillusion of 1965-1975, the nation was rocked by turmoil that included the Vietnam War, urban noting, the forced resignation of a U.S. president, the outbreak of widespread drug abuse among the middle class, assassination of major political leaders, and a loss of confidence in institutions.

The Ys, in response, were challenged by National General Secretary James Bunting to change their ways. He said the choice was "either to keep learning or to become 20th-century Pharisees clinging to forms and theories that were once valid expressions of the best that was known, but that today are outdated and irrelevant."

With national YMCA support and federal aid, new outreach efforts were taken up by community Ys in 150 cities. The Ys poured their own money and talent into outreach as well. Outreach programs were not new to the organization, but the size and scope involved were new.

The four-fronts youth programs withered for lack of attention, dying out entirely in many major centers, but holding fast in YMCA camping and in parts of the Midwest and much of the South. When federal aid dried up, money troubles began to reappear, as Ys struggled to keep faith with those they were helping.

An even more insidious problem was in the mix. Long schooled in conciliation, Y people found themselves being confronted aggressively both at home and abroad. It was particularly hard to deal with and discouraging. Beginning in 1970 the fraternal secretaries serving YMCAs overseas were being called home. Some buildings in U.S. cities were shuttered and residences dosed for lack of clientele and insufficient funds for proper maintenance. Y leaders were urged to become more businesslike in both their appearance and their operations, a topic raised by Y boards since the 1920s.

## Trends

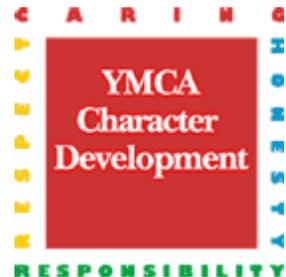


After 1975, the old physical programming featured by YMCAs for a century began to perk up as interest in healthy lifestyles increased nationwide. By 1980, pressure for up-to-date buildings and equipment brought on a boom in construction that lasted through the decade.

Child care for working parents, an extension of what YMCAs had done informally for years, came with a rush in 1983 and quickly joined health and fitness, camping, and residences as a major source of YMCA income.

## Character Development and Asset-Based Approach

During the 1980s and '90s, the ideas of "values clarification" were slowly replaced by ideas of "character." The moral upbringing of children had been considered the sole domain of the family, and enabling the child to discover his or her own ethical system was the goal. But by the mid to late '80s, this was seen as contributing to a morally bankrupt society, in which there is no notion of virtue (or of vice), just different points of view. The ideas of character development and civic virtues became central, with Bennet's *The Book of Virtues* hitting the best-seller lists and organizations such as Character Counts! being born. "Preach what you practice" became as much a part of the ideal of youth development as "practice what you preach," and "it takes a village" replaced "it's the family's job to develop morals."



The YMCA movement had been involved in character development from the beginning, but in an implicit and practical focus rather than an explicit one. (George Williams stated this perfectly in his response to how he would respond to a young man who said that he had lost his belief in Jesus, by saying that his first act would be to see that the young man had dinner.) The YMCA movement studied the issue and emerged with four "core values" -- caring, honesty, respect and responsibility -- and promptly began to incorporate these in all programming in an explicit and conscious way.

During the '90s, a tremendous change occurred in the field of youth development. Previously, the focus had been on the "deficit model," in other words, what went wrong with the youth who got into trouble, and how could they be corrected. But the same way that prevention and development of health, rather than just the cure of disease pervaded the medical world, youth workers and academics started to look at what contributes to healthy development and prevents problems -- an "assets model." The YMCA of the USA collaborated with The Search Institute on studying this issue in depth and coming up with practical results.

The research showed 30 (later increased to 40) developmental assets that positively correlated with pro-social and healthy behaviors in youth, and negatively correlated with anti-social and unhealthy behaviors. The more assets a youth has, the more likely he or she is to behave well, the less likely to engage in risky behaviors. This not only provided a "road map" for Ys to follow in creating healthy kids, families and communities, but also was an inherent proof of the effectiveness of youth programs.

It also showed a wider focus than had been thought possible. It doesn't matter if a program consists of sports, music, a teen center, mentoring or aerobics, or if it's aimed at reducing teen pregnancy, smoking or crime. If it provides one or more of the developmental assets, it will reduce the overall risk of any kind of negative behavior, and raise the likelihood of positive behavior.

## **Highlights and Accomplishments of the YMCA Movement in America**

Ys have been so integral to their communities that organizations have been founded at meetings at YMCAs without being part of Y programs. The Gideons organization famous for putting Bibles in hotel rooms was started at a YMCA, but without Y staff or volunteer involvement. So we say that the Gideons was founded at a Y, but not that a Y started Gideons.

It would be impossible to list all of the individuals and organizations contributing to this document. We received information from sources ranging from trade associations to university professors to current and retired YMCA employees. The only things they had in common were a deep respect for Y traditions, a love for what the YMCA stands for and a desire to help. Special recognition must go to the staff of the YMCA of the USA Archives. Their efforts and irreplaceable resources provided needed details when no one else knew where to look.

The reason to look at what YMCAs did in the past is to inspire today's YMCA staff and volunteers to serve their communities with the same concern, dedication and courage. They may not make a list of firsts, but they will keep YMCAs foremost with their accomplishments.

## Everybody plays, everybody wins-sports at YMCAs



Millions of people have been introduced to sports at YMCAs. Many of the sports people play were introduced at YMCAs, too.

Volleyball was invented at the Holyoke (Mass.) YMCA in 1895, by William Morgan, an instructor at the Y who felt that basketball was too strenuous for businessmen. Morgan blended elements of basketball, tennis and handball into the game and called it mintonette. The name "volleyball" was first used in 1896 during an exhibition at the International

YMCA Training School in Springfield, Mass., to better describe how the ball went back and forth over the net. In 1922, YMCAs held their first national championship in the game. This became the U.S. Open in 1924, when non-YMCA teams were permitted to compete.

Racquetball was invented in 1950 at the Greenwich (Conn.) YMCA by Joe Sobek, a member who couldn't find other squash players of his caliber and who did not care for handball. He tried paddleball and platform tennis and came up with the idea of using a strung racquet similar to a platform tennis paddle (not a sawed-off tennis racquet, as some say) to allow a greater variety of shots. After drawing up rules for the game, Sobek went to nearby Ys for approval by other players, and at the same time formed them into the Paddle Rackets Association to promote the sport. The original balls Sobek used were half blue and half red. When he needed replacements, Sobek asked Spalding, the original manufacturer, to make the balls all blue, so they wouldn't mark the Y's courts.

Softball was given its name by motion of Walter Hakanson of the Denver YMCA in 1926 at a meeting of the Colorado Amateur Softball Association (CASA), itself a result of YMCA staff efforts. Softball had been played for many years prior to 1926, under such names as kittenball, softball and even sissyball. In 1926, however, the YMCA state secretary, Homer Hoisington, noticed both the sport's popularity and its need for standardized rules. After a gathering of interested parties, the CASA was formed and Hakanson moved to settle on the name softball for the game. The motion carried, and the name softball became accepted nationwide. Shortly thereafter, the Denver YMCA adopted a declaration of principles for softball, adhering to noncommercialized recreation open to all ages and races and demanding good sportsmanship. When the Amateur Softball Association of America was formed in 1933, the Denver YMCA team represented Colorado in its first national tournament, held in Chicago.

Professional football began at a YMCA. In 1895, in Latrobe, Pa., John Brailer was paid \$10 plus expenses by the local YMCA to replace the injured quarterback on their team. Years later, however, Pudge Heffelfinger claimed that he was secretly paid to play for the Allegheny Athletic Association in 1892. The NFL elected to go with Pudge's version of events.



Yes, it was at the International YMCA Training School that in December 1891, James Naismith invented the game of basketball, doing so at the demand of Luther Gulick, the director of the school. Gulick needed a game to occupy a class of incorrigibles -- 18 future YMCA directors who, more interested in rugby and football, didn't care for leapfrog, tumbling and other activities they were forced to do during the winter. Gulick, obviously out of patience with the group, gave Naismith two weeks to come up with a game to occupy them.

Naismith decided that the new game had to be physically active and simple to understand. It could not be rough, so no contact could be allowed. The ball could be passed but not carried. Goals at each end of the court would lend a degree of difficulty and give skill and science a role. Elevating the goal would eliminate rushes that could injure players, a problem in football and rugby.

Introducing the game of basketball at the next gym class (Naismith did meet Gulick's deadline), Naismith posted 13 rules on the wall and taught the game to the incorrigibles. The men loved it and proceeded to introduce basketball to their home towns over Christmas break. Naismith's invention spread like wildfire.

Not only was basketball invented by a YMCA institution, but the game's first professional team came from a Y. The Trenton (N.J.) YMCA had fielded a basketball team since 1892 and in 1896 its team claimed to be the national champions after beating various other YMCA and college teams. The team then severed its ties with the Y. It played the 1896-97 season out of a local Masonic temple, charging for admission and keeping the proceeds.

## **No idle hands -- YMCA programs**

YMCAs run programs of all types, from activities for older adults to Zen aerobics. Some of the biggest are camping, swimming and child care. Here are some stories of their development.

Camping has been a part of YMCA programming for more than a century. The claim for a YMCA first in camping, however, must be worded carefully, since the YMCA did not invent camping in 1885, and Sumner Dudley did not lead the first YMCA camping program. What YMCAs can claim is having founded the first continuously used camp. The first school camp was started in 1861 by William Gunn, and Gunn camps became well known. A camp for weakly boys was organized in 1876 by Dr. Joseph Trimble Rothrock. The first church camp for boys was started in 1880, and in 1881 the first private camp to meet special educational needs was established. None of these camps was a YMCA camp, and none of them operates today.

YMCAs became involved in camping in the 1860s, with the earliest reference being that of the Vermont Y's boy's missionary (who would now be the youth director) taking a group of boys to Lake Champlain for a summer encampment. In 1881, the Brooklyn (N.Y.) YMCA reported taking 30 boys on a camping out. Many other YMCAs had camp experiences for youth as well, and in 1882 national records started recording camping programs under outings and excursions.

The oldest camp, now known as Camp Dudley, began in 1886 on Lake Champlain, NY Sumner Dudley, long active in both the New York and New Jersey YMCA movements, was asked in 1884 to take young honor YMCA members camping. In 1885 he took seven boys for a week's encampment at Orange Lake, NJ The next year Dudley moved the site to Twin Islands, Lake Wawayanda, NJ Ultimately, the camp settled on Lake Champlain, NY, in 1908. Dudley referred to the first camp as Camp Baldhead. After Dudley's death in 1897, the camp was renamed Camp Dudley.

The Ragger Society, the forerunner of today's Rags and Leather Program, was started in 1914 at Camp Loma Mar in California. It started because a camp director wanted to award athletic ability. Other camp leaders objected, noting that a boy with physical disabilities would then never be able to win. They settled on a program of personal counseling and seeking God's will for oneself. The hymn, I Would Be True, written in 1917 by Howard A. Walker, was inspired by the program's creed. Walker himself later went to India and performed YMCA work there.

Swimming and aquatics have long been associated with the YMCA, and tens of millions of people across the country learned how to swim at the YMCA. It was not always this way, however, and for many years swimming was seen as a distraction from legitimate physical development.



The first reported YMCA swimming bath was built at the Brooklyn (NY) Central YMCA in 1885. By the end of the year, it was reported that 17 Ys had pools. Pools then bore scant resemblance to the pools of today: The Brooklyn Central pool was 14' x 45' and 5' deep. Early pools, in addition to being small, had no filters or recirculation systems. The water in the pool just got dirtier and dirtier until the pool was drained and cleaned, which some Ys did on a weekly basis. No wonder the medical community saw them as a threat to health.

Two developments helped change YMCA staff attitudes towards pools. The first was the development of mass swim lessons in 1906 by George Corsan at the Detroit YMCA. What Corsan did was to teach swimming strokes on land, starting with the crawl stroke first, as a confidence builder. Prior to Corsan's methods, strokes were only taught in the pool and the crawl was not taught until later. Corsan also came up with the ideas of the learn-to-swim campaign and using bronze buttons as rewards for swimming proficiency. He gave a button to boys who swam 50 feet. Corsan's learn-to-swim campaigns resulted in 1909 in the first campaign to teach every boy in the United States and Canada how to swim.

Perhaps Corsan's land drills for swimming came about as a result of how swimming had been taught. Early YMCA staff viewed swimming as a distraction from the real job of physical development, which meant exercise and gymnastics. Boys in San Francisco, for example, could not use the pool until after they had passed a proficiency test in gymnastics. In the 1890s, swimming was taught by using a rope and pulley system.



The second development was the use of filtration systems for keeping the water clean. Ray L. Rayburn, a founder of what was the Building Bureau (now BFS), came up with the ideas of building pools with roll-out rims and water recirculation systems. Recirculation meant that the water could be filtered and impurities removed. The first roll-out rim was installed in 1909 in the Kansas City, Mo., pool. In 1910, a filtration system was added to the Kansas City pool. No more would pools be considered health menaces.

The combination of these developments, Corsan's mass teaching techniques and Rayburn's filtration systems, came together to popularize swimming and swim instruction at YMCAs. In 1932 there were more than 1 million swimmers a year at YMCAs. In 1956, the national learn-to-swim campaigns became Learn to Swim Month. In 1984, it was reported that YMCAs collectively were the largest operator of swimming pools in the world.

It is hard to overestimate the effect the YMCA movement has had on swimming and aquatics in general. A Springfield College student, George Goss, wrote the first American book on lifesaving in 1913 as a thesis. It was a YMCA national board member (then the YMCA International Committee), William Ball, who in the early 1900s encouraged the Red Cross to include lifesaving instruction in its disaster and wartime services programs. The first mobile swimming pool was invented at the Eastern Union (NJ) Y in 1961, enabling the Y to take instruction and swimming programs to people who could not go to the Y. The YMCA Swimming and Lifesaving Manual, published in 1919, was one of the earliest works on the subject. The Council for National Cooperation in Aquatics, formed in 1951, was created as a result of the efforts of the YMCA. A group of 20 national agencies, the Council was organized to expand cooperation in the field of aquatics.

Even the military used YMCA swim instruction techniques. In World War I, the Army used mass land drills to teach doughboys. In 1943, Dr. Thomas K. Cureton, chairman of the YMCA National Aquatic Committee, published *Warfare Aquatics*, which was widely used by the armed forces (and YMCAs!) during the conflict and after.

The term "bodybuilding" was first used in 1881 by Robert Roberts, a member of the staff at the Boston YMCA. He also developed the exercise classes that led to today's fitness workouts.



Group child care was not started at a YMCA, but Ys moved swiftly to meet the needs of a changed and changing society. Rosie the Riveter went back home after World War II, but her daughter left and didn't look back. Today's YMCA movement is the largest not-for-profit provider of child care, and is larger than any for-profit chain in the country.

No one could have predicted that in the beginning. The origins of group child care are obscure and we will probably never know who had the first group care program. A strong possibility, however, is that group care grew out of gang prevention and teen intervention programs in the 1960s. The Chicago YMCA had a strong youth outreach program in the 1960s (Ys had been working with youth gangs in one way or another since the 1880s). Workers noticed, however, that youths attending the program often brought their younger siblings along because they were providing care while their parents worked. Child care was organized so that the older kids could attend these programs without concern or distraction.



Another impetus for group child care at the Y came from John Root, general secretary (today he would be CEO) of the Chicago YMCA. Root had returned from a trip to the Soviet Union, where he had observed firsthand the extensive child care programs offered by the government and how the availability of child care benefited both children and their families. Root was determined to have YMCAs do as much in America.

The idea quickly spread to other cities. In the 1990s, about half a million children received care at a YMCA each year. In 1996, child care became the movement's second largest source of revenue, after membership dues.

## **The American way -- YMCAs' influence on society**

Many times YMCAs influenced society simply by coming up with creative solutions to their own problems, such as a need for trained YMCA employees. These solutions then spread throughout our society because they met the needs of others. Often YMCAs set themselves up as models long before others even knew there was a problem. Here are some examples of how YMCAs shaped the development of social institutions in America.



Many of the practices of colleges and universities in America, in fact, several colleges and universities themselves, can be traced back to YMCA involvement in higher education. Ys in the 19th and early 20th centuries placed much more emphasis on formal and informal classes and teaching than they do now. This stemmed in part from the fact that free public education was not so widespread as it is today. That meant that there were large numbers of working teens who needed classes and instruction if they were to avoid the traps and pitfalls that George Williams so

keenly observed in London decades earlier. YMCA classes and instruction also stemmed from the need for properly trained staff to run local Ys and carry on its programs.

The first institution of higher learning organized by the YMCA national organization was the School for Christian Workers in Springfield, Mass. Later known as the International YMCA Training School and finally as Springfield College, the School was to train Y workers in all aspects of business and management. Previously, academic training for YMCA employees was mostly summer institutes and training sessions, the first being held in 1884 at Lake Geneva, Wis. These were insufficient, though, and at least since 1876 there had been calls for Ys in large metropolitan areas to set up training schools.

The need for a formal school was also felt in the Midwest, with a YMCA Training School housed in the downtown Chicago YMCA opening in 1890 with five students. It ultimately became George Williams College, after merging with the Western Secretarial Institute, a summer training school in Lake Geneva, Wis., in 1892. A century later, George Williams College became part of Aurora University, in Aurora, Ill.

The idea that large metropolitan associations should have classrooms for teen education and staff training was put into practice in San Francisco and Boston in the 1880s and 1890s. What is now Northeastern University in Boston started as informal law courses in 1897 with the founding of the Evening Institute of the Boston YMCA. Formal classes started in 1898, under the name of the Evening School of Law of the Boston YMCA. The school added additional subject areas and became Northeastern College in 1916. Later expansion led to its becoming Northeastern University in 1922. The Evening Institute of the Boston YMCA was also the birthplace of student work study, a concept familiar to students receiving financial aid at almost every college or university in the country.

The origins of Golden Gate University in San Francisco are similar. The San Francisco Y was founded in 1853, one of 13 YMCAs operating in North America at the time. In 1881, the YMCA Night School was established, a name it kept until 1895, when it became the YMCA Evening College. The Evening College formed a YMCA Law School in 1910, becoming Golden Gate College in 1923.

Many YMCAs had cooperative agreements with some of the most prestigious institutions of higher learning in America, many starting in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of the more notable institutions include Oberlin College (America's first coeducational school), Yale Divinity School, Whittier College, Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary. The Southern YMCA College and Graduate School was founded in Nashville, Tenn., in 1919, with the help of Vanderbilt University, Peabody College for Teachers, and Scarritt College for Christian Workers. It closed in 1936, with many of its programs going to the Blue Ridge Assembly. In Chicago, Roosevelt University was founded in 1945 as a result of a split within the existing Central YMCA College.

The YMCA movement played a large role in the development of higher education. By 1916, there were approximately 83,000 students taking more than 200 YMCA courses. In 1946, approximately 130,000 students were taking courses through Ys. In all there were 20 YMCA colleges in 1950, ranging from Fenn College in Cleveland to Springfield College. Beginning in the 1930s, as the colleges became freestanding institutions of higher learning and not just training centers for YMCA staff, it made sense for them to break free of the YMCA movement altogether. In 1997, only Springfield College and the George Williams College of Aurora (Ill.) University retain close ties with the movement.

Another aspect of YMCA involvement in higher education was the work of student YMCAs at many colleges and universities. The first recorded student Ys opened in 1856 at Cumberland University in Tennessee and at Milton Academy (now College). Students, of course, must have been active in informal YMCA bodies before then. Student Ys offered counseling and services to students on an ecumenical basis, an approach that heavily influenced and ultimately changed the way church and college staff conducted their own campus outreach programs. Student work was so important to the movement that in 1922, the movement authorized the organization of a national student council, complete with its own statement of purpose.

Certification of staff with respect to general training is a YMCA development, growing out of the need for education that led to establishing YMCA schools in the 19th century. In 1922, a plan for voluntary certification to be a YMCA secretary (today's director) was drawn up.

YMCAs were also among the first to develop systems of certification for staff in teaching programs. In part, this can be traced to the publication by Association Press of manuals and materials for use by staff in teaching courses. In 1938 a national plan was developed for certifying aquatic directors and instructors. In 1959, certification was offered in skin and scuba diving. In 1996, more than 54,000 people were certified in various subjects or as trainers of trainers.

The YMCA organized a Retirement Fund for employees in 1922, with about 1,000 Ys and 4,000 staff participating. The first official steps to organizing the fund began in 1913. Prior to that, churches and welfare organizations, if they made any provision for the future at all, had widows and orphans plans. The Y's retirement plan was a first for any major welfare organization and probably the first for any such nonchurch association.

When the fund became operational in 1922, it began with an endowment of \$4 million, including a \$1 million conditional gift (in the form of a challenge grant) from John D. Rockefeller Jr. (who had been active in the student Y at Brown University). Around that time, the Gamble family, of Proctor & Gamble fame, gave the fund a large block of stock.

Successful investments allowed it to survive the stock market crash of 1929, and in 1934 the fund corpus had grown to \$15 million. The initial retirement age was 60. The fact that YMCAs organized one of the earliest retirement funds should be seen in perspective. YMCA staff had worked in other ways to improve working conditions. YMCAs had been active in labor's campaigns to shorten the work week since 1885.

The Nobel Peace Prize awarded for pioneering work in peace making was jointly awarded in 1946 to John R. Mott, a leader of the YMCA movement in America, and to Emily Greene Balch. Mott's award was in recognition for the role the YMCA had played in increasing global understanding and for its humanitarian efforts. Mott himself was a product of the student YMCA movement and he was a major influence on the Y's missionary movement. In 1993, the Jerusalem International YMCA, the only Y owned by the YMCA of the USA, was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for its work for promoting peace in the Middle East.

Residences at YMCAs play a vital part in both the movement and in American society. Staying in a YMCA room has been mentioned in song and literature, and the list of people who stayed at Y residences range from Dave Thomas, the founder of Wendy's restaurants, to Charlie Rich, the country music star and black revolutionary Malcolm Little, later known as Malcolm X.

Dormitories were seen as giving young men a place of refuge from the evils of the world. In 1898, *Young Men's Era*, a Y publication, declared that dorms were more in keeping with the YMCA mission than other moneymaking devices. The first known Y dormitory was noted in 1867, when the Chicago YMCA had a 42-room dormitory in Farwell Hall. Intended for young men who could not afford more ample accommodations, it was, in the words of Dwight L. Moody, to be a Christian home for the stranger young men coming to this city. Farwell Hall burned down shortly thereafter.

It was 20 years before the second dormitory was built at a YMCA, this time in Milwaukee in 1887. In the meantime, though, several YMCAs maintained emergency dormitories for the unemployed. The Harrisburg (Pa.) YMCA opened a Y dormitory in 1877 in a renovated hotel.

By 1910, 281 Ys had about 9,000 rooms available, and in 1916 the Chicago YMCA Hotel opened with 1,821 rooms. By 1922 Ys had approximately 55,000 rooms and in 1940 there were about 100,000 rooms at YMCAs. No hotel chain had more rooms.

## **And a star to steer by -- organizations influenced by YMCAs**

The influence of YMCAs on others extends far beyond individuals in their programs. Here are some organizations that drew on YMCA experience or assistance during their formative years.

The Camp Fire Girls (now Camp Fire Boys and Girls) were founded in 1910 through the joint efforts of Luther Gulick, M.D., and his wife, Charlotte. Gulick was already well known for his work in the YMCA, his understanding of the whole person leading to his design of the YMCA's inverted triangle, one side each for spirit, mind and body. Busy with his existing commitments, Gulick did not want to take on the task of forming another organization. He did, however, advise others on the organization of the Thetford Girls, the forerunner of the Camp Fire Girls. Charlotte by then had become interested in the Thetford Girls and was inspired to name their first camp, at Sebago Lake, Maine, Camp WoHeLo, from the first two letters of the words Work, Health and Love. She saw them as forming an upright triangle, which she pictured superimposed over the Y's symbol to make a star.

YMCA staff members played a key role in the development of the Boy Scouts of America. After Lord S.S. Baden-Powell and others started Scouting in 1907 in Britain, it spread to America, and many YMCAs here had Boy Scout programs around the turn of the century. YMCA and Scout leaders realized that Scouting in the United States needed to be a separate movement, but that it would benefit from YMCA nurturing, too.

Soon it was decided by the Boy Scouts that they needed their own national organization, and in June, 1910, a temporary national headquarters for the Boy Scouts was housed in a YMCA office in New York City. The first National Council office of the Boy Scouts of America was opened in New York City in 1911.

Ties to the YMCA continued for some time after 1910. That year, Lord Baden-Powell and others held the first training conference for Scout leaders, the Scout Master's Training School, at the Silver Bay Association, which was well known for hosting retreats and meetings for the leaders of the YMCA movement (the YWCA and other organizations also used Silver Bay for similar purposes). These Scout Master's Training Schools continued for some years.

In 1985, on the occasion of their 75th anniversary, a plaque first given in 1947 was rededicated at Silver Bay by the Boy Scouts of America, in honor of its role in founding of Scouting in the United States.

The United Service Organizations, better known as the USO, was created in October 1940, as a joint effort by the YMCA, YWCA, National Catholic Community Service, National Jewish Welfare Board, Traveler's Aid Association and the Salvation Army. These organizations, like the YMCA, had long histories of helping servicemen and noncombatants in the nation's wars, but the scale of mobilization needed as America prepared for World War II was far beyond the scope of any one organization. The only way to deal effectively with the needs of the hundreds of thousands of young men being drafted was to combine and coordinate efforts. In January, 1941, USO leaders met with President Roosevelt and various military leaders. In settling a dispute between which areas of the USO's activities would be controlled by the military and which by the civilians, Roosevelt ordered that the private organizations would handle the recreation services and the government would put up the buildings and put the USO name on the outside.

The Peace Corps, founded in 1961 by order of President Kennedy, was patterned after the YMCA's program of World Service Workers, which had started in the 1880s. The student Ys of that era included as members John Mott and Robert Wilder, who founded the Student Volunteer Movement in 1888. The volunteers pledged themselves to overseas missionary work after graduation from college. The YMCA was given the opportunity to organize the Corps, but turned it down due to the burden of its other activities.

Association Press, first established in 1907 as the YMCA Press, was created as the publishing arm of the YMCA movement, producing technical works, Bible study courses and other works suitable for building character and leadership skills, and was a pioneer in publishing books on sex education. It was also the leading publisher of evangelistic materials used by YMCAs, including the popular everyday life series of devotionals written by Harry Emerson Fosdick between 1910 and 1920. Association Press also printed the text first used by Dale Carnegie in teaching public speaking: *Public Speaking, a Practical Course for Business Men*. The name Association Press was given in 1911, and it was closed and sold in the late 1970s after many years of declining book sales.

Many people confuse the Association Press with the current YMCA Press in Paris, France, also known as the Paris Press. The Paris Press does in fact have a U.S. YMCA connection. It was started in Prague in 1920 by Julius Hecker, a World Service Worker, who wanted to publish works in Russian for those fleeing the revolution and the civil war. Since many books didn't fit in with Communist ideology, they couldn't be printed under Communist rule. Hecker's efforts helped the refugees sustain their culture and community in the face of great upheaval. One of the most important works put out by the Paris Press was the Russian edition of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*.

## **That they may all be one -- diversity in the YMCA**

YMCAs have interpreted their Christian mission in a practical way, including in their programs and outreach missions many groups excluded by others at the time. For example, long before the phrase cultural diversity was used, YMCAs were at work in the Great Plains with both the U.S. Cavalry and the Sioux Indians.



U.S. Indian Ys first started in 1879, with the founding of a YMCA by Thomas Wakeman, a Dakota Indian, in Flandreau, S.D. The Dakota Indian associations were formally received into the state organization in 1885. By 1886 there were 10 Indian associations with a total of 156 members. By 1898 there were about 40 Indian associations, including several student YMCAs. The student department's interest in Indian work was fueled by James A. Garvie's presentation to the convention of 1886: Garvie, a Sioux, had translated the model college constitution of a student Y into the Sioux language.

The first Y employee hired to do Indian work full time was Charles Eastman, MD, a Sioux hired in 1895. Prior to that, however, the Kansas state association had engaged a native Indian missionary to work among his own people. In 1920 Indian efforts were overseen by the student department. By 1926 the number of Indian YMCAs was too small to include separately in the annual report. The General Convention of Sioux YMCAs in Dupree, SD, and the Mission Valley YMCA Family Center in Ronan, Mont., are the last YMCAs on reservations.

U.S. YMCAs serving Asians were first established in San Francisco to serve the large Chinese population there in 1875, although the YMCA in Portland, Ore., had opened a mission school and engaged a Chinese man to distribute religious tracts five years earlier. The Chinese were subjected to violent racism at this time, as witnessed by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The secretaries of these Chinese Ys were natives of China who converted to Christianity. A Japanese YMCA was founded in San Francisco in 1917.



YMCAs in the African American community have a long and varied history. The first YMCA for blacks was founded in 1853 by Anthony Bowen, a freed slave, in Washington, D.C. It was the first nonchurch black institution in America, predating Lincoln University in Oxford, Pa., by a year. In 1888, William Hunton became the first full-time black secretary in the YMCA movement, and in 1900, the first conference of black secretaries was held. In 1896 there were 60 active black Ys, 41 of which were student Ys at colleges (the first black student YMCA was formed in 1869 at Howard University, Washington, D.C.). By 1924, there were 160 black Ys with 28,000 members.

Twenty-five black YMCAs were built in 23 cities (there were three in New York City) as a result of a challenge grant program announced by Julius Rosenwald in 1910. Rosenwald promised \$25,000 toward the construction of YMCAs in black communities if the community raised \$75,000 over a five-year period. Adjusting for inflation, Rosenwald's grants would total about \$10 million today. The effect of these Rosenwald Ys was keenly felt in the 1950s and '60s: YMCAs, being integral parts of the black community, played important roles in the struggle for civil rights.

YMCAs and Y leaders also played important roles in the fight for civil rights. In 1932, the student YMCAs voted to not hold meetings in states with Jim Crow laws. Eugene E. Barnett, head of the national YMCA organization during the 1940s, was a strong advocate of integrating YMCAs and full civil rights for minorities.

While YMCAs provided proud firsts on racial matters in the 19th and early 20th centuries, they also provided some sad lasts later on. In the 1960s, some 300 YMCAs were still racially segregated, and a few left the movement rather than comply with the national organization's directive to integrate.

The YMCA also had a role in the creation of modern black historiography. Carter G. Woodson, Ph.D., a historian and the second African American to receive a doctorate in history from Harvard University, stayed at the Wabash Area YMCA in Chicago when he visited the city during the 1910s. During that era, formal and informal segregation limited blacks to only certain areas of the city. As a result, the Wabash Area Y became a major institution in serving the black neighborhood known as Bronzeville. It was there that Dr. Woodson and three friends met in 1915 to found the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. The men felt that if whites learned more about blacks, race relations would improve. The association, and Dr. Woodson's later scholarship, were important vehicles in establishing the study of African American history as an accepted academic pursuit at all major colleges and universities. Dr. Woodson was also a practical man in addition to being a scholar: he knew that demonstrating the talents and accomplishments of blacks in America would help increase white regard for blacks. In 1926 he organized the first Negro History Week, held in Washington, D.C. In the 1960s it grew into Black History Month and is now celebrated throughout the country.

In the 1970s, Bronzeville ran down, the Wabash YMCA was closed and the building nearly torn down. Now the neighborhood is improving and the building is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The early history of women in the YMCA is not well documented, although it is believed that the first female member of a YMCA joined in Brooklyn, NY, in the late 1850s. This is based on a statement by one observer in 1869 that Brooklyn had had women as members for half of its existence. The Brooklyn YMCA was founded in 1853. There were several female members, at least unofficially, by the 1860s. The Albany (NY) convention of 1866 went so far as to refuse to seat several women delegates, holding that representation at the convention had to be based on male membership. Ellen Brown, who was not only the first female employee of a YMCA, but also the first boy's work secretary in the movement, was hired in 1886. By 1946, women accounted for 12 percent of the membership.

This is not to say that women were not active in YMCAs before the 1860s. Almost immediately after the founding of the YMCA in the United States in 1851, women taught classes, raised funds and functioned as a ladies aid society would in a church. These committees of women were largely informal, and official Ladies Auxiliaries were not formed until the 1880s. There is record of lady members using YMCA gyms in 1881.

## **Wherever the soldier goes -- YMCAs and the military**

George Stuart, founder of the Philadelphia YMCA and head of the Y's efforts in the Civil War, said that there is a good deal of religion in a warm shirt and a good beefsteak. YMCAs, to meet the needs of those in the armed forces, responded with care, imagination and skill. Here is an overview of the YMCA and the military.

YMCAs and the military have enjoyed a relationship that predates the Civil War. YMCAs have always sought out young men to assist, and the fact that men went into the military simply meant that the YMCA followed them there. Before the Civil War, there is record that the Portsmouth (Va.) YMCA supplied a library in 1856 to a Navy port and later held meetings aboard a training ship. In 1859, the Boston YMCA made similar efforts.

Ys first participated in American wars with the May, 1861, formation of the Army Committee by the New York Association during the Civil War. Several YMCAs, notably the New York and Chicago associations, raised troops, including New York's 176th, the Ironsides Regiment. In Chicago, it was reported that the Chicago YMCA raised five companies of troops and could have raised five more.

The New York Association's Army Committee and similar efforts by several other Ys were merged into the Christian Commission, responsible for directing Union YMCAs' relief efforts. The Christian Commission oversaw approximately 4,850 volunteers, one of the most famous of whom was the poet Walt Whitman, who served as a nurse. Through the Christian Commission, YMCAs supported hospitals and supplied nurses and aides to tens of thousands of casualties and prisoners of war throughout the hostilities, on both sides of the conflict. YMCAs were also active in distributing tracts and Bibles throughout the Union and the Confederacy. The Chicago Y held devotional services for the soldiers and later helped maintain a home for men in transit, the sick and the wounded.

Not only did YMCAs help raise military units, but military units started YMCAs. Southern units were more active than Northern ones in this regard, and about 30 such Ys left records. The federal POW camp at Johnson's Island, Ohio, organized a YMCA, its chief functions being looking after the prison hospital and holding weekly lecture meetings. In the winter of 1863-64, the YMCA of one Mississippi brigade organized a one-day-a-week fast among its members and sent the saved rations to the poor in Richmond.

The Civil War generally devastated YMCA membership in both the North and South. The work of the YMCA during the war, however, made it popular with the troops, and the movement recovered swiftly.

In the period between the Civil War and the Spanish-American War, YMCA work with the military consisted mainly of providing a regimental writing tent for the men during the summer and holding Bible studies. Annapolis had a functioning YMCA among the midshipmen by 1879, and West Point reported a cadet branch in 1885. Finally, a YMCA was given permanent quarters in Fort Monroe, Va., in 1889. Things got onto a more official footing when the 1895 YMCA Convention authorized greater efforts. Little was done before the Spanish-American War to implement this directive.



The outbreak of war with Spain saw a repeat of YMCA efforts during the Civil War. Ys raised military units and followed the flag to the Philippines and Cuba, attending to the needs of servicemen, prisoners of war and noncombatants.

The experiences of the YMCA movement showed that helping servicemen would require full-time resources, and in September, 1898, an Armed Services department was established. In 1902, Congress authorized the erection of permanent YMCA facilities on military bases, and in 1903, special training was available for secretaries

heading Army and Navy Ys.

By 1914 there were 31 military YMCAs and 180 traveling libraries. Almost a quarter of a million men stayed in their dormitories. The YMCA had an extensive presence in the military during the period before World War I.

Almost 26,000 YMCA staff and volunteers performed YMCA work during the first World War, some of it years before America entered the war. American secretaries, under the sponsorship of the World Alliance in Geneva, were sent to Europe at the beginning of the war to care for prisoners held by both sides. While firm figures are not available, it is safe to say that YMCA efforts directly helped hundreds of thousands of POWs, and indirectly helped most of the 4 million POWs of that war.

With its more than 1,500 canteens and post exchanges, the YMCA fed and entertained more troops during World War I than did any other welfare organization, including the Knights of Columbus and the Salvation Army. It was common for Catholics and Jews to use Y buildings for religious services. In all, the YMCA performed more than 90 percent of the welfare work of the time, mostly in the form of running canteens and post exchanges. The canteens and post exchanges the YMCA ran in France were released from minimum price laws in effect in America, its history and reputation being sufficient guarantees against abuse.

The Y's efforts during WWI even inspired music. One song about the Y was written by Irving Berlin, who was stationed at Fort Yaphank in 1918. Berlin wrote I Can Always Find A Little Sunshine in the Y.M.C.A., which was performed in a revue he wrote titled Yip, Yip, Yaphank. Another, The Meaning of YMCA (You Must Come Across), written by Ed Rose and Abe Olman in 1918, had the lyric: They've done their bit and more. To help us win the war....The Y is right there on the firing line.



World War II saw a continuation of YMCA services for the military and displaced persons. The scale of the YMCA's efforts during WWII is seen not only in its USO work, but also in the number of prisoners of war assisted through YMCA efforts. It is believed that between 1939 and 1945, YMCAs worked with, or supplied the bulk of the financing for working with, some 6 million POWs in more than 36 countries.

YMCAs also worked with the 10 internment camps set up in 1942 to hold the 110,000 Japanese Americans held during the war. The bulk of the Y's work consisted of clubs and camping for boys in the camps. In the words of David M. Tatsuno, an internee and former member of the Japanese Y in San Francisco: The Y never forgot us. Tatsuno smuggled an eight millimeter movie camera into the Topaz, Utah, internment camp, where he took some extremely rare footage of daily life in the camp. Tatsuno's film was recently given to the Library of Congress. It is one of only two amateur films in the Library's collection. The other is Abraham Zapruder's film of President Kennedy's assassination.

## **I'll meet you at the Y-organizations started at YMCAs**

YMCAs have long been places where things happened. Here are some of the organizations and events that first took place at a YMCA.

Toastmasters International was invented in 1903 as an older youth public speaking program by Ralph C. Smedley, education director of the Bloomington (Ill.) YMCA. Smedley realized that older boys visiting the Y needed training in communication skills. He arrived at the name The Toastmasters Club because meetings resembled a series of banquet toasts. At each YMCA Smedley transferred to, he would start a new club. Viewed as a personal idiosyncrasy of Smedley by other YMCA secretaries, the Toastmasters Clubs he started were by and large not successful until he began working at the Santa Ana (Calif.) YMCA. After the first Toastmasters Club meeting there on October 22, 1924, the idea took hold and spread, and a federation of Toastmasters Clubs was soon created. The federation of clubs incorporated in 1932, and by 1941 Toastmasters needed Smedley's full attention, so he resigned from the YMCA to devote himself to his creation.



The Negro National League, the first black baseball league to last a full season, was formed at a meeting at the Paseo YMCA in Kansas City, Mo., in 1920.

Gideons International was formed on July 1, 1899, at the YMCA in Janesville, Wis., by three men (Nicholson, Hill and Knights) who had come up with the idea a few months earlier. The Gideons were a group of Christian commercial travelers who were to evangelize as they went around the country on business. To that end, Gideons would leave Bibles in the rooms in which they had stayed. While their

meeting was at the YMCA, they were not Y staff or volunteers or members. Nor were they taking part in a YMCA program.

Jazzercise, a famous aerobic exercise program for women, was started in 1969 in Evanston, Ill., by a dancer, Judi Missett. Missett began teaching Jazzercise® in 1972 at the La Jolla, (Cal.) YMCA. Jacki Sorensen, by the way, who is frequently but erroneously associated with Jazzercise®, has no connection with the YMCA. She has popularized aerobic exercise, however, and YMCAs have benefited greatly from her efforts in the field.

Father's Day in its present form was created at a meeting at the Spokane, Wash., YMCA in 1909 by Louise Smart Dodd. The Y and the Spokane Minister's Alliance swiftly endorsed the idea and helped it spread, holding the first Father's Day celebration on June 10, 1910. President Wilson officially recognized Father's Day in 1916, President Coolidge recommended it in 1924, and in 1971 President Nixon and Congress issued proclamations and endorsements of Father's Day as a national tradition.

Some lists of YMCA firsts state that Warner Sallman painted Head of Christ in the reading room of the Central YMCA in Chicago in 1940. Unfortunately, there's no evidence to support that claim. According to Valparaiso University's Art Department, Sallman made a charcoal sketch of Head of Christ at his studio at 5412 North Spaulding, Chicago, in 1924 as cover art for a magazine called The Covenant. In 1940 he was asked to create a color version and created the oil painting that has been reproduced approximately 500 million times, making it one of the most popular works of art in history. The oil version was probably created at his studio.

The idea that Sallman originally painted Head of Christ in a YMCA probably got started as a result of Sallman's chalk talks. Sallman, a devout Christian, held some 500 chalk talks, many at YMCAs, where he would make a charcoal sketch of Head of Christ while giving a testimonial about Jesus. At the conclusion of his talk he would give the sketch to the Y or other organization sponsoring the session. Sallman did make additional oil paintings of Head of Christ, some of which may have been made in YMCAs during talks, or on commission. At least one YMCA has confirmed that, in 1949, Sallman countersigned an oil copy of Head of Christ which is still at the YMCA. Sallman himself related that he had made the original 1924 charcoal sketch in his studio one night.