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**Welcome Wagon**

# YWCA Looking To Uncertain Future As Needs Change

(Continued From Page 1)  
 year. Hours of the shop were extended to include mornings as well as afternoons and all day Wednesday. Records show 750 customers bought clothing with 400 people monthly using the shop to help stretch their family clothing budget. Volunteers were added to streamline pricing of incoming clothes and get them on the racks sooner for sale. Also rummage sales in January and June netted \$110.

The "Ways and Means" committee added to the treasury with a treasure and trivia sale, skate and hockey exchange, China Tea, tag day, bridge, and men's luncheon and fashion show.

Administration of the "Y" suffered somewhat by the resignation in March of Executive Director Verna Harries. In September Rae Abernethy was engaged as part time executive director and consultant for a four-month period. During the greater part of the year the burden of administration fell on the board of directors, Program Director Gwen Halliday and the small staff at the office and resale shop of the YWCA at 25 Yonge Street North.

Membership for the year totalled 444 senior members, 203 junior members and six contributing members. The majority of the memberships were in Richmond Hill and Thornhill, although some came from North York, King,

Maple, Oak Ridges, Markham, Toronto, Gormley, Agincourt, Newmarket, Unionville, Weston, Aurora, Buttonville, Concord, Schomberg and Nashville.

A disappointing return from campaign letters was reported. From a total of 1,224 letters sent to adult members, special names, professional people, service clubs, business and industry just 137 donations totaling \$2,658 were received.

Reporting on program, Mrs. Wright told the meeting over 2,000 women and girls, men and boys, participated in YWCA programs in 1971. Programs she said are designed to provide opportunities to learn skills, to learn to use and enjoy leisure time to meet others in the community, to escape boredom and loneliness, to release tension. Programs offer young people opportunities to work in leadership capacity, and the baby sitting service provided with day-time programs give young mothers a break away from the toils.

Is this sufficient justification for the "Y"? Mrs. Wright asked. Courses of every kind are offered in secondary schools and community colleges. One can play tennis without belonging to the "Y". One can swim locally without a "Y" connection. Children may go to other camps, and there are sports activities in the schools.

The difference, Mrs. Wright said, is that "Y" programs and activities are planned, implemented and evaluated by volunteers — community people who feel they know what they want and need and who want to have a hand in working out the answers.

Leadership potential is spotted in YWCA classes, is encouraged and developed. People so involved may be directed to other community volunteer tasks. Persons may gain confidence to enter the paid labor market, or they may be encouraged to take on administrative responsibilities. Self-determination, and community development has always been a goal of "Y" program activities, said Mrs. Wright.

To ensure that this philosophy is carried out through program, the "Y" employs staff dedicated to the "Y" purpose. Even though dollars are inadequate, Mrs. Wright continued, the "Y" does "put its money where its mouth is".

Civic leaders have spoken highly of the "Y", of the importance of voluntary participation in community life, of concern for young men and women in the teen years. People outside Richmond Hill itself, in many parts of the region, have spoken of need for leadership in initiating programs that could be carried forward by local people.

With transportation a problem, should activities be centered in the old town, or

should they be taken to the people? Does the YWCA stay in the core of Richmond Hill, does it grow with the expanding town, does it go into apartments, does it go into all areas of the region? asked Mrs. Wright. The "Y" has never lacked good will or drive, she concluded, but it lacks space. It must look to the community for support if it is to survive.

In introducing the focus study, Mrs. Claudine Wallace, chairman of the task force committee, thanked Miss Abernethy who initiated the study and provided early leadership and Mrs. Grace Jackson of the National YWCA who gave her services as a consultant.

The urgent question, said Mrs. Wallace, is "Can the 'Y' in this region continue?" The situation is critical, and if it is to survive it must go to the community at large for support.

In preparing the report, said Mrs. Wallace, the committee had gone into the community to determine need.

Finance Chairman Mrs. Edith Burnfield told the meeting that the study had been approached in a general feeling of despair because of the lack of funds. "We almost thought of folding up, but we decided we must go on." Without its many willing and able volunteers, she said, the "Y" would have been unable to function.

The focus on program pointed to many areas that should concern the "Y": continuation of present program of clubs and classes; lack of public transportation to activities which keeps young mothers and senior citizens from participating; concern for latch key children at lunch time and after school; teenage programs; and programs, club and social activities for handicapped people; community services to newcomers; increased programming for children seven to 12; and baby sitting service for the public.

The "Y" should look further into decentralization of programs, assess ways and means of assisting communities to organize activities to meet their needs, investigate possible use of available recreational areas in apartment buildings, study housing needs and establish priorities regarding programming.

Recommended areas of program development included elementary school age, girls in teens or high school age, women as people, pre-schoolers, women as mothers, women as single parents, women as cultural strangers, women without dependents.

There are many more organized programs available in the community for boys, the committee found, than there are for girls.

Community and municipal leaders were invited to attend the meeting. There were representatives from the Social Planning Council, Parents Without Partners, the town and the region.

Richmond Hill Regional Councillor Donald Plaxton advised the members to step up the campaign for assistance from the community. The YWCA in York doesn't have the resources of a united fund as the YWCA and YMCA in Metro have. And it was inevitable that the "Y" in Richmond Hill should get to a point where it cannot on its own raise enough money to meet its needs.

The "Y", said Plaxton, is providing a valuable service to the community and the time has come when it must turn to the municipality for support.

## In The Spotlight

(Continued from Page 2)  
 Schmidt. In order to make its restoration as authentic as possible, Mrs. Neil chose British Columbia hand-split shingles for the roof. "These shingles are random and very long", Mrs. Neil told us, "so they are very close to the original ones, built to last 100 years." Incidentally, these shingles are used now on most buildings in provincial conservation areas.

"However," Mrs. Neil pointed out, "that was just one part of my life. I would prefer to talk about my 'houses' which were restorations too." She then described four houses which have meant much in her life; in three of which she raised her five children, in an atmosphere filled with tradition and colourful beauty. Beauty which can only be found in the warm tones and graceful, yet practical lines of Canadian furniture and furnishings of bygone days.

To walk into a "Neil" home is to walk into sunshine. Strangely enough it was a rain-drenched day in May, outside, when we visited the Colborne Street house. But there was a "glow" of color indoors that enfolded us in its snug, uncluttered warmth. The glow came from the soft sheen of beeswax — polished cupboards, pine floors, tables and chairs which ranged from the colour of honey to creamy pine and colonial maple. Each item in each room complimenting the eye, as did the pewter, brass, silver and glassware ... carefully, and almost discreetly placed to allow the viewer to "rest" his gaze ... winking and blinking in a salute to the 20th Century from centuries of past use.

Speaking with fondness of her hobby — the restoring of old houses — Mrs. Neil said, "Everything we've bought to complete former houses has been old and discouraged, until we have fixed them up". For until 12 years ago, Elsa Neil did all the "fixing up" herself. Stripping antiques "which appeared like magic. I would 'think' of something I needed — the 'phone would ring and someone would be offering to sell or give it to me," she reminisced.

The first house, on Georgian Bay, was a log cabin summer house and planned as a retirement home. But those plans changed as the five children grew older and the Neils moved to Yonge Street, Thornhill. (Now the home of Doris Fitzgerald, Thornhill's historical writer).

Sometime in the 1950's Elsa Neil was inspired to build a log cabin home, on John Street, Thornhill. The Neils found a three-quarter acre lot on John Street, surrounded on three sides by the Don Valley and the Don River. Elsa Neil discovered a one hundred year old barn in Woodbridge. She had it dismantled. Log by log and board by board it was sawed and planed to specifications (hers) at Rowley Bros. Mill (one of the last water mills in this area), at Brooklyn, Ontario.

The floors in this second log cabin house (now owned by Mrs. Douglas Storms), are three-inch thick planks, 18 to 22 inches wide. Originally these planks were the barn's threshing-floor.

"With dowel, mortise and tendon, loving patience and gentle persuasion — and beeswax — we worked to fulfil this house of our dreams", Mrs. Neil told us.

How they left this house and went on a world tour, coming back to Canada to live in Oakville (where Mrs. Neil arranged the 1967 Oakville Museum — including an authentic 1867 children's nursery for the Centennial project of the University Women's Club — is another story. But it leads on to the finding of the Colbourne Street home, which Mrs. Neil states, "Will never be opened to the public. This is Harry's and my retirement home — and it is to remain privately ours."

Invited guests are welcomed into its serene atmosphere. But the Neils have learned that "show places" are too often sought after and it is too late to contemplate the thought of having to build or renovate, or refurbish another retirement haven.

Wherever Elsa Neil goes she is a living example of a most enthusiastic historian on the "Early History Of Canada"; for she believes social history should be taught "visually". And how better, but through Canadiana projects.

Long before Upper Canada Village, or Black Creek Pioneer Village were built, Mrs. Neil was lecturing for the provincial government on Canadiana. During 1954 she lectured from Cornwall to Sarnia. Her subject? "Treasures In Our Attic".

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