

The year was 1906 and following a public meeting in the ANA Hall, the Bendigo YWCA came into being.

The meeting was the result of a visit to Bendigo by a Miss Booth, of the Melbourne YWCA. She had come to Bendigo to raise enthusiasm and interest in an association "that is now world-wide."

The wife of the then Bishop of Bendigo, Mrs Langley was elected as the inaugural president of the Bendigo YWCA. Her secretary was a Miss Owens.

Public relations officer of the Bendigo YWCA, Paula Svehaug, has researched the records of the past 80 years and revealed many interesting facts about the innovations and activities of the YWCA in Bendigo.

The original meeting was told that the YWCA was a world-wide organisation of women and girls, which aimed at the well-being, balanced development of the spiritual, intellectual, social and physical faculties, and the building of a strong and joyous Christian character.

From a small beginning, through the efforts of a handful of committed women, the YWCA of Bendigo was on the move, and eventually helped change the face of Bendigo's growing community.

In the YWCA's early days in Bendigo, an employment bureau was established for girls. They were taught how to apply for work, how to present for an interview, and their rights in the workforce.

Eighty years later the CES hands out booklets on the same subjects.

YWCA numbers continued to grow, the annual meeting of 1917 saw discussion on: "The necessity of obtaining a suitable building with residential quarters."

This was because young women from outlying areas were coming into Bendigo and were in need of safe, comfortable and inexpensive accommodation.

During 1919, a delicensed hotel, the Black Swan in Howard Place, was officially opened as the home of the YWCA in Bendigo. Full board and classes were offered ranging from home nursing, millinery, first-aid, typing and bookkeeping to French and English courses.

However, the YWCA was not only concerned with accommodation; their concern for women and girls led the YWCA to initiate strong social changes.

The Bendigo Advertiser of 1925 recorded that Dr Georgina Sweet had addressed young girls at the YWCA rooms, in a series of five lectures on "sex education." This was followed in 1926 with lantern slides and illustrations in Bendigo's Temperance Hall.

One can only image the uproar this topic would have caused. Today, the subject of sex education is still being hotly debated.

In its first 20 years, the YWCA had exposed Bendigo to the issues that were controversial at the time — women's rights and sex education.

Paula Svehaug said the best way of describing an association such as the Bendigo YWCA was through the eyes of some of its members:

• VI MORGAN joined the YWCA at the age of 14, in 1928, as a "Girl Citizen," and shared the top corner room of the Black Swan. In those days girls of the YWCA wore a uniform of black stockings, navy blue skirt, a navy tie, with a white blouse sporting the now famous triangular emblem of the YWCA.

During the depression years, the Black Swan was a haven for girls and young women who had little hope of employment; the Black Swan offered support and companionship.

During 1926, the Bendigo YWCA formed the first basketball association, not only in Bendigo, but also the Loddon Campaspe Region; this formed the basis of a love for the sport that Bendigo still fosters.

The YWCA's interest in bringing organised com-

petitive sport to Bendigo did not stop there. The YWCA introduced softball to this city.

VI Morgan recalled one of her favorite stories of the time when a group of girls from the YWCA hired a horse and cart and set off for a picnic at Fosterville. The fact that none had any experience with a horse and cart did not worry the girls.

Finally arriving at their destination, they untied the horse from the cart and allowed it to graze as well as quenching its thirst. Later the horse was brought back and reunited with the cart.

While the girls were enjoying their sausage sizzle, the owner of the land came over and introduced himself.

He asked how far the girls had to travel and when they replied, Bendigo, he gave an uproarious laugh and pointed out he was sure the horse would get back to Bendigo, but without the cart. It seems the only thing attaching the horse to the cart was the animal's kind disposition, as there was no secure strap to be found.

During 1932, VI Morgan recalled that Radio 3BO ran a quiz contest, called "The Battle of the Sexes," between the YWCA and the YMCA, and was apparently great fun.

However, the debate between the two clubs at that time on the subject "women should be paid the same wages as men for similar work" was not fun.

In 1939, Australia was at war, and as the war progressed, Bendigo hosted not only Australian but also American soldiers, who were camped at the showgrounds.

The women of the YWCA helped with the ironing and letter writing, and joined with the YMCA to run fortnightly 50-50 dances in the YMCA Hall.

The YWCA also had their doors open every Sunday to supply morning and afternoon teas, as well as a sympathetic ear to the many servicemen who were far from home.

During 1958, Campbell House was taken over the YWCA, replacing the old Black Swan building, however, because of the distance from the city it did not prove a popular venue and was sold in 1960. In 1963, the YWCA moved to premises at the corner of High and Short Sts.

• LORIS NANKIVELL joined the YWCA Young Marrieds Club in 1947, and was the youngest woman on the board at that time. She recalled that on the Saturday before Mothers Day, the women of the YWCA always held a Mother and Daughter Banquet.

A Music and Drama Fest was held in Melbourne for several years and the Bendigo YWCA entered the fields of verse speaking, choral, folk dancing, and one year put on a comedy-drama.

Mrs Nankivell and Mrs Marge McDowall gave up their Saturday mornings to train girls between the ages of seven and 12 years in music, crafts, paintings and plays.

It was not uncommon to have up to 130 girls at the one time. No fees were charged and costumes were made for the children by members of the YWCA and interested mothers.

• MAVIS CARNE, who joined the YWCA, in 1961, soon became president. She had been a local businesswoman and soon injected a great deal of drive and enthusiasm into other areas of the YWCA.

Mrs Carne was quick to recognise the fast-moving sociological changes of the times.

After school care programs were started in schools such as Kangaroo Flat, Strathfieldsaye, Long Gully and South Bendigo. These programs accommodated children of working parents and others for 1½ hours after school.

Mrs Carne was very proud of the YWCA, and on June 14, 1966, in order to celebrate the YWCA's 60 years of service to the Bendigo community, arranged for the then Governor of Victoria, Sir Rohan Delacombe to head the list of invited celebrities.

Mrs Carne pointed out that the government of the time had been impressed with the Bendigo YWCA. The YWCA had been asked to pilot a program known as the Mother-Child Playgrounds Project. This organisation is now Australia wide and has been based on the Bendigo model.

During 1968 the Young Theatre Group was established; today it is still thriving. It has given hundreds of young people (6-16 years), a chance to learn about the theatre and to gain self-confidence.

Mrs Carne resigned as full-time executive director in 1979, but has continued part time in the position.

In December, 1983, the YWCA moved to its present premises at 465 Hargreaves St, with Mrs Elaine Tuddenham as president.

Today, the YWCA is just as interested in the community as in past years. It runs school holiday programs, play schools, porcelain painting, stretch sewing, HSC English and French, exercises to music, yoga, the Young Theatre, the Friendship Club, a World Concern Group, a Alone Again workshop and a drama group (Wyse Players).

- The 80th anniversary celebrations for the Bendigo YWCA have been organised for Sunday, May 4, between 1 and 5 pm, at the Community Resource Centre, in St Andrew's Ave, Bendigo.