

**Finding aid for the Grand Rapids
Public Library Young Men's Christian
Association (YMCA) collection
Collection 305**

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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Summary Information

Repository	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
Title	Grand Rapids Public Library Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) collection
Date [inclusive]	1865-2001
Extent	1.3 Linear feet Three boxes
Language	English
Abstract	<p>This collection documents the history of the Grand Rapids, Michigan Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), founded in June 1866 and continuing today. Included are materials previously filed in a variety of formats in the Local History Department and brought together here. The collection also contains a 2001 manuscript on the history of the Grand Rapids YMCA, as well as research material used in writing the history. This research material, which makes up approximately two thirds of this collection, consists of photocopies of material found among the Grand Rapids YMCA's own document collection as well as in the Local History Department. The original material and the material copied range in dates from 1865 to 2001.</p>

Biographical/Historical note

The very first Young Men's Christian Association ever was formed in London, England, in June 1844. The first American YMCA opened in Boston in 1851. Twenty-two years to the month after the London Y, the Grand Rapids YMCA was organized by a group of men led by Moreau S. Crosby. Crosby, the son of Insurance Agents J.S. Crosby & Son, had lent his office for the formulating meeting and was named the organization's first president.

Reflecting the mission of the national organization, the Grand Rapids Y was initially mainly concerned with Protestant evangelism as a means of protecting and benefiting young, single, idle men in the city. Operating out of a series of different rented spaces, the group conducted prayer meetings, public sermons, Bible studies and social events. They maintained a reading room and an employment bureau.

Eventually the mission would broaden, also in tune with the national organization, to include educational programs, war relief, programs for the working man, and camping trips for boys. The Grand Rapids Y hosted classes on a variety of subjects ranging from the cultural to the vocational. While, unlike the national organization, it just missed the Civil War; the local Y would go on to become heavily involved in World War I and II relief efforts. The Y took a special interest in working men, establishing a branch for railroad men and taking a wide spectrum of programs into the factories. The Y has sponsored boys camping retreats since the late 1890s. Camp Manitou-Lin, the first in a series of Y owned campgrounds, opened after a piece of property on Barlow Lake in Barry county was donated to the Grand Rapids YMCA in 1912.

Physical activity was introduced into the Young Men's Christian Association later in its history. Gymnastics and then body building were new trends welcomed by the Y. In the mid 1870s, while the Grand Rapids Y was still in rented rooms, it began making space for a gymnasium. In the 1890s, both basketball and volleyball were invented and spread quickly at the YMCAs.

In 1886, The Grand Rapids YMCA was able to occupy an entire building for the first time upon leasing one on the corner of Ottawa and Pearl from Julius Berkey. The organization realized a long held dream of building and owning its own structure when what is today known as the Federal Square building was dedicated on March 28, 1893. The association eventually outgrew this building and a new home was dedicated April 11, 1915.

From the 1960s to the present, there has been an emphasis on family activities at the YMCA. When the Grand Rapids YMCA first opened, it encouraged women to join and charged them half the price of men for a membership. Women's suffrage meetings were held at the YM in the 1870s and women were swimming at the YM regularly in the late teens and early twenties. Generally, however the YMCA's programs have been restricted to men until the 1960s. From the 1960s to the present, the YMCA has grown into an organization with equal access to men, women and children. Today the YMCA has a very active child care program.

Scope and Contents note

The Grand Rapids Public Library's Young Men's Christian Association collection consists of two main groups of material. One group contains items that were collected from a variety of Local History Department resources and gathered together here. The other group consists of items that were generated during the writing of the 2001 history of the Grand Rapids YMCA. This history was written by Gordon Olson and Jennifer Morrison, who donated a copy of their completed manuscript as well as materials Morrison copied during research. The items found in our collection are original. Those generated by the history project are primarily photocopies of original items either elsewhere in the Local History Department's collection or in the YMCA's own document collection.

The two buildings the YMCA has constructed for itself are very thoroughly documented in text (brochures and newspaper articles) and in images (brochures and photographs) in this collection. People, events and programs are also well documented, though less comprehensively. A series of Local History Department photos from 54-48-14, copied here, are an especially good representation of a broad range of Grand Rapids Y programs in the late teens and early twenties. Brochures and YMCA newsletters give the best view of life at the Y through its history.

The Olson/Morrison 2001 manuscript is the best easy reference for an overview of the Grand Rapids YMCA's history.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Various, including 00.[5762].1.

Related Materials

Additional References

The Grand Rapids Public Library Local History Department's YMCA Vertical File

The archival files at the Grand Rapids YMCA itself were a source for many of the reproductions in the GRPL YMCA Collection, including photographs, brochures, newsletters, scrapbooks and other items.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids.

Genre(s)

- records (documents)

Geographic Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History

Subject(s)

- Charities -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids

Series I. GRPL Local History Department Items

Collection Inventory

Series I. GRPL Local History Department Items 1891-1990, n.d.

Scope and Contents note

Included in this series are documents taken out of the YMCA vertical file, booklets that were previously catalogued and on the reading room shelf and one scrapbook found in the scrapbook collection. The folders in this series are arranged alphabetically. Material within the folders is arranged chronologically.

	Box	Folder
Annual and special reports 1944 - 1979	1	1
Brochures, informational and promotional ca. 1913-1990	1	2
Centennial Capital Fund Campaign material 1966-1967	1	3
Dedication programs 3/28/1893 and 6/22/1949	1	4
Entertainment Courses 1900/1901 and 1907/1908	1	5
Envelope dated 10/24/1916	1	6
Minutes 7/23/1958 and 1/25/1967	1	7
Newsletters, 'Pleasure and Progress' March 1892 and Jan. 1893	1	8

Series II. History Project Material

Newsletters July 1980 - Sept. 1983	1	9
Press releases Ca. Aug. 1966 - 3/16/1967	1	10
Scrapbook (Includes the brochures, 'Minting Manhood' and 'Fifty Years of Progress') 10/2/1891 - 9/4/1930	1	11
Songbook, 'Community Songs', n.d.	1	12
Tickets to presentation 'A Good Soldier' by Dr. Robert E.L. Jarvis, n.d.	1	13

Photo Albums

	Box	Folder
From Wise Men's Club of the YMCA, GR. : in recollection of a very pleasant afternoon, July 13, 1900 00.[5762].1 Note: Received date stamp of March 1944.	3	12
Y.W.C.A. 'Said and Done' Newsletters, ca. 1920's? 00[1895].1	3	13
Y.W.C.A Waubansie Cottage Flyer 00[1895].1	3	14
Y.W.C.A 'Is their Future Worth \$250,000' 00[1895].1	3	15

Series II. History Project Material 1865-2001, n.d.**Scope and Contents note**

Series II. History Project Material

This is all material whose original purpose was to use as information in writing the 2001 history. The final manuscript is also included here. A good portion of the YMCA's photographs and brochures were copied and are included here. The YMCA has quite a full run of newsletters. Only relevant sections of less than half of these were copied and can be found here. The biographical files contain information copied from the P & B files and elsewhere in the Local History Department. Carl Bajema has added to the newspaper articles in large part and continues to do so. This is the reason for the disproportionate amount of articles from the 1880s and 1890s, a period of special interest to Prof. Bajema. Some of the general historical information in this series was found on the website, www.ymca.net. The very recent promotional material came from the YMCA. Everything in these folders is arranged by date, except for the biographical files that are arranged alphabetically, and the local history department photographs that are arranged by collection number.

	Box	Folder
Olson, Gordon and Jennifer Morrison, 'Body, Mind and Spirit: A History of the Grand Rapids YMCA', Grand Rapids: unpublished 2001	1	14
Photocopies of YMCA owned photographs 1894-1929	1	15
Copies of YMCA owned brochures ca. 1893-1944	1	16
Copies of YMCA owned newsletters 11/9/1878-Jan. 1955	1	17
Copies of misc. YMCA owned material 11/8/1948, n.d.	1	18
Biographical files 10/1/1883-2000, n.d.	2	1
Photocopies of Local history department photographs 1904-10/2/1942, n.d.	2	2
Copies of city directory entries 1865/1866-1925	2	3

Series II. History Project Material

Copies of newspaper articles 10/12/1873-3	2	4-12
Copies of local history department books, manuscripts and serials 1882 - 1952, n.d.	3	6
Information on history of national organization 6/29/2001, n.d.	3	7
Information on current branch locations 6/29/2001, n.d.	3	8
YMCA promotional material 1999-2000	3	9