A History of the First Three Decades of the Olivet Boys and Girls Club in Reading Pennsylvania (Book 1)
rfj5031, Written by students at Penn State Berks

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Miscellaneous Short Pieces
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The project that led to this booklet is a form of what is known in higher education as community-based undergraduate research instruction that partners students, faculty, and community organizations to fill a community need. The Olivet Boys and Girls Club in Reading, Pennsylvania has a rich history; it was founded in 1898, and it is one of the original 50 chartered members of Boys & Girls Clubs of America. The organization has served thousands of boys in Berks County for over a century and girls officially since 1990. During the 2014 Spring semester, more than 40 students in four courses at Penn State Berks partnered with the Olivet Boys and Girls Club to begin to document and share the organization’s compelling history.

In each class, students’ research and writing were framed within a specific theoretical and instructional approach. In Laurie Grobman’s sophomore-level general education writing class, students studied Olivet in the context of pressing issues such as poverty, educational inequities, the role of nonprofit organizations in United States society, and children’s development. The course focus was on writing, particularly the role of writing in a democracy and the constructed and selective nature of historical writing.

Eight students were in Laurie’s senior-level capstone course in the professional writing major. This course serves as a stepping stone between the academic study of professional writing and the real-world application of the skills, abilities, and knowledge students have acquired through their coursework. Since the professional writing program at Penn State Berks was developed, we have had two primary goals: that our students understand and are able to participate in meaningful ways in their communities and that they have the skills and knowledge to pursue and find fulfilling careers that involve the passion they have for writing, language, and communication. The Olivet history project is a meaningful, written intervention in the community.

Students in Jill Burk’s general education communication, arts and sciences course, Foundations: Civic and Community Engagement, explored the conceptual foundations of public scholarship, and the contemporary themes and issues in civic and community engagement. This interdisciplinary course focused on the rhetorical practices needed to create and sustain a thriving democracy. In this course, the students outlined the foundations of democracy, citizenship, and civic engagement, and worked to define civic engagement and its related activities. By participating in the Olivet Boys & Girls Club community-based research project, students considered the notion that local history is itself rhetorical and discussed the importance of public memory in shaping communities. In addition, the students learned the importance of participation in local civic life by committing to a project where they participated in local civic life.

Moreover, all students experienced a challenging and new (for most of them) way of “doing history” through what we came to call the “Olivet BGC archives”: a collection of thousands of documents and photographs in
binders and boxes collected over 116 years by individuals affiliated with Olivet. These archives are incomplete, yet they are also an incredibly rich cultural resource that enabled students to participate in constructing a history of Olivet and its children, families, and personnel. In addition, students spent hours at the Berks History Center, scouring newspapers.com, speaking with Rich DeGroote from Olivet, interviewing relatives of some of the Olivet individuals, and scouring neighborhoods in Reading to look for buildings.

Among the most important goals for the project were for students to understand that poverty has been a pervasive problem in the United States for centuries. Census data for the city of Reading in 2012 lists a population 13.2% black or African American, 58.2% Hispanic or Latino, and 28.7% white. The Olivet serves 3000-4000 children per year. 82% of these children live at or below the poverty level; 62% are Hispanic/Latino; 23% are African American; 6% are multi-racial; and 9% are white. 59% are male and 41% are female. But in Olivet’s first three decades of existence, census data for the city of Reading indicates a population that was 99% white, 0.9% black, and less than 1/10 of 1% for all other races. Our students learned that while demographics change, too many families, children, and adults in our society have lived and continue to live in poverty. As members of our local and national communities, we must help to solve this persistent problem and to provide financial security to all our neighbors.

Finally, it is vital to acknowledge that the content in this book was limited by time, space, cost, and access. All chapters were written by undergraduate students within the span of one semester in a course that included a great deal of other assignments. They are novice historians who did a remarkable job. The students made every effort to represent the historical evidence accurately and objectively. Any inaccuracies are entirely unintended. We are aware that much of Olivet’s history in its first three decades has been left out of this book, but we hope the book is the stepping stone of further documentation and preservation of this history. Topics we wanted to see covered but did not have student writers for include, among others, kindergarten (co-ed); fathers club; relationship between Olivet and the national organization, originally called Federation Boys’ Clubs (FBC); and college scholarships. This book is a history, not the history, of Olivet’s first three decades.

Many people put forth great effort to support a project such as this. Our deepest appreciation goes out to

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Student Introduction

By Jami Grunmeier

The Olivet Boys and Girls Club history writing project was about the past, present, and future. We (students) looked into the past to try and understand the present and possibly create a better future for the children at Olivet. This was the first written history of Olivet, and we had hundreds of documents and photographs to tirelessly page through in our temporary Olivet archives room at Penn State Berks. Each student was a historian: we determined the most important parts of our individual topics to write an article that is part of this book. We learned how powerful writing can be: undergraduates at Penn State Berks would be the first to construct, shape, and publicly share this city’s 116 year old organization.

Before this process had even begun, we were assigned many different articles on poverty in the United States. These articles primarily focused on children in poverty and why poverty happens in the first place. This helped us gain insights into why this project was relevant and why it was going to be so important. This project was about helping the children of the clubs, as well as the communities that these clubs have affected, be a part of something greater than an after school program. It was about connecting the people of the past to those of the present, to help the children in the present see that they aren’t alone. With this meaningful mission ahead of us, a lot of the students realized finding articles on the children or clubs themselves was much harder than we had anticipated.

I found almost nothing about my assigned topic, the Shillington club. I was completely stumped and didn’t know how to continue in my research. I finally decided that sometimes research isn’t about reading articles that other people have written but going out and finding the information first hand. I first went to the Berks History Center, where once again I was presented with minimal information. I did find interesting facts about the building itself, such as how much it cost to build the building and that it was built by William McCormick, the founder of the Boys and Girls Clubs. I then went to the Shillington Library where I was directed to the local courthouse; there I only found the building’s proper address, which had been wrong in the articles I had read before. When I finally arrived at the building it was in rubble. The snow from earlier in the winter had collapsed the roof, and the building itself was going to be torn down and replaced with either a small park or parking lot. A neighbor came out and told me that he had seen a lot of photos in the building and that I should try to find someone to retrieve them for me. I went to the police to find out who owned the building, but no one there knew who currently owns the building. They did tell me that after the building was sold by the Olivet it had become a theater and then a recreation center. After finding all of this new information I decided it was unsafe for me to go into the building in its current condition. But through my independent research I found out more information than the archived club documents or articles from the Reading News-Times (from Newspapers.com) were able to provide. All of the information will help the Shillington club live on through people’s memories long after the building is demolished. The children will know that the kids that used to use that club were much like them—even with decades between them.
What our classes hoped to accomplish was the beginning of a book of the history of the Olivet Boys and Girls Clubs of Reading so that this organization can continue to break the cycle of poverty in Reading. We also hoped that the children would feel like their own stories are important and deserve to be remembered and written down just like the children of the past. We hoped to bring a feeling of unity to the community that the clubs have affected for numerous decades. Finally we hoped that those who read the book will see that poverty affects all types of people and that it is a problem we all must try to resolve. We all must care about our fellow community members enough to one day rid our communities of poverty. First, we must bring the subject of poverty into visibility and realize it is our problem.
Olivet BGC Club Introduction

By Richard DeGroote

The history of the Olivet Boys & Girls Club has been a story that has developed over the past 116 years. In reading about the founding of the organization in the late 1800’s and into the 20th Century there were great stories that helped to weave the tapestry of what we are today. I was always touched by the struggle and direction that many of the club members lives took. I truly appreciate the research and efforts of the Penn State students in helping to bring these stories to life.

It was the vision of William McCormick to provide recreation, education and guidance programs to the boys of Reading. His story is one of civic engagement and helping the boys find their way through some very difficult times. The founding of the club was a true story of selflessness by many individuals led by William McCormick.

Many of the early club members went to lead very productive lives in education, law and youth service. Early club members Pat Frobey and Spike Moyer went on to become Directors of the Olivet Boys Club. Their connection with the early years helped to carry on the mission and direction of the club.

In order for our organization to move forward we need to know where we’ve been. The success that we have experienced was in most part set in motion in the first 30 years of our existence. The struggles and determination of our founders truly helps us to understand our past.

Richard DeGroote
Olivet Boys & Girls Club
Minstrel Shows at Olivet in the First Three Decades

Laurie Grobman

White minstrel shows (whites performing in blackface) were among the most popular forms of entertainment in both the north and south beginning in the 19th century and through part of the 20th century (Schroeder, 2010, 142). Unsurprisingly, as evidenced in the Reading News-Times minstrel shows were popular and prolific throughout the Reading area at this time. Regrettably, white minstrel shows were also frequent occurrences in the Olivet clubs in its second two decades, as indicated in the Olivet BGC archives and in the Reading News-Times.

An article from the Reading News-Times dates the first Olivet Minstrel show in 1912 (“Olivet Boys” 1912). The Ladies Auxiliary Club sponsored Olivet minstrel shows beginning in 1919 (“Girl Minstrels” 1922). The five numbered clubs hosted and performed minstrel shows, and these were seemingly popular with the public, as indicated by articles in the Reading News-Times and Reading Times. For example, a 1922 article notes that the auditorium was filled and the show was a “big success” (“O.B.C. Auxiliary”). The archives and the newspaper mention an Olivet Minstrels club, and several announcements and articles in the newspapers discuss Olivet minstrel shows being performed to benefit local churches.

Minstrelry and blackface are complex phenomena, but the consensus among scholars today is that minstrel shows and blackface “pretend[ed] that slavery was amusing, right, and natural” (Lott 1992, 23) and, as a result, was used by pro-slavery advocates to justify slavery. Furthermore, as Patricia R. Schroeder, Professor of English and Coordinator of American Studies at Ursinus College in Pennsylvania, asserts,

The widespread popularity of these characters throughout the nineteenth century ensured that stage depictions of African Americans, which were actually caricatures of blackness performed by white men, had little to do with black culture or actual black experience. Through their performances, however, white minstrels in blackface created a socially accepted definition of race, scripting racial difference as inferiority. (2010, 142)

In other words, minstrelry and blackface misrepresented African Americans, and these misrepresentations influenced many Americans’ (mis)understanding of African Americans, especially those who had little actual experience and contact with black people. Furthermore, minstrelry and blackface generated and perpetuated egregious misconceptions and stereotypes about African Americans that linger still today.

My message for everyone who reads this book is almost cliché, but we must learn from the past by acknowledging truthfully the past. I also made the editorial decision to remove all discussions of minstrel shows and blackface in the student-authored articles in the book. I am not trying to hide nor censor history,
although I am sure many people will disagree with my decision. I had discussions with Olivet personnel about this issue, and students and I discussed it at length. My choice to write about minstrelry and blackface history as a separate topic from the other articles in this book is to be sensitive to African American readers, especially children. It’s really that simple. Words can hurt. Images can hurt. History can hurt. If nothing else, these are lessons that I as a multicultural educator want my students to take away from my classes. And as a scholar, I hope to add minstrel shows to my own research agenda. One thing that struck me was the language with which the shows were described in the Olivet BCG archives and the newspaper.

In the pages of this book, readers will find that from its origins, Olivet Boys Club (and later, Boys & Girls Club), cared about, supported, and nurtured children at risk. Today, the Olivet organization cares deeply about all children, and those involved would never intentionally insult, offend, or make fun of children of color. There is much to learn about the history of Olivet, race, and ethnicity, and the Olivet history project is continuing. We will present this history truthfully and sensitively.

References


Further Reading


Olivet Boys and Girls Club has a long history of serving youth in the Reading area. According to a history compiled by former Olivet Boys Club Director, Ralph Bigony, the club started as a simple gesture on the part of a wealthy man. William “Mac” McCormick had been out bicycling when he spotted a “group of boys loitering in the vicinity of the Park school building” (Bigony). He dismounted from his bicycle, greeted the boys, and then rented a hall from a nearby hotel. Once the hall was booked, he invited the boys from the street and others “whom he felt needed to be guided rightly” (Bigony). The name of this first group was the Boys Friendly Club.

Despite the popularity of the Boys Friendly Club, there was no permanent location for the after-school meetings. For twelve years, the club members gathered at twelve different locations: the Park Hotel; Arion Garden; the Thalheimer building; 17 S. 7th Street; Front and Court Streets; the Luden building; the basement of Olivet Presbyterian Church; 403 Cherry Street; Lauer’s Park; the YMCA at 630 Penn Street; Luden’s Natatorium at 134 North 5th Street; and Olivet playground (Bigony).
In 1902, McCormick met with Reverend Dr. James Robinson, the new pastor at the Olivet Presbyterian Church. McCormick wanted to encourage younger boys to join the club, so he and the pastor decided to send invitations to all the local newspaper carriers (Bigony). The first night, September 2, 120 new members had joined the club. The meeting might also have included Rev. Robinson’s decision to allow the boys’ use of the church’s basement for Sunday school classes (Bigony). The time spent in the church’s basement influenced the group enough to prompt a name change. In 1902, the club officially became known as the Olivet Boys Club.

A newspaper article written by Ray Koehler titled “Mac had a Mind of his Own,” found at the Berks History Center, gives some information about McCormick’s career and his contribution to the club: “He was a master character builder, and while others were busy making money, Mac was busy making men!” He dedicated a lot of his time to the boys. Even as a busy editor, he would stop whatever he was working on to talk to one of the boys if the boy visited him at work. He wanted to turn them into gentlemen. Even his newspaper, the Reading Herald, never advertised any alcohol or cigarette ads. One time one of his boys became ill and was prescribed whisky by the doctor. However, the boy refused it, saying, “Mac said you shouldn’t drink whisky.” Mac had to go to the boy and tell him he would be forgiven because it was for medical reasons (Koehler).

Eleven years after the club began, McCormick financed construction for a “splendid two-story structure at Clinton and West Oley Streets.” The new home for the club cost $18,000 and was dedicated on April 5, 1910 (Bigony). The Clinton Street Club housed two bowling alleys, billiard, game, and meeting rooms, shower baths, and a gymnasium with a stage. The club also had a shooting gallery. If the boys attended Sunday School they were allowed to shoot a few bullets (Koehler). Later, the club added more bowling alleys, an outdoor swimming pool, and Reading’s second playground, called Outdoor Fields (Bigony).

The club’s growing popularity paired with McCormick’s belief that “it is better to build boys than mend men,” prompted the club to open additional locations (Bigony). Club No. 2, called Otto Boys’ Club, was located first at Laurel Street, across from the pipe mill. It later moved to West Reading, on the north side of Penn Avenue. Club No. 3 moved location during its time as well; it started at 10th and Chestnut Street, went to 17th and Perkiomen Avenue, and then finally found its home at the old YMCA at North 6th Street (Bigony).

The building that housed Club No. 4 was given to McCormick rent-free by Mr. and Mrs. Luden. It still sits at 722 Mulberry Street. Because of the Ludens’ donation, the club was self-sustaining; McCormick didn’t have to pay rent and all supervision was voluntary. Club No. 5 was located near Lancaster Avenue in Shillington; McCormick paid $7,000 for its use (Bigony).

The five clubs, frequently called the “Olivets,” were funded by McCormick out of pocket because “no effort was ever made to make money at the clubs.” Club No. 4 was virtually cost free, but the other clubs’ deficits were paid by McCormick, which amounted to thousands of dollars during his lifetime. The deficits were caused by McCormick’s desire to “keep dues in reach of the working boys” (Bigony). Mac could afford to cover the costs because he was born into a wealthy Harrisburg family in 1866; his father, James, was a
lawyer.

After graduation, McCormick worked for a number of newspapers. Later in life, he became the publisher of *News-Times* and *Herald Telegram* in Reading (Bigony). Through his work at the newspapers, McCormick was able to afford and fund many of the clubs’ expenses. McCormick took that first step from his bicycle in 1898 because “he had always been deeply interested in civic-minded enterprises and gave much of his time to working class boys” (Bigony).

McCormick also created several publications about raising boys to be proper gentlemen. He published three books: *The Boy and His Clubs*, *Fishers of Boys*, and *Problem of the Working Boy* (Bigony). He was also owner and editor of the monthly magazine, *Work with Boys*. A *Reading Eagle* article states of McCormick, “He was a man of unflagging energy, crowding many hours of work into each day as a newspaper man and in the promotion of his Boys’ Club and other altruistic enterprises. He seldom took a vacation. When he did it was generally for the purpose of planning a book on the boys’ work, of which he wrote a number” (“Herald Editor” 1923).

McCormick was also very active in other aspects of the community. He was a member of the National Playground Association, the National Alliance of Workers with Boys, the American Academy of Political and Social Science, and the director of the Federation of Boys Clubs. McCormick’s dedication to the Olivet Boys Club influenced his involvement with the Federation of Boys Clubs, of which Olivet was a charter member (“Obituary” 1923).

At age 57, McCormick died on Feb. 11, 1923 of pneumonia. After his death, Clubs 2, 3, and 5 were closed because no one else could finance the expenses. Bigony wrote, “It was feared that all the clubs were to be closed. They would have been except for the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Wm. H. Luden. They purchased the building and equipment of Club No. 1 and the paraphernalia, equipment, and apparatus of Club No. 4. They also financed the incorporation of the clubs and later presented the deeds of both buildings to the Trustees.”

In a letter linked to his will, McCormick said that he wanted “the whole property sold” in the event of his death. Furthermore, he outlined his intentions for all of the clubs. He wrote, Club No. 1 “should be sold without sacrifice. Any suggestion that it be deeded to the city or to any organization should be repelled. I have given freely for a quarter of a century. On my death the work can stop” (“McCormick” 1922). When McCormick wrote the letter, there was not a proper location for Club No. 2. However, he had saved $300 in its treasury to secure a new location and any necessary equipment. Furthermore, in the letter, McCormick noted hints of jealousy between the leaders of the club locations. If he died before Club No. 2 had been built, McCormick did not want the treasury funds to be split among the remaining clubs. Additionally, McCormick implied that Club No. 3 should become a part of the Rotary club because “it is at present less of an Olivet Club than any of the others.” He thought Club No. 4 could potentially remain open with the continued help of the Ludens, though with the “understanding that it be run as an Olivet Club.” McCormick’s final note for Club No. 5 was simple. He wrote, “in the event of my death it had better be closed” (“McCormick” 1922).

Bigony believed that McCormick’s “dream bore fruit. His thinking and his work grew with the men he
helped to train.” McCormick’s legacy has continued to grow and flourish since the creation of the Boys Friendly Club over a century ago.

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William McCormick: Professional Life

By Bianca Sepulveda and Ashley Offenback

Olivet founder William McCormick attended Harrisburg Academy for high school; his strong academic ethics and professionalism earned him a spot in the prestigious Ivy Leagues at Yale University. His hard work in college helped him receive second colloquy appointments his junior and senior years, as well as the title of class poet. In addition to his successful academic performance, he was heavily involved in student life. He excelled as the Yale Courant editor, as well as secretary and treasurer of the bicycle club. His contributions and involvement in student life earned him the title of valedictorian at his 1889 graduation (Endman 1923).

Following McCormick’s graduation in 1889, he pursued his passion for journalism and became a reporter for the Boston Post. However, this would only be the stepping stone in his editorial career. In March 1890, he became the editor of the Bethlehem Times at Burnham Industrial School in New Canaan, New York, which would later lead him to his next career venture. In 1892, McCormick transitioned his career from journalism into the education field when he became the Burnham Industrial School Headmaster. A year later, McCormick returned to his home state of Pennsylvania and became the editor of the Allentown Daily Leader, a newspaper company he founded. McCormick invested not only in this newspaper company, but in 1895 he also purchased the Reading Herald (Endman 1923).

The Reading Herald soon became the heart of all that was encompassed in McCormick’s journalism career. After purchasing the Herald from A.C Buckwalter and John B. Dampan, McCormick became the sole proprietor of the company. Originally, the Herald was a four-page paper with six columns to each page. In comparison, most newspapers were smaller, and a paper with longer length was rare (Meiser 1991). Together, McCormick and the Herald grew to appease many insatiable minds in the city of Reading. “It was progressive and was not afraid to touch upon topics that had hitherto been regarded as sacred from the profane touch of the editor and reporter’ (Meiser 1991). McCormick was also known for his editorials; he was “a brilliant writer whose editorials could sparkle with wit–or bite like an unbroken meerschaum, McCormick’s crusading Herald was his mouthpiece. He feared neither man nor adventurer’ (I Knew a Man 1923). One of the Herald’s shining moments was in 1898 during the outbreak of the Spanish American War; it started to supply evening papers for six cents a week, in addition to the morning papers, which were ten cents a week (Meiser 1991). After the war, the evening paper became so popular that it continued to publish in the evening and abandoned its morning obligation “which was generally covered by Philadelphia newspapers’ (Meiser 1991). This remained consistent until the merger of McCormick’s companies.

At the time, Reading had three major newspaper companies: Reading Times, Reading Telegram, and Reading Herald. As time progressed, it became evident that Reading’s economy could not support all the full-time newspapers (Meiser 1998). On March 1, 1920, McCormick merged them into a morning News-Times and an evening Herald-Telegram. He located the business at 200 North Sixth Street.
A birthday card McCormick sent to an Olivet boy. He often sent letters and cards to the Olivet boys, including those serving in World War I.

Aside from his experience as a reporter, editor, and entrepreneur, McCormick was also a member of the Olivet Presbyterian Church, where he taught Sunday school to young men. He was also a part of many associations, such as the National Playground Association, National Alliance of Workers with Boys, American Academy of Political and Social Science, National Institute of Social Science, and the Director of the Federation of Boys’ Clubs. Regardless of his involvement in other boards and work, McCormick’s primary focus was always the Olivet boys. “He could be in the middle of an editorial and if an Olivet boy came in, Mac would stop wherever he was to talk to him. Later, he’d pick up the thought as if he’d never been interrupted” (Koehler 1923). All of this experience began the foundation of McCormick’s vision for the Olivet Boys Club. In 1898, the Boys Friendly Club was created. However, it took multiple re-locations and different advertising techniques before the name changed to Olivet.

According to the Educational Curator of the Berks History Center, in the early 1900s, Reading was twice the size that it is now. It was a melting pot of Ukrainian, Italian, and Polish immigrants (Hefner 2014). Regardless of race or ethnicity, McCormick contributed to the city of Reading by providing children an escape. “Kids were smoking and drinking on the street corner and he provided a healthy activity for them. Recreation, education, and guidance” (DeGroote 2014). McCormick sought out these children and found them an outlet that would exercise their mental, physical, and emotional health. His obituary stated that he had a “high moral tone, which inspired 100’s of boys to lead the best kind of life” (Endman 1923).

Before he died, McCormick had ordered coal to be sent to an older woman’s house. However, the truck driver dumped the coal onto the pavement and drove off. After witnessing this act, McCormick grabbed a shovel and put the coal in the cellar. It was at this time that he over-heated and caught a cold, which led to him contracting pneumonia. McCormick died on February 11, 1923 in St. Joseph’s Hospital after being sick for days. Shortly after, the Reading Herald ran out of business. “Mac was the heart of the Herald when he
died Herald died’ (*I Knew a Man* 1923). It was McCormick’s personal belief that “it was better to build boys than to mend men;” in his lifetime he was able to reach out to each Olivet boy. “This manner of man is hard to believe, that he could get these boys with the spirit that they had; they loved him, they loved that club, and they loved one another” (*I Knew a Man* 1923). Not only was he a role model for these young boys, but he was also a “pioneer in emphasizing the need of recreational feature in community life” (Endman 1923). As a result, many of these boys grew up to be “the best citizens in the town,” and they owed it to the nobility, strength, and diligence of William McCormick (Bigony).

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Timeline: 1898-1929

By Brittany Tymes

1898 – William McCormick started the The Boys Friendly Club when he rented out a hall at The Park Hotel.

1899 – The Olivet Boys Club occupied the second floor of the Thalimen Building.

1902 – The Olivet Boys Club moved to the Olivet Presbyterian Church (120 youngsters enrolled in the club the first night).

1903 – The Luden Building opened at 6th and Washington streets. The club occupied a floor.

1906 – The Olivet Boys Club became a charter member of the Federation of Boys Club, joining 52 other groups. Howard Myers was named superintendent.

1907 – The dance hall opened at Lauer’s Park.

1908 – The Olivet Natatorium, the largest indoor pool in Pennsylvania at the time, was used by the club.

1909 – Olivet started work on a permanent settlement in Ricktown.

1910 – The Clinton Street Unit, Club No. 1, was built. This club had two bowling alleys, billiard tables, meeting rooms, showers, a stage, and a gymnasium.

1911 – A relay race to Lebanon was held.

1912 – The club took a trip to Stone Harbor.

1913 – Club No. 3 opened in an old abandoned saloon.


1917 – Frobey was named superintendent. 1921 – The swimming pool was constructed at Clinton Street.

1922 – In approximately this year, Club No. 5 opened.

1923 – McCormick died. William Luden bought both Mulberry and Clinton street units and donated them to the Board of Directors.

1929 – The Ladies Auxiliary was formed.
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23 Locations in 32 years

By Tyler Kio

The Olivet Boys Club was started by William McCormick in the spring of 1898 after he saw a group of boys loitering on the corner of a street in Reading. McCormick quickly came up with a dream of having a safe place for young boys to develop and activities that would benefit them.

McCormick first rented a hall called Arion Gardens of The Park Hotel on South 7th Street, between Cherry and Franklin streets. It was fitted with gymnasium equipment and McCormick was quick to invite that first group of boys he saw to come partake in his dream.

In the summer of 1898 McCormick moved the club to an old school house at Perkiomen Avenue and Franklin Street, due to Arion Hall being used as a beer garden. That fall the club moved back to Arion Gardens. Due to increased interest in his club, McCormick moved to larger quarters in 1899. The new residence of the club was the Thalimer Building. It was located at 143 Cedar Street. The first floor of this building was a functioning blacksmith shop, and the club occupied the second floor which formerly hosted the Thalimer Cigar Box Company (Bigony Early Locations).

As a second blacksmith moved in at the Thalimer Building, McCormick rented larger quarters on 7th Street in late 1899. In 1900, the club had to move again. This time they moved to 17 South 17th Street in Reading. Not much is known of this location, other than the knowledge that McCormick rented two floors here (The O.B.C. Record 1909)
Members of the club in the Luden Building in 1903.

In 1901 the club moved to the Reading Paper Mill and occupied the office building at Front Street and Court Street. The location of the actual building was in the “V” between Front Street and River Road. Then in 1902 the club moved to a new location called “The Seashell House.” This club location was on the 100 block of Friedensburgh Rd., in Mount Penn. The club remained here until 1903 (The O.B.C. Record 1909).

Following the “Seashell House,” the Olivet Boys Club occupied a floor of the Luden Building in 1903. The Luden Building was located on 6th and Washington Street. This location consisted of three rooms. The first and smallest room had books for the boys to read, as well as checkers and small games. The second room was larger and it consisted of a pool table and a shuffle board. The third and largest room was the furthest back, but was made into a gym for the boys. It had mats, pull-up bars, punching bags, and dumb bells for the boys to exercise. After the club left the Luden building, the American Casualty Company moved in, followed by Gilbert Associates (The Olivet Boys Club).

From late 1903 to the end of 1904, the club had residence in the basement of the Olivet Presbyterian Church. This is around the time when the club adopted its new name, changing from the Boys Friendly Club to the Olivet Boys Club. The basement had a large gymnasium where the boys could play basketball and exercise.

In 1905 the Olivet Boys Club moved to the Green Tobacco Factory. This was their tenth location since the club was started in April of 1898. This club was located at 403 Cherry Street. In order to get to their section of the building, the members had to go up three flights of stairs, then walk to the back of the third floor, and then take a flight of stairs down to the second floor. This club had two large rooms. The boys became interested in starting a basketball team, and the club started having drills at Lauer’s Park (Bigony History).

Due to the boy’s growing interest in playing basketball, the club moved to Lauer’s Park from 1906 to 1907. They occupied a dance hall there, between 2nd and 3rd Street. It was owned by Lauer’s brewery. The club was abruptly thrown out of Lauer’s Park in 1907, as the owners of Lauer’s Park decided to tear down the buildings to make room for a baseball stadium where teams form the Atlantic Baseball League would play. With no home, 1907 received the label as “The Homeless Year” and McCormick used his own money to pay the five dollar fee for forty boys to attend the YMCA. The YMCA was located at 619 Penn Street.

During “The Homeless Year” the Olivet Boys Club had regular Sunday morning meetings at “The Neighborhood House.” This house was located at 611 Eisenbrown Street, and was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Howard Myers. The club was allowed to use the two sitting rooms on the first floor for meetings (“The Neighborhood House” 1907).
Boys swimming in the Natatorium

Following “The Homeless Year,” the club moved to the Natatorium from 1908 to 1909. The Natatorium was located at 134 North 5th Street. It was owned by William H. Luden who had built it in 1904. At the time, the Olivet Boys had access to the largest indoor pool in Pennsylvania.

Feeling the necessity for a permanent home, the OBC started work on a permanent settlement during 1909 in Ricktown. The price of the build was $18,000. On April 10, 1910 the first ever permanent club was dedicated. It was called Club No. 1, and was located at 677 Clinton Street between Clinton and West Oley streets in Reading. This club featured two bowling alleys, billiards, meeting rooms, showers, and a stage in the gymnasium. The club was built by contractor Harry Heckman (McCormick 1922).

The OBC then felt the need to expand, and in 1912 a second club was opened, Club No. 2. It received the nickname of “The Otto Boys’ Club” and was located at Laurel and Minor Street.

Again the club needed more room and decided to open a third club in the fall of 1913. Club No. 3 was in an old abandoned saloon at 11th and Cotton Street. The OBC had to close Club No. 3, but later reopened the club in the fall of 1914. The second building was located at 10th and Chestnut Street in an old market house. Again, Olivet had to close club No. 3 and for the third time club, No. 3 was opened in 1915. This club location was at 17th and Perkiomen Street. The building itself was a church building that was owned by Reverend W.F. Klein. Olivet helped pay $2,200 dollars to repair the chapel and paid a twenty dollar a month rent.
Between 1915 and 1923 Olivet decided to open a fourth numbered club. OBC decided on an old motion picture theatre owned by William H. Luden and this club was located at 722 Mulberry Street.

Finally, The Olivet Boys Club opened their fifth club under McCormick. The club building was a one story, fireproof structure that was also a portable unit. The location of this club was on Lancaster Avenue in Shillington, and the cost of the building was $7,000.

After McCormick’s death, the OBC was in danger of disbanding, and would have if not for the generosity of William H. Luden. Luden purchased Club No. 1 and all the equipment and then sold the deed to OBC trustees for a sum of one dollar. In addition to the purchase of Club No. 1, Luden built a three story addition to Club No. 4 which cost him $12,500. He then also purchased Club No. 4 and proceeded to sell the deed to the board of trustees for the sum of one dollar (Bigony Program for Olivet).

Olivet did open two outdoor locations. The Olivet Playgrounds, between West Oley and West Douglas Street was opened in 1905. In addition to the playground, The Olivet Gardens were also opened in 1905 and its purpose was to be a community garden that did not allow any manual labor to be completed on Sundays.

Today, The Olivet Boys and Girls Club has eight functioning clubs in the city of Reading. Among those eight clubs, Clubs No. 1 and No. 4 are still functioning at their original locations. The six newest clubs are: The Glenside Club at 880 Avenue A, Oakbrook Club at 1161 Pershing Boulevard, The Pal Club at 325 Walnut Street, the 13th and Perkiomen Club at 1310 Perkiomen Avenue, The Link Club at 201 Noble Street, and The Richard J. Ricketts Center at 640 Beech Street.

**References**


Historical Context, Reading, Pennsylvania: 1898-1910

By Saadiqa Vann

The Industrial Revolution had been the hub of Reading. In the early 20th century, manufacturing distribution started to take place. Meanwhile railroads, transit, steel, and iron products were considered textile manufacturing. The main industrial families were the Thuns, Jannsens, Carpenter, Parrishes, Sullivans, Ludens, and Kramers. These families rose to great prominence and power. With their newfound wealth they built mansions in Reading and along the suburbs of Wyomissing, PA. During the beginning of this era, Reading was mostly populated by Protestants, conservatives, and Germans. The unemployment rate was very low (Engle 2005).

Reading became one of a few cities to be run by a Socialist administration and had a lot of socialist mayors. The city started to increase at a tremendous pace and being located between Philadelphia and Harrisburg made way for the city’s success and growth. Some major local factories produced shoes, cigars and beer however smaller enterprises consisted in trades and crafts. James H. Carpenter founded Carpenter Steel in 1889 and he took over the site iron and steel productions (Engle 2005).

While Reading steadily prospered, there was a giant set back when the city was hit with a tornado. On January 10, 1889 a tornado struck the city of Reading. Over one hundred people died in the wreck. The impact affected the town tremendously, and the emotional and physical damage was devastating. Nearly one-fourth of the city was destroyed and over sixty people were missing. The recovery cost the city a great deal (Beitler 2007).

References


In 1912, the industrial city of Reading, sitting halfway between the historic city of Philadelphia and the state capital Harrisburg, was a divided city from the presidential election. The people and the city were split into two major parties at the time: Woodrow Wilson’s Democratic Party and Theodore Roosevelt’s National Progressive Party, better known as the “Bull Moose Party.” Berks County and the city of Reading supported Wilson, but the surrounding counties and the state of Pennsylvania went for Roosevelt (“The Election of 1912”).

After the election of 1912, the city was calm. In the distance, the loud noise of locomotives getting their shipments of coal and dropping off shipments of metal and rubber could be heard. Pennsylvania was a coal rich state with most of the coal veins towards the center of the state. Reading was a hub of railroads, steel mills, and automobile factories. The great industrial boom came to the city of Reading after the Civil War. Then, after the Great War, all factories in the city were producing at capacity and open for work 24 hours a day.

One of the first industrial infrastructures in the city was the railroad, known as The Philadelphia & Reading Railroad, that used to transport coal to Philadelphia. Later in the 1900s it was transporting steel, automobiles, rubber, cloths, and oil to all the reaches of Pennsylvania and the United States. At the same time in Reading, its pioneer companies, known as “Brass Era Companies,” were slowing down production due to lack of demand.

At the time of Roosevelt’s presidency to the end of Wilson’s first term, Reading went through a change, the Progressive Era. Reformers sought to improve a lot of the underprivileged aspects of Reading by rectifying perceived wrongs. President Roosevelt supported regulation of big business and sometimes supported workers’ rights against the interests of the company. During Wilson’s presidency, progressive principles were furthered when statutes were passed for an eight-hour workday for railroad workers, workers’ compensation, and regulation of child labor.

In response to criticisms aimed at industries, some companies instituted “welfare capitalism,” giving employees special benefits to secure loyalty and to prevent the creation of unions. Some of the benefits included subsidized housing, libraries, and employee social clubs.

The culture of Reading and the East Coast was changing. The period from 1894 to 1915 was one which workers in the United States began to have more leisure time than their predecessors. One reason for this, industrial employers began to decrease working hours and institute a Saturday half-day holiday, which gave workers more free time for leisure activities. Vacations began to be regularly offered to workers, although they were usually unpaid ones. The monotony of specialized industrial work and the crowding of urban expansion also created a desire in the worker to have leisure time away from his job and away from the
bustle of the urban city ("Topics for Work").

Reading was about to get the biggest influx of people since the potato famine in the 1840s; it was called the Great Migration. During the initial wave the majority of African Americans moved to major northern cities like New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Reading. The first large movement of African Americans occurred during The Great War, when half a million African Americans moved from the South up to the North. The northern industry’s demand for workers was a result of the loss of five million men who left to serve in the Armed Forces, as well as the restriction of foreign immigration ("The Great Migration 1915-1960").

The economic environment of Reading from 1911 to 1920 was a very industrialized one only behind Philadelphia and the steel capital of the United States at the time, Pittsburgh. In the years 1918 to 1929, Reading was a prosperous place with the U.S.’s economy booming after the Great War. Reading’s local economy was booming from local coal mining companies to local steel mills, from Reading’s local automobile manufacturers to even the small shops on Main Street.

References


Historical Context, Reading, Pennsylvania: 1921-1932

By Jonathan Nolan

The city of Reading during 1921-1932 had both prosperous and unfavorable aspects. The start of 1921 seemed very prosperous; the Reading Liberty Bank passed $1 million in resources on January 1, 1921 (The Reading Eagle 1921). Then just three days later, six thieves held up a local Wyomissing bank and took $180,000. They were jailed a short time later (The Century Journey: Volume 3).

By 1922, Reading had 16,355 children enrolled in the public schools, and 3,000 children in private schools (Albright 1948). It was estimated that there were 400 teachers for these public school students; nothing was recorded for the number of private school teachers.

The next year, from September 30 through October 6, 1923, Reading celebrated its 175th anniversary. The week-long celebration was noted by the managing editor of The Reading Eagle, Albert N. Burkholder. There were four parades throughout the week to celebrate the anniversary, along with official receptions with many distinguished guests. The celebration was brought to the community by 26 committees totaling 678 people (Albright 1948).

The following year, Ferdinand Thun and Gustav Oberlaender donated $125,000 and 23 acres of land to build the Reading Museum and Art Gallery (The Century Journey: Volume 3)—just one of many donations the two gave to the city. Thun and Oberlaender were partners who worked in collaboration with Henry Janssen. The three were successful business partners in a braiding machine company (Edmunds 2012). On January 11, 1925, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Advent at Telford Avenue and Noble Street in West Lawn opened. Just a few months later the Berkshire Electric Co. became incorporated, absorbing four other light, heat, and power companies. The same year Reading voters approved a $750,000 bond issue for a new city hall. After three years of debating the best location, the city council purchased the building that was once used as an all-boy’s high school. The city council purchased the building for $510,000 and used $240,000 for renovation and restoration (Albright 1948).

In 1926, Thun, Oberlaeder, and Janssen donated more than $4 million to build a new hospital; 30 acres of land was included. The hospital opened on October 2, 1926. The next year, 1927, Reading Senior High School, otherwise known as The Castle on the Hill, opened in September (The Century Journey: Volume 3). The Reading Museum and Art Gallery, opened on May 5, 1928. After a few months, on August 31, the Reading Division established the first full-time bus route with service between Fifth Street and Penn Avenue, just another example of times changing in a growing city.

Later that year, September 1928, Albright College in Myerstown and Schuykill College in Reading made an agreement to merge, forming Albright College in Reading. The following month Thun and Janssen offered Leinbach’s Hill to be the city’s new courthouse. On December 4, 1928, the foundation for the School of Theology at Albright College was set; the building was completed the following year.
Another organization that boomed during this time period was the Reading Automobile Club. Under the lead of William W. Keck, from 1921-1930 the membership increased dramatically, from 250 members to 12,786, the largest club in Pennsylvania. The club has released a monthly magazine every month since 1922.

On the other hand, there were also problems. By 1924, 146 hotels and saloons selling alcohol and a handful of them were using peepholes to allow customers in (Taggert 1997). Reading fell victim to the Volstead Act, which allowed breweries with certain licenses to produce “near beer”, because it only contained half of a percent of alcohol. (Taggert 1997). On the morning of February 18, 1922, twenty enforcement agents, led by Supervisor W.A. Kelton, raided saloons and hotels. It was estimated that the total amount of possible revenue from the bootlegged gin, wines, whisky, and other alcoholic beverages was nearly $50,000. Most of the saloons and hotels were open that Saturday night and had replaced their alcoholic beverages within a few days, if not hours.

With the labor movement becoming a part of political discussions, the Socialist Party started to struggle to keep its power. It struggled the most when the textile industry started its uproar (Forrester). In 1927 there were fewer than 36 registered Socialists. Ironically, it was the same year that Henry J. Stump was elected mayor along with two city council seats, the city controller job, and two school board posts.

References


*The Century Journey: Volume 3*.


Olivet and Reading, Pennsylvania during World War I

By Jared Moser

When war broke out in Europe in 1914, the United States almost immediately began supplying Great Britain and France with armaments and supplies. Pennsylvania proved particularly vital in the war effort with its various textile and steel mills located in western and eastern Pennsylvania (“Milestones”). These coal and oil reserves were transported by rail and barge from the northern reaches of the state along the Schuylkill River, turning Reading into a crossroads and supply hub for cargo headed to Philadelphia’s ports to be sent overseas as well as other reaches of the United States (“The History of Reading”).

It wasn’t until 1917 that the United States declared war directly on the Axis powers and joined Britain and France on the battlefields of Europe. Like most American cities, Reading supplied young men to the war effort from 1917 through 1918. Depending on the historical document, this number varies among 60, 128, and 160 men in total (“The History of Reading”). According to most records, only one casualty was a former Olivet member: Joseph Sowa. Residents of the city and surrounding areas showed their support for the Sowa family by attending a public viewing of his remains on March 6, 1918; three thousand people attended (“Three Thousand” 1918).

The Reading and Olivet communities came together and organized such clubs like the Olivet War Mothers Club, which provided a meeting time and place once every month for mothers of young soldiers to congregate and discuss letters from the front. In addition, the women acted as a support group for one another. The Olivet Boys Club also participated in programs for soldiers returning from the war. One program was held in June 1918; the Olivet baseball team played a game against the Kutztown A.C. team as the main attraction in a festival for returning soldiers (“Kutztown Plans” 1918).

References


Club No. 1 Clinton Street: 1910-1920

By Austin Will and Jennifer Smith

Howard Myers (left) and Pat Frobey

The building for the Olivet Boys Club No. 1 was dedicated on April 5, 1910 and, at that time, as stated in the *The Reading News-Times*, was “one of the finest in the city” (“An Ideal Club House” 1910). The building, located at the intersection of Clinton and West Oley streets, in an area known as Ricktown, was contracted by Harry Heckman and cost $18,000, a substantial fee at the time (“Early Locations of Olivet Boys Club” 1963; “The Olivet Boys Club”). McCormick, the club’s founder, chose Ricktown because it was an area where the “working boys” lived, and these were the people he wanted to help (*I Knew a Man*). McCormick showed his dedication to the club by paying for all of the building’s costs (“Olivet Boys’ Club Building Dedicated” 1910).

Club No. 1 was the first permanent home of the boys club, after several temporary ones in earlier years (“Early Locations of Olivet Boys Club” 1963). It was a two story building, with the first floor constructed of stone and the second built off of a frame that was later finished with a metallic coating (“Olivet Boys’ Club Building Dedicated” 1910). It was built for the members of the club to enjoy, complete with a reading room, bowling alleys, pool tables, gymnasium/auditorium, stage, cooking area, and outside playground (“An Ideal
Club House” 1910; “Olivet Boys’ Club Building Dedicated” 1910). In order to be a member of the club, the boys had to be at least 10 years old (I Knew a Man). Also, they had to pay a monthly fee of ten cents (The Book of Olivet). As members, they could participate in a variety of sports and activities. The club also served as a spot for Sunday school, a photo club, and a meeting spot for the Mothers’ Club. The Olivet Boys’ Club No. 1 even held the county championship for basketball for 13 years (I Knew a Man). Howard Myers was the superintendent beginning in 1914 and was succeeded by Pat Frobey in 1917 (“History of Olivet”).

References


In spite of Club No. 1’s popularity, when McCormick passed away suddenly in 1923, an uncertain fate was left for the club and the boys who attended it (Cremer 1997). Despite it being in McCormick’s will that he wanted all the clubs to close, William Luden stepped in and purchased two of the clubs to help keep Olivet running (“William ‘Mac’ McCormick”). Club No. 1, including the building and all of its equipment, was handed over to the board of directors (“William ‘Mac’ McCormick”). Club No. 1 would continue to thrive throughout the rest of the 1920s and eventually joined the council of social agencies (“Olivets, Legal Aid” 1928). By doing so Olivet became part of the Community Chest, a program run by the Reading and Berks Welfare Federation that took local tax money as well as raised money and put it towards local agencies that supported the community of Reading (“Community Chest”). So by joining the Community Chest the Olivet Boys Club gained more prestige in the Reading area as an important social agency and also received more local funding (“Don’t Shove” 1938).

During the 1920s, a lot of activities at the club were educational and recreational (DeGroote 2014). From what was recorded in local newspapers during the time, the more popular physical activities were basketball and baseball. Club No. 1 had several different teams within the club but there was also an Olivet League,
which allowed the boys to compete not only within their club but with other Olivet clubs in the surrounding Berks area (“Arlingtons” 1920). Club No. 1 also had a pool put in during the 1920s, so during the summer months the boys could be found outside swimming (Cremer 1997). Other popular activities were track races and long distance runs where the boys would either compete against other clubs or in some cases against school teams like F. & M. Academy, an all-boys preparatory school for Franklin and Marshall College (“F. & M. Meets” 1922).

Some of the other activities that occurred at Club No. 1 during the twenties were banquets and suppers, which were in most cases hosted by the Ladies Auxiliary. The women were instrumental to these events because they would not only run them but also cook the meals (“Dinner To The” 1920). The Ladies Auxiliary at Club No. 1 was also important in helping to run the Olivet garden plots, which served as a source of income for the club, allowing people in the community to purchase a plot for fifteen dollars each to grow produce for keeping or to sell (“The Value” 1922). The Olivet Boys Club, specifically Club No. 1, provided the boys with organized activity and guidance which gave them the right tools for a successful future. Two boys who attended the Clinton Street Club and made successful careers for themselves were Jesse and Marvin Gehman. The two brothers both attended the Clinton Street Club during the 1920s, which is when Jesse Gehman began his interest in sports and physical fitness (“Jesse Gehman Poses” 1925). Jesse would take his own personal physical fitness to such a level that he was a favorite of famous sculptors because of his “Hercules-like” physique and coincidentally he was the body model for the Christopher Columbus statue that stands in City Park of Reading (“Jesse Gehman Poses” 1925). Jesse was also an amateur wrestler along with his brother Marvin; the pair were well-known throughout the Berks area and professional wrestling community as two of the greatest (Hornbaker). Marvin was so good that he was eventually inducted into the Berks County Chapter of the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame for his 2,327 professional wrestling matches of which he won 1,887 (Hornbaker). Club No. 1 gave these young boys a place to go where they could grow and learn the skills to fulfill their potential.

References


Club No. 2 West Reading

By Afiyo Awouya

Club No. 2 was started in 1912 and was located at Laurel and Minor streets. Paul Otto was the director of the club (“William ‘Mac’ McCormick”). For several years it occupied a single room (“What We Are Doing” 1915). Club No. 2 was also known as the Otto Boys’ Club, named after its director. Otto was also in charge of the Reading Iron Co. Playground, which was located at Laurel Street above 7th and across from the pipe mill (Bigony).

Club No. 2 moved to West Reading in November 1914; the club rented an abandoned picture show house (“What We Are Doing” 1915). This picture show house was on the north side of Penn Street Bridge, but I could not establish the exact address of this location. Edmund Levan, Ralph Bigony, and other members of the advisory committee assisted during this relocation. McCormick had the floor lowered because it was slanted, and a basketball court labeled “ideal” was installed (Bigony). Club No. 2 was very popular at its new location and the full-fledged gymnasium was really appreciated in the neighborhood.
Otto studied medicine at the University of Virginia and graduated with an M.D. in June 1927. Peter Schrack, a former club member, became the director of Club No. 2; he became a probation officer with Berks County after working with the Boys Club (“William ‘Mac’ McCormick”). I was unable to find when Otto stopped working as the director of the club and Schrack stepped in.

Otto Boys’ Club was open every evening and on Saturday afternoons. Some children spent several hours at the club, including afternoons and evenings. The club developed many activities, such as weekly moving picture shows for the little children of the neighborhood, a sewing class for children on Saturday afternoons, Sunday school, the mothers’ meetings, suppers, the visiting nurses clinic, and others. These events were the club’s way of reaching out beyond those who were members (“What We Are Doing” 1915).

Club No. 2 started taking attendance in December 1914. The attendance figures counted only the boys and men who actually belonged to the club and who participated in games, athletics, and other activities. People who just dropped in were not counted. In January 1915, the average monthly attendance for Club No. 2 was 374 (“What We Are Doing” 1915). At the end of December 1916, Club No. 2’s membership of 130 included 14 seniors, 7 intermediates, and 45 juniors. The attendance at Otto Boys’ Club for November 1916 was 1,368 (“800 Members” 1917).

James E. Norton was a treasurer of Club No. 2 (“Olivet at No. 2” 1917) and a financial report from October states:

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Sidney Kline and Earl Seidel were two members of Club No. 2 who participated in the 11th Annual Banquet of Olivet Clubs (“11th Annual Banquet” 1919).

In The Reading News-Times, Club No. 2 was mentioned several times in regard to the participation of the club’s members in various activities. For instance, the Otto Boys’ Club gave a party for the Social Centre’s Girls’ Club on one Friday evening (“Girls Club” 1913). Another article mentions a new bowling team made up of Club No. 2 men of West Reading, with J. George Rishel as manager (“New Season” 1920). Another article describes a Sunday evening at Olivet Club No. 2 with an address made by Schrack (“Olivet Boys” 1920). This implies that by 1920, Schrack was no longer the director of the Otto Boys’ Club. After the death of McCormick in 1923, Club No. 2 was among those that closed because there was no one willing to finance it.

References


Club No. 3 Pendora

By Blake Miller

The first location of Club No. 3 was at 10th and Chestnut streets. This location was offered to the club by Reverend W.F. Klein who originally wanted to use it as a church but later thought it would be better used as a Boys Club. Klein purchased and fixed up the building for the use of the club. This renovation process cost Klein $2,200. This cost included purchase, renovations, and re-erection of the chapel. In turn, the club put up $1,000 to restore the inside of the chapel (“What We Are Doing” 1915).

The club accumulated 180 members in its first year. 156 of these boys were middle school age. The remaining boys were six high school aged boys and 18 elementary aged children. In November 1916, the club had a monthly attendance of 1,754 (“800 Members” 1917).

Club No. 3’s second location was at 17th and Perkiomen, close to Pendora Park. George Ege was elected President of the newly nicknamed “Pendora” Club. During his inaugural speech he spoke about how the Boys Club saved his life when he was a youngster. Ege also talked about how he remembered being invited into the club and watching basketball games (“President Ege’s Address” 1916).

Basketball and baseball were the most popular sports played at Pendora. Track and Field was also popular; banners of past track and field victors hang in the rafters at the Pendora gym. In fact, more than 1,000 spectators were present at the track meet at Pendora on September 4, 1917 (“Fetes Wind Up Playgrounds” 1917).
The county’s boy’s baseball league was split into two divisions: the Northern Division and the Southern Division. Pendora played in the Southern Division. As for basketball, Robert Hilbert played for Pendora. Hilbert later went on to be a star player for the Boyertown High School basketball team. Pendora also hosted the Second Round games for the Ohio League high school basketball tournament. At that time Arthur W. Frobey was the head physical director at Club No. 3. It was Frobey’s idea to implement pool tables into the recreation room at the 10th and Chestnut Street location (“Sand Lots Will Be Punished” 1921).

Club No. 3 was eventually housed in three other locations throughout the years. The first move was to 11th and Cotton in an old market house. The next location transition was to 17th and Perkiomen. Club No. 3 finally moved to its last location at a former Young Women’s Club of America site located on 6th and Walnut. All of these locations were in Reading (“History of Olivet”).

After Ege stepped down as president, Peter Shrack took over his duties as president of Club No. 3. Shrack
was a member as a young boy. Shortly after William McCormick passed away in 1923, Club No. 3 closed.

References


“What We Are Doing.” 1915. The O.B.C. Record No. 89. Olivet BGC Archives.
William McCormick established Club No. 4 Mulberry Street in 1914. It is located at 722 Mulberry St. in a building that was formerly a motion picture theatre and to the right of a blacksmith shop. William H. Luden owned the building before it was Club No. 4—most likely after its time as a movie theater—and granted its use to McCormick rent-free. Due to this and the fact that it was run by volunteers, McCormick was able to renovate Club No. 4 in 1914 and have its doors open for Bill Byerley, Club No. 4’s first member (“History”). Though there was never an effort to make a profit at the club—the dues were only $0.05 a month when the clubs were first organized—the rent-free use also allowed Club No. 4 to be the only one of the original five clubs to be self-supporting (Miller 1927).

After McCormick’s death in 1923, only Club No. 1 and Club No. 4 remained open due to the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Luden (Miller 1927). One document said that the couple bought Club No. 1 and all of the supplies for No. 4, and then sold them to Frank Miller for $1 apiece; Miller then became president of the clubs (“Early Locations”). A few other documents noted that the first superintendent of Club No. 4 was S. Fred Miller, and he served for seven years before being succeeded by Edmund Levan (Miller 1927). Club No. 4 underwent another renovation when Mr. and Mrs. Luden added a three-story addition that cost approximately $12,500 (Miller 1927); I was unable to find the year of the construction.
Sports—basketball in particular—were a huge part of the early history of Club No. 4. The way the basketball teams were organized throughout all of the clubs was that each club had a league with about six teams. The winners from each club’s league would then meet in a championship game at the end of the season. Club No. 4 had a Friday Night League and a Tuesday Night League. The Friday Night League consisted of 15- to 19-year-old boys of any skill-level (“Olivet Teams” 1921). The Garnets were the team most mentioned in The Reading News-Times and seemed to consistently be the best team in Club No. 4’s Friday Night League. In January of 1921, the Garnets participated in a game against the Nicetown Club in Philadelphia; they were the first Reading Junior League team to play at the Nicetown Club. While they lost the game, the members of the team were treated to a lavish banquet that was said to have made up for the disappointment of the loss (“Best Basketball” 1921). The Garnets then went on to be undefeated within the Friday Night League in 1921 (“Garnets Win” 1921).

The Tuesday Night Basketball League at Club No. 4 contained the older, stronger, and more skilled boys at the club (“Olivet Teams” 1921). The Marions seemed to consistently be the champions of the Tuesday Night League; they were the most mentioned team from that league in the newspaper.

The club also had a baseball team that was established in 1921 (“Ball League” 1921). However, other than the article announcing the establishment of the baseball team, there weren’t many reports of the scores or standings found in the historical archives or in the newspaper archives.

There were also multiple reports of the Olivet clubs holding annual banquets hosted by the Mothers’ Club, a group of women who helped the clubs by holding banquets and dinners (“Annual Feast” 1921). The clubs also held annual banquets for the “intermediate” club members, which were also hosted by the Mothers’ Club. In 1921, this banquet for the “Medes” was held at Club No. 4 (“A Banquet” 1922). Along with the banquets, the Mothers’ Club also held Gala Festivals at Club No. 4 where snacks, treats “the kind only mothers can bake” (“Fete for Mothers” 1921), and drinks were served in the clubhouse for people who bought tickets. A gymnastic show also took place at Club No. 4 in January 1922; it is unclear whether it was a one-time show or an annual event (“Mark Best” 1922).

Club No. 4 Mulberry Street celebrated its 100-year anniversary in 2014 in the same building McCormick first started the club in; this is the longest continued use of one building in Olivet history (“History”). The building isn’t the only thing that has remained the same, however. The Mulberry Street Club continues to meet the needs of the children in the surrounding neighborhood in many of the same ways as McCormick’s Club No. 4 did one hundred years ago.

Note

1 Atlases in the Berks Historical Center indicate that the building at 722 Mulberry Street was a cabinet shop in the late 1800s and then Club No. 4 in the 1900-1920s. The atlases never depicted the building being a movie theater. Research on William Luden also never noted that he owned either a cabinet shop or the movie theater. Therefore, I concluded that Luden most likely owned the building after it was a movie theater.
References


Club No. 5 Shillington

By Jami Grunmeier and Keyara Holmes

Note from editor: The authors of this article, Jami and Keyara, did a remarkable job trying to track down the history of Club No. 5. Their work is presented below. There remains, however, some uncertainty about the club's actual location. Hopefully further evidence will be discovered in the future.

Club No. 5 was founded in March, 1921; Harvey Adams was the president and superintendent (“Olivet Club No. 5”). The meeting to organize the club was scheduled for March 14, 1921 and was open to the public. The meeting was to be held on Catherine Street, between New Holland Avenue and Miller Street (“Shillington” 1921). Our research points to 22 Holland Street in Shillington as the location of Club No. 5. Today it is a dilapidated building on its last legs; its roof has collapsed due to the overwhelming weight of snow. But in the 1920s it was a fresh new building built for $7,000 by McCormick for the boys of Reading and Shillington. The building was a “spectacle” as it was a hub for sports in the local area and gave the boys a place to belong. Basketball became one of the first sports to form in the club. “Basketball is being talked about at the Olivet No. 5 at Shillington. Teams are already forming and plans are being made for two leagues” (“Two Leagues” 1922). After these leagues were formed, the boys quickly excelled and won most of the games they played.

Baseball was also loved by the Olivet boys. The Shillington No. 5 Club was particularly successful and won almost all the games they played. The Shillington Club often held gym classes every Monday and Thursday nights, and these were “well attended by the boys” (“Shillington” 1922). The club also had meetings that had nothing to do with sports but more with the mind. “[There] are very capable speakers at every meeting, so that the spiritual as well as the physical side may be developed” (“Shillington” 1922). The community
members were welcomed into the club for these meetings to see what the boys were doing as well as to get involved themselves.

After the founder’s death the club was sold quickly by his heirs (Bigony). Librarians from the Berks History Center and the Shillington police stated that the building was turned into a movie theater as well as a recreation center. Club No. 5, although short lived, had an impact on the character of the boys in the community, the hearts of the volunteers who helped the boys, and the town they all lived in.

References


Clinton Street Pool

By Evan Unruh

Olivet Club No. 1 was one of the very first Olivet clubs built in the Reading area. The big attraction of Club No. 1 was its swimming pool. Upon its completion, the Clinton Street swimming pool was the only outdoor pool in Reading (DeGroote 2014).

Several documents in the Olivet Boys and Girls Club archives have descriptions of when the pool was built, ranging in years from 1921 to 1925. The official year that the Olivet Boys and Girls Club list the Clinton Street pool being built is 1925 (Olivet Boys and Girls Annual Report 1997).

While conducting research on this matter, I was able to find an article from The Reading News-Times stating that the pool was dedicated upon its completion in July 1921. At this dedication, three divers representing their respective clubs (Clubs 1, 2, and 3) dove into the pool to officially open it. There was also a singing of several hymns, a reading of a Psalm, as well as a dedicatory prayer (“Olivet Pool is Jammed” 1921).

Both the boys and men of the club built the pool. Construction and completion of the pool took about two months (“Olivet Pool is Jammed” 1921). Robert D. Cremer stated in “Wonderful Mr. McCormick” that “it was dug out with hand labor; all Olivet boys. I helped every weekend.” Pat Frobey, the superintendent, supervised the entire construction process (Cremer 1997).

When the Clinton Street swimming pool first opened, it was only open to men and boys. Girls were not allowed to swim in the pool, but they were able to get some fun out of watching the boys enjoying themselves (“Olivet Pool Popular” 1924). I was able to confirm this in two 1931 photographs found in the Olivet BGC archives; only young boys are pictured. Since the pool was such a popular spot for the young boys, the Olivet Playground located at Club No. 1 became less popular because the boys just wanted to swim in the pool (“Olivet Pool Popular” 1924).

The Clinton Street pool was used to host various sporting events. These events ranged from swimming and diving meets to water polo matches. The club often hosted swimming contests, according to a swimming contest signup sheet in The Reading News-Times (“Boys’ Swimming Contest” 1922). The club also advertised its water polo games in the The Reading Times (“Water Polo Announcement” 1936). The Olivet club also had a swimming team. They were referred to as “The Olivets” (“West Reading Lands Second” 1932).

When the Clinton Street pool was first built, it was referred to as only the Olivet Pool (“Olivet Pool Popular” 1924).

References


Alvin "Doggie" Julian

By Stephanie Semple

Alvin Julian (top row, left) with the Olivet Midgets Junior League in 1913.

There is very little documented about the early years of Alvin Julian. He was born in Reading to Frank Julian and Marie Faust on April 5, 1901 (Bowen). The only information I could find on him as a child was a photograph of the 12-year-old Julian after winning a trophy in basketball from Olivet in the 1913-1914 basketball season.

Julian’s life became more documented once he got older. From 1915-1919, he attended Reading High School. He was a member of the school’s basketball team all four years, which was a passion that fueled his professional life (Blevins 2012).

After graduation, Julian attended Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania from 1919-1923. During his time there, he earned 10 letters in three different sports: baseball, basketball, and football (Blevins 2012). He had a lot of success on the university’s football team and received All-East and All-American honors (Wilson).
His success during his college athletic years provided Julian with different outlets for a professional sports career. Immediately following college, he joined the NFL team The Pottsville Maroons. The Maroons, emerging from the post-World War I era in 1922, was started by three Pottsville businessmen who hoped to profit from the team. In 1923, the roster picked up Julian, as well other college stars (Gudelunas and Couch 1982). The season ended up being a winning one with a record of 7-3-2 (“1923 Pottsville Maroons” 2006). The success the team had caused it to become a respected name in the NFL for a handful of years, but Julian made his exit after one season due to lack of playing time.

Julian then made his way into professional baseball playing with the Reading Keystones of the International League from 1923-1924 (Blevins 2012). He only played in a total of six games and was dropped from the AA league to the B league the following season. He played for the Harrisburg Senators and the York White Roses from 1924-1925 where he played a total of 100 games and recorded a .305 batting average. In 1926, he was traded to the Lawrence Merry Macks and was then dropped down to the D league playing for the Chambersburg Maroons before dropping out of professional baseball altogether (“Alvin Julian” 2009).

Julian began his coaching career at Schuylkill College (presently known as Albright College) in 1925. He served as the college’s football coach until 1931, which is when he decided to leave college coaching to briefly coach high school (Blevins 2012). In 1933, it was at Ashland High School where Julian took on a lot of responsibilities coaching baseball, basketball, and football (“Alvin ‘Doggie’ Julian” 2003). Ashland’s football team in 1935 was coached by Julian to a perfect record, and they were crowned Eastern Conference Champions (Wilson). After only two years as a high school coach, Julian decided it was time to return to the college world.

Muhlenberg College brought Julian on board in 1936. He served as the college’s baseball, basketball, and football coach (“Alvin ‘Doggie’ Julian” 2003). In 1940, Julian made the move to Allentown, Pennsylvania so he would be closer to the school (Bowen). He coached at Muhlenberg until 1945 and saw a lot of success during his time there as a basketball coach. The team won a Middle Atlantic Conference title and tied for three others. Only one of the nine seasons Julian coached finished with a losing record and he had a 129-71 overall record as a coach (“Alvin ‘Doggie’ Julian” 2003).

In 1945, Julian made the move out of Pennsylvania and into Worchester, Massachusetts to be the head basketball and assistant football coach at Holy Cross College (“Alvin ‘Doggie’ Julian” 2003). It was in 1947 when he really started to get recognition in the basketball community. That year, his team won the Sugar Bowl Championship and the NCAA title, and they became the only New England school to do so (Blevins 2012). He was named the Boston Basketball Writers’ Coach of the Year, and it was also during this time when he coached future Hall of Famer Bob Cousy (“Alvin ‘Doggie’ Julian” 2003). In 1948, his team almost repeated its NCAA victory, but lost in the semi-finals (Wilson). He left Holy Cross College after that year with an overall record of 65-10 (“Alvin ‘Doggie’ Julian” 2003).

His exit from college coaching happened because in 1948 Julian was asked to be the coach of the professional NBA team the Boston Celtics (“Alvin ‘Doggie’ Julian” 2003). He was only there for two seasons because his team didn’t see much success with a 47-81 record (Blevins 2012).
Julian’s final coaching job was at the prestigious Ivy League Dartmouth University in Hanover, New Hampshire ("Alvin ‘Doggie’ Julian" 2003). He signed on as coach in 1950 and had tremendous success. The team won three Ivy League titles in 1956, 1958, and 1959 and Julian coached in three NCAA tournaments (Blevins 2012).

His time with Dartmouth also brought along different types of success. In 1961, Julian published a book called Bread and Butter Basketball. The book discussed the practical and psychological skills necessary to be a basketball coach and game a system to teaching players better habits (Reagan 1961). He also served as the National Association of Basketball Coaches president and was enshrined in the Helms Athletic Foundation Hall of Fame ("Alvin ‘Doggie’ Julian” 2003).

On December 29, 1966, Julian suffered a stroke while coaching a basketball game in Rochester, New York for the Kodak City Classic. His condition was not deemed critical, but it ultimately led to his death the following year ("Doggie Julian, Stroke Victim” 1966).

On July 28, 1967, Julian passed away at a nursing home in White River Junction, Vermont at the age of 66. The cause of death was determined to be Arteriosclerotic Heart Disease, which is a hardening of the arteries (Stephens 1967). He was buried back home at Wyomissing Cemetery and was survived by wife Lena, sons Alvin Jr. and Franklin, and daughter Mrs. Robert Beckwith (Abbe 2010).

Julian continued to receive honors for his coaching career well after his death. In 1968, Julian was enshrined to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, which honors over 300 people who have made exceptional contributions to basketball ("History of the Naismith” 2009). He was also inducted into the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame in 1976 and the College Basketball Hall of Fame in 2006 (Wilson). He left a college coaching legacy by coaching in five NCAA tournaments, coaching in two National Invitation Tournaments, and recording an overall record of 386-343 (Blevins 2012). He had a lot of success with basketball, beginning with that Olivet basketball trophy from 1913-14.

References


Karl "Buck" Friedmann

By Elizabeth Boulanger and Jessica Condon

Karl “Buck” Friedmann, a well-loved Olivet alumnus, was born on August 19, 1903 to Albert and Catherine (“Berks County” 1905). He was a student at Reading High School from 1917-1921. He was very involved with athletics as a child; “he was an outstanding Olivet athlete, and at Reading High, and Dartmouth” (“Olivet Old Timers” 1967). He played on the Olivet Arrows basketball team in 1916-1917. The next year, he was both a coach for the younger boys who played for the Olivet Elaines and a Senior League champion while a player for the Ideal basketball team (Basketball Binder). While at Dartmouth, Buck played basketball his sophomore, junior, and senior years (Dartmouth 1922-25). Buck became captain of the Dartmouth basketball team during his junior year (Dartmouth 1923-24).

Buck married fellow Reading native Sara E. Fahrenbach and was the father of two children: Karl Jr. and Barbara. Karl Jr. followed his father’s example and attended Dartmouth for his medical internship and residency. He has an M.D. and currently practices medicine in Connecticut (“Dr. Karl Friedmann” 2014).

Buck Friedmann earned a master’s degree from Columbia University. He taught in Wilmington, DE before moving back to Pennsylvania and becoming a math teacher at Girard College in 1935. In 1954, Friedmann was chosen as the head of the Orphan’s Institute at Girard College. The next year, he was elected vice president. Two years later, he became the acting president. Despite his responsibilities to the college, Buck still made time to go back to Olivet and speak to the gathered members, both old and new.


References


Edgar Elias "Dusty" Bredbenner

By Jessica Hartman and Kathryn Furman

Edgar Elias Bredbenner was a child in the Olivet Boys Club in the early years and even attended Club No.1. Bredbenner was born in Reading on February 18, 1891. He was the fourth child born to Anson Luther and Agnes J. Bredbenner, and he had nine brothers and sisters. His older brothers were Alyera, Orlas, and Albert. Edgar’s younger siblings were Flossie, Anson A., Loretta, Agnes V., Harvey, and Ester (“E.E. Bredbenner Still Lives” 1971). Although Bredbenner had many siblings, he didn’t go unnoticed by his family, friends, and community. Many people noticed him so much that they nicknamed him “Dusty” because of how he would speed around corners on his motorcycle and throw dust in the air (“E.E. Bredbenner Still Lives” 1971).

Eddie Bredbenner, 3rd from left in back row, is pictured with the basketball team near the turn of the century.

Throughout his childhood and young adulthood Bredbenner lived in Reading and attended Club No.1, also known as the Clinton Street Club (Pamphlet). Not only was he part of the Boys Club, he was also involved with Boy Scouts for 35 years (“E.E. Bredbenner Still Lives” 1971). In his older years, he was a scoutmaster at the World Jamboree in 1937 (“Edgar E. (Dusty) Bredbenner, Sr.”). The archived materials from Olivet include several pictures of Bredbenner taken after winning the state championship in basketball during the...
1907-1908 season with Club No.1.

After attending the club and participating in sports activities, such as basketball, baseball, football, and track, Bredbenner became very interested in physical education. Before he moved to Ithaca and began his career in Physical Education, he married Olla Knaut, a Reading schoolteacher and playground leader (“E.E. Bredbenner Still Lives” 1971). When Bredbenner and Olla moved to Ithaca, New York, Bredbenner attended Schuylkill Seminary, NY University, and Cornell University and eventually earned a degree in Physical Education. By 1940 he had become an active coach in Ithaca. He started a badminton team, organized a rifle team, and directed city basketball leagues for both men and women (“Edgar E. (Dusty) Bredbenner, Sr.”). Bredbenner also played on an inter-collegiate team (“Busy Days for Bredbenner” 1922) and helped to rebuild several Ithaca playgrounds (“E.E. Bredbenner Still Lives” 1971). He was also a superintendent of recreation in public schools in Ithaca (Silva 1963).

When he moved to Ithaca, Bredbenner stayed involved in his hometown. During the summer, he often returned home to visit his parents and coach track and field, as well as help with the basketball teams at the clubs (Silva 1963). He did this until his parents passed away. After that, no information was found on him coming home and being active in the community.

He retired in 1958 after 38 years of service in Ithaca Public Schools (“Edgar E. (Dusty) Bredbenner, Sr.”). He made such an impact on the Ithaca community that they named a football field after him at Ithaca High School, which is now known as the E.E. (Dusty) Bredbenner Field (“E.E. Bredbenner Still Lives” 1971). One person even said of Bredbenner, there is “not sufficient space to list all accomplishments” (“Edgar E. (Dusty) Bredbenner, Sr.”). Bredbenner passed away in 1982 in Tompkins, Delaware County, New York (“Edgar Bredbenner” 2014).

References


Pamphlet. Olivet BGC Archives. Binder 5.

Stewart "Spike" Leon Moyer

By Stephen E. Doyle and Edward V. Burns

The Olivet Boys and Girls Club has come a long way since its humble beginnings in 1898 (DeGroote 2014). That is due in large part to the contributions made by those who helped build it and guide it. One such man was Stewart “Spike” Leon Moyer, a man who was well-respected in the community of Reading. Moyer was a man who made his work all about fun. His life was dedicated to recreation, particularly for kids. Moyer didn’t spend his whole life working for the Olivet Club; he accomplished many things in many fields throughout the course of his life. A standout athlete and an NCAA Division One All-American soccer player, a 30-year career as a U.S. Naval Officer, and his time at Olivet are just pieces of who he was and what he did.

Moyer was born on August 24, 1913. It wasn’t much later that he became an Olivet member in 1919. Like many of his fellow Olivet boys, Moyer grew to be a tremendous athlete, which lasted throughout his entire life. Richard DeGroote came to Penn State Berks on February 20, 2014 to speak about the early times of the club and he noted that Moyer was a standout in basketball, soccer, and gymnastics. Moyer graduated from Reading High School in 1931 (Biography). “Reading is very proud of its high school, in which future citizens of the United States are being trained every year” the school yearbook, The Arxalma, read that year.
The education system was recorded as being cutting edge, “courses are offered with all modern facilities needed in the teaching of them. The machine and printing shops, the cooking and dressmaking rooms, besides clean, light recreation rooms and a large, beautiful auditorium go to make life at the school a pleasure for pupils and teachers” (The Arxalma 1931). DeGroote also noted that Moyer’s next stage of the journey would be possible in large part to the scholarship provided to him by the Olivet Boys Club, which sent him to Springfield.

Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts was where Moyer proved himself as a standout athlete. A Springfield yearbook states that he starred on the soccer team, which he captained in 1937, the lacrosse team, and gymnastics. He won the New England Tumbling Championship in 1936 and played on the inter-class football, wrestling, and baseball teams. In addition to all of this he was the president of the Maroon Key Society, tutored soccer, gymnastics, dancing, was an American Red Cross Lifesaver and Examiner, and was a member of the Varsity and Cosmopolitan Clubs. In his junior year at Springfield, Moyer earned a physical education scholarship to attend the Berlin, Germany School of Physical Education, a college with an exchange program with Springfield. Later he went to the Nils Bukh School for Danish gymnastics and took a skiing course in Austria. Another interesting element of his studies included his time traveling with Charles Lindbergh, with whom he toured the Luftwaffe in pre-war Germany (DeGroote 2014). He also attended a German military school for physical education in approximately 1937.

In August of 1942 Moyer entered the U.S. Navy and became a Lieutenant. He spent a year as the Assistant Welfare Recreation Officer at Sampson Naval Training Station in New York. He attended Amphibious Warfare & Navy Ordinance School and was Division Officer for an Ordinance Company (Biography 2000). In 1944 he was a small boat officer and in 1945 he became the Executive Officer for Advanced Naval Base in Germany. Later, he became the Acting Commanding Officer of Headquarter Company for Naval Forces in Germany when he was promoted to Lieutenant Commander. 1946 saw Moyer moved to inactive reserve status, where he would remain for the rest of his 30 years of service. From 1946 to 1959 he was the Commanding Officer of the Local Naval Reserve Unit, from 1952 to 1959 he was Commandant’s Representative of the 4th Naval District. He became a Captain in 1962 and spent three years as the Chairman of the Officer’s Advisory Board. He was the Eastern Pennsylvania Commanding Officer for the U.S. Naval Academy Blue and Gold program from 1964 to 1972, which was for information and screening of Academy applicants. In 1972 Moyer retired from the Navy (Biography).

Moyer’s son, Michael Moyer, stated that while in Germany during the war, Moyer’s unit helped liberate Dachau and he documented the atrocities that occurred there. Mike read a letter written from his father to one of his uncles stating that he had witnessed atrocities (Moyer 2014).

Moyer was an active duty father, worker, and member of the community during that time, too. Moyer married Marie C. Noll on September 3, 1938 at St. Mark’s Reformed Church. Their reception was held at the Olivet Club at West Oley and Eisenbrown streets, maintaining Moyer’s connection to the place of his boyhood memories (“Marie C. Noll” 1938). They had one son together who would go on to earn his doctorate in physical education and teach at Penn State Berks.
Before he left for the Navy, Moyer worked for the City of Reading, starting in 1938. He worked to organize athletics and recreational leagues and tournaments in the city (Reber 1984). He formed the first Greater Reading Football League in 1939. When he returned from the war, he went back to the city, working for the recreation department for a total of 30 years (Reber 1984). He worked as the Director of Recreation for the City of Reading until 1965, when a bit of controversy broke out. “I grew up at the Olivet Boys—that is where I learned about sports and where I got my first job as a lifeguard,” he said (Reber 1984). The club offered him considerably more money than he had been making while working for the city. There was much popular support for Moyer to stay with the city. As recorded in The Reading Times, “City Hall sources said the hubbub generated by the Moyer money issue had given rise to increased pressure by other employees [sic] for instant wage hikes such as that offered Moyer.” Michael Moyer explains the situation this way: “an independent recreation board that oversaw the department would not accept my father’s resignation. The board . . . approached city council and asked for the raise for my father. This action caused a bit of a controversy, but once that occurred my father again submitted his resignation to the recreation board and this time they did reluctantly accept it thus ending the issue.”

At the end of his career with the city he was honored with a plaque. At that event he said, “It’s a solemn occasion. It’s been 30 wonderful years of association with people… I could not have had a better department staff during the years.” He had been offered to go to work in Minnesota at one time for $13,000, but “Spike didn’t want to go. He’s a Reading boy; he likes Reading” and that’s where he stayed. “They don’t come any better than Moyer, as a man and as a recreation leader.”

Moyer passed away in 2000. His widow, Marie, found some new information after her husband died, which she relayed in a letter to her son, Michael, and which Michael disclosed to us. “He was in Espionage – his year of study at the University of Berlin, Germany (counted for his Junior Year of study at Springfield) was a great asset in war as he was fluent in German and whenever he and Carlton Greider had ‘time off’ they traveled to various regions throughout Germany.” She also noted that she had found a letter of Commendation from the Admiral W.P. Mack, Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy. After Moyer passed away, Marie Moyer received a letter from Paul J. Hoh, President of Reading City Council on June 14, 2000, stating, “My memories are of someone who always brought so much energy and enthusiasm to everything of which he was a part!” He also wrote, “We can only hope that you take some measure of comfort in remembering all of the many ways in which his life touched thousands of people, young and old, and helped make Reading the wonderful place it has been for families.”

References

The Arxalma. 1931. Reading High School. Berks History Center


Lottie I. Lutz and Howard S. Reeser (Lottie and "Pops")

By Jeannelia Santiago

Among the many individuals who played a role in the history of the OBC, Lottie I. Lutz and Howard S. “Pops” Reeser stand out. Lutz’s contribution was through the form of arts and education; she was a teacher of sorts in the club. Reeser was the basketball coach for many years and is credited with leading the team to a number of championships.

Lutz is said to have been the first female staff member for the OBC (DeGroote 2014). Her role on the club staff was that of a teacher; she taught the boys how to read, and she also gave music lessons, specifically guitar and mandolin lessons to both boys and girls (Lutz 1907). There is not much more mentioned about Lutz in the archive records as far as her involvement. However, through information collected from various sources, I was able to get some details of her personal life. Lutz was born on November 10, 1878, to Mr. Lewis H. Lutz and Mrs. Lucy Elizabeth Wagner Lutz. She was the third of four children. Her siblings were Flora J. Lutz, W. Irwin Lutz, and Harvey E. Lutz (Tipton 2013). Her address in all records is listed as 734 Thorn Street in Reading, PA.

Lottie Lutz, second from the left, wearing a hat, with club members.
According to resident records for the city of Reading maintained at The Berks History Center of Berks County, Lutz was a salesperson in 1900. Three years later, she was a teacher. Based off information gathered from various articles in the *The Reading News-Times*, I believe she was also a teacher at the Cross Key School. In an article from March 25, 1916, there is a report from a third annual entertainment event held by the school in which she is mentioned as having played a role (“Third Annual Event” 1916). There are also a few photographs of Lutz in the archives, one photograph of her alone posing outdoors for the camera, one of her with the kids, and one of her headstone at her burial site. Lutz passed away in July 1976 at the age of 97 (Tipton 2013). I have not found any record of her having been married or having children, but she is buried at Greenwood Cemetery in Hamburg, PA (Tipton 2013).

Reeser was the basketball coach for over 15 years (Reeser 1916). There are several pictures of him with the members of the team he coached. Most seem to be from championships. Although I was unable to find much information about Reeser, one interesting article from *The Reading News-Times* on February 10, 1917 has to do with a dispute as to whether Reeser’s team had in fact won the championship that year (“Mohnton Answers” 1917). It was difficult to gather personal information regarding Reeser because there were so many records associated with the name Howard S. Reeser in the city during his time.

References


John Morgan Davis

By Larnelle La Rose and Ciara Gonzalez

As a boy growing up in Shenandoah, PA, John Morgan Davis had ambitious dreams of becoming a lawyer (“Did You Know” 1972). His parents, William J. Davis and Sarah R. Morgan, moved to Reading when Davis was five years old. He became an Olivet member as a boy although we could find no records in the Olivet Archives of his attendance during that time. Davis came from humble beginnings, and he was described by his mom as “a very good student.” His father was a barber, sales representative, and grocer; Davis followed in the footsteps of his dad by working hard. While in high school he also worked in a grocery store to earn spending money. One of his inspirations in becoming a lawyer was because his father had a secret passion of becoming a lawyer (“John Morgan Davis Is Appointed” 1963).

Davis went to Reading High School and graduated in 1924. According to Reading High School’s 1924 yearbook, Davis had many nicknames, including, “Johnnie,” “Jack,” and “J.D.” He received the Bronze Scholarship award and he played baseball, football, and basketball; he was a member of the Glee Club and Scrub Football. In his quote in the yearbook, he promised to be a “permanent lawyer” (“John Morgan Davis” 1924). There is also a story in the yearbook about Davis helping a friend with some legal work; it states, “He once kept ‘Sam’ out of jail.” “Sam” then gave “J.D” two quarts of wood alcohol. After drinking this he became “woody.” He also won the suit of “Farmer Jones when Josephine’s father sued ‘Farmer’ for 25 cents” (“John Morgan Davis” 1924).

Davis received a bachelor’s degree in economics at the University of Pennsylvania in 1929 and earned a law degree at Penn’s law school in 1932. During his senior year in college in 1929, he entered broadcasting as an unpaid announcer for WLIT, Philadelphia. Also in his broadcasting career he did free announcing for WRAW in Reading as well as WIP and WHAT Radio in Philadelphia. Davis developed such a great love for broadcasting that in January 1931, while still in law school, he became a paid full-time announcer at WCAU Radio and became night supervisor later that year (“Did You Know” 1972).
The next year Davis married Eva Pierson and they had three children: Patricia, Carole, and John Jr. They resided in Philadelphia. Davis became Vice President and General Counsel and a minority stockholder of the radio station (“Did You Know” 1972). From 1944 to 1946, Davis was the general counsel for the National Association of Broadcasting and served as the adviser to Committee on Education and other types of programming (“Lieutenant Governor” 1960). In 1951 he was elected to the Philadelphia Common Pleas bench in the Democratic sweep that captured the mayoralty from the Republicans for the first time in 68 years (“Lieutenant Governor” 1960). He was appointed to the federal court at age 56. Davis stated, “Law is my life and I am happy to serve it” (“John Morgan Davis Is Appointed” 1963).

Davis had a deep interest in education. His son John Jr., who was 11 years old at the time, asked his father if he could attend summer camp. Davis replied, “You must earn that right son.” John Jr. stated, “But I can’t earn that much money.” Davis replied, “I’ll supply the money. You just improve your marks (or grades) in school, that’s the important thing” (“Lieutenant Governor” 1960).

Davis was described as a “man with a constant twinkle in his brown eyes” and at age 53 was asked by Governor David Lawrence to spearhead a citizens’ committee study of the state’s schools from kindergarten to college. He was quoted as having “a deep interest in education” and was “deeply appreciative of the chance to help make public schooling even better.” No one was more proud of Davis’s efforts in his love for education than his son who not only went to camp that year but also stated that he was “happy his father poked into his education” (“Lieutenant Governor” 1960).
Davis was so involved in education that he served as the president of the PTA of Philadelphia Girls High for six years, and eventually served as the honorary president while his daughter, Carole, was “a senior at the school for advanced academic students” (“Lieutenant Governor” 1960). In 1960, his eldest daughter, Patricia Ann, age 23, was a University of Pennsylvania graduate student majoring in Russian and held a degree as a language teacher. During his time in the PTA, Davis said, “We worked closely with the faculty to provide the best possible education for our daughters” (“Lieutenant Governor” 1960). He is quoted as stating: “I’m very happy over the way Philadelphia public schools educated my children.” He added that, “Improvements always can be made. I feel strongly that government, national and state, has failed over the years to take full advantage of the assets in our most intelligent children” (“Lieutenant Governor” 1960).

Davis was also a part of the Olivet Boys Club. There isn’t a lot of information about him being involved in the club as a kid, but he was a part of the Olivet Old Timers Club. Each year it held a reunion for past members to come and catch up with old friends, talk about where the club was heading, and discuss some of the projects and events the club was involved with. The archives include a letter from Glenn Bigony to Davis inviting him to the Olivet’s Father and Son Dinner (Bigony, Glenn 1959). There were also letters sent back and forth between Ralph Bigony and Davis inviting him to the Olivet’s Old Timers Banquet and of Davis accepting the invitation and thanking Bigony for giving him the “thrill of going back to his long beloved Olivet Boys’ Club to renew so many old and valued friendships;” many of those people he had not seen in more than thirty years (Bigony, Ralph 1964). In this letter Davis also tells Bigony that he hopes the Scholarship he would assign would help some Olivet boys achieve happiness in their future just as his scholarship from Senator James Norton helped him achieve his success and happiness (Davis). Again, this reinforces Davis’s care and commitment toward education and that Olivet helped Davis to earn his college education.

References


Chapters
Arthur Wilson "Pat" Frobey

Arthur Wilson "Pat" Frobey

By Stephen E. Doyle and Edward V. Burns

Arthur Wilson Frobey, more commonly referred to as “Pat,” was an integral part of the Olivet Boys Club. He devoted 44 years of service to the Olivet Boys Club, carrying out the ideals of its founder (Binder 18).

Frobey stepped into McCormick’s shoes so that McCormick’s great work might continue. On November 15, 1956, the Oldtimers adopted a resolution, extending their thanks to Frobey who retired on October 1, 1956 (Binder 8). Included in the resolution was a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

“Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.”

As Jeff Palmer said in his visit to the Penn State Berks Campus on February 20, 2014, “I didn’t go to the club to have my character built, but it happened,” which has a lot to do with the guidance of Frobey.

Frobey was born in Reading on September 18, 1891 to Augustus and Amanda (Huber) Frobey. He became involved with the Olivet Club as a boy in 1903. “He just seemed to be a neighborhood kid who grew up near Clinton Street” (DeGroote 2014). Frobey was a member of the Olivet Sick Committee in 1907, which involved checking in on ill members (“Our Sick Committee” 1907).
Pat Frobey (front, right) with the 1908-1909 Olivet Juniors

As was the case for most kids with Olivet, Frobey was very involved with sports. He played basketball and worked and volunteered with the club. He first played basketball with the Victors when the Boys Friendly Club played its games in the Luden Building and captained the Olivet basketball team for ten years (Binder 18).

He was a notable player in the area, one who garnered notoriety at times. One such time was on March 7, 1916 when he nearly caused a mob fight for his seemingly rough play. “Several hundred Pottstown fans threatened to mob Pat Frobey, of the Olivet Club” and he “had to be escorted from the hall directly to the train station in a taxicab” (“Pottstown Fans” 1916). The fans even stormed the court at one point, but “cooler heads prevented any rough stuff” in the 31 to 18 loss to the Senecas. In addition to his skills on the court, he “covered first base and performed in the outfield as a baseball player. He was a halfback and end on the OBC football teams. Pat later managed the diamond and gridiron teams” (Binder 18).

In 1913 Frobey worked at the Fall Rivers Boys Club, then worked at the Olivet Club until his retirement (DeGroote 2014). At Fall Rivers he served as an athletic instructor (“Pat Frobey Dies” 1965). Frobey became Director of Olivet Boys Club No. 1, succeeding Howard Myers who became superintendent, in 1914 (Binder 15). Frobey worked in a variety of positions, ultimately serving as superintendent from 1917-1956. He was the president of the Middle Atlantic Area of Boys Clubs of America. He was also a lifetime member of the
Boys Club Professional Association and a founder of the Reading Junior Optimist Club. Frobey helped organize the City Playground system and was also known as a wrestling coach. He coached Marvin “Mercer” Gehman who was a professional wrestler known for the “Atomic Dropkick.” He also coached Spike Moyer and Emanuel “Minny” Pezdirc who wrestled in the Navy during World War II. Frobey was at the helm of the Olivet Club as executive director for many years, until his retirement in 1956. At one point, in 1947, he ran unsuccessfully for city council as a Republican candidate (“Rites Wednesday” 1965).

A U.S. Army veteran of World War I, Frobey was also affiliated with Ephrata Post 429, American Legion and Strawbridge-McCloud Barracks, 72, Veterans of World War I, and the Boys Club Professional Association (Olivet BGC Archives). He was a former president of the Middle Atlantic Area of the Boys Clubs of America (“Pat Frobey Dies” 1965). He was also in charge of the Kiwanis Club’s Camp Joy for underprivileged children (“Rites Wednesday” 1965).

Frobey passed away at the age of 73. The two Olivet clubs on Clinton and Mulberry streets were closed for the day in honor of a man who had devoted his lifetime to helping many underprivileged boys. Several hundred people attended the viewing held in the funeral home. His hard work, dedication, and years of service to the Boys Club, combined with his athletic ability, make Frobey an Olivet legend.

References


Olivet BGC Archives. Binder 8.

Olivet BGC Archives. Binder 15.

Olivet BGC Archives. Binder 18.


Paul "Doc" Pieffer

By Breana McKenney

In 1905, The Olivet Boys Club gained one of its newest members. Paul Matthias Peifer was born on January 3, 1892 in the Schuylkill Avenue area to John and Ida Peifer. At age 13, Peifer was one of the new kids to join the OBC. He joined Olivet when it was located on the fourth floor of the Luden Candy Factory on the northeast corner of 6th and Washington streets (“Paul Peifer Recalls Club Days”). He was a member of Club No. 1 when he joined (The O.B.C. Record). He immediately got involved with sports when he began his time at Olivet. I found a picture of him and the Olivet Comets (1905-06) in the Lauer’s Park Building. From the picture, the Olivet Comets appear to be a basketball team.

Peifer continued with Olivet when it moved from Lauer’s Park, to Luden’s Natatorium, and then again to Clinton and West Oley streets (“Paul Peifer Recalls Club Days”). He also played baseball with Olivet in 1909 at age 17 (“Reading Beaten in Ninth Inning” 1909). At age 18, Peifer was a part of Reading High School’s class of 1910.

After high school, Peifer graduated from Interstate Commercial College. In 1910, Peifer lived with his parents and his three siblings, Frederick G., Blanch S., and Edward W., in Reading Ward 15 (“1910 United States Federal Census about Paul M. Peifer” 1910). He was still 18 at the time and was the second oldest of all the siblings. In 1911, he wrote a song called “Our Teams” for the Olivet Songbook. Also in 1914, he wrote another song called “The Banquet Song.”

Peifer was admitted into the Olivet Truemen. Those admitted into this group had to have completed at least 10 years of service in an Olivet club and had to be at least 21 years of age (“The Olivet Truemen”). He was baptized at St. Luke’s Lutheran Church on May 10, 1892 (“Pennsylvania and New Jersey” 1892).

In 1922, Peifer sang for an audience at one of the Olivet banquets. Apparently the song he sang, which was not specified, he had sung at every Olivet banquet since he wrote it years earlier (“Peifer Sings Own Song” 1922). While searching through the archives, I found that Peifer was the manager of the Olivet football team. The article gives an address for Peifer at 527 Schuylkill Avenue (“Olivets Ready for Pigskin Play” 1920). This may be the address of his residency during that time. Another article that I found was about Reading High’s first football game of the season. Peifer must have been the manager of this team as well as the Olivet, since “manager Paul Peifer” was written in this particular article (“R.H.S. to Open” 1923).

In 1921, Peifer married Minnie Sweitzer. They were married in their home at 1124 Butter Lane where Minnie’s family owned a farm for generations (“Paul Peifer Recalls Club Days”). The ceremony took place in the living room of their home. Five years later in 1926, Minnie gave birth to their first baby girl at the Reading Hospital. They named her Margery (“Births” 1926). Peifer and his wife had another girl, Sara Ann. She may have been named after Minnie’s mother, Sara Sweitzer. Sara Ann was born in about 1930.
In addition to their two children, Peifer and his wife had other household members in 1940. Minnie’s mother Sara Sweitzer and her two brothers Jeremiah and Samuel B. Sweitzer all lived in the home located in Exeter (“1940 United States Federal Census” 1940). At that time, Peifer was 48 years old. I came across an article on Sara Sweitzer’s 75th birthday celebration which took place in Stony Creek (“Diamond Birthday Observed” 1927). It was a picnic dinner attended by Peifer and Minnie and many other family members on both the Peifer and Sweitzer sides.

In 1939 in Stony Creek Mills, Paul and Minnie Peifer attended a chicken dinner held by the choir of Bethany Lutheran Church (“Bethany Church Choir” 1939). Peifer was a tenor in that same church choir at the time (“Paul Peifer Recalls Club Days”). Minnie was on the committee of arrangements for the event. Throughout his lifetime, Peifer worked as a printer at the Telegram, an evening newspaper (“Paul Peifer Recalls Club Days”). He also worked as an inspector in 1940 (“1940 United States Federal Census about Paul Peifer” 1940).

At 50 years old, Peifer joined the army to serve in World War II (“U.S., World War II Draft” 1942). This was his second time in war. He also served in World War I in 1917 when he was only 25 years old (“U.S., World War I Draft” 1917). His dates of service were July 1, 1918 through January 1, 1919 (“Pennsylvania, Veterans Burial Cards” 1777-1999). After his service in 1919, Peifer was temporarily elected president of the Olivet Veterans (“Local News Notes” 1919). Many years after serving his country, Peifer was employed by the Berkshire Knitting Mills for 37 years. He retired in 1957 (“Deaths”).

As he grew older, Peifer still seemed to love singing. He and Clarence “Bushy” Rhoads led the songs at the Olivet banquet on April 24, 1965 (“Olivets to Dine Next Saturday” 1965). I found that Peifer’s name began to appear in the McCormick Memorial Foundation section of the Olivet banquet program in 1971, but I think he actually joined in 1968. It was mentioned that he immediately joined the “Mac” McCormick foundation after attending the last banquet; this was in 1967, so I assumed 1966 would be the year he joined. I found multiple programs with his name listed. To have been on this list, members must have had contributed at least $100 or more to invest and help assure that there will always be an Olivet Boys’ Club.

Olivet lost Peifer as an involved participant on March 13, 1978 (“Pennsylvania, Veterans Burial Cards” 1978). I could not find a cause of death, but he died in his home leaving behind his wife and both of his children plus four grandchildren and two son-in-laws. Margery was the wife of Richard Feroe and Sara was the wife of Emit Milner (“Deaths”). Peifer was 86 years old at the time. He was buried in Spies Zion Cemetery located in Alsace Township (“Pennsylvania, Veterans Burial Cards” 1978). Minnie lived to be 92 years old. She died in October 1988 (“Minnie S. Peifer Social Security Death Index (SSDI) Death Record” 1988). Paul was a true member of the Olivet club even after he was too old to be a member.

References


By Bianca Sepulveda and Ashley Offenback

Olivet boy Ralph Oliver Bigony was extremely involved in club activities and interested in the Olivet story, more so than others. He viewed William McCormick, or Mac, as he was affectionately referred to by all club boys, with extreme admiration. Bigony’s involvement in Olivet helped create different avenues in his life (DeGroote 2014).

Bigony spent much of his life collecting newspaper articles and documents about McCormick and Olivet. It was many years after McCormick’s death in 1923 that Bigony realized he had acquired enough records to form a written history. After his retirement in 1961, he began a quest to fill in missing gaps of information in his knowledge of Olivet. He wrote letter after letter in attempt to discover anything and everything he could about McCormick’s life and the Olivet story. He tirelessly devoted his life to tracking down the information he needed to formulate a complete picture (Ralph Bigony Binder). Bigony was over 70 years old when he finally compiled the pieces together in a publication entitled History of Olivet Boys Club in Reading.

Bigony’s intense reverence of Mac shines through his work. He writes about McCormick and the early days of the club in 1898: “With a second-hand piano, which he played expertly, some picture books, a croquignole set, a few sets of Indian Clubs and dumbbells, he had started an effort to reach boys whom he felt needed to be guided rightly. What they lacked in member-ship was made up in enthusiasm” (Bigony).

Ralph Bigony with his Olivet archives.
Bigony was also involved in organizing Olivet Club reunions after his retirement. The boys gathered to participate in or watch the Old Timers basketball games regularly. The Olivet Archives has Bigony’s membership cards from 1975, 1976, 1977, and 1982. Bigony planned the Old Timers annual banquet in 1964. He wrote letters to the former Olivet boys, inviting them to attend the banquet and reunite with their brothers. For many of the Old Timers banquets he supplied photographs—lining the wall of the gymnasium—that he collected during his years as an Olivet boy. He displayed photos of many Olivet functions, including basketball team championships, track marathons, gymnastic competitions, and summer outings. These photos can be found in the detailed Olivet Archives kept by the organization.

Outside of Olivet life, Bigony lived as a working class boy. Bigony was born on January 20, 1894 in Flemington, PA to Katie and Robert Bigony, a butcher and steel mill laborer. As the middle child, Bigony had two older siblings, Mary and William and two younger brothers, Samuel and Glenn (“1900 U.S. Federal Census”). Bigony was born with black hair and brown eyes and grew up to be five feet nine inches (“U.S. World War II Draft Registration Card” 1942).

At the age of 14, Bigony lived at Frederick Street in Clinton County (“1910 U. S. Federal Census”). As a teenager of the working class, Bigony held his first job as an inker boy at a shoe factory in 1908 (“1910 U.S. Federal Census”). At the age of 16 Bigony joined the Olivet Boys Club (DeGroote 2014). 1910 was the year of the first official Olivet building on Clinton Street in Reading (Olivet Boys and Girls Annual Report 1997).

In 1915, he divorced his first wife and married Clara Williams Sands. Within the same year, they had their first son, Donald Ralph (“1920 U.S. Federal Census”). Two years later, Bigony registered for the World War I draft as a conscientious objector (“U.S. World War 1 Draft Registration Card” 1917) and worked as a shoe laster for Curtis Jones Company (“1920 U.S. Federal Census”). During the early 1900s, shoes were mainly made by hand. Feet had to be molded into a stone or wooden mold or last, to ensure proper fit. The shoe laster tacked and sewed the soles to the upper shoe, a task that required great skill (Karwatka 2010).

In addition to Bigony’s numerous occupations, he was also an active member of the Socialist party. By 1935, he was an organizer for the party. Bigony spoke at a meeting of party supporters at the Labor Lyceum in 1935: “Our present job is to get the workers of Reading registered. Do not be deceived. After the primaries we will find that we still have to beat Fusion. Fusion is possible only a little more difficult. The Democratic wing has declared against Fusion, but the Republicans still poll a vote of 7,000 in the city. That’s worth several candidates to the Democrats anytime” (“Warns Socialists” 1935).
The Socialist party faced opposition from many people in Reading and the party headquarters at Reed and Walnut streets was burglarized in 1936. A record filing cabinet, typewriter, mimeograph machine, and countless records were stolen. Among the records were lists of active members in the city and county, charters, lists of voters, lists of members of the past 30 years, and personal papers of Bigony’s. Bigony told The Reading Eagle he did not report the incident to the police because, “I don’t think city hall is in sympathy with my viewpoint in Socialist matters” (“Taken, Charge” 1936).

Bigony was confident someone with a key committed the crime, and he claimed to know who it was. He had heard rumors prior to the break-in, but assumed them to be untrue. He said, “I didn’t pay any attention to it. I thought it was just a lot of talk.” The Socialist party had recently split in ranks and widened by the secession of the state organization and this caused some tension among members. Bigony took the burglary very personally. “As secretary and organizer for the county party, I am personally charged with the safekeeping of those records. No one had any authority to remove them and to my mind their disappearance is a theft,” he said (“Taken, Charge” 1936). Bigony died in 1982 at the age of 88 in Reading (“U.S. Social Security Death Index” 1935).

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William Luden

By Nicholas Hildenbrand

William H. Luden was an instrumental figure in the Olivet Boys Club. According to the Olivet Archives, Luden was friends with the club’s founder, William McCormick. Luden allowed the club to occupy the fourth floor of his factory in 1903 and it was used by the club for two years. After McCormick’s death, Luden bought the equipment of all five Olivet clubs and gave it to the president, Frank Miller. During his lifetime Luden also purchased the buildings for what was then named Club No. 1 and Club No. 4 (Olivet BGC Archives).

Luden was born to a watchmaker and his wife on March 5, 1859 in Reading. According to an article retrieved from the Berks History Center, when Luden was 14 he became an apprentice to a Reading candy maker known as Color and Barret, which was located at 310 Penn Street (Reading Times 1949). Another article from the Berks History Center states that Luden initially learned his candy making skills through his first employer. Using molasses, brown sugar, and a few other ingredients he made a syrupy mixture which he then poured into brass molds. When the syrup hardened the candy was removed and sold.

When Luden left Color and Barret he went to another candy shop but quickly found himself dissatisfied working for someone else. It was then that he decided to start making candies on his own. He set up shop in his mother’s five by six foot kitchen and within his first year produced 30,000 pounds of candy (Worley 1981). An article from the Berks History Center states he made this candy after borrowing some molds from a previous employer, Ike Barret. His early candies included sweets like peanut bars and “moshies.” Moshies were clear, hard candies colored red and yellow that were shaped like chickens or roosters and sold for a penny apiece.

Luden walked around with a basket on his arm and delivered the candies in person to retail stores, offices, and the Pennsylvania Hotel next to his home. He asked local shopkeepers to display his candies as an advertising attempt to promote his business. It was through this practice that he developed his very own distribution system, one of the first distribution systems established by a candy maker in the city of Reading. This system grew as time went on until it reached outside of Pennsylvania to the eastern and southern United States (Worley 1981).
According to another article from the Berks History Center, after ten years Luden moved his business from his mother’s kitchen to a four-story building on the northeast corner of Sixth and Washington streets; utilizing roughly one hundred and fifty workers his business grew to fill the building. He eventually purchased property on North Eighth Street in 1900 because his business had expanded even further. However, in 1909 he expanded the south end of his establishment from 60 feet front and 110 feet deep to 225 feet front and 110 feet deep and increased his work force to five hundred people. In 1925, his business produced 15 million packages of candy (The Reading Times 1949).

Despite the three hundred different types of confections that Luden produced at his factory on North Eighth Street there was one in particular that led him to massive success, Luden’s Menthol Cough Drop (The Reading Times 1949). Although the story of how he invented this product has never been confirmed, the tale goes as follows: one year he was overstocked with candy after the holiday season, and a customer with a cold came into his shop. In the past, people sniffed vials of menthol to relieve congestion. The customer joked with Luden that he should mix menthol in his candy so he could enjoy both at the same time. Luden took his excess stock of candy and re-melted it into the syrupy mixture and added menthol to it, giving birth to the now world famous cough drop (Worley 1981).

During his time in Reading, Luden built two mansions (Worley 1981). The first was built in a Victorian Romanesque style in 1899 at North Fifth Street and the second was the Bon Air mansion in 1907. He was married to Annie Ritter and had a total of eight children with her (Harry Ritter, Albert Musser, Dorothy,
Marjorie, Frederick Shearer, Milford Dirk, Jeanette, and Wilma). Luden was a devoted member of the Church of Our Father and an active member of the community (“William H Luden” 2009).

Luden donated $2,500 to the Mercersburg Academy for a gymnasium and purchased the Boys’ Home on Schuylkill Avenue for Berks County. He even kept the Olivet Boys’ Club afloat by purchasing the buildings and equipment for Club No. 1 and Club No. 4. He spent $12,500 erecting a three-story addition to the rear of Club No. 4 (Olivet BGC Archives). Several documents make note of the fact that Luden understood the value of an education. He gave his employees bonuses for keeping their kids in school after they reached the legal age to work.

Luden was responsible for the construction of the Natatorium on North Fifth Street as well, which contained Reading’s first commercial indoor swimming pool (The Reading Times 1949). Always concerned with the welfare of children he charged a modest admission fee so everyone had an opportunity to learn and enjoy a healthy recreational activity. The pool was available to the public all days with the exception of Sundays, when Luden and his family came to visit. Always conscious of his health, Luden never drank coffee or tea, only hot cocoa. He also made sure to go horseback riding every morning to keep active (Worley 1981).

Luden’s wife Annie died in 1916 and he later remarried Catherine Fasig. In 1927 he retired and a year later he sold his business to the Food Industries of Philadelphia for $6.5 million. In 1949, Luden died at the age of 90 of a heart attack at his home in Atlantic City, New Jersey (“Wm. H. Luden Dies” 1949).

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Olivet BGC Archives.


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Wilfred C. "Wahoo" Wadsworth

By Carl F. Vorwerk, Jr.

Since being an Olivet boy in his childhood, Wilfred “Wahoo” Wadsworth had always been a strong member of his community, whether it be at the Olivet, within politics in Reading, or at his church. In our interview on March 26, 2014, daughter Margaret Gill informed me that her father was nicknamed “Wahoo” due to his keenness to swimming and athleticism. In addition, the Wahoo is a type of fish which swims at exuberant speeds, much like Wadsworth did in his younger years. Wadsworth lived a healthy life of 88 years, passing away in 2008. His family members still remain heavily involved within the Olivet, especially Gill who was Chairman of the Board from 2010 to 2011 (Young 2010).

Gill recalls hearing stories of her father, who was born on April 12, 1915. Wadsworth was the son of a professional horse trainer from England. Wadsworth was born while his family was on the road in Chicago due to business. Most of his early life was spent within his community or with the Olivet Boys Club where Wadsworth attended Club No. 1, also referred to as the Clinton Street Club. According to his daughter, the Clinton Street Club is where Wadsworth learned to swim, a pastime which he kept with throughout his life. Wadsworth was not just affiliated with the Clinton Street Club, however. The Reading Eagle mentions Wadsworth as the winner of a baseball throwing contest in 1927 at his church (“300 Attend” 1927) and as one of 104 boys enrolling as a Boy Scout in 1929 (“104 Boys”).

A member of Reading High School’s class of 1933, Wadsworth was the recipient of a general vocational education. According to The Arxalma, which is the published yearbook of the 1933 Class of Reading High, Wadsworth was a participant in tennis, golf, varsity football, swimming, and track. In his senior year, Wadsworth managed the track team, eventually leading to third at the Penn Relays. Wadsworth was also a member of the “Hi-Y” club throughout all his years of high school. Even after graduation, Wadsworth kept affiliated with Reading High and was one of the chief founders of the Reading High School booster club (Arxalma 1933).

Gill recollected stories of her father’s effort to continue his secondary education. Wadsworth attended New York Institute for courses on Hotel Management (Gill 2014). He traveled to Detroit where he worked at the Deerborn Inn (Flannery 1995). Seeking more opportunities, Wadsworth traveled on the Queen of Bermuda to Bermuda (“Personal Mention” 1935). Bermuda became the location where Wadsworth would meet his wife, Jean Walker Wadsworth of Canada. The two married in 1939 (“Mr. and Mrs. Wilfred C. Wadsworth” 1970). Returning to the United States for work before World War II, Wadsworth moved to New York (Flannery 1995). Gill told me during our interview that her father worked at New York’s Ritz Carlton Hotel.

In 1943, Wadsworth and his wife had their second child, according to Gill. The family moved back to Reading, where Wadsworth began working at Carpenter Technology. There Wadsworth worked a blue-collar job, dealing with metal alloys and metal frames for the bodies of automobiles (Gill 2014). Wadsworth opened his own insurance company by 1951, shortly after leaving Carpenter Technology. According to a
1995 article in The Reading Eagle, Wadsworth’s company was a Nationwide affiliate (Flannery 1995). Around this time Wadsworth began to get more steadily involved with the Olivet Club and even had friends within the Boys Club. According to Gill, Wadsworth became involved with the Olivet Boys Club as he grew older. Gill recalled “going to events sponsored by the Boys Club” as a young child with her parents. While Gill was not a member of the Olivet due to her gender, she recalls her brother being a prominent athlete within the Boys Club. Sadly, he passed away at the age of 45 (Gill 2014).

Wadsworth’s adult legacy was riddled with many executive positions, such as President of the Reading Lions Club (Flannery 1995), Vice President of the Monarch A.C. (Flannery 1995), and Vice President of Olivet (Gill 2014). Wadsworth held the position of Vice President of the Olivet for almost two decades since there were no term limits on executive positions at the time of his election to office. Two years after becoming Vice President of the Olivet, Wadsworth ran for the elected office of Mayor of Reading; however, he lost to Joseph Kuzminski (Reber 1985).

While associated with the Lions Club and Olivet, Wadsworth was able to help raise around $850,000 for the Boys Club (Wadsworth 1975). In 1990, Wadsworth was involved in the Olivet capital campaign to build a new swimming pool at the Clinton Street Club. According to Gill, the land for the club’s pool was donated by the DANA Corporation. Wadsworth was the first member in the pool, wearing a red and yellow 1920s era swimsuit (Gill 2014). Also in 1990, Wadsworth voted against changing the name of the Boys Club to the “Boys and Girls Club.” However, he was overruled. Wadsworth passed away in 2003, but would have been proud that his daughter, Margaret Gill, was elected as Chairperson of the Olivet Board of Directors (Young 2010). To this day Wadsworth’s name is known throughout Olivet, and his legacy continues due to the support and dedication of his daughter.

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World War 1 Casualty James Sowa

By Jesus Rodriguez

Joseph Sowa, the only Olivet boy killed in World War I.

James Sowa, a former member of the Olivet Boys Club No. 1, was the only Olivet boy to die in World War I, according to most records. Sowa’s name was first pronounced Jozef Sova which is originally Slovakian, then Joseph Sova, and finally James Sowa.

Sowa was killed in a tragic accident on February 26, 1918 that involved a tug boat called the Cherokee. The tug boat was 27 years old, built of iron, and was 120 feet long. The ship was taken over by the Navy from a company called Luckenbach. After it had some repairs it was ordered to Philadelphia for service with her squadron and was later assigned for duty overseas. Next it left Philadelphia for New London, Connecticut. In bad weather and sea conditions, the ship headed towards Newport Rhode Island, where she loaded coal and stores before starting for Washington, DC. The ship ran into a heavy storm off the Delaware coast. During the storm, water leaked through the deck floors, doors, and bunker plates, sinking the ship. Only ten crew
members survived, saved by a British streamer (“Blame for Loss” 1918). Bodies were recovered, including Sowa’s,
on March 2, 1918 (“Sowa’s Body” 1918). The next day his remains arrived home where they were met by his father, Michael Sowa, and a number of relatives and friends.

Viewing services were held in Sowa’s hometown of Reading. 3000 people attended at George A. Prokopovitsh Funeral Home on 239 South Sixth Street (“Three Thousand” 1918). The wake was held from Monday, March 4 to Tuesday, March 5. The casket was open and placed in the sitting room. Sowa’s body was attired in his sailor’s uniform. Then-Reading Mayor Edward H. Filbert was called upon with a detailed squad of officers to attend the funeral. On March 6, 1918 a funeral was held for Sowa. It was a military funeral and Polish-Catholic societies participated, with some of them in uniforms. Services were held in St. Cyril and Method Catholic Church, attended by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and led by a 30 piece band.

Sowa was laid to rest in a square oak casket covered with a large American flag. An honor guard of the Sons of Veterans escorted the procession from the church. The cortege was led by members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, followed by the Peerless Band and 300 members of Slovak Lodges. At the cemetery, six pallbearers fired three volleys over the grave, and taps were sounded by Fabian Sebest (“Local Sea Hero” 1918).

Club No. 1 also held a memorial service for Sowa. “Extracts were read from a number of letters written to Sowa by a club member and stories of his club activities were related” (“Local Sea Hero” 1918).

Note

1. A typed four page document written by Robert Cremer, Sr. in 1997 states, “Did I mention that a lot of Olivet boys were in World War I. Many of the Olivet men lost their lives in France . . . Mac put up Gold Stars for the Olivet boys who were killed in the war.” Cremer had been involved with Olivet for more than 60 years. However, all other records we located stated that Sowa was the only Olivet alumnus killed in the war.

References


Basketball

By Zachary Whitman

The Olivet basketball program was formed by the kids of the Olivet Boys Club. Based upon the research, 1905 marked the first time there was any mention of the Olivet Boys basketball team in the Reading News-Times. The teams played their games in the Natatorium located in Reading (“Basketball Schedule” 1905).

The very first mention of the Olivet Boys basketball team in the newspaper came when they were mentioned at the top of their league standings with a record of 2-0 (“Standings of the Clubs” 1905). A year later marked the first time they were featured in a box score with a small recap of the game; they lost to Reading High School by a score of 22-15. A boy by the last name Bortz was the leading scorer for Olivet that game with seven points (“Two Exciting Games” 1906). The Olivet Boys Basketball team frequently played the Reading High School basketball team. The matchup between the two Reading programs happened multiple times a year, every year, for the first thirty years of their existence. The leading scorer, Thomas S. Bortz, appeared in the obituaries later that year. He died from complications of appendicitis and peritonitis; he was 19 years old and the newspaper mentioned that he was a member of the Olivet basketball team (“Obituaries” 1906).

Near the end of 1906, the Olivet basketball team joined a four-team basketball league. According to records from the Reading Basketball Association, seven teams applied for admission: Ajax, Elaine, Olivet, Interstate, Dummies, Parkside, and St. Peter (“Basketball” 1906). Even though they were in this league, they still played Reading High School in an out-of-league game (“Getting Ready for Season” 1908). The first time Olivet appeared in a paper besides The Reading News-Times was in 1908 in The Lebanon Daily News when they beat the Invincibles by a score of 2 to 1 (“Invincibles vs Olivet’s” 1908). Typically, Olivet played on the Natatorium floor but they also played on the Y.M.C.A. floor in Reading (“Olivet’s and Peerless” 1908).

In 1909, a county league was organized, and it featured eight teams, four from the city and four from the county. They played at the Armory. The champion would be determined by the greatest number of games won during the season and would be awarded a “handsome silver cup and pennant” (“County League is Organized” 1909). A week later the teams were announced: Ajax, Olivet, Independent, and Sterling from the city. Mohnton, Robesonia, Sinking Spring, and West Reading were from the country (“Teams of County League are Named” 1909). Almost three weeks after the league was announced, Olivet was involved in an overtime thriller where the team lost to Ajax 21-19. It was said to be the most entertaining game of the season (“Ajax Wins Fine Game” 1909). Near the end of the 1909 season, Olivet was featured, for the first time, as a Christmas day attraction where they played a basketball game at Armory Hall (“Games on Christmas” 1909). The typical starters for the 1909 season went by the last names Shade, Kohl, Bredbenner, Fisher, and Schrack.

The County League was reorganized into a six-team league in 1910 because it was unfair to drop games won by teams dropped from their organization. The teams were Olivet, Parkside, West Reading, Comet, Mohnton,
and Sterling. James Row was also named the president of the new County League ("Reorganization of County League" 1910). Later on in 1910, there was mention that the Olivet Boys Club had a junior basketball team. The players’ names were O’Reilly, Litschi, Conner, Gaul, and Martin ("Olivet Jrs., Score Shutout" 1910). Throughout the rest of the basketball year, many mentions were made that Olivet was the top team in the County League but there was never any mention that they won the championship.

Later on in the Olivet Boys basketball history there was mention that sometimes the Olivet boys had to pick players for the team if the regular starters were not available. One example came from 1915 when the Olivet boys played Douglass A.C. They were without all five starters and played with five junior players. In this article they were referred to as the Reading Olivets ("Not the Regular Olivet Team” 1915).

The fans also played a big role in the basketball team’s history. Not only did they make holidays fun by attending the Olivet basketball games, they also gave back to the team. Arthur Peifer was a basketball player for the Olivet Basketball team; he was kicked in the kidney a few years earlier and he suffered from an enlarged kidney because of it. As a result, the fans donated all proceeds of one of the games in the 1915 season to Peifer’s surgery. It was called “the biggest affair of its kind ever staged in Reading” ("Fans Planning” 1915).

The 1916 Olivet basketball team.
In 1918, the team was scheduled to play for the Berks County Championship. The details are vague, but the team was set to play a three-game series against the Walnuts to decide the championship. The manager of the Olivet five was H.S. Reeser and the games would be played on the Olivet home floor and at the Y.M.C.A. (“Rival Cage Teams Arrange Series” 1918). This was supposed to be a smooth event but the following week the first game was cancelled due to the Olivet manager not wanting to play at the Armory. The Walnuts said that they cancelled the game because the Olivet team went back on its word of playing the first game at home. Several hundred fans showed up to watch the great game, but they left dissatisfied when the game was never played (“Sports Editor, News-Times” 1918). I was not able to locate any newspaper articles in regards to those championship games, but a newspaper article dated later told the outcome of the games, which Olivet won. The next month, Olivet was gearing up to play Allentown. The Reading News-Times wrote an article about it, stating, “The Reading Olivet Five, claimants of the Berks county championship” (“Olivets vs Allentown” 1918).

At the end of the Olivet Boys Club’s basketball team’s first thirty years of history, it took on a name change. For years it had been called the Reading Olivets and this name stuck with the community. But, in 1924 the Reading Olivets became the Olivet Rangers (“T.N.T. Five Beats Olivet Rangers” 1924). This was the first mention of Olivet team being named the Rangers and it was the start of a new era. For a long time, the Olivet team was a bottom dweller in the standings and that all changed in 1918 when it became the Berks County Champion.

References


Educational and Vocational Programs

By Anthony Rothenberger and Zachariah Zimmerman

Boys in the Olivet library at 403 Cherry Street in 1905.

A 1912 Olivet publication ponders what people may think of the club. They may ask, “What is this Olivet Boys Club?” and their first guess might be, “Oh, it’s a place where they make athletes.” But, the publication notes that more knowledgeable people know that it’s a place “where they make men. Good men, strong men, clean men.” And that answer’s about right. That’s the very thing the O.B.C. has been trying to do for close on to 14 years” (The Book of Olivet).

The early years of the Olivet Boys Club was much more than just sports. The club offered both educational and vocational opportunities. The programs aimed to keep kids off of the street and prevent them from being exposed to bad and violent behavior. The Olivet Boys Club offered a wide range of classes like a Shakespeare class, a sewing class, a drawing class, a gymnasium class, and more (“What We Do” 1906). Holding these classes kept adolescents off the streets and helped further their education. The Olivet Boys Club was more than a club; it was a community that offered support and development for youths. Other classes offered to youths during the years included (“What We Do” 1906):
• Arithmetic Class – taught by Mrs. Hagy
• W.G.C.’s Mandolin Class – taught by Ms. Lutz
• Boys’ Mandolin Class – taught by Ms. Lutz
• Boys’ and Girls’ Choir – offered on Saturdays

Another unique contribution the Olivet Boys Club offered was events for children to bring in the different things that they made to show others their achievements, such as: hammocks, watch fobs, and baskets. The Olivet Boys Club also made a library available to get boys interested in books so that they could broaden their knowledge and vocabulary (The O.B.C. Record). In fact, the Olivet Boys Club even hired a librarian who organized the books and helped the boys find specific titles.

The Olivet Boys Club offered many opportunities that helped boys learn skills that would help them grow into caring and responsible adults. The impact of the vocational programs is demonstrated through the testimony of former Olivet boys. At a banquet held to welcome back club members who had been away at school, these members reminisced of their time at the club. Former member Ralph McCoy said that the “memory of Olivet encouraged him and his hard work at Williamson.” And John Schrack mentioned that the “Olivet force was applied to his activities at Mt. Hermon.” The most notable testimony at that banquet was from Paul Otto who urged many fellows to “get in line for higher education” and hoped that many more clubmen would be going to school in the future.

An article titled “Wonderful Mr. McCormick” stated that McCormick was responsible for sending boys to college and trade schools while another article titled “A Remembrance” by Robert D. Cremer (1929) told of a man named Mr. Bricker who pushed Cremer to take courses in commercial rather than sticking to general courses.

The Olivet Boys Club offered youth so much more than just being “a place where they make athletes.”

References

*The Book of Olivet.* Olivet BGC Archives.

Cremer, Robert D. 1929. “A Remembrance.” Olivet BGC Archives.

The O.B.C. Record. Various years. Olivet BGC Archives.

“What We Do.” 1906. Olivet BGC Archives.

“Wonderful Mr. McCormick.” Olivet BGC Archives.
Marathon

By Stanley Tsai

Robert “Bibs” Eckenroth winning the Herald Marathon on May 6, 1911.

During the club’s early years, the Olivet Boys Club held many races. A substantial amount of information regarding these races is found in newspaper archives and the club’s archives. A notorious marathon runner was Robert “Bibs” Eckenroth. According to the Olivet Archives, Eckenroth emerged victorious in the Herald Marathon on May 6, 1911 with a 62 minute 30 second time (“Herald Marathon Winner” 1911); though referred to as a marathon, the race was 11 miles long (Bigony 1962). Several documents found in the archives mention Eckenroth as a member of the Olivet Boys Club and winner of the Herald Marathon held in Reading (“Herald Marathon Winner” 1911). These competitions were not exclusive to the Olivet Boys Club; members of different clubs participated in these marathons (“Marathon Has Boys Worked Up” 1920).

One of the most well-known marathons was the 5-mile marathon held in the streets of Reading. The winner
in 1913 was Beck Reed, a member of the Olivet Boys Club. Reed had a record time of 26 minutes and 30 seconds. In this marathon, members of the Olivet Boys Club, Birdsboro High School, and Wyomissing High School competed against each other (“Reed Winner” 1913).

Another significant marathon was the A.A.U. 5-Mile Marathon of 1915. The winner of this marathon was Nick Giannakopulas and at the time he was considered the second greatest runner in the world. Giannakopulas won the marathon with a record time of 25 minutes and 17 seconds, defeating the other marathon runners including Eckenroth. Eckenroth finished in fourth place out of the 104 marathon runners (“A.A.U. Five” 1915). In a 4.5 mile race in 1916, the Germantown Boys’ Club defeated the Olivet Boys Club (“Local Runners” 1916).

In the early years of the club, the marathons were significant events that were fondly recalled decades later. In a 1962 letter in the archives, Ralph O. Bigony reminisces about the 1911 Herald Marathon. The letter contains a record of the times of each runner who participated in the marathon with Eckenroth as the proud winner (Bigony 1962). Another letter by Bigony is addressed to a man who ran in the 1911 Herald Marathon. Bigony told the man, Ralph M. Gounder, that he recently ran into his son and asked if he knew his father was “famous as a marathon runner.” According to Bigony, Gounder finished 21st with a time of 79 minutes, 15 seconds and he was the only entrant for the “Belmonts” (Bigony 1963).

References


Summer Camps

By Margaret Weaver

The Olivet archives and other materials I found discuss only a few seasons of summer camps. A 1907 edition of the Olivet Boys Club Record, the official newsletter, describes “The O.B.C Camp.” During that summer camp, the boys hiked, played games, and fished. The camp’s success was credited to the boys, who followed the example William McCormick set in previous years. The summer camp in August 1907 was held at Earlville, fifteen miles south of Reading along the Manatawny Creek. The campers fished nearly every day to eat. The campers held meetings every evening, where they read from the Bible, sang a few rhymes, then ended with the club prayer.

In August 1907, they picked Weidner’s Farm as the place to set up camp. After the dishes were done and hung away, the campers had activities they could do. They could go fishing where they caught a great number of sunnies and catties along with some eels, suckers, and bass. They could also play ball or go swimming. The camp had visitor’s day where three girls and six boys showed up. The reason the number was so small was because the walk from the car to the camp was about five miles, which took two and a half hours. A few of the visitors stayed overnight. Some of the visitors were Eva Wingert, Maggie Withman, Bertha Morgan Dale, W. Roland, C. Kohl, William Klahr, Bredbenner, John Hartzel, McCormick, Reeser, and John Schrock. The records described some of the normal activities that took place on specific days, but noted it “can’t tell all that happened, for the Record ain’t big enough.” The final day of camp was moving day for all the campers, so on that day they loaded up and headed for Reading. Everyone sang out all the club chants and so on. By five thirty the groups reached Rambo’s and unloaded the tents (“The O.B.C. Camp” 1907).
The Olivet Juniors Camp (date unknown)

“The Olivet Playground Program for Summer of 1909” states that the camp was conducted by the Olivet Fathers’ Club and directed by Francis J. Fisher. The schedule lists several activities for both boys and girls, even though the Olivet club at the time was boys-only. Among the activities for boys were track, swimming, bar bell exercises, military exercises, baseball, volleyball, folk dancing, and drill and pennant tests. To earn a pennant, boys 13 years and older had to “chin” 6 times, run 100 yards in 12 seconds, and do a good running high jump. Boys under 13 had to “chin” 4 times, run 100 yards in 14 seconds, and do a good jump. Girls’ activities included swimming, bar bell, marching, running, calisthenics, basket making, dancing, and folk dancing. Several of these activities are listed as having an unnamed female chaperone. Boys and girls who made hammocks were allowed to keep one at no charge.

The summer camp in 1914 had a total of approximately 100 boys and men. 69 of these boys were referred to as “juniors” and all were regular campers for several days or a week except Mr. Myers, who seemed to be the only adult at the camp the entire time. It appeared that there were other adults involved; however, they could only stay for two or three days at a time because their work would not allow them to stay longer. There were also campers and adults who came only for a night and a meal. The charge for a full week per camper was two dollars. If a boy was not able to attend a full week he paid ten cents for each meal and ten cents for spending the night (“The Juniors Camp” 1914).

In 1922, a summer camp at Schuylkill held a July 4th party for Olivet men, and members of the Ladies’ Auxiliary had an all day picnic chaperoned by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas J. Earnest. For activities they swam (referred to as “bathing”), played ball, paddled canoes, and enjoyed a round of fun (“At Olivet” 1922).

In 1928, the Olivet Boys Club held a summer camp at Cross Keys. About 40 boys stayed at the camp each week of the summer season (“Boys Led” 1928). That is all the information I could find on the Cross Keys summer camp.

References


In January of 1909, the Fathers’ Club of Olivet decided to rent out four acres of land to individuals and families so they could build their own gardens. The Fathers’ Club wanted to create this garden as a community-wide activity that would not require any manual labor on Sundays. The four acres were divided into 132 fifty cent lots, 60 twenty-five cent lots, and 133 five cent lots. In order to get people to hear about the selling of these lots, the Fathers’ Club sent around notices to the schools that they would start to sell this land during the first week of May (“Early OBC History”).

Helen Miller rented out the gardening land from the Fathers’ Club. She started out by buying a five cent lot and planted lettuce, radishes, flowers, red beets, and marigolds. She tended to her garden by watering every night and making sure to weed whenever she felt it was needed. Since her garden had been doing very well once her lettuce and radishes were all grown in, she decided to plant twenty cabbage plants. However, the water hydrants that were located throughout the garden broke, and she was unable to get any water for her cabbage plants, causing them to not grow well (“Early OBC History”).

In March 1909, the Fathers’ Club moved from this land to the Reading Iron Co. Farm since it had been abandoned. They also secured more land between Oley and Douglass streets as well as between Clinton and Gordon streets. On this new land they promised that they would have gardens and children’s playgrounds. The new land also had different lot sizes. These new lot measurements were 20 x 30 foot lots for fifty cents; also, they now had children’s lots that measured 4 x 10 feet for five cents. When adults purchased a garden they received an optional pack of seeds that were sent from Congressman John Rothermel in Washington. However, they only gave out 200 packets of seeds to those who applied first. The children’s gardens, when purchased, also received a small pack of seeds.

These new lots went on sale for cash only on Saturday, April 10, 1909 for returning gardeners; new
gardeners could purchase land on Monday, April 12. Children’s gardens went on sale Saturday, April 10 from nine to eleven in the morning only. That year there were also a few changes to the land. There were no more water pipes throughout the garden, due to accidents the previous year, and there was only one central point for water. The Fathers’ Club also installed electrical lights and appointed a few city policemen to protect the garden and prevent any theft. Gardeners were allowed to plant whatever they wanted; however, the children’s garden was run by Miss Wells and she required all their gardens look alike (“Early OBC History”).

Members of the Fathers’ Club noticed that Miller was working very hard to make her garden the best it could be, and during the last week of June they awarded her with a ten cent prize for having the nicest garden. Then, during the middle of July, Miller bought another five cent lot and planted one and a half pecks of beans and more various kinds of flowers. However, that summer of 1909 was a tough year for many of the other gardeners. During August they experienced a drought, making it difficult for them to water. This caused many people’s vegetables and other crops to dry out. However, despite the drought that summer, many people reaped large harvests and had high totals of products that reached into the hundreds of dollars (“Early OBC History”).

References

Mothers' Club/Ladies Auxiliary

By Amina Stokes

The Mothers Club did “helpful work in connection with Olivet Clubs.” The Mothers Club was composed of the mothers and friends interested in the work of the Olivet clubs (The O.B.C. Record 1909). The Mothers’ Club participated in many events and meetings for the Boys Club. Along with fundraising, the mothers were always serving refreshments at banquets. Some of the foods and drinks they served were ice cream, cake, and cocoa (“Olivet Mothers Celebrate” 1921).

An article in The Reading News-Times from 1921 stated that the mothers were celebrating their anniversary. The article explained that the Mothers Club from Club No.1 celebrated its anniversary with guest members from the Mothers Club No. 2 and No. 4. The mothers also read their annual reports and listened to some speeches (“Olivet Mothers Celebrate” 1921). Mrs. Doerrmann, the president of the Mothers Club at the time, presided and gave a very good report of the women’s work throughout the past year.

The Mothers Club and children at Club No. 1 in 1910

In 1922, the Mothers Club sold berries on a lawn. The Mothers Club of Club No. 1 held a strawberry festival on a Thursday evening on the club lawn. Ice cream, cake, and candy were sold. One of the events that took place was a swimming race in the pool, which was won by Leroy Sponage (“Olivet Mothers Sell Berries on Lawn” 1922). The mothers were named in a 1907 O.B.C Record as the “Moving Mothers” because they were always moving the club to and from different locations. They had rooms with the Myers family at 378 Heller Street. They then moved to 611 Eisenbrown Street. The Mothers Club stated, “We may have not gained much in knowledge the past year, but we have certainly learned how to move, and sometimes at very short notice.” An article titled “The Neighborhood House” (1907) discusses the responsibilities the mothers took on. The mothers held their meetings Tuesday afternoons, and there were more meetings.
throughout the week. The expenses for rent and other utilities were more than sixty dollars a year. The mothers took the responsibility of raising the necessary money.

In 1922 Gertrude Moyer joined The Mothers Club (The O.B.C Record). Gertrude and her husband Joseph Moyer formed the Ladies Auxiliary club from the Mothers Club on Friday, February 4, 1929 (“Services to Honor Boys Club Founder” 1929). The Ladies Auxiliary held many events. On May 24, 1929 the members of the Ladies Auxiliary of Olivet Club No.1 were entertained at a banquet in Club No.1 (“Services to Honor Boys Club Founder” 1929). This was to show recognition of their services to the Boys Club.

On November 15, 1930, the members of the Ladies Auxiliary of Club No.1 held a Halloween party at Graul’s Farm House Inn. They served dinner, played games, and awarded prizes (“Auxiliary Holds Halloween Party” 1930). A card party was sponsored by the Auxiliary on a Thursday evening (“Auxiliary Sponsors Card Party Thursday” 1932). The event was held at 1040 Penn Street. Prizes were awarded at each table and there were prizes awarded at the door. In 1933, the Olivet Boys Club No.1 held its annual junior banquet (“Cage Awards Given at Olivet Banquet” 1933). Seventy members attended and a meal was served by the Auxiliary. The Auxiliary also sponsored a concert in July 1935. Refreshments were served later during the concert. A few months earlier, in May 1935, the Ladies Auxiliary held another card party under the directions of Gertrude Moyer. The Ladies served refreshments as well (“Boys Club Auxiliary to Sponsor Concert” 1935).

Gertrude and Joseph Moyer had four children: Stewart “Spike” Moyer, Fern Dewald, Bernice (Moyer) Lebo, and Bob Moyer. Stewart Moyer was executive director of the Olivet Boys Club from 1966 through 1979. Moyer’s other children also had important roles in the organization as well. Fern Dewald was awarded for her seven decades of serving as a member or officer of the Ladies Auxiliary. Bernice (Moyer) Lebo was still an officer of the Ladies Auxiliary in the mid-1990s, and Bob Moyer was a former board member who started a scholarship fund in honor of his parents. Gertrude and Joseph Moyer believed strongly in giving back to others, and this is how they lived their lives according to Fern Dewarld (Olivet Boys and Girls Annual Report 1996).

“We probably wouldn’t be [as successful as] we are today without the Ladies Auxiliary” (DeGroote 2014). Still today, the Ladies Auxiliary is a major fundraiser and supporter (DeGroote 2014). Moyer was truly a great individual. She was awarded accolades for her services from the Olivet Boys Club and from members of the Ladies Auxiliary. The Ladies Auxiliary is a helpful supporter and fundraiser that has helped with events, meetings, and more throughout the years. Over the years, they have helped buy vehicles, uniforms, and also the renovation of the Clinton Street Club (DeGroote 2014). They still sell candy—one of their major fundraising events—as well. The Ladies Auxiliary is the ultimate fundraiser and helping hand and is instrumental to the success of the club.

Note

1. Gertrude Moyer’s son, Spike Moyer, also has a chapter in this book.
References


The O.B.C. Record. Various Years. Olivet BGC Archives.


Mickle Muckle Club

By Alexis Verbin

Of the many binders full of historical material in the Olivet Boys and Girls Club Archive, one is dedicated to the Mickle Muckle Club. The binder is not specific in nature about what the motives of the club were, but there is enough information to know what the club did. The time span for the club is unclear, although it appears to have been established in 1907. The only mention of the club found in newspaper archives comes from the dedication of Club No. 1’s building in 1910: “Philip Ortman Jr. gave a brief history of the Mickle Muckle Club, a branch of the Olivets which was organized three years ago for the purpose of giving the members a pleasant time” (“Olivet Boys’ 1910).

The only other documents regarding the club are the Mickle Muckle Club Minutes that were recorded at every meeting. The club met once a week at the Olivet Club House and the documents date from October 20, 1911 through October 25, 1912 (“Mickle Muckle Club Minutes”).


Recorded every week were accounts of the members present, unfinished business, new business, events of that day, and the date for when the next meeting would be. The meetings consisted of games, storytelling, guest speakers or visitors, a Club Prayer to end the meeting, and a promise of a good deed for the following week. Some of the games played were Table Ten Pins, Dominoes, Checkers, “Up Jenkins,” “The Messenger Boy,” “Rip Van Winkle,” “Stage Coach,” and Table Bowling Alley. A variety of stories were told throughout the meetings. These stories consisted of “The Enchanted Horse of Persia,” “The Monitor and the Merrimac,” “Daniel Boone,” “Cinderella,” “The Five School Boys,” “Gulliver in Lilliput,” “Gulliver in Brobdingnag,” “Wicked Giant,” “Story of David,” “Bluebeard,” “Regina the Indian Captive,” and information about different types of snakes (“Mickle Muckle Club Minutes”).

In addition to the fun games and stories, treasury issues were also discussed at meetings periodically. The amount held in the treasury account and any outstanding bills were discussed by the club. Minutes from the previous meeting were also read and approved at each meeting. Each entry of the minutes and description of the meeting was signed by the secretary, Stanley Adams. Elections of new members and members assigned to officer roles were discussed and dealt with as well. A card referring to a banquet was also found in the Olivet Archives. There was an annual banquet that provided awards to members of the club (“Mickle Muckle
Club Minutes”).

The meetings were held until 9:00 pm. At this time the members recited their Club Prayer and were dismissed until the next meeting.

References


Pins and Uniforms

By Chris Bechtel

The original logo on hats and shirts included an “O” with an initial behind it to delineate the town or neighborhood the team was from. The “R” in the photo below may be for Ricktown, but this is not certain.

Image not found

The baseball uniform pictured below is from around 1910.

Image not found

Olivet teams took on names of mythological figures, literary figures, and Native American tribes.

Olivet boys were often awarded pins were years of membership or for winning contests, games, or other competitions. Many show the Olivet cross, a symbol used on many of the materials.
Chapters
Spiritual Guidance

By Charles Gyapong

In the words of Thomas Chew, who wrote the Foreword to William McCormick’s The Boy and His Clubs, “In the Olivet Boys’ Club there is religious spirit which is good for the boys and the club.” According to Chew, religion was woven into the life of the boys in a natural way to the point that it was hard to tell if the club was the warp and religion the woof. To him, “whichever it is the figure of Christ is woven into the characters of the boys in a sane and happy manner” (1912, 5).

The club had an active Sunday school program. In 1909, Olivia P. Johnson and Anna F. Heckman were the Sunday school teachers. Johnson led the children in singing. The pupils in the Sunday school were motivated in different ways. In February 1909, a book was offered to the first pupil who recited the Beatitudes (Sermon on the Mount by Jesus Christ). The next Sunday, the following pupils recited the Beatitudes perfectly: Ruth Richardson, Anna Prizer, Helen Miller, and Bessie Wirts. The children followed the Sunday school program and participated in responsive scripture readings. After the children had successfully learned how to recite the Beatitudes, the pupils were busy committing the Ten Commandments to memory (“The Sunday School” 1909).

Collections were taken by the Sunday school regularly and part of the collections during Easter of April 1909 was used for an outreach program. The school children sent flowers to sick children at the Reading Hospital.

In April 1910 during the building dedication of Club No. 1, Rev. H.S. Ecker led a responsive reading of the Holy Scriptures. The hymn “One Foundation” was sung and the audience joined in prayer. Lloyd Unger, who spoke for the Junior Olivet Boys Club, said, “The Club teaches us to become men of sober character” (Olivet Boys’ 1910).

McCormick wrote to Joseph Mehle, a former member of the club who had enlisted in the United States Army. In his letter, McCormick said to Mehle that the most important aspect of the club is the Sunday school. McCormick said he had received over fifty letters from the Olivet boys who had joined the Army and shipped to fight in World War I who missed being part of Sunday school. He mentioned how the Sunday class had become an inspiration for many men who visited from different churches for fellowship and that they all liked the Olivet spirit. In his conclusion, he said he was bound to remind Mehle about prayer. He advised that it’s not only good to pray when in a foreign land fighting a battle but also at home, because prayers are not good for war time only but also in days of peace (“The Last Letter” 1918).

References


Olivet Truemen

By Jami Grunmeier and Keyara Holmes

An Olivet man could become part of the Olivet Truemen if he was “ten or more successive years a member of the Olivet Boys Club” (“Reading, Pa. – Olivet Boys’ Club” 1923) and was at least 21 years old. The Olivet Truemen helped organize meetings and activities and helped keep the Olivet Boys Club open after McCormick’s death. In fact, “It was the Olivet Truemen who gathered together after Mr. McCormick’s death and to this meeting came Mr. Luden. It was determined that the Boys’ Club should go on” (“Reading, Pa. – Olivet Boys’ Club” 1923).

After McCormick’s death, the Olivet Boys Club was organized and directed by a board of directors. Many on this board were Olivet Truemen. The management was entirely in the Truemen’s hands and many meetings were held in order to keep the clubs running.

In 1924, “George D. Snyder was elected president of the Olivet Truemen at the annual meeting” (“Snyder Elected” 1924). And then in 1928, “William Winkler was elected president of the Olivet Truemen to succeed William Cremer” (“Olivet Truemen Pick” 1928).

The Truemen held services every year in order to honor the late founder of the Olivet Boys Club; this tradition helped to keep the memory of the early years of the club alive (“Services to Honor” 1929). Without the dedication of the Truemen, the Olivet Boys Club might have never survived the death of its founder.

References


The “Olivet” Name, by Tyler Kio

From late 1903 to the end of 1904, the club had residence in the basement of the Olivet Presbyterian Church. This is around the time when the club adopted its new name, changing from the Boys Friendly Club to the Olivet Boys Club. The basement had a large gymnasium where the boys played basketball and exercise.


The New York City Trip in 1909, by Margaret Nina


One Popular Song, by Ishmael Dunn

The Olivet archives are filled with songs created by Olivet staff and boys. One of the most popular songs was “The Luden Building Song” (1903), sung to the tune of “Jingle Bells”

We work like busy bees from seven o’clock til six. At Harbster’s or the Brassy or the yard where they make bricks. In several parts of Berks, at jobs of different sorts, the only one who never works is Thomas Boogie Bortz.

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