

## The Community Clubs

During pioneer days, members of the Society of Friends established several closely related neighborhoods in the vicinity of West Branch and Springdale. Developing under the influence of Quaker ideals, these communities have always been known for their friendly coöperation. In more recent years this spirit of unity has become crystalized in the definite form of community clubs.

For more than a decade and a half West Branch has fostered a "good fellowship" organization of which every one in the community is a member. In the spring of 1911 at a meeting of seven persons, four of whom were teachers, the West Branch Sociability Association was originated. Mrs. Carry Montgomery, the wife of a local minister, appears to have been "the moving spirit" and largely responsible for its organization. The first officers elected were Mrs. Montgomery, president; Walter Miles, first vice president; F. B. Tyler, second vice president; Mrs. Eva Penrose, secretary; and Rev. E. A. Lang, treasurer. At first the meetings were held at the home of the president. Later they were held in the parlors of the various churches.

The purpose of the organization as stated in its constitution was "to provide wholesome entertainment, promote good fellowship, and encourage civic



improvement in the community." Any individual who should "feel in sympathy with the purpose of this organization" was "eligible for membership" and could become a member by signing the constitution.

Programs of literary nature were usually held, after which refreshments were served. Although these meetings were open to the public and every one was invited, attendance at first was small. During the World War interest was directed into other channels and for a time the club was discontinued.

In 1919, however, interest was revived and the club was reorganized under the name of the West Branch Community Club. In a campaign for membership at that time a public meeting was held, the constitution and by-laws were read, and the presiding officer asked all who wished to become members to stand. The entire audience arose. Officers were elected by acclamation.

Since the date of reorganization interest in the Community Club has continued to grow. When the new school building was erected the Community Club equipped the assembly room and since then the meetings have been held at the schoolhouse. Meetings occur monthly throughout the school year.

Chautauquas, lecture courses, farmers' institutes, and Fourth of July celebrations are fostered by the Community Club. Some indication of the enthusiasm with which such enterprises are undertaken may be gleaned from the minutes of the business meet-



ings. On one occasion the secretary wrote: "The Committee then gave in detail the Talent arranged for the Chautauqua to be held June 29 to July 4th inclusive. Motion carried to hold a Chautauqua Booster Social in the opera house June 7th." The president then named a "committee on preparing Banners for the Automobile Booster Run for Chautauqua."

At Christmas time each year a three-day Community Christmas celebration is fostered by the club. For this the entire town is appropriately decorated, special attention being given to the decoration of the business district. A feature of the celebration is usually a series of athletic contests of general community interest. This may be followed by a Christmas pageant, a free motion picture show, or an evening of Christmas music. One evening is always devoted to the children, Santa Claus figuring prominently in that program.

Another important activity of the club is to foster an annual community picnic. In commenting upon the approach of this annual event a local editor some years ago explained that "the executive committee is anxious that it should be in fact a community picnic, a community holiday, when everybody will come together for a day of recreation, sociability, and fun — a day that will unite our community more nearly into one big family. Such days make life just a little more joyful and our community a better community."



Activities of the Community Club during recent months have been particularly interesting. When Herbert Hoover was nominated by the Republican party as its candidate for President of the United States, the West Branch Community Club fostered a celebration such as had never before been held in that town. Plans are now being made to hold the annual community picnic this year at a time when Mr. Hoover can be present, and it is anticipated that thousands of people will attend.

Whenever a program or celebration is undertaken by the Community Club every one, regardless of church affiliation, political views, or individual idiosyncrasies joins in the undertaking. Coöperation and enthusiasm characterize all of its activities. Commercial Clubs and Chambers of Commerce are common, and their aims in fostering better commercial relations are well defined. Numerous luncheon and "service" clubs have their special purposes. But a Community Club, as such, is as unique as it is effective. Functioning wholly independently of commercial, religious, or fraternal interests, it serves as a vehicle for the conduct of common enterprises. It fills an important place in the intricate needs of community affairs. This is true not only of the club at West Branch but in neighboring communities where similar clubs have been organized.

A few years ago the village of Springdale was in need of better school accommodations. The idea of consolidation was suggested. Citizens realized that



a community club would secure unity of action in this matter as no other organization could. Accordingly, a club was formed, modelled after that of West Branch, and the consolidation was effected. This called for a new building and a considerable expenditure of funds, but the Community Club was amply able to cope with the situation. A remarkably well-equipped building was planned and erected, much to the credit of the club and to the entire community.

Recently community clubs have been organized at Cedar Valley, Downey, and perhaps in other neighboring towns. The most significant feature of these clubs is the fact that they are really community organizations. Every one in the community is presumed to be a member: to live in the community is to be a member of the Community Club, and any one may participate in the activities if he chooses.

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