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CHAPTER THREE

The Establishment of the Y.W.C.A. in Bendigo

Y.W.C.A. homes are established in the principal centres and the doors are open to all who profess to be a follower of God.²¹

The city of Bendigo became one of these principal centres on May 23, 1906. The inaugural meeting of the new branch of the Y.W.C.A. was held at the A.N.A. Hall, View Street with Miss Sarah Booth, founding member and general secretary of the Melbourne Y.W.C.A. in attendance.

The first meeting place for the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. was the rented rooms at the house at Number Six Medic Terrace, Myers Street. (see Plate 1). At this location the members planned to continue the Y.W.C.A.'s objectives of the spiritual, social, and intellectual edification of young girls. The Annals of Bendigo record how the board of management of the new branch intended to conduct the home along similar lines to that of the Melbourne Y.W.C.A., which had been established twenty-four years earlier. It was planned that the rooms be available as full boarding accommodation as well as a room open to girls who wished to read, write letters, or "indulge" in any indoor pastimes.* The Association was also to be connected with an employment

21. Bendigo Advertiser, 26 May 1906.

* As far as this research could find, no permanent hostel arrangements were made available by the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. until 1919.

bureau for young ladies.²²

The first purpose of the Y.W.C.A. was to "brighten the lives of the young girls attending, and to give them spiritual and educational advantages".²³ Educational classes were to be offered to increase the efficiency of the women by teaching them new skills. In the rooms at Medic Terrace, Bible study, shorthand, dressmaking and millinery classes were soon started. However, the establishment of a Y.W.C.A. hostel had to wait until the 1919 opening of the doors of the former Black Swan hotel at Howard Place.

The spiritual aspects of the Y.W.C.A. had remained, losing none of their strength or importance during the Association's adaption to the regional Victorian way of life. Very distinct aims concerning religious matters dominated the operation of each branch of the Y.W.C.A. There was the importance of making certain that the Association was open to young women of all classes of society,

to form a bond of union between those who desire to place themselves under Christian influence and to secure to them help and sympathy as they move from place to place.²⁴

22. The Annals of Bendigo, D. Lockwood (ed.) Maryborough, 1981, p. 343.

23. Bendigo Advertiser, May 1962.

24. Dunn, op. cit. p. 3.

Indicating the strength of the religious force connected with the Y.W.C.A., the opening meeting of the Association was presided over by the Archdeacon Watson, with the board of management consisting of representatives from the the Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, and Church of Christ denominations. Traditionally, the wife of the Anglican Bishop was the patroness of the Association.

The members of the first board of management stressed that the Y.W.C.A. homes were not based upon social lines, that it was their faith in God which made these young girls equal.

When a girl became convinced of true Christianity, the social barriers were to an extent broken down, and the motto on the members' badges, 'By love serve one another' was carried into effect.²⁵

Before opening the first hostel, the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. experienced many changes in the location of the premises. A pamphlet issued as early as 1918, by the National Y.W.C.A. in Sydney, refers to how the Association was financed and explains how the buildings were the result of special appeals, or the gift of generous citizens.²⁶ However, the Y.W.C.A. was planned to be largely self-supporting through membership fees, class fees, and hostel and cafeteria charges.

25. Bendigo Advertiser, 26 May 1906.

26. National Y.W.C.A. Pamphlet, 'Y.W.C.A. What Is It?'

Having moved from Medic Terrace to the residence of Y.W.C.A. member, Miss Duff in Forest Street, and then to Mitchell Street, the Bendigo Association did not have the opportunity to receive the extra revenue of cafeteria charges until new rooms were rented at View Street.* An upstairs room in the building in View Street was used as a clubroom. When a downstairs room at the same building later became available for rent, the Y.W.C.A. decided to lease the room, which then became the site of the first cafeteria run by the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. The Y.W.C.A. cafeterias were designed with the working girls in mind. The lunch room was made available for the girls who could not return home for their midday meal. Women could take their own lunches or buy food at the cafeteria, with prices as low as one penny for a cup of tea and a two course meal, including meat and vegetables, for one shilling.²⁷ The cafeteria also provided a safe and sheltered area for girls to spend their lunch hour.

Up until this stage, all the work, apart from the teaching of various classes, had been done by volunteers. Trained leaders were required to ensure that the Association was being organized with maximum efficiency. The work of co-ordinating, and organizing the Association's many groups and activities was recognised as a full time job in 1908, when the national office in Sydney sent Miss F. Stillwell to become the first general secretary. The addition of the cafeteria and the employment of staff by the Y.W.C.A., meant the Bendigo branch was coming closer to fulfilling the physical needs of the girls of Bendigo, according to the Association's aims -

* The actual date of this move is uncertain.

27. Bendigo Advertiser, 2 September 1920.

"the lunch-room and rest-room provide quiet and refreshment at a small cost for tired city girls."²⁸

By 1915, the Bendigo Association had only one more move to make before it found a more permanent 'home'. The Y.W.C.A. took up residence for four years above what was then a store on Derghave Street. The need to open a Y.W.C.A. hostel in Bendigo was discussed at the July 1918 annual meeting. The home would provide safe housing for girls working or studying away from the shelter of their homes.²⁹ With this idea, the chairman made a pledge of 5 pounds towards the establishing of such a boarding-place, providing another nineteen members would make similar donations before the end of the following June. The fulfillment of the national aim to meet the social needs of girls, in part, by the "opening of hostels in convenient positions where girls away from home may find comfortable accommodation and environment,"³⁰ came in 1919 with the opening of the first Bendigo Y.W.C.A. hostel, the former Black Swan hotel, located at Howard Place. (see Plate 3)

28. National Y.W.C.A. pamphlet, 'Y.W.C.A., What Is It?'

29. Bendigo Advertiser, 27 July 1918.

30. National Y.W.C.A. pamphlet, 'Y.W.C.A., What Is It?'

The hostel originally provided enough room to accommodate the Association's need for a boarding place for ladies and many of the meetings and activities of the various clubs and groups within the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. The building contained at least twelve rooms for boarders. The boarders were mainly short distances from areas such as Hyer on the Beehive, factory workers from the Bendigo mill, school teachers, and students from the areas around Bendigo that were not far for daily travel to attend schools. Other rooms were provided for travellers requiring a safe, cheap place to stay while visiting an unfamiliar city.

Some of the rooms could accommodate up to four ladies. At least three or four of the rooms were single rooms. The accommodation was said to have been very plain, yet as one former boarder suggested it was a very understanding and caring atmosphere in which to live.³¹ However, not all the memories of the ladies who responded to questions about the first Y.W.C.A. hostel were quite as fond. One lady recalled travelling to Bendigo from Rochester with her mother during the 1920's to stay at the hostel. Her most vivid memory of their stay was the room they had to share with a number of other ladies, after being shifted from their original twin room where they had discovered the beds to be infested with bugs.³²

31. Interview with Miss V. Morgan, 30 August 1985.

32. Interview with Miss M., 28 August 1985.



PLATE 3: Modern View of Former Bendigo Young Women's Christian Association hostel. Formerly the Black Swan Hotel, Howard Place.

The families and friends of the boarders were welcomed by the Y.W.C.A. to conduct their visits in the social rooms of the former Black Swan, which also provided a dining room for boarders and Y.W.C.A. members. Visitors therefore, had the opportunity to buy their meals at the dining room. Staff were employed to do the cooking and cleaning. The ladies did their own washing and ironing from the laundry room within the hostel. The boarders were provided with three meals a day, the evening one consisting of three courses. One resident at the Y.W.C.A. hostel during the 1930's, Miss V. Morgan, remembered the ongoing dispute over the small serves of food provided for the boarders. The matron, or person in charge of the ladies, frequently reminded the ladies to be thankful for small mercies. This prompted the boarders of the time to joke how they often ate 'small mercies'.³³

Such examples should not distract from the ideals behind the Association's concern for young women. Miss Morgan noted how in 1934 she was paying one pound a week for her board at the Y.W.C.A. Being well into the Depression decade, the Association allowed for special consideration of Miss Morgan's circumstances by charging a fee for board which was lower than the average paid by the boarders at the time. Miss Morgan believes the difficulties caused by a period of retrenchment from the Harro mills, and a family bereavement figured highly in the Bendigo Y.W.C.A.'s offering of board at the price which she could afford. This kind of example highlights the help and atmosphere which the Y.W.C.A. provided, an Association presented "to women, by women".³⁴

33: Morgan Interview.

34: *Ibid.* on cit. p. 3.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Bendigo Young Women's Christian Association's Activities From 1906 to 1939.

The purpose of the Y.W.C.A. are briefly set out as follows: - first association in loyalty to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour; second, encouragement of fellowship in the Christian Church; third the fourfold development of the individual; and fourth; the extension of the Kingdom of God throughout the world.³⁵

These features were aimed at the "building up of strong and joyous Christian character."³⁶ Their expression was found through the various activities organized by the Association. The fourfold features of the individual referred to the "well-balanced" growth of the young girl's and woman's spiritual, intellectual, social and physical development.³⁷

The Bendigo branch of the Y.W.C.A. prepared many newspaper articles so that the public might understand the Association's aims and goals for young women in the community. One of the first hurdles was to show that the Association, despite the word "Christian" in its title, was not a religious sect, and that its activities did not consist only of Bible classes and religious meetings. There was nothing sectarian in the Y.W.C.A.'s programme. However, the Bendigo

35. Bendigo Advertiser, 21 June, 1927.

36. National Y.W.C.A. Pamphlet, 'Y.W.C.A. - What Is It? p. 1.

37. Loc. cit.

Association differed with the above purposes by claiming it included in its membership not only young women members of many different branches of the Christian Church, but also "many who belong to none... A woman is not excluded from the Association because of her religious beliefs or her lack of them." 38

Meetings held by the Y.W.C.A. club at the committee house were usually opened with a prayer or vesper, and closed with the giving of the benediction. Members assisted in the giving of religious instruction in Bendigo schools, and participated in the national week of prayer held each year. However, the Y.W.C.A.'s programme for girls and women was wide, offering many activities to assist members in the building-up of their "joyous" Christian character.

Activities were aimed at developing self-control, courage, generosity, honour, leadership, co-operation, skill, confidence, and posture in every member. The Association planned to "use every instrument that is within its reach for the good of the women of tomorrow." 39 Exactly how the Y.W.C.A. intended to realize these strengths in its members, is reflected through the participation in the various activities which the Association offered.

38. Bendigo Advertiser, 26 September 1924.

39. Bendigo Advertiser, 1 February 1924.

The importance the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. placed on the value of sport and other recreational activities highlights one example of how the Association's primary interest was for women and girls. Recreation was seen as the renewal of life in the individual. The ladies contacted about this research agreed about the importance of the Y.W.C.A.'s programmes of sport and recreation. Miss Wilson who was associated with the Y.W.C.A. prior to 1991 gave the example of how many sports were not available for women in Bendigo until the time of the Y.W.C.A. that not even lawn bowls was played by women.⁴⁰ As late as 1938, the Y.W.C.A. was attempting to make more sporting facilities available for all women. At the annual meeting of that year, the Chairman, Rev. W. MacLean remarked on the lack of suitable playing areas for girls and young women in the Bendigo area. "It is very noticeable and very regrettable that there are insufficient play areas in Bendigo; although it would be generally admitted that physical fitness was a highly desirable asset in the citizens of any community."⁴¹

Despite such activities, the Bendigo Association managed to present many sporting activities without an abundance of playing grounds. The Y.W.C.A. brought competition basketball to Bendigo. Annual sports

40. Interview with Miss E. Wilson, 20 August 1985.

41. Bendigo Y.W.C.A. Board of Directors, Minute Book, 27 July 1938 p.6.

days and competition between other women's teams became a regular part of the Association's activities. Games were believed to hold a positive educational influence, training girls for the development of will power, endurance, and initiative.

The Y.W.C.A. emphasized that all girls should have the opportunity, with rowing at Lake Weeroona and swimming at the city baths amongst the Association's earliest sports arranged for women (see Plate 1). Physical culture classes which included marching, exercising, rhythmic, and folk dancing were introduced in 1925. Such physical activity was considered as a means of ensuring a good environment for young women, and of teaching girls the need for a healthy body, as well as a healthy mind. For "wholesome" activity outside the hours of work or school was necessary where girls "naturally develop the habit of idly frittering away their time in useless if not harmful occupations."⁴² Miss Morgan noted the popularity of the Y.W.C.A.'s sporting programmes, that they were well attended and eagerly looked forward to by the members. Miss Morgan gave the example of the boarders at the hostel, especially the students, who did not have any obligations to join the Y.W.C.A.'s activities, happily participated in the programmes which were available.⁴³

42. Bendigo Advertiser, 1 February 1924.⁴

43. Morgan Interview.

The Y.W.C.A. programme of recreation existed in the four main areas of individual, family, club or group, and community recreation. A good balance of these four varieties of recreation were designed to give young girls a positive, all-round feeling of their own individuality, by embracing the Association's plans for developing the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of Y.W.C.A. members.

The Association promoted the idea of individual recreation where girls could be taught to enjoy solitude by having interests which would prevent loneliness and create a sense of opportunity in the member. The ability to swim, to row, and the knowledge of flowers, trees, music, photography, and literature were just a few of the pastimes which the Association believed worthy to fill the girl's individual recreation.

To achieve a proper balance in the development of the young girl's emotions, the Y.W.C.A. realised the need for individual recreation to be complemented by social "play".⁴⁴ The family was the first group within which such social interaction would be found by young girls. The Association felt that the girl's future social relationships would be built up out of the early habits and attitudes developed within the home circle. The individuals of a family would therefore, need to learn to play together as the mingling of old and young in a spirit of recreation "helps to keep alive the sympathy and understanding between old and young which so easily fail to function if not wisely cultivated."⁴⁵

44. Bendigo Advertiser, 5 December 1924.

45. Loc. cit.

As part of a Y.W.C.A. group or club, the member was to be supplied with the opportunity for inspiration that would come from fellowship and comradeship. It was hoped that in offering club and group activities, the young girls would carry the "inspiration" of fellowship and comradeship back home for the mutual benefit and understanding of all members of the family.⁴⁶

The Y.W.C.A. encouraged girls to use their spare time in educational studies that would improve their efficiency and attitudes towards life. Such opportunities were considered to be very important to the Y.W.C.A.'s plans to "promote the satisfaction of their desires for a fuller life."⁴⁷ Educational programmes fell into two main categories; those which would provide training for employment, and guidance for the choice of vocation. By 1919, the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. offered a programme of classes in shorthand, typewriting, book-keeping, first-aid, dress-making, millinery, whitework, singing and elocution, French and English, Bible history, and missionary work. Correspondance courses were available in some of the subjects.

Lectures were organized by the Y.W.C.A. Topics were diverse, each aiming at improving the knowledge and understanding of members, and thereby contributing to the Association's aim of the well-balanced development of the spiritual, intellectual, social, and physical aspects of a girls character. Subjects for lectures given to members between

46. Bendigo Advertiser, 5 December 1924.

47. Bendigo Advertiser, 12 September 1929.

1906 and 1939 included, "The Modern Girl - How to help her", given by National Girls' Work secretary, Miss Bridgman in 1926.⁴⁸ This address discussed the importance of citizens' understanding the responsibilities faced by young women, to recognize the difference of decisions from those of the previous generations, to be made by young women. Miss Bridgman highlighted the need for organizations such as the Y.W.C.A. in the lives of young women who had made the decision to leave their schooling to begin work, to "make up for the things she was missing, by going out into the world at this critical part of her life."⁴⁹ In 1934, members of the Federation Club heard talks on the effect of alcohol on human life. These talks were illustrated charts "showing life in its animate and inanimate forms with mankind its highest form."⁵⁰ These particular talks were designed to prove to the ladies the statement that "wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived hereby is not wise," and to point out the evils of cocktail drinking and of smoking.⁵¹ Talks on the prevention of disease were part of the members study of the public health and how it could be best conserved. Within the various clubs, members included study periods on various topics, such as "A Girl's Idea of Marriage" and "How We Got the Bible", readings and discussions of literature acted as a means of encouraging and guiding members to read widely. The response of young women to the many clubs appears to have been enthusiastic. The Bendigo Y.W.C.A. offered both junior and

48. Bendigo Advertiser, 27 July 1926.

49. Loc. cit.

50. Federation Club Minute Book, 1 May 1934 p. 20.

51. Loc. cit.

senior groups with the minute books admitting to a noticeable decline in attendance only during times of extreme hardship, such as the 1937 outbreak of polio which was still known at that stage as infantile paralysis.⁵²

The promotion of community fellowship extended outside of the membership to help other people more directly. Two main examples of this were the Thrift Club and Travellers' Aid Society. The introduction of the two activities provided the Y.W.C.A. with new opportunities to serve, and a means of expressing the spirit of comradeship and fellowship through the Association to other members of the community.

The Y.W.C.A. Thrift Club was begun in Bendigo during the First World War. The idea was to encourage girls to save their wages. The stores and factories where the Thrift members were employed were visited regularly by the Y.W.C.A. secretary or honorary worker. The girls would give whatever amount they could afford, this money was then banked until the end of the year when the total sum, including interest was returned to the girl.⁵³ The Thrift Club was believed to give its members "a control of expenditure, thoughtful, deliberate, self-control ... a new vision of the use of money."⁵⁴ New friendships were formed

52. Minutes of the Activities Committee, 26 October 1937, p. 14.

53. Bendigo Advertiser, January 1919.

54. Bendigo Advertiser, 16 May 1924.

between the girls saving their money in the thrift scheme, and the Y.W.C.A. representatives visiting work places to collect the girls' savings. Mrs Carne, a ~~former boarder at the Y.W.C.A. hostel~~ and a past president of the Association, suggested how important such a club proved to be to young girls, especially those who were about to be married. The savings would therefore become a small "nest-egg" for the future, with the Association receiving half a per cent for all the money which the Thrift Club had collected during the year.⁵⁵

The Travellers' Aid Society of Bendigo was formed in 1917. The Y.W.C.A. believed the scheme should be supported on humanitarian, patriotic and religious grounds. For Travellers' Aid followed the ideal of giving hospitality to the stranger by extending a welcome to the city and making the traveller's stay in the city as pleasant and safe as possible. Travellers' Aid workers were identified by their white badges, and worked throughout the city of Bendigo, meeting regularly to report on the progress which the society had been making. The policy of the Travellers' Aid Society was the protection from and prevention of evil.⁵⁶ Volunteers met and arranged alternative transport for those travellers who failed to catch their trains. Such people were also provided with or directed to suitable accommodation and boarding places.⁵⁷ Recognizing and detecting the dangers and

55. Interview with Mrs. M. Carne, 16 April 1985.

56. Bendigo Advertiser, 17 October 1924.

57. Bendigo Advertiser, October 1918.

difficulties of travellers was also extended to young boys and girls, the young mother and her family, the aged, the infirm, the mentally handicapped, those taken ill during a journey, lost or runaway children, those people travelling alone, and immigrants who had no relatives or friends. And finally the Travellers' Aid Society was there for those travellers who would appreciate a friendly welcome when they arrived at an unfamiliar city.

The Y.W.C.A. of Bendigo spread its concern for all women beyond the clubs and activities. A holiday house at Seaford was made available for those members who wished to stay at a safe place while holidaying alone, or to those who needed a place to recuperate from illness.⁵⁸ The hostel in Bendigo was open Christmas Day to all women who could not return to their homes, or those who did not have a place to receive dinner during this day.⁵⁹

Employment was a major part of the Y.W.C.A.'s concern for young women. When the Association could not find work for unskilled women seeking employment, efforts were made to provide these women with temporary employment where they could "earn and learn at the same time." This was particularly helpful to those who could not otherwise afford the necessary training to prepare them for employment.⁶⁰

58. Bendigo Advertiser, 9 December 1923.

59. Bendigo Advertiser, 20 December 1923.

60. Bendigo Advertiser, 24 July 1924.

The employment of young women did not end the Y.W.C.A.'s concern for the personal development of its members. Through club activities, the Association aimed at overcoming the lack of demand made upon the personality of the individual due to the specialized state of industry. The Y.W.C.A. recognized that the manufacturing processes absorbed the greatest number of girls, and that the industrial worker had less chance of development in accuracy and expression which some kinds of clerical and shop work offered.⁶¹ The fellowship with others in the Association and the initiative demanded by participation in group activities were believed by the Y.W.C.A. to be a means for the industrial worker, who was often as young as fourteen or fifteen, the opportunity to develop the power of concentration through doing things that give real pleasure.⁶²

The idea of world fellowship was maintained by the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. clubs. Through the worldwide operation of the Y.W.C.A., members received ideals of fellowship between the nations of the world. Lectures and discussion of women of foreign lands and the nations in which they lived, were given throughout this study's time-span. Talks concerning modern Russia, or the Japanese at home, for example, provided explanations of the work being carried out by the Y.W.C.A. overseas. Bendigo members actively took part in the World Fellowship Committee, where meetings were devoted to the study of foreign countries. Bendigo members exchanged

61. Bendigo Advertiser, 20 December, 1923.

62. Loc. cit.

letters with Y.W.C.A. members in India, Switzerland and North America, to learn about their customs and lifestyles.⁶³

Such activities were part of the Y.W.C.A.'s aim of the linking of all the girls and women of every race and tongue. Understanding between the races included the Australian aborigines. In 1934 the 'Federation' club, a social group of the Bendigo Association, hosted a visit by the matron and two of the residents of the aboriginal home at Quorn, South Australia.⁶⁴ Invitations to meet the visitors were extended by the club's secretary to include as many as possible of the Christian Church organizations of Bendigo.⁶⁵ Those present at the meeting listened to the two young aborigines recite from the scriptures. This kind of example illustrates the Y.W.C.A.'s desire to prove the power of Christian associations by attempting to shape the 'new' post-war world closer to Christian models.

Through general activities, the Bendigo Association made a solid investment in the "budding" womanhood of the community.

We believe that as members of an organization which avowedly bases its life on the teachings of Christ, we are entrusted with varying gifts and opportunities of mind and spirit, of riches, and skill, of leisure and influence, and of youth

* 63. Federation Club, Bendigo Y.W.C.A. Minute Book, February 1934, p. 56.

64. Federation Club, op. cit., p. 50.

65. Loc. cit.

and experience which it is our responsibility to use in helping to meet the need for leadership today.⁶⁶

The Association's work would bring its own rewards in the future in the form of fine citizenship.

⁶⁶ Miss V. Catt, General Secretary, speaking at the 21st Annual Meeting of the Bendigo Y.W.C.A., reported by the Bendigo Advertiser 11 June 1924.

CHAPTER FIVE

Special Efforts: The Young Women's Christian Association's Response to War and the Effects of World War One.

The years of the Great War, 1914 to 1918, saw the participation of the Y.W.C.A. in much community work. Contributions were also made to the Y.W.C.A.'s national and international work by the Bendigo members. The programmes and activities arranged by the Association took on an added importance during the war, and the years leading up to the Second World War.

The advent of the First World War proved to be a solid reminder of the reasons behind the formation of the Y.W.C.A. originally. Once again, war years would represent a time when certain standards of living for women must be maintained, and the Association's principles as a strong moral force for women to abide by, should not be broken down. The club life and community service enjoyed by the members gave the young ladies something definite in their lives during the uncertain times of war.

In keeping with the Association's responsibility to the community, the ladies of the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. answered the call to contribute to the war effort locally. One main example of this is the work which they carried out in conjunction with the Young Men's Christian Association of Bendigo, during the emergency which existed at the Military Camp as a result of the meningitis outbreak of 1916. The demands of supplying

meals and provisions such as books for the soldiers who had been isolated at the camp to stop any further spread of the illness, was one of the responsibilities met by the ladies during the war.⁶⁷

The Y.W.C.A. of Bendigo also provided a place for those women on the home front to gather and pray for the allies. Following an outline suggested by the Australasian League of Women, a series of prayer meetings were held at the Y.W.C.A. club rooms during May 1918. Each meeting was devoted to a different area of the War. Prayers were said for personal loyalty, a truer unity among Christians, as well as the Allied Forces.⁶⁸ Like many of the Y.W.C.A.'s programmes, these meetings were open to all who wanted to attend, and not just members.

The ladies of the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. were kept up to date on the work being done by the countries and women who were closer to the battle fronts. Lectures were also given about the ladies of America and Britain, which also did much to aid the motivation of the efforts of the ladies at home. The Bendigo Association heard of how women of the American and British Y.W.C.A.'s were housing, and catering for, the women workers of the nearby munition factories, with hostels being built near the military camps of these countries to allow the women to meet their soldier relatives under "the best conditions."⁶⁹ The Indian Association

67. Bendigo Advertiser, 31 May, 1916.

68. Bendigo Advertiser, May 1918.

69. Bendigo Advertiser, January 1919.

had been requested by the military authorities to organize clubs for nurses to join in Mesopotamia. Australian members of the Y.W.C.A. helped to raise funds for the building and maintaining of an Australasian hut in France for all Australian women in the war zones.⁷⁰

Sharing the experience of women of other nations during the war was considered by the Y.W.C.A. as an important step towards the recognition that the welfare of both men and women should be considered together. Examples of the work carried out by American Y.W.C.A.'s were shared by Miss Jean Stevenson, who addressed the Bendigo association in April 1919, after two years of international work for the Australian Y.W.C.A. Miss Stevenson spoke of how important the building of Y.W.C.A. hostels close to military camps and munition factories had proved, and how much that "home touch" of the hostels had meant to the American women during the war years. This example illustrated how the Americans had recognized the need in such abnormal times for some extra interest in the lives of their growing girlhood. Before the close of the First World War, positive steps towards the opening of the Bendigo Y.W.C.A.'s first hostel were well under way. By 1919, the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. had begun a major campaign to raise funds so that it could continue its contributions to community, national and international work.

70. Bendigo Advertiser, January 1919.

In Australia the soldiers and their needs have filled the horizon and perhaps rightly so - but it has meant the shelving of our women folk. A woman's life is usually one of self-sacrifice where men are concerned, but now there is no reason why they should stay in the background. Surely they have earned the right for help and consideration.⁷¹

The immediate aim was to raise two thousand pounds for the leasing and upkeep of a home for girls and a general rest room for women of Bendigo and surrounding district. The money, in providing a hostel and larger club rooms, would enable the Y.W.C.A. to continue its work of reaching out to the girlhood of the community.

After the war, the Y.W.C.A. of Bendigo continued its own programme of construction in the form of benefits and achievements for the young women of the community - "After the earthquake the still, small voice," suggested one member.⁷²

The Association believed that God had a message to give the world after the earthquake of war. While raising money to ensure the continuation of the work, the Y.W.C.A. introduced the Girl Citizen's movement, an updated version of the Hearthfire girls' group, a change which occurred soon after the finish of the First World War.

71. Bendigo Advertiser, May 1919.

72. Miss Snelson, National Worker with the Australian Y.W.C.A., reported by the Bendigo Advertiser, January 1919.

The Girl Citizens was offered to members between the age of fourteen and twenty, and was aimed at training young women to become 'all-round' citizens. The national Girls' Work secretary of the Y.W.C.A., Miss M. Geddes, took the message of the citizens movement to Bendigo's Sunday schools, State schools, teachers, business colleges and factories, in order to create further interest amongst the young women of Bendigo.

Through the citizens movement, teenagers were to be trained in health, happiness and helpfulness to ensure that the girls had a good environment, and an interest in "wholesome" activities outside of work or school. This wholesome activity meant that girls participated in specially designed programmes of sport, recreation, educational classes, and voluntary community service such as singing for the residents of the Benevolent Asylum.

The Y.W.C.A. recognized the large gulf between their pre-war and post-war selves. "The whole life of the nation has been altered, and no part of it is more affected than the life of women and girls."⁷³ The Girl Citizen movement was an important part of the post-war reconstruction, a way of guiding girls towards becoming the best citizens. For example, in 1925 the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. offered a series of five lectures on sex education. These classes were given to present the facts, with special bearing on problems and conduct, "because of the greatly increased and widespread freedom both of boys and girls due to industrial conditions and to war and post-war conditions."⁷⁴ Stressing

73. Bendigo Advertiser, 1 February 1925.

74. Bendigo Advertiser, 8 March 1925.

the biological and human aspects, the lectures were held to give a proper basis for judgement, as the changing conditions had thrown responsibilities hitherto unknown upon young women, responsibilities which they could not meet successfully without sufficient knowledge.

The aim of groups such as the Girl Citizens, was commented as a means to an end, to develop competent, level headed women. The Y.W.C.A. would go to great lengths to protect the girls from any "evil". One perfect example of this is mentioned in the minutes of the board of directors, when the general secretary, reported having "great difficulty" with a group of girls who insisted on playing basketball with a team of boys from the Y.M.C.A. However, a compromise was made and reported during the next meeting, with the general secretary saying that the game had gone ahead, but stressed that she had been present to supervise throughout the game.⁷⁵ The safety of young girls was particularly highlighted during and following the years of the First World War. Miss Morgan, noted how this was a very important issue to the Y.W.C.A., that parents expected their children to learn high standards from the Association, and believed the Y.W.C.A. hostel to be one of the few "respectable" or "safe" places for the accommodation of young girls in Bendigo.⁷⁶ "Parents could know their daughters were being brought up just as they would have been at home."⁷⁷

75. Minutes of the Board of Directors, 10 July 1939. p. 75.

76. Morgan Interview.

77. Loc. cit.

Protection from the evils of the modern age would allow the awakening of the world's womanhood to continue efforts in the creation of world peace. National Girls' Work secretary, Miss Bridgman, addressed the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. in 1924, and noted the "linking completeness" of the work done by the Association's organizations of the world following the War.

On the Continent, the older people, who are war-weary and pessimistic, are gloomy in their outlook but the young people are awakening to the knowledge of previous false standards, and are optimistically looking forward to a future in which youthful hearts and intellects may solve the problems which have baffled previous generations.⁷⁸

The message the Y.W.C.A. carried, was that this awakening of the world's womanhood combined with the friendliness between the youth of nations would provide a strong factor in the prevention of future wars. The Y.W.C.A. through the Girl Citizens movement emphasized the thought that youth needed guidance to prevent mistakes of immature judgement. Membership within the Girl Citizens allowed the young ladies to "ally" themselves with women of "earnest purpose" in all countries. Through operating internationally, the girls had the instrument to translate into action their aspirations of world peace and social progress.⁷⁹ The co-operation and contact between youth and the older generations became the Y.W.C.A.'s key to helping to shape the post-war world to Christian purposes. The adolescent girls, as members of the Y.W.C.A.'s Girl Citizens, played what the Association viewed as an "indispensable" contribution to make to the community through their "vision, enthusiasm

78. Bendigo Advertiser, 5 May, 1924.

79. Bendigo Advertiser, 25 March, 1924.

and youth.⁸⁰

The Bendigo Association had worked quietly in order that girl could be helped to be and do their best at all times and in all pl. The care for soldiers and the raising of funds for Australian women war was only part of their service. Their provision of some person in the lives of country women through the leadership and direction shared within club and hostel life continued the Association's advancement of young women. A programme of talks and prayers concerning world disarmament and the futility of war became a predominant part of the Y.W.C.A.'s between war meetings.⁸¹

The world is divided and war-ridden yet expectant, it longs for unity and peace. National fears and suspicions, race antagonisms, religious bitterness, the desire of one class or nation or race to dominate others - all these separate the peoples, divide Christian forces and paralyse the lines of progress. Yet mankind everywhere restlessly hungers for a better world. Disappointed, it still hopes and it has reason to hope. For its Creator Who 'made of one blood all nations of men' wills peace for humanity. Therefore the hope of this broken world lies in the life of today, and youth must now reflect the old evil attitudes of the past generations and shoulder the burden of new leadership adventurously.⁸²

80. Bendigo Advertiser, 28 March, 1924.

81. Minutes of the Federation Club, 24 April 1934, p. 18.

82. Bendigo Advertiser, during Prayer and Fellowship Week, 7 November,

Highlighting faith and optimism in female youth, the Y.W.C.A. had realised and proved the importance of its own aims, particularly during the years of the First World War, and the time right up to the declaration of the Second World War. On September 4, 1939, a special meeting was called by the Board of Directors of the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. Their business was to discuss the policy of work to be followed during the war period. The war was only one day old, and the Association had already adopted its plans to care for the women whose husbands had to leave home because of the war, with special emphasis on those women with young children. A World Fellowship Committee was to be formed immediately, and more was decided to be done for the educating of the members in international affairs. Commencement of a series of Sunday services and Bible study groups was also planned.⁸³

The Bendigo Y.W.C.A. was, in effect, contributing much to the idea that "no nation can rise higher than her women."⁸⁴

83. Board of Directors Minutes, 4 September 1939 p. 77.

84. Bendigo Advertiser, January 1919.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Overall, an image has been built up of the kind of aims held by the Y.W.C.A. of Bendigo between the years of 1906 and 1939. The response to the Y.W.C.A.'s provision of a Christian atmosphere seems to have been good. Minute books record strong membership and good attendance, however membership drives were undertaken from time to time when members would be requested to bring a friend to the next meeting or function to help build that club or committee into an even stronger group.⁸⁵

The special courses and activities made available by the Association, and the frequent visits and talks by members of the national and international committees of the Y.W.C.A. suggest the Bendigo Association was given status equal to that of its 'sister' organizations of the metropolitan areas.

85. Minutes of the Activities Committee, 31 August 1937, p. 11.

The cafeterias run by the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. experienced strong patronage, with the total number of meals served in one year amounting to 5680 in 1927.⁸⁶ The total amounts collected by the Thrift Club increased from 134 pounds in 1918⁸⁷ to 1101 in 1927,⁸⁸ providing members with funds for their activities and a nucleus for permanent banking.

Extra bedrooms were included in the hostel during the 1920s causing the club rooms to be relocated in Bull Street, above Taylor Brothers' furniture store, a site adjacent to the hostel (see Plate 1 and facing plate 6). The demand for board at the Y.W.C.A. had always been strong. This popularity culminated in the 1926 renovation of the upstairs rooms of the hostel for the visit of twelve Swiss workers from the company which owned part of the Hanro Mills. The Y.W.C.A. hosted their visit, providing each girl with a wardrobe more suitable to Australian conditions. The other boarders helped the visitors with their English, and the Swiss girls trained the workers at the Hanro Mills in the use of the latest machinery from overseas.

86. Minutes of the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. Annual Meeting, reported by the Bendigo Advertiser 28 July 1927.

87. Minutes of the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. Annual Meeting reported by the Bendigo Advertiser, 27 July 1918.

88. Minutes of the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. Annual Meeting reported by the Bendigo Advertiser, 28 July 1927.

Therefore, the Swiss girls and the local members of the Y.W.C.A. benefitted from the visit, which without the Association or its hostel may not have been able to take place without the guarantee of good accommodation for the young ladies.

Columns concerning the local Y.W.C.A. appeared regularly in the Bendigo Advertiser. The inclusion of the articles were justified by the idea that they would "enable readers to form an opinion that it is good to have such places in our midst, where youths and maidens are so well cared for."⁸⁹ Despite their bias, these columns have been the reason for the reliance on the Bendigo Advertiser, as their descriptions of meetings and programmes held by the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. have provided a wealth of information that was unavailable elsewhere.* The Y.W.C.A. did much to make sure the support of the Association in Bendigo was not limited to a small group of people. Annual festivals held by the Association became an important part of the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. The festivals were held to give the general public the opportunity to hear speeches about the work being carried out by the Association locally and abroad. The various clubs of the Association were represented by members performing plays or giving recitals and demonstrations of the skills which they had learnt from the Y.W.C.A.'s classes.

89. Bendigo Advertiser, 6 February 1919.

* See Chapter One: Aims and Methodology for explanation of the use of newspapers as an historical source.

The festival usually coincided with, and promoted the Y.W.C.A.'s annual appeal for funds so it would be able to continue its work. Appeals for financial assistance ranging in amounts from 250 pounds to 5000 pounds were held during these early years of the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. In 1926, the Mayor commented on the Association's continued struggle for extra finance. "What a pity that such a deserving institution had to resort to an appeal for financial assistance."⁹⁰ He added that it was the public's duty to develop any organization working for the betterment of "mankind". The Bendigo public appears to have responded well to the many requests for funds. The money raised went to various causes, such as the building of a hut for the Australian women in France during World War One, and the establishment of a hostel for young women in Bendigo.

Through its community service, sporting and club activities, classes and lectures, the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. presented an even balance of the features that could aid a young woman's development, with particular emphasis on the spiritual, physical and intellectual aspects of the members' character.

The resulting fellowship between young women in the Bendigo community had its own special meaning.

⁹⁰. Minutes of the Board of Directors, 27 July 1938 p. 4.

The Young Women's Christian Association belongs to us, its members. Membership means sharing. Sharing means giving, combined giving means power - our power. What a single person is unable to do, a great and mighty organization can succeed in. Together we are strong, together we can reach far, together we are powerful. Let that power be used for the fulfilling of our purpose.⁹¹

91. Miss V. Catt, General Secretary of the Bendigo Y.W.C.A. speaking at the Annual Meeting 1927, reported by the Bendigo Advertiser, 25 July 1927.

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