

TESTIMONIAL DINNER in honor of
HENRY M. BEARDSLEY, Citizen forty-three years President Kansas City, Missouri
Young Men's Christian Association on the occasion of its DIAMOND JUBILEE 1860-1935
January 11, 1935 Hotel Muehlebach
Henry M. Beardsley

PROGRAM

Honorable Arthur M. Hyde, Toastmaster
Invocation Dr. Walter H. North
President Council of Churches

DINNER

Greetings Mr. Fred M. Lee
President Merchants Association
Greetings Dr. George Melcher
Superintendent Public Schools
Greetings Dr. G. P. Baity
Minister Westport Presbyterian Church
Address Mr. Henry M. Beardsley

THE Young Men's Christian Association is not a building, although the name has become so identified with an edifice of some kind that it is difficult for the general public to conceive one without the other. This is unfortunate but perhaps inevitable. Large buildings have become important adjuncts to great organizations like schools, colleges, clubs and churches, and it seems to be a bit difficult for the average mind to apprehend fully great achievement without the evidence of brick and mortar.

The first Young Men's Christian Association, however, was nothing but a group of Christian young men who were interested in the moral welfare of their fellows, and who banded themselves together for mutual benefit and unselfish service. This group was brought together by one young man, George Williams, who was knighted by Queen Victoria in later years for distinguished service to his fellow men. All through the history of the movement this first organization has remained the exemplar for those that have come after. Where this pattern has been followed most closely there has been the largest success.

The first Association in Kansas City was merely a group of earnest Christian young men who, with their successors, prayed and worked together for nearly thirty years, without a building. But back of this organization there was a single individual, the Rev. W. M. Leftwich, who was the motivating force behind it all.

In 1896 history repeated itself again in Kansas City and one man of great faith and vision, of strict integrity and great unselfish purpose, rallied forces that had been scattered by disaster and on the ruins of the past started to build anew the work of the Young Men's Christian Association. The story of what this man did, and has done during the forty years since then, is an Association epic.

He knew something of the difficulties that must be faced because he was a director while the old organization staggered under its burden of debt and finally tottered to its fall. He was elected president in 1892 when that office conferred few honors on the man who held it. He exhausted every resource in his efforts to salvage the property and when nothing further could be done he attended to all of the details involved in closing out the enterprise. Meanwhile, with

almost prophetic foresight, he took the steps that were necessary for the formation of a new corporation immediately upon the expiration of the old. It was he who passed the torch from the old organization to the new so that its flame of devotion to the city's youth might not entirely die out.

The re-establishment of the Young Men's Christian Association in Kansas City in 1896 was much more difficult than the initiating of the movement in 1860. The people as a whole do not quickly forget and forgive failure. Many who had formerly given money and time to the work would not co-operate in the renewal effort. A new constituency of workers and givers had to be developed. This was a slow and trying process.

The rented quarters at 810 Wyandotte street were not attractive. The building was an old one which had been occupied previously by the Kansas City Star. Many alterations had to be made before the work of the Association could be accommodated. The equipment brought over from Ninth and Locust streets was wholly inadequate. Little money was available, which made it impossible to put the rooms and furnishings in proper repair. When all had been done it was a sorry contrast to the new building and equipment which had preceded. Small wonder that the young men who had seen and enjoyed finer things balked at what was then offered them. It is not surprising that an enterprising city felt little pride in such an humble and meager undertaking. Such a situation was not attractive to Association secretaries and several of those who tried to cope with its problems did not succeed. Most Association presidents would have become discouraged under such conditions and probably would have resigned in short order. But the man who occupied the office then was made of sterner stuff, and did not lose his poise. With great faith he looked steadily forward to a better day of which he felt assured, "for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Who was this man who stood at the helm when the waves of adversity ran high and saved his crew when the ship went down? He was born in Ohio, a state famed for the production of presidential timber and fine men. He studied and practiced law in Illinois, the state of Abraham Lincoln, whose broad prairies exhale a subtle sense of greatness, a greatness akin to the greatness of God. He came into Missouri at the age of twenty-eight, to Kansas City, "the heart of America," the city whose name was then synonymous with opportunity, the city to which he was destined to give more than forty-five years of his splendidly useful life.

With a keen sense of civic responsibility, and a compelling desire to serve his day and generation well, he gave himself with great abandon to public service. He sat in the upper house of the common council six years and presided over the board of public works for two. The people made him mayor at a critical moment and he established a record for constructive achievement. If he had then listened to popular acclaim and had yielded to the lure of political ambition he might have risen rapidly and reached great heights. But he was more devoted to the program which he had mapped out for the youth of Kansas City and waived all personal considerations. He was active in every major civic movement in the community and if his name did not appear among the promoters of great city-wide enterprises the people wondered. Few citizens of Kansas City have exerted a more potent influence on the entire life of the community than he.

The secret of his leadership is not difficult to trace. He believes in the golden rule, and in the application of the principles of Jesus to the problems of life. He is true to Christ and his church, and is a man of unswerving loyalty to duty as the guiding principle of life. He has abounding

faith and confidence in his fellow men and the purposes of God. He is an incurable optimist and feels confident that the Kingdom of God is a realizable ideal.

His own church holds him in highest regard, his denomination has tendered to him its best gifts of leadership, schools and colleges have delighted to do him honor.

During his active life he has devoted at least half of his time to the public weal. Along this line his loyalty to Christian ideals has been conspicuous. With no material resources, entirely dependent upon his own personal efforts for a living, in a profession where business comes to a standstill whenever he leaves his office on an errand of unremunerative service, this man has been a prodigal giver of time. In his constant fellowship with other leaders, many of them well-to-do men, he has often felt embarrassed that he could not join them in princely gifts of money. But his philosophy of life would preclude the accumulation of such wealth as would enable a person to give away large sums. And now at the age of seventy-two, with almost unabated vigor and the same unconcern about the future as ever, he continues to live a strenuous life of service.

It is a significant thing when a man without the prestige of position or wealth, with no assets save character and faith and courage and a determination to do the right as God gives him to see the right, becomes one of the first citizens of a great metropolitan city. And that city is honored in having as a citizen a man of such caliber.

This was the man with the “thinking heart” who, when the day was darkest, “held his place—held the long purpose like a growing tree— held on through blame and faltered not at praise.”

The present Young Men’s Christian Association of Kansas City, with its vast outreach, is a monument to Henry M. Beardsley and his fidelity to a great trust imposed upon him by his Lord and Master long ago. For forty years continually he has been president, a thing unprecedented in Association history, and with rare genius and devotion has led this great character building agency to a position of world-wide influence and power. And his bow still abides in strength. Verily the Young Men’s Christian Association is not a building.

[Reprinted from “More Than a Building” a story of the Kansas City, Missouri, Young Men’s Christian Association]

DINNER INVITATION COMMITTEE

Fred M. Lee, Chairman

William Volker E. F. Swinney H. F. Hall Joseph F. Porter Henry J. Haskell Herbert V. Jones Henry D. Ashley George Melcher

W. T. Kemper