

***Proud of Our Past, Focused on Our Fearless Future:
YWCA of Niagara
1915-2015***

Mission of the YWCA

***The YWCA is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace,
justice, freedom and dignity for all.***

Acknowledgements

This history would not have been possible without the work of the dedicated women who kept the record of the YWCA in the last 100 years. The dozens of scrapbooks filled with clippings of the YWCA's news in the local papers makes fascinating reading, especially those from the early years. The Y-Teens and other groups also often kept scrapbooks and/or saved programs and other documents of their events that were invaluable in recreating their activities. The unknown author of the 50th history speech and the authors (Margaret Hoch, narrative writer and Esther Nixon, research assistant) of the 75th anniversary history made my job much easier. The pictures in the book were made possible by the photo-journalists women who captured the highlights of the YWCA. Unfortunately, few of the pictures list the names or dates, so I have done my best with the help of Jennifer Stoll to situate the time and place of the photos. For the current era, Kathy Granchelli, Mary Brennen-Taylor, Jennifer Stoll, J Suzan Ben, Sylvia Baptiste, and Jean Mullet-Hosey were invaluable sources of information filling in the "holes" in the permanent record. Connie Brown and Kathy Granchelli made many helpful organizational suggestions. Martha (Marty) Troia provided the expert editorial assistance that only she can do so well. All the remaining errors are mine. Thanks also go to my husband Joe Gadawski who has been a tireless supporter of my career and gave up the first year of our shared retirement so I could work on this history. I thank them all! Nancy E. McGlen

Preface: *When it was founded in 1915, the YWCA was named the YWCA of Lockport to indicate the home community it expected to serve. It was not long, however, before the YWCA's programs expanded into the nearby towns, cities and villages. In 1996, to reflect the changes in the reach of its commitment to help the women and girls in the western half of the county, the YWCA changed its name to the YWCA of Niagara. With the merger of the YWCA of Niagara and the YWCA of the Tonawandas and the Niagara Frontier in 2015, the members adopted the new corporate name of the YWCA of the Niagara Frontier. In this manuscript, I will refer to the local organization as the **YWCA** and the national YWCA as the **YWCA/USA**. No matter what its name, the organization that got its start in Lockport in 1915 has remained committed in the last 100 years to serving the needs of women and children in Niagara County.*

The Beginning of the National Young Women's Christian Association



The YWCA is the oldest women's organization in the United States. As Rita Duarte Marinho notes, "The YWCA literally began as a movement; its name came later. In each instance the founding of a member association came about because a small group of concerned, caring women would begin the task of making life better for other women" (Marinho, 563). While its programs have varied with the changing economic, social, and political climate faced by women, its focus on making life better for women and girls in the community and in the world has not.

The YWCA began in England in 1855, but it quickly moved to other parts of the world and in 1894 the World YWCA was organized. In the United States the first chapter was founded in 1858 in New York City by Carolyn D. Roberts. Another chapter in Boston organized in 1866. In both cases, a small group of middle and upper class Christian churchwomen were concerned with the needs of young employed or unemployed women (Marinho, 562) in their community. In the beginning, Protestant ministers often opposed these organizations of women led by women, arguing women should be submissive to men in the church and community. But, like the leaders of the Women's Movement of the same era, the women of the YWCA refused to accept a subservient role. These churchwomen were inspired by the religious revival of their time that maintained that salvation for men *and women* necessitated helping the less fortunate. They were determined that the problems they saw in their community could best be solved by women in an organization of women and led by women (McGlen, et al). Those first YWCA chapters were followed by more such groups in states and cities in the Northeast and

Midwest. In 1906, 616 of these YWCA chapters held a joint meeting, and formed the YWCA of the USA (**YWCA/USA**) with a national board and president (Marinho, 563).

Addressing the economic and social disruptions brought about by the Industrial Revolution on women and girls in their cities and villages was the focus of these first YWCAs. In each community where a YWCA was founded, the basic issues were the same: women, mostly young, rural or immigrant, were either employed or looking for work in the new factories that were springing up. These working women were often in desperate need of safe and affordable housing, inexpensive meals, and social support for the challenges they faced in the new workplaces (Marinho, 563). In response, the YWCAs provided boardinghouses, nutritious meals, and social and recreational programs. Training for the new positions opening to women also soon became part of the offerings of local YWCAs.

The Beginning of the YWCA in Lockport

The YWCA in Lockport (**YWCA**) like its counterparts was started by a small group of women. Mrs. George Chase and her daughter, Ellen, had heard about the YWCA organization from the wife of a famous minister, Mrs. Washington Gladdin, while on a ship returning from England. (Unfortunately, until the 1970s, married women were often referred to only by their husbands' names. As a result, the first names of the married founders, officers and members were almost never recorded.) Inspired by Mrs. Gladdin and the recognition that Lockport had no such organization for women and girls, Mrs. Chase invited her friends to a tea to hear speakers from the Buffalo and Tonawanda YWCAs discuss what they were doing. Several teas followed at the homes of her friends, Gertrude Scott and Mable Ransom. Shortly after, a provisional board was selected, the legal papers incorporating the organization prepared, and on February 1, 1915, the first annual meeting was held. A board of 25 members was selected, officers were chosen, and 12 different committees established. The organization grew quickly and by November of 1915 there were more than 930 members (Hoch and Nixon, 6-7).

Mrs. George Chase



In addition to Mrs. Chase, other earlier leaders were Mrs. H.J. Babcock, the first President and Ellen Chase, Honorary Vice-President. Other officers were Mrs. C.C. Campbell, Mrs. Elbert Whitney, Mrs. Monteford Holley, Miss Frances Dunham, and Mrs. H.J. Boyton. Miss Charlotte Bullymore served for four months as the first CEO, with Miss E. Louisa Woodford assuming the role of CEO for the next three years (1915-1918). Because the marital status of members, officers and staff was usually indicated, we know that until the mid-1950s most of the CEOs of the **YWCA** were single women, often coming to Lockport with degrees from prestigious colleges and experience managing YWCA programs in states as far away as California.

From its beginning the **YWCA**, as was the case with other YWCAs elsewhere in the country, developed programs to support women and girls and the community. While the economic, social and political situation faced by women in the Niagara Frontier in the last 100 years has changed greatly from those first years, each of the **YWCA**'s programs have been designed to empower women economically, socially, and politically. It has also participated in efforts of the **YWCA/USA** to increase social equality, eliminate racism and promote international understanding and peace.

The early years: 1915-1940

The economic and social challenges

The Industrial Revolution that began in the early part of the 19th century had provided many young, rural, single women with employment outside the home. By the beginning of the 20th century even more positions were attracting women into the job market. Nationally in 1900, 20 percent of all women were employed (Hesse, 37). While many poor, minority, and immigrant married women did work outside the home (in 1900, 43 percent of African American women, 25 percent of immigrant women and 15 percent of American born women were working outside the home (McGlen, et al, 140)), the typical employment pattern for women in the early years of the **YWCA**'s existence was to work for a few years before marriage and to stop working outside the home when they married.

At the turn of the century, the two largest employment categories for women were domestic service (40 percent) and industry (25 percent). The former positions were held by mostly African-American and immigrant women and girls. While the industrial jobs continued to attract native-born single women, the women in these jobs also included many immigrant and married women, who needed to support their families. In addition to domestic service and industrial jobs, the latter decades of the 19th century had seen the growth of women-mainly professions (teachers, social workers and nurses) and trade positions (clerical/sales clerks). Attracting mostly middle class native-born single women, by 1900, 8.6 percent of employed women held professional jobs, 9.9 percent of working women were in sales and clerical jobs (Hesse, 43). (Note: Discrimination and poor educational training prevented immigrant and African-American women from getting these more desirable jobs). As a result of the Erie Canal, Lockport was a prosperous community at the turn of the century with many businesses and industries, including textile and manufacturing. Women were employed in many of these companies.

The first 25 years of the **YWCA**'s existence saw dramatic changes in the employment of women, locally and nationally. The United States involvement in World War I (WWI) starting in 1917 resulted in many men joining the military, opening more jobs to women. Even when the war ended, many women continued to work. Thus, two years after the war, the 1920 US Census found more than 23 percent of women were employed (Hesse, 37). While the end of WWI pushed many women out of the positions reserved mainly for men, the Great Depression (roughly 1929-1940) did even more to restrict the opportunities for working women. With unemployment exceeding 25-30 percent, many businesses, governments, and school districts restricted jobs to men and/or instituted "marriage bars" and "motherhood bars." These policies prevented married women and women with children from holding positions in teaching, government and clerical work, that had, during more prosperous times, been women-only or women-mainly. Even with these barriers, many women, mostly unmarried or widowed women, or married women whose husbands could not work or who worked for low wages, continued to be employed either out of economic necessity or because they chose to work.

In the early years of the **YWCA**, the conditions faced by working women in all these positions were far from ideal. Employment in factories and shops involved long hours, often dangerous conditions, and little or no chance for promotion. Exceedingly low wages (much lower than men in the era before equal pay laws) left many employed women in difficult financial straits. Sexual harassment was not prohibited and working women were often subjected to the unwanted advancements of employers or the false promises of unsavory men. The **YWCA** responded to all of these issues, altering or expanding programs as the needs of the women and girls in the community changed, limited only by the organization's financial situation.

Economic Empowerment Programs

To address the needs of employed women and women looking for work, the **YWCA** developed several programs. In the beginning, it devoted much of its energies in this area to career readiness training for women seeking employment. To better prepare women for employment in the new clerical positions, courses in shorthand and typing were offered (Hoch and Nixon, 8). Because of the ready availability of many jobs in the field, the organization also publicized a course in telegraphy the Buffalo YWCA was offering (Hoch and Nixon, 9). Other programs developed by the **YWCA** were designed to help the women prepare for jobs that were previously closed to them including workshops on auto mechanics. The "Union Sun and Journal" in an article on April 3, 1918, noted the classes would cover "the gasoline engine, carburetors, batteries, spark plugs, lubrication, inner tubes and vulcanizing". The article concluded that "The experimental stage in training women in auto mechanics is past, and the time of great possibilities for women in the service field is at hand." (Hoch and Nixon, 9)

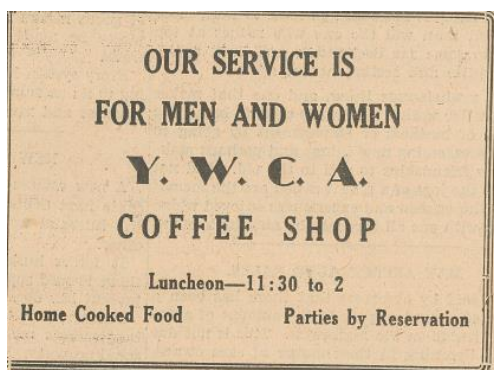
The need to learn skills like hat, shirtwaist and dress making were also the focus of some of the early classes. One reason for the training was the availability of jobs in the garment industry which employed many women. A second reason for such classes, however, was that both women who stayed home and women who worked outside the home, whether married or single, were still responsible for all the domestic duties including making their own clothes and,



if married, the clothes of their families. Even young, single professional woman wanted to learn how to make the clothes they needed and could not buy. They also needed assistance in learning other domestic skills, like cooking (Hoch and Nixon, 7).

Housing, Health and Safety Empowerment Programs

Many of the women seeking employment or already employed were coming into the city from the farms or were otherwise unable to find good places to live on their meager wages. To address this problem, the **YWCA** (and most YWCAs nationally) offered these young single women affordable housing (Sims, 5). The few rooms the organization could provide in the Olson Building, however, did not begin to meet the need for housing. In 1919, for instance, more than 120 people came to the **YWCA** looking for a place to live. To further address this demand for affordable housing, in addition to letting rooms, the organization also ran advertisements in local papers asking if any residents in the community had rooms they were willing to rent to women (Hoch and Nixon, 11). In one year of the program, over 500 rooms were listed in the registry. For its first 65 years, except for the years when it did not have a building, housing for single women continued to be offered at the **YWCA**'s headquarters. This housing gave the residents more than a place to sleep. There was generally a reading room, a gym, a kitchen, regularly offered classes, frequent meetings of groups a young woman could join, and a residence director who served in a role similar to that of a "housemother."



In the early years of the **YWCA**, it was also soon apparent that many of the young women coming to work in the factories or businesses not only needed places to live, but were also undernourished and physically unable to work the long hours (12-hour or longer shifts were common). To address these needs, the YWCAs in most communities provided daily meals at a low cost. When its facilities permitted it, the **YWCA** also provided low cost lunches for the whole community and dinners for women only (Hoch and Nixon, 7). In its first year, more than 1,224 persons

were served affordable meals. One such menu included chicken soup for three cents, macaroni and cheese for five cents and pumpkin pie, also for five cents. At its peak during WWI, almost 30,000 meals were served to community residents, especially young women (Hoch and Nixon, 10). These were very popular and when the **YWCA** moved into a new home in an old fire hall in 1923, with no facilities to offer meals and could not afford the cost of remodeling, members of the community were very upset at the loss of the **YWCA** "restaurant." (Hoch and Nixon, 13)

To better prepare young women for the physical stamina required by the long hours of sitting or standing and to counter stereotypes about women's physical abilities to work all day, early YWCAs also started programs in calisthenics (Sims, 8). From its first year, the **YWCA** was also concerned about the strain of working on young women, and it offered programs on hygiene, first aid and physical education (Hoch and Nixon, 7-8). The "outfit" of the day in these early gym classes was "bloomers, middies, and sneakers" (Hoch and Nixon, 8). Later courses were offered for "corrective gymnastics" to help women with flat feet, weak arches and other such issues (Hoch and Nixon, 10). In 1923, the **YWCA** was able to start swimming classes for women and girls when the Lockport YMCA offered some women-only pool time to the **YWCA**. Notes from those days indicated that the regulation one-piece grey tank suits were in dubious condition and "were forever springing leaks and had to be patched." Too few swim suits also necessitated quick washes so the next person could put on the damp suit and jump into the pool (Hoch and Nixon, 14-5).

Hikes and summer camping excursions to help women develop stamina and provide diversions from the long hours of work also were very popular offerings of the **YWCA** all during this era (Hoch and Nixon, 11). The athletic training the women received could, on occasion, give women the opportunity to show everyone that they could be as "fit" as men. At the 1920 camp, for instance, the girls' baseball team challenged the Boy Scouts team and beat them, 17-13! Camps continued even during the Great Depression when "Stay at Home Camps" provided an affordable alternative during the hard economic times (Hoch and Nixon, 16).

Picture of girls at Altamont Camp around 1915-1920



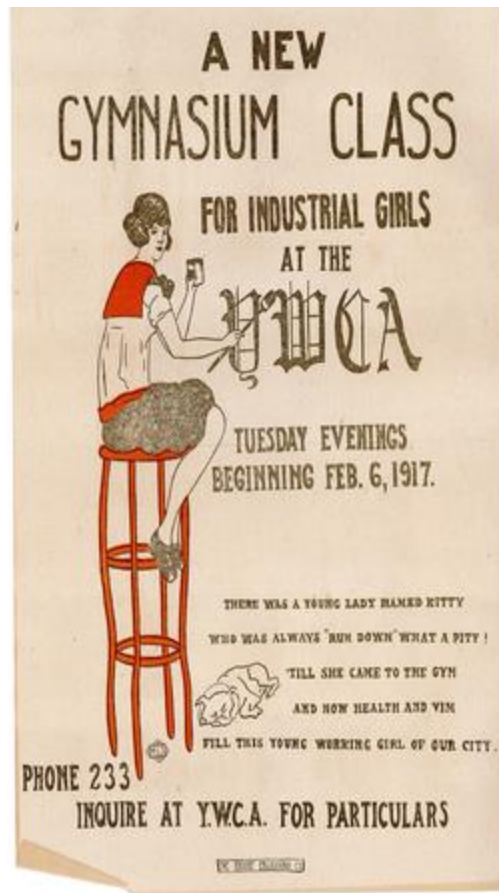
Social, Leadership and Organizational Empowerment

One of the motivating concerns of the founders of the **YWCA** was the lack of activities for young women in the community. While young men had the YMCA, there was no place in Lockport for girls and younger women to meet and develop as young Christian women (Hoch and Nixon, 6) As a result, one of the first things the **YWCA** did was to provide support and opportunities for girls to get together with other young teens and pre-teens. This activity was formally organized in 1919 when a chapter of the Girls Reserve (an organization of the **YWCA/USA**) was founded in Lockport. This organization for young teens and pre-teens offered a wide array of social activities, such as dances, banquets, trips, and other social gatherings. By the 1920s, the Girls Reserve had organized itself into several clubs structured by age groups.

Another group, the Business Girls, also was started in 1919 with the election of the first officers in February. The purpose of this club was to allow women in these occupations to meet and socialize with other professionals and women in the clerical and sales fields. In October 1928, the **YWCA** established a Business and Professional Girls Club to further support women in the clerical and professional jobs (The **YWCA/USA** had a similar group) (Hoch and Nixon, 15).

To meet the social and physical needs of women working in industrial jobs, the YWCA in many communities established industrial clubs. In Lockport, in 1918 the **YWCA** founded industrial clubs at Harrison Company, Kresge Company, and two more clubs at the Niagara Textile Company. Other clubs were in the planning stages, and an article in the local paper encouraging such clubs asked employers, "Is your company interested in clubs to provide talks on health, good taste in dress, gymnastics, basketball, homemaking and dancing?" (Hoch and Nixon, 10) Another club for women working as household assistants was started in Lockport by the **YWCA** in 1920. A placement service for the assistants started by the **YWCA** was very popular with many women from factories looking to change positions to the less demanding assistant jobs in private homes.

Ad for Gym Class for Industrial Girls, 1917



From its beginning, the **YWCA/USA** has seen one of its roles as developing leadership skills in women. Local YWCA boards were allowed to develop unique programs that responded to their community's needs. Individual women, both those working and those not working outside the home, organized programs for others and showed both their community and themselves what women could do. The elections of officers and boards placed YWCA women in governing roles that women were often denied in the larger political arena. The **YWCA** exemplified this pattern with an elected board and officers that were always women. However, because of legal issues and maybe even doubts about women's ability to manage money and/or make investment decisions, a Board of Trustees composed of men and women was put in place to "oversee" the financial decisions of the board and to manage the **YWCA's** monies. Leading members of the community were appointed and many were trusted advisors on a wide range of issues until early in the 21st century when it was decided there was no longer a need for the trustees.

The clubs and organizations the **YWCA** started, such as the Girls Reserve, the Business Girls and the Industrial Clubs also provided organizational and leadership training for the girls and women in the community. For instance, while the Girls Reserve was primarily a social organization, it provided training for young women in public leadership through it many community events and social service projects. One of their first such activities was fundraising for WW I. In the decades that followed, the Girls Reserve would participate in many other public events. Even the social programs planned by the Girls Reserve provided a chance for young women to develop managerial and leadership skills, such as scheduling, marketing,

advertising, and budgeting that could be transferred to public leadership roles. The Girls Reserve (and later the Y-Teens) was the training ground for many women who would later become **YWCA** officers and board members as well as leaders in Lockport's businesses and civic groups.

Girls Reserve from 1931 in front of Lockport High School



*At least one future **YWCA** board president is in the picture, Marjorie Upson (first row, 10th from right) who served two terms as president (1955-56, 1957-59).*

In the Business Girls club, in Lockport and in other YWCAs in the nation, young women could develop the leadership and organizational skills that could be transferred to their place of work, in addition to the opportunity for social interaction with other professional women. Additionally, the focus of discussion in their meetings often shifted to the problems the women faced in the workplace, such as equal pay for equal work, education for the workplace and the need for personal development (Marinho, 563). These discussions both influenced and were influenced by the political agenda pursued by the **YWCA/USA**.

The same was true in the industrial clubs. Designed to provide the women in the factory with the chance to socialize and engage in recreational activities with other similarly employed women, the clubs often became a place where working women, including many immigrant, minority and poor women, could learn the skills, which for some women, translated later into labor organizing and union formation. As was the case with the business clubs, the social gathering of industrial women could become forums for discussions of working conditions.

These groups, like their professional women counterparts, helped push the **YWCA/USA** to the forefront of calls for better working conditions for women (Morinho, 563; Sims, 78, 80).

In addition to participating in local meetings and programs, the members of the **YWCA** and its various clubs regularly attended state and national meetings, camps and conferences. At these events there were physical and social activities, as well as the leadership and other classes where the women and girls from Lockport had the opportunity to discuss issues of concern with women and girls from all over the state and nation.

The YWCA's close affiliation with Protestant churches meant the moral development of girls and women was a concern to members of the organization. To address the religious development of young working women and girls, prayer and hymn singing were very common in all meetings of the general membership and in the groups it organized. In addition, to counter the sexual harassment and real threats from men who would take advantage of working women, the **YWCA** showed two films in 1919 to warn young women about wrong living and other such moral threats. Women 16 years old and older saw "The End of the Road", while younger girls saw "The Beginning of Life" (Hoch and Nixon, 11).

Political Empowerment

The **YWCA/USA** has, since its founding, taken political positions on many issues, especially those of importance to the health and safety of children and working women. The association, for instance, was a major proponent of limiting child labor, and as early as its Third National Conference in 1911, it adopted a resolution that "Resolved: that the Association shall seek to educate public opinion regarding the need to establish a minimum living wage" (Sims, 148). In 1920, the **YWCA/USA** adopted the "Social Ideals of the Church," which called for industrial justice, collective bargaining and the rights of workers to organize. To instruct local chapters about this platform, it established a legislative board to inform its chapters about federal legislation and to educate members about "social, economic, and political issues upon which they as citizens, were expected to form opinions....." (Sims, 80). The **YWCA/USA** also joined the Women's Joint Congressional Committee, a lobbying organization of several women's groups that pressed Congress to pass legislation to benefit working women, including minimum wage and maximum hour legislation (Marinho, 565).

As noted, the Great Depression in the 1930s took its toll on working women. In response in 1930, at the Eleventh **YWCA/USA** National Convention resolutions were passed in support of "improvement in the working conditions of women and girls in business and industry," especially "unemployment, hours of wages, and equal rights" (Sims, 150). The **YWCA/USA** was also a major supporter of the New Deal programs, including Social Security, the Civilian Conservation Corps, unemployment insurance, national health insurance, public housing, minimum wages, and the rights of workers to unionize and engage in collective bargaining (Marinho, 565).

In addition to domestic issues, the **YWCA/USA** also took an active role in international issues by both supporting the rights of women in the world and the growth of YWCA chapters in other countries. It was also a major proponent of world peace. During this era, for instance it endorsed United States membership in the League of Nations and the World Court (Sims, 82). An interest in international issues more generally was an important focus of both the national and local chapters of the YWCA. Visiting officers of YWCA chapters from all over the world came to the United States to learn how best to serve the women in their nations, but also educate local YWCA chapters about their countries and the condition of women in those nations.

The political activities of the **YWCA** during this time were influenced by both domestic and international events. Domestically, the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 that gave women the right to vote led the organization to see one of its important roles as educating women on how to participate in politics. One way it did this was by offering classes on how to be intelligent voters. Programs on parliamentary rules, military tactics, English language classes for immigrants, and lectures on protective legislation and other proposed laws that would impact working women were part of the **YWCA's** offerings during its early years of existence. Internationally, the organization participated in fundraising to support the war, raising its share (\$1000) of the **YWCA/USA's** United War Work Campaign, which had pledged to raise \$4 million. In addition, a Patriotic League for Girls and Women was formed in Lockport to sell bonds and participate in other war relief efforts, such as a parade to increase public interest for war relief (Hoch and Nixon, 10).



In the decades that followed, the members of the **YWCA** continued to take an active interest in world issues. It recognized the needs of people in other nations and held several fundraising efforts to secure monies for international causes. After WWI, for instance, it supported war relief in Europe and the Near East Relief Fund. Talks on international affairs were also popular, including one on 1918 on Serbia and others on post-WWI events in Europe including the Russian invasion of Finland in 1939.

Programs to eliminate racism and discrimination

The **YWCA/USA** early in its development had programs to support black, immigrant, and Native American women. By the early 1900s, black women and girls were members in many chapters in different parts of the United States. The general pattern, however, especially in the South, was for there to be separate chapters or organizations for white and black women and girls. The national board attempted to set the model of equal treatment for the local chapters. In 1908, it hired a black woman to work with the black chapters and organizations. The **YWCA/USA** also maintained a policy of holding its national conventions only in states where there was no racial discrimination (Sims, 35). Even with these efforts, tensions between chapters in the South and other parts of the nation prevented a unified policy on interracial practices until after World War II (WWII).

In addition to working for the end of racial discrimination, the **YWCA/USA** backed efforts to support foreign-born women and involve them in club activities, especially in the industrial clubs. The **YWCA** was certainly aware of the efforts of its national organization on racial and immigrant equality. Indeed, Lockport has a long history in support of racial equality. Quakers, who were some of the early settlers in Lockport, were strong abolitionists; and Susan B. Anthony had also spoken in the city against slavery. Most notably, in 1877 the Common Council had voted to desegregate the schools. The **YWCA's** concern with the plight of immigrant women and children was reflected in its English language classes for immigrants. It also organized a toy drive in 1925 for immigrants coming to Ellis Island (Hoch and Nixon, 12, 14).

Organizational and Financial Challenges

The need to fund its many programs was a challenge for the **YWCA** from its founding. In the beginning, with 100s of members, dues were the source of much of the programming dollars and the basis of the budget. The sale of meals and the rental of rooms also provided some income until 1923, but these were not enough to pay for its many programs. To address the need for monies, a number of fundraising efforts were undertaken by the organization's board during its first quarter century. One of the first was a circus. With admission of ten cents, patrons were treated to red lemonade, peanuts and clowns. The event was a great success (Hoch and Nixon, 10). Other early efforts to secure funds included rummage sales and a cooperative gift shop where members could bring their crafts for sale with the profits going to the **YWCA**. Each year a major fund drive was held with local businesses running ads in the city paper in support of the effort. Other money-making events included plays (often featuring co-ed actors), estate sales and even a basketball game that featured the **YWCA** basketball team playing the Tonawanda YWCA team. Generous benefactors were also a key to the **YWCA's** survival. Early records indicate trusts for the organization were established by Laura Moody, Jennie Liddle and James Liddle. In 1921, Caroline Wood left \$3,000 to the YWCA in her will. This large sum of money (in 1921 dollars) was used to start a permanent building fund which the organization soon needed when the city took back the fire hall that had been the **YWCA's** home for six years (1918-1924). For the next three years, the organization was without a building. In 1927, with the seed money from Ms. Wood, the board purchased 32 Cottage Street. To make the building more useful, the group organized a major fund drive (\$30,000). With the help of 200 volunteers, the Girls Reserve, and the local Protestant churches, the drive was a success

raising more than \$46,784 (Hoch and Nixon, 14). Over 600 **YWCA** members attended the dedication of their new home.

The YWCA of Niagara's Home at 32 Cottage Street



*The **YWCA** moved into 32 Cottage Street in 1928 and continues to occupy the building today. Until the **YWCA** bought it, the building served as a private home. During the time of the Abolitionist Movement, a secret room on the third floor served as hiding place for fugitive slaves as one of their stops on the Underground Railroad. The building was added to the National Register of Historic Buildings in 1987. The **YWCA**'s homes before Cottage Street were located on Prospect Street from 1915-1918, the third floor of the Olsen Building from 1918-1923, and in old fire hall from 1923-1924.*

The Great Depression of the 1930s brought tough times for the nation and the **YWCA**. The organization's annual budget fell from \$10,000 in 1930 to \$8,000 in 1933. But the dire economic condition of the nation and the community meant that the **YWCA**'s financial drive that year only could raise half of what was needed, \$4,689. The **YWCA** was not alone. Most of the local social service organizations in Lockport were in desperate need of funds as the demand for their programs rose dramatically while the economy sank. To address these needs, a Lockport Community Fund (which later became the Eastern Niagara United Way) was started in 1938, and in 1940, the **YWCA** became one of its agencies. Unfortunately, the Community Fund Drive was not successful that year and the budget of the **YWCA** had to be cut (Hoch and Nixon, 16-7). Even with the budgetary limits it faced throughout the Depression, the list of monthly events and programs offered by the organization still included a full complement of lectures, dances, banquets, trips, and physical activities. To celebrate their first 25 years of existence and their continued commitment to serve the women and girls of the community even during challenging times, the **YWCA** held a banquet. It featured group singing-always a part of any event- and a fashion show of what the founders of the **YWCA** would have worn modeled by members of the Girls Reserve and the Business and Professional Club.

The YWCA: 1941-1965

The Economic and Social Challenges

The United States entry into WWII radically altered the economic picture for women in the United States. This war, even more so than WWI, opened up many industrial, professional and clerical positions to women. "Rosie the Riveter" was not just a poster figure in Western New

York, as many local companies became major suppliers of equipment used in the war. One of Lockport's largest companies, for instance, Harrison Industries, was a chief supplier of equipment used in the war and women were among its key employees. In addition to jobs in the war industry, other positions previously available to men only opened up to women when the supply of male workers was drained by the military draft. To fill the need for women workers, the U.S. government launched a major campaign to convince women of their patriotic duty to go to work. The government also did its own recruiting of women and hired more than one million women to fill jobs in the government. By 1945, 38 percent of all women in the United States were working (Hesse, 37). Unlike previous decades when most women worked before marriage, many of the women who joined the work force during WWII were married, often with teenage children. From 1940 to 1945, the percentage of married women working rose from 15 to 45 percent (McGlen, et al, 145).



Women worked in many traditional “men’s jobs” in factories during WWII

At war's end, the government and industry launched an equally ambitious campaign to get women out of the workplace and back into their homes, as the returning veterans needed jobs. Companies that had produced equipment for the war shifted to producing consumer goods, like cars and washing machines, and they needed women to stay home and buy the new domestic “equipment” every home needed. In many industries and communities, the pre-war limits on employing married women or women with children were reinstituted. Many women lost their jobs and the employment rate of women dropped from 38 percent in 1945 at the end of the war to 31 percent just two years later.

But the women who had worked during the war years often wanted to continue to work. This desire to work plus the explosion of women-only or women-mainly service and professional jobs like teaching the Baby Boomers soon resulted in the percentage of women working climbing back to war levels. Thus by 1965, just under 37 percent of women were employed. These working women, unlike before the war, included more married women and women with school age children. In 1965, 40.5 percent of single women, 38.3 percent of married women living with their husband, and 39 percent of married women with school age children worked.

Almost one-quarter (22.8 percent) of married women with pre-school children were employed (up from 10 percent in 1948). In addition to the dramatic change in the numbers and percentages of working women, the **YWCA**'s second quarter century also saw the start of the Women's Rights Movement. These national events and changes in Lockport and surrounding community required the **YWCA** to develop new programs and modify the ones it had to support the women and girls in the community.

Economic Empowerment

During WWII, the demand for workers meant that most women who wanted a job could find one. Indeed, one estimate in the early years of the war was that there would be over 20,000 factory jobs in New York State alone women would have to fill. The **YWCA** encouraged its members to take advantage of the training the government was offering for these jobs. Supporting the many married women working, especially women in the war industries, became a prime focus of the both the national and the **YWCA** during the war. The **YWCA**, for instance, changed its swim and gym schedule to add more evening and early morning classes to accommodate women in the war industries who were working late day and night shifts. The organization also had other programs to aid women in uniform and local women who were volunteering in public safety service or working in the factories. One popular offering was the annual "Stay at Home Camp" for young children of working women. The Girls Reserve, for its part, volunteered in the camps and repaired toys for the children of the women who were in military service, volunteering or working in local factories.

Junior Child Care Aides at the YWCA, July 1943



In the immediate aftermath of the war, the **YWCA**, like the rest of the nation, tended to shift its focus from working women to women who did not work outside the home. It organized many activities for 'stay-at-home' married women including new clubs. As the economic situation changed in this quarter century and more married women went to work, however, the **YWCA**

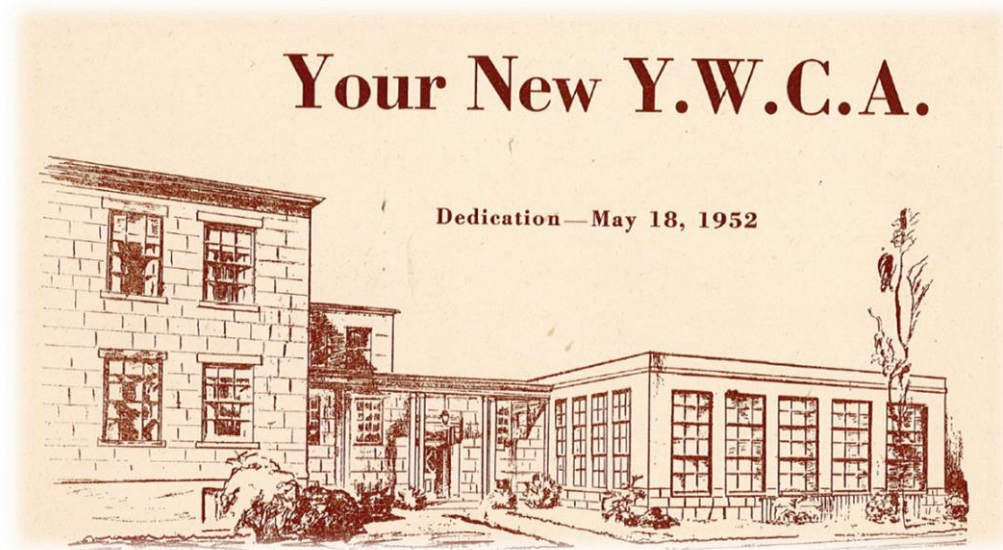
began to see that one of the most important ways they could support women was to offer day care and other programs for the children of working women.

Housing, Health and Safety Empowerment

Housing for a few women (eight in 1965) continued to be offered at Cottage Street during this quarter century of the **YWCA**. The **YWCA** after WWII also continued to be the hub of social activity in Lockport. Indeed, there were so many activities and meetings at 32 Cottage Street it soon became clear that there was a need to expand the facility, especially the gym and meeting rooms. After a successful fund drive, in 1952 the new space, the gymnasium, was dedicated.



The formal groundbreaking ceremony for the new addition and gymnasium was held on Saturday, May 5, 1951. Present were, left to right: Samuel M. Johnson, W. Harrison Upson, Jr., Lloyd S. Cochran, Miss Nan Taylor, Miss Mabel Ransom and Mrs. Harry L. Ransom.



During the 1950s and early 1960s, with its expanded space at Cottage Street, the **YWCA** was the location for many physical activity programs for the whole community including roller-skating, volleyball, and ballroom dancing. Other sport programs for women and girls also continued to be part of the **YWCA** t's offerings. These included some old activities, such as swimming and exercise classes, and training for new sports like golf.

Picture of golf class in the gym, 1953



Social, Organizational and Leadership Empowerment

Perhaps because more mothers of teens were working during and after the war, the Girls Reserve, which became the Y-Teens in 1943, was even more active than before. A TEEN Town for girls and boys was started at the **YWCA** in 1943 and continued to be popular with local teens

in the 1950s (Hoch and Nixon 17). The Girls Reserve/Y-Teens also did their part to support the war effort including volunteering to pick fruit when there was a shortage of workers and entertaining the troops at the United Services Organization (USO) at Fort Niagara. After WWII, the Y-Teens continued to organize many social activities for young people in the community, including their popular teenage dances, Christmas pageants, Mother-Daughter and Father-Daughter banquets, and dozens of other yearly programs (Hoch and Nixon, 18). The Y-Teens also expanded with more sections and programs for younger pre-teen girls.

Pictures of Y-Teens in an activity @1950 from building addition book



The Business and Professional Girls Club continued to offer programs of interest to working women during the war years. One conference for Western New York club members, in addition to presentations on the up-coming presidential campaign and white collar unions, included a panel on "Are husbands necessary?" where the challenge of combining marriage and work was topic. By the 1950s, the Business and Professional and Industrial Clubs were merged into one organization, the Business, Professional and Industrial Girls Club of the **YWCA**. Composed of women in secretarial, professional and industrial clubs, the organization met every Monday night for dinner and a program. Once a month, a business meeting was planned by the cabinet and the officers. In addition to socializing and making friends, the club provided the women a chance to use the recreational facilities at 32 Cottage Street and to learn about national and world events. The 1952-1953 list of activities, for instance, included talks by the Democratic candidate for Congress (E. Dent Lackey), the Vice President of Niagara Mohawk, and a local civilian defense official. A Christmas Party for Salvation Army Children, a book review presentation, a Father-Daughter Banquet, a Mother-Daughter Banquet, an Employers Banquet, several gym programs, numerous business meetings and several weeks of charm courses rounded out the year's program.

As noted, post-WWII, with its culture of returning women to the home, left many women who followed this path feeling isolated and in need of intellectual and social stimulation. Betty Friedan in her book, "The Feminine Mystique," published in 1963, characterized this feeling as "the problem with no name." In response, the **YWCA** in this era focused much of its attention on non-working women, especially women with young children. It created more programs for married/non-working women including more clubs. In 1943, one of the first of these organizations for women, the Young Matron Club, was started to provide social support for women with young children whose husbands were at war or working long hours in the war industries. A Newcomers Club, organized before WWII, evolved into the group, YW-Woman. Chapters of this organization were started in Lockport, Gasport and Newfane. The focus of the YW-Woman groups was on helping women create a happy home, raise children and build a better community. Separate programs for moms and pre-school sons and moms and preschool daughters were also popular **YWCA** activities during this era.

Young Matron Club members with their children at a meeting



In addition to the new clubs, the **YWCA** expanded its offerings of lectures on a wide variety of topics, including art, culture, and the issues of the day. More activities, such as craft classes, book clubs and trips were also part of the programming in its second quarter century (Hoch and Nixon, 31) A noon travelogue, featuring presentations on such places as the Holy Land, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Alaska became a popular feature for both women who stayed home and those who worked outside the home.

Political Empowerment

As it had during the WWI, the **YWCA** took an active role in war support efforts during WWII. Groups came to the Cottage Street to roll bandages and learn first aid. The U.S.O. campaign was also launched there. The Girls Reserve sold warsages (boutonnieres for men) to fund the war; and they along with the **YWCA** membership sold war bonds and stamps as part of a community effort to support the war (Hoch and Nixon, 17). The **YWCA** also started Emergency Units to train women in first aid and established a blackout room in the basement (Hoch and Nixon, 17). Programs at Cottage Street had information on how women could support the war effort by following the new consumer rules and modifying old clothes rather than buy new so the money saved could purchase war bonds. The Girls Reserve did its part, welcoming a representative from the WAACs to their meeting who gave an impassioned lecture urging the group's members to join her organization and participate directly in the war effort.

To better educate the public and their members on important local and national political issues, the **YWCA** formalized its presentations of current events into a series, Public Affairs Discussions. These talks covered both national issues like the 1964 Presidential election and local issues like funding of the new Niagara County Community College. During this era, the **YWCA/USA** continued its efforts to foster peace and cooperation among nations, including support for United States membership in the United Nations. In concert with the national organization, the **YWCA** built much of its international programming on the themes of world fellowship and understanding (Hoch and Nixon, 19). It supported efforts of the **YWCA/USA** to help women around the world by raising funds for women in war torn nations and offering programs on refugees in Europe. In addition, it continued its talks about world events, with many presentations by women who had traveled, studied, worked, or volunteered abroad.

Programs to eliminate racism and discrimination

In 1938, the **YWCA/USA** established a commission to study the racial practices of both the national and local chapters. The report found that in many places there were separate organizations for white and black women and girls. In response, the National Board adopted the Interracial Charter pledging the whole organization to racial integration and inclusion of women and girls of all races in "the mainstream of Association life..." (Sims, 72; Marinho, 564). The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s further heightened the commitment of the organization to racial equality; and by the 1960s full integration was a requirement of all YWCA chapters. The **YWCA/USA** was also a major sponsor of Civil Rights March on Washington in 1963. The **YWCA** was in support of the national's policies and reflected this by participating in the Lockport 1964 Civil Rights March (Hoch and Nixon, 19).

Organization and Financial Challenges

Now that the **YWCA** was an organization funded in part by the Community Fund (United Way), its financial challenges were lessened. In 1948, for instance, the first mortgage on 32 Cottage Street was "burned" to symbolize its payment. In the boom years after the war, fundraisers and generous donations from members of the community and "sister organizations," such as the BPW and Zonta Club, quickly helped to raise the needed monies for the new gymnasium. Cottage Street, with this new addition, was an even more popular location for events organized

by the Y-Teens, lectures and presentations for the community, meetings of the **YWCA**'s many clubs, and many other activities for the community. The centralized role of the **YWCA** in the life of Lockport is best reflected in the city's Centennial Celebration. Much of the planning for the event was held at 32 Cottage Street as was the Centennial Ball. The **YWCA**'s celebrated its own 50th year of serving the women, children and the community in 1965 with a birthday party which 130 guests attended (Hoch and Nixon, 17-19, 21-22). At the dinner the executive director, Christine Loomis, noted "The **YWCA** has become an integral part of this community, and we have progressed in many ways during the past 50 years. We owe everything we are today to the pioneer women of 1915. It is not an easy task to give birth to an idea such as the organization of the **YWCA**, and the many problems which were surmounted by these women of vision and foresight. We are proud of our heritage." (Hoch and Nixon, 21)

The YWCA: 1966-1990

The Economic and Social Challenges

The trends of more women working, more married women working, and more women with children working that began in the **YWCA**'s second quarter century, continued at even a faster pace in the next 25 years. The "stagflation" of the 1970s and early 1980s that involved both high inflation and stagnant wages (especially for men) and the decline of industrial jobs in Western New York pushed or pulled even more women into the workplace. The Women's Movement, with its focus on the right of women to work, and new laws, including the 1963 Equal Pay Act, which required equal pay for men and women in equal jobs (not comparable jobs) and the 1964 Civil Rights Act which on paper forbade sex discrimination in employment, all resulted in even more women entering the labor force. Thus by 1990, more than two-thirds of single women, almost 60 percent of married women, 54 percent of women with school children, and 38 percent of women with children under six were working (Ries and Stone, 322, 323).

Economic Empowerment

Title IX of the Educational Amendment Act of 1972, which made it illegal for high schools and colleges to discriminate against girls and women, opened many educational programs to women that had previously been closed or where only a small percentage of the seats were allotted to women. Starting a trend begun in the late 19th century when women could go to college for teaching and social work, women now could go to college to get education for even more professional careers, such as medical doctor and lawyer. Clerical and some technical training also became more readily available to women who completed high school. These trends appeared to lessen the need for the **YWCA** to provide job training, but as we will see in the 21st century, a new group of women would need the help of the **YWCA** to prepare for work.

Rather than offering job training, making sure women had the knowledge to manage their money or that of their household was the focus of some of the **YWCA**'s economic empowerment program in its third-quarter century. In January 1968, for instance, the organization held a five week series of talks called "Things Women Should Know About." The presentations were designed to give women critical financial information on such things as

creating a will, preparing taxes, buying insurance, and managing one's finances. In 1972, the **YWCA** also sponsored a four week income tax class for women who wanted to learn how to prepare their own tax return and/or help others prepare theirs (Hoch and Nixon, 34). In the next year, an investment seminar was held (Hoch and Nixon, 36).

Recognizing that more women wanted to and needed to work, helping women find work or learn about careers was the topic of several **YWCA** seminars in this era. In concert with the BPW, the **YWCA** sponsored an employment workshop in 1968 for women with information on occupations and strategies for getting a job, including how to frame good application letters and resumes (Hoch and Nixon, 27). In light of discussions about women being "segregated" into low-paying women-only or women-mainly careers, the executive director of the **YWCA**, Eleanor Bradley, attended a state workshop in 1975 to learn about educational training for women beginning or returning to college. She subsequently participated in programs to counsel women about non-traditional careers and educational programs for those careers (Hoch and Nixon, 37). In 1975, the **YWCA** and the Zonta Club sponsored an "Operation Match-Up Service" to link women in a certain career with women who were contemplating obtaining a job in that field.

With more women employed, especially women with children, the **YWCA** determined that it could support working mothers by offering supervised programs for children who were not in school. One of its most popular programs was for pre-school children, Right Start Child Care, which served more than two dozen children each year (Hoch and Nixon, 38, 45). In addition, an after-school program for children aged 6 to 12 was begun during this era to accommodate children of working mothers who could not be home when the school day ended. Funded by grants and fees, the after-school program expanded during the 1980s to include students in the city and parochial schools with activities offered at the **YWCA**. A morning and afternoon program for preschoolers, both boys and girls, was also added during the 1980s. In 1989, the **YWCA** opened the Child Care Center. Fully licensed by New York State, the center was located on South Transit Road. Equipped to serve 40 children daily, the facility was designed to meet a major need of working women and the community of Lockport (Hoch and Nixon, 66-67). Unfortunately the Day Care Center was very expensive to run and after several years of large deficits, the organization reluctantly had to close it.

While the day care center was too expensive to run, the **YWCA** did its best to meet the community's child care needs. In addition to its after-school program, to help address the problem of unsupervised time in the summer, Camp Halfaday (Half-a-Day) for girls 6 to 13 was offered in July and August (Hoch and Nixon, 31). It expanded to five weeks in 1984 and to six weeks in 1985. In 1984, the camps were opened to boys as well as girls. The activities were many and included crafts, games, horseback riding, singing, hikes, and field trips to important places like the Historical Society's Museum, the Niagara County Courthouse, the Post Office, the Fire Department, the Buffalo Zoo, and Fantasy Island (Hoch and Nixon, 32-33). A week-long camp for even younger children, Camp Happy Tots, was started in 1975 (Hoch and Nixon, 38). Re-named "Summer Fun" by 1985, the program ran for two weeks.

The first holidays youth program was started in 1978 to fill the idle time of the Christmas break (Hoch and Nixon, 47). Periodically, the **YWCA** also offered programs and trips during other school holidays. Additional programs for young children and teens were developed during this time, including classes on physical fitness, drama, horseback riding, and cheerleading. The goal of all these summer activities was twofold: to provide the children with fun ways to learn and keep active in the summer and to support working mothers who needed a safe place for their children during the time school was not in session.

Housing, Health and Safety Empowerment

The **YWCA** continued in its third quarter century to offer limited housing opportunities at 32 Cottage Street. Funds to up-date the facilities, especially the residents' kitchen, were generously donated in 1967 by the Taylor sisters, Dora and Eleanor (Nan), long-time members and patrons of the **YWCA**. The minutes of the board, however, indicate that the housing did not always have all the new amenities sought by the residents. In 1968, for instance, a policy was adopted that required the residents to buy their own televisions! In 1980, however, in part because of space limitations, the residence rooms were closed. As we will see below, the **YWCA** would only be briefly out of the "housing business."

A full complement of exercise programs for adult women, including a Body Fitness Program that attracted more than 100 women to the basement exercise facility at Cottage Street, continued to be offered. In 1985, the exercise space and the program were given a new name, the Lockport Health Club. The health club had a full exercise space, a sauna and equipment. Free babysitting was offered to make time for exercise for mothers with young children.

Sport programs and exercise classes were also offered for teen girls (Hoch and Nixon, 55), and the swimming classes for children were also very popular. In the summer of 1971, a physical development class for children with disabilities was jointly sponsored by the **YWCA** and the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (Hoch and Nixon, 30). The **YWCA** also held other health programs like presentations on drugs and venereal disease to the membership at its "Keeping Up" programs and to the Y-Teens at one of their meetings (Hoch and Nixon, 25, 29). There were also talks on self-defense, breast cancer, alcoholism, gun safety, first aid for children, dealing with stress, and a three week series on safety in the home and in the car (Hoch and Nixon, 34, 42, 43). A support group, an exercise program, and a special presentation on reconstructive surgery for breast cancer victims were part of the **YWCA's** programming in the mid-1980s. A related group, Start With Today, was formed with the American Cancer Society for victims and families of victims facing life threatening illnesses (Hoch and Nixon, 57).

The challenges facing teenagers during the 1960s led to several workshops for young women. In addition to exercise and self-improvement classes, there was a presentation on "Dynamic Relationships." This series included sessions on stereotyped thinking, understanding mixed singles and the thought process of young men and women. For the parents of teens, a Tough Love program about how best to raise teenagers was offered at the **YWCA** in 1987-1988. Open

to all parents trying to raise teenagers, this was a free program for anyone in the community who wanted to attend (Hoch and Nixon, 59-60).

The **YWCA** also tackled other issues facing women in this decade. Because more marriages were ending in divorce, the **YWCA** developed a series of six workshops in the mid-1970s, entitled "Women in Transition-How to Cope with Separation and Divorce," for women going through the process (Hoch and Nixon, 43, 63). A similar program was offered again in the 1980s.

An old issue, violence against women, especially domestic violence, which had long been kept hidden in the home, was taken from its shadows by the Women's Movement. The **YWCA** responded to this problem in 1979 by first establishing, along with other community leaders, a Violence Against Women Task Force. Led by concerned women from the community and the **YWCA**, this task force promoted community awareness and education on the issue with an active speakers' bureau. It also established an emergency fund for a temporary shelter for women in crisis, developed a community needs survey, and one of its members volunteered her own home as a safe haven for victims. In 1983, the **YWCA** established a Domestic Violence Hotline, providing information and referral services for safe shelters outside of the area. A grant from then Assemblyman Matthew J. Murphy Jr. allowed for expansion of the Hotline and the addition of counseling services by a trained social worker. Calls to the Hotline soon convinced the task force members of the need for a more permanent local shelter in Eastern Niagara County. To meet the need, the **YWCA** successfully sought a grant from the New York State's Children and Family Trust Fund to start a "safe house" for women and children escaping from a situation of domestic violence. The eight-bed facility opened in 1986 and the **YWCA** was once again in the housing business! In addition to the new housing, the Domestic Violence Hotline was expanded to 24 hours, staffed during the day by YWCA employees and by dedicated volunteers during non-business hours.

Rape was another women's issue tackled by the **YWCA** in the 1970s. Under the leadership of youth volunteer Mary Brennan, top local law enforcement officials and Judge Charles Hannigan, a Rape Prevention Task Force Seminar was held in 1977 (Hoch and Nixon, 44).

Social, Leadership and Organizational Empowerment

The **YWCA** continued to provide social organizations for married women including several to attract young mothers (Y-Wives and Special Friends Club for women with children in K-6th grades) (Hoch and Nixon, 31, 35). A group for older women (29 and Holding) started in 1960 and was still going strong in 1990. All of these groups' programs included such things as crafts, speakers, trips, and community service projects overseen most of the time by a full-time adult programming staff member. The organization also sponsored a full range of presentations and workshops for the larger membership and the community on everything from flower arranging, quilting, crocheting, and stained glass making to Social Security, driver education, and modern art. There were also classes on such non-traditional topics as basic auto care and a "Fix it Class" on minor home repairs and decorating. The wide range of continuing education programs

offered to the community by the **YWCA** was recognized by the mayor of Lockport, Joan Radecke, in 1978 as part of her Continuing Education Week in Lockport (Hoch and Nixon, 47).

The **YWCA** also planned trips to see plays and other events in such places as Stratford, Buffalo, Toronto, and Rochester. Cruises and trips to even farther locales were part of the late 1980s programming. In an effort to attract an even wider audience of working women and men, the popular travel log talks, which could draw more than 100 people, moved from the lunch hour to the evenings to accommodate more people's schedules.

The Y-Teens expanded in this era with new chapters in Newfane, Gasport and Wilson. The group also continued social activities like sock hops, trips to New York City and Toronto, participation in community events, and volunteering to support national and community needs. In 1968, for instance, the Y-Teens cleaned up Outwater Park and painted the benches and tables after the park had been vandalized. Another Y-Teen project included gift boxes for soldiers wounded in Vietnam. The Y-Teens were also active in supporting fundraising efforts for the YWCA, UNICEF and Toys for Tots. Similar volunteer and fundraising efforts were part of the Y-Teens' annual events throughout the third quarter of the **YWCA's** existence. A group of younger girls, the Crickets, also participated in many activities organized by the staff.

Political Empowerment

To provide its members and people in the community with the opportunity to become informed citizens, the **YWCA** continued two of its very popular programs that provided political information on local and national issues. The "Keeping Up" series of talks by community leaders from the mayor to the local librarian discussed local and national issues including such diverse topics as venereal disease and Lockport history. The Great Decision program focused on foreign policy issues like "Cuba and the Panama Canal."

In the late 1960s, the Women's Movement began to receive wide public attention. One of the **YWCA's** first "acts" in support of the movement was in 1969, when the board voted unanimously to allow employees to wear pant suits, with discretion! (Hoch and Nixon 29-30). A more serious discussion of women's rights and equality was offered in 1973, when the **YWCA** held a six week seminar on the "Status of Women and the Concept of Equality." Open to the public, the talks explored many issues including the Equal Rights Amendment which had recently passed the Congress (it later failed to secure the needed approval by the states) (Hoch and Nixon, 35). At the final seminar meeting, the notes indicate that the consensus of the women participants was "Others are running our lives, and, we as women, must take a greater interest and part in making decisions that affect our lives" (Hoch and Nixon, 37).

Members of the **YWCA** took an active part in state events during the International Women's Year (IWY) in 1975, and YWCA women were part of a group of community women who successfully pressed the Lockport City Council and mayor to declare March Women's Month in the city. In the same year, foreshadowing what would become the Niagara Awards in the 1990s, the **YWCA** Public Task Force and the League of Women Voters honored 16 women from the

community for their accomplishments in education, government and the humanities at the first



International Women's Decade (IWD) luncheon (logo on left). At the event the speaker, Dr. Sol Gordon from Syracuse University, spoke in favor of women's liberation and argued for sex education. The John Birch Society picketed the event and the controversial speaker, but the women did not bow to the pressure. With new co-sponsors (the UAW and Zonta Club), the event was repeated in all

but one year of the International Women's Decade (1975-1985) and for the next ten years after the decade ended (1986-1995). Each year dozens of local women were honored for their accomplishments and their community service. In total, over 230 women were recognized. Notable women spoke each year at the event including Carol Bellamy, President of the New York City Council. At the 1980 IWD luncheon, she urged those present to "continue the fight against discrimination" (Hoch and Nixon, 49).

The **YWCA's** home at Cottage Street also became a site of the battle for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) with members of the **YWCA**, the League of Women Voters and other local citizens meeting to hear a talk on the need for the amendment in 1976. During this era, the **YWCA** was a sponsor of talks by many famous advocates for, and symbols of women's rights, including Mary Anne Krupsak, Lt. Governor of New York and U.S. Rep. Bella Abzug, a major proponent of increased political participation by women (Hoch and Nixon, 37). In the 1970s and 1980s, the **YWCA's** Women's Rights Task Force organized several programs on women's issues including an eight-week seminar on "Human Sexuality: A Woman's Point of View," and another entitled "The Release of Woman Power" on women's involvement in politics. A six-week series on "Focus on Women-Focus on You," had presentations on self-awareness, confidence building, successful communication, and setting priorities (Hoch and Nixon, 48). The task force also sponsored an open meeting in 1977 on Title IX, which made sex discrimination in education illegal. The presentation on funding of girls and boys sports programs in the Lockport school system made it clear that the law was needed and changes in the funding of programs for boys and girls in the local system should to be made. Once March was designated as Women's History Month, the **YWCA** also regularly observed the occasion. In 1990, for instance, the organization sponsored a four-part film series, "Women in American History". The public was invited to all the presentations. The **YWCA** staff also attended meetings of the **YWCA/USA** on such issues as full employment and its impact on women workers.

In addition to the issues surrounding women's rights, the **YWCA/USA's** focus on worldwide freedom, justice and good will continued. In support, the **YWCA** regularly held a World Fellowship dinner to celebrate the common spirit of all peoples. In 1966, it also sponsored an International Border Workshop with YWCA leaders from Canada, India, Hong Kong, and the United States. Throughout this era of the **YWCA's** history, every year there were talks about various parts of the world. Guests from foreign countries and local community members were invited by the organization to give presentations, open to the public, about such countries as India, the Philippines, Taiwan, Cuba, Greece, Ethiopia, Yugoslavia, and Scandinavia. The **YWCA** also continued to raise funds for social needs in other parts of the world. In 1967, for instance,

it contributed to the Middle East Emergency Fund. Annually during this period, the organization participated along with other YWCAs in Mutual Service Week to celebrate partnership with women and girls around the world. In 1989, the **YWCA** was selected as one of 12 YWCAs in the nation to host a team of women from YWCAs in Asia. A woman from Taiwan and one from South Korea stayed nine days in Lockport, learning about the **YWCA**'s programs and activities (Hoch and Nixon, 67).

Programs to eliminate racism and discrimination

The **YWCA/USA** continued to advocate for racial equality during this era. In 1965, it opened the Office of Racial Justice to campaign against discrimination; and in 1967, it elected the YWCA's first black woman as President, Helen Clayton. The **YWCA** also supported the Civil Rights Movement. Efforts included sending letters to members of Congress in support of pending civil rights legislation. Deeply saddened by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the **YWCA** sent a sympathy letter to his family (Hoch and Nixon, 28). In 1970, at the prompting of black members, the **YWCA/USA** adopted the "One Imperative," which required the organization and all of its chapters to eliminate racism wherever it existed and by any means necessary. The **YWCA**, in support of that goal, sent a delegation of three of its leaders to the **YWCA/USA** National Conference on Racial Justice in 1972. The conference brought together leaders from more than 100 national organizations to discuss how best to bring about racial equality (Hoch and Nixon, 31).

Organizational and Financial Challenges

The third quarter of the **YWCA**'s existence presented its own financial and organizational challenges. Generous donors like the Taylor sisters, Nan and Dora, continued to do their best to help, often providing the money needed for special projects. Membership drives, however, were still the basis of much of the effort to secure the resources for the organization's expanding programs. Very ambitious goals were often set and phone trees or phonathons undertaken; but, all too often, the achieved number of members fell short of the goal. An annual dinner for members provided an opportunity to raise money and honor volunteers, officers, board members, and staff. To supplement membership dues, the board and dedicated volunteers organized many fundraising events. A popular one for more than 25 years was the Mistletoe Mart, which opened the gym at Cottage Street to vendors selling Christmas decorations and gifts. Rummage sales, usable goods sales, and used clothing sales were frequent as well during this 25-year time period. Periodically, the association had an auction or a sale of old furniture and equipment. Another popular fundraiser for many years was the salad bar. These events offered the lunchtime crowd an opportunity to eat a great meal and support the **YWCA**.

YWCA members serving at the salad bar, undated



Money each year from the Eastern Niagara United Way (formerly the Community Fund) was essential to the **YWCA**'s many programs for women, children and the community. In 1989, for instance, the United Way funds were a third of the **YWCA**'s budget. The economic turmoil the United States faced in the 1970s and the early 1980s meant that the United Way drive often fell short; and in 1981, the drive was even postponed until the economy improved. The shortage of funds and the poor economy in the early 1980s forced the **YWCA** to drop plans to expand its facilities at 32 Cottage Street. Instead, modest renovations were made, which included ending the residential facilities and moving the day-care program into the parlor. Roller skating was stopped due to the gym floor's deteriorating state, and to save energy dollars, the front windows of the gym were insulated and boarded-up.

To support its programs, especially its new programs in domestic violence, the **YWCA** in this period turned to new sources of funds: government and foundation grants and payments. Monies from a New York State Division of Youth grant underwrote the After School Latch Key program allowing it to be free to children ages 6 to 12 of working parents; and a New York State Department of Social Services grant provided money for the domestic violence counselor. In recognition of this new source of income, Board President Esther Nixon called 1986-1987 the year of grants.

Even with all its financial challenges, the **YWCA** celebrated its 75th year of supporting the women, children and community of Lockport and the surrounding areas in great style in May 1990. At its 75th annual dinner, Lockport dignities, **YWCA** members and staff celebrated with a cake with 75 candles. As the authors of the 75-year history, Margaret Hoch and Esther Nixon wrote, "While 75 years denotes a sense of longevity, the YWCA of Niagara's changing program

patterns show that it is making a real effort to keep up with the times and to meet and serve the needs of the community” (p. 69).

The Current YWCA: 1991 to the present

The Economic and Social Challenges

The economic trends set in motion with WWII continued at an even more rapid pace after 1990. While the stagflation of the 1970s and early 1980s ended by the mid-1980s, the economy did not fully returned to the high employment and growth of the two decades after WWII. Studies showed that wages of men with a high school or less than a high school education had failed to keep up with inflation. There also had been a decline in men-mainly fields like construction and industry. At the same time, there had been a growth of women-mainly service jobs and some professional careers like teaching and nursing. Education levels for men and women had also reversed such that, by 2014, more women than men were graduating from high school and college. With women’s earnings contributing more than one-third of the income of a married couple, more than ever there was a need for women of all categories to work to support themselves and their families. The result was that by 2013, more women were working (58 percent), more married women were working (53 percent), more women with children were working (71 percent) and more women with young children under six were working (65 percent). The rising divorce rate and the growth of never-married women with children also had altered the role of women in the family. By 2014, more than 25 percent of families with children were headed by a mother only. With fewer than half of women-headed families receiving full child support from the father, most of these families faced difficult economic straits. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 2012, more than 30 percent of the families with children under age 18 who were headed by a woman (and had no husband present) fell below the poverty level. Changes in welfare law to require work and limit the time of benefits also put even more pressure on mothers in these families to find work that could support themselves and their children (McGlen, et al, 321). One of the results of these economic changes has been the rising number of homeless families headed by a woman. In 2013, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimated that one third of the homeless population were families, most of which were headed by a woman.

The **YWCA** has responded to the changing condition and increased its attention on the needs of unemployed women and homeless women and their children. As we shall see, in many ways the programs of the **YWCA** today look like those offered 100 years ago when the organization began.

Economic Empowerment

In the **YWCA**’s most recent 25 years, the intersection between unemployment and homelessness has shaped many of the organization’s programs. We can see this most clearly with Carolyn’s House in Niagara Falls. In 2001 with New York State Historic Tax credits, other government monies, and private funding, the **YWCA** undertook a \$6 million renovation of the former residence for Niagara University nursing students (the building had also been a home for seminarians) located in an economically depressed section of the city. The goal was to be

able to offer transitional housing for homeless women and their children. In 2005 the renovation was complete and the **YWCA** opened Carolyn's House, named after the late Carolyn Van Schaik, a community activist with a passion for the city of Niagara Falls and its preservation, who had been instrumental in providing the legal assistance that made funding the project possible.

Carolyn's House



Carolyn's House is a transitional housing facility with 19 low income apartments for homeless women and their children. It also is the site of the culinary arts program and The Catering Crew.

Many of the residents at Carolyn's House have experienced domestic violence, while others are in substance abuse recovery. Some women are seeking to regain custody of their children. All the women are working toward graduating to their own permanent residence and employment. The objective of Carolyn's House was to support the women so they could turn their lives around. The **YWCA** believed housing alone was an incomplete solution to achieve this goal, so it designed programs that would help the women transition out of poverty toward economic self-sufficiency. This starts with the **YWCA** case management team providing counseling and guidance to each resident to help her develop a personal plan for self-sufficiency and preparation for permanent housing. Each plan includes both short and long-term goals and the case management team meets regularly with each resident to monitor her progress, amending and modifying the goals and objectives to adapt to the changing needs of the tenant. Support services and programs are also provided to assist each resident achieve her plan. These include general counseling, parent skill development, mental health counseling, chemical dependency education and support groups, domestic violence support and/or counseling, vocational training, holistic health and wellness training by a certified nurse, youth case management, job training, employment placement and financial literacy instruction from Key Bank staff or a volunteer financial counselor.

For some of the women residents, their plan has involved earning a GED (offered by BOCES at Carolyn's House since 2007); for others the goal is to enroll in Niagara County Community College (NCCC) or other institution of higher education to earn a certificate or degree that will

lead to a career. By early 2014, several women had earned their GEDs, and many have “graduated” to permanent housing and employment. To further assist the residents’ transition successfully after Carolyn’s House, the **YWCA** has also entered an agreement with Housing Visions to provide organizational oversight of housing and support programs in Niagara Falls for graduates of Carolyn’s House.

Between opening in 2005 and spring 2015, Carolyn’s House has provided housing and social support for 190 women and 240 children. More than 75 percent of Carolyn’s House women have moved on to independent living. One example of success would be “Victoria,” who with domestic violence counseling and support from Carolyn’s House staff divorced her abusive husband. She also gained the legal right to work in the United States (“green card” status) with help from the Volunteer Lawyers Project. The new legal status and job readiness preparation and advocacy from the staff allowed Victoria to achieve gainful employment in retail. Another success would be “Brandi.” She participated in sobriety and chemical dependency counseling and addressed ongoing physical health needs. She achieved sobriety and was accepted into NCCC’s phlebotomy’s program. She subsequently sought and found gainful employment with the advocacy and the job training provided by Carolyn’s House staff. There are numerous other examples of women who have found the support they needed at Carolyn’s House that allowed them to “graduate” to permanent housing and financial independence.

A key part of the program at Carolyn’s House has been job training in the field of culinary arts. With support from the John R. Oishei Foundation, which helped build the state-of-the-art kitchen and fund the program for several years, graduates earn a certificate in nutrition and culinary services. While food service preparation, nutrition and sustainability are some of the skills taught, students get much more from the training. Soft skills, such as showing up on time and contributing to a positive work culture, translate to any work environment. This 16-week program is offered to every resident of Carolyn’s House, with approximately 16 new participants each year. The program instructs the students on the full range of skills needed for employment success and is designed to give residents an opportunity to gain employable culinary skills and work experience, allowing them to seek entry- or mid-level internal or external positions within the food service/hospitality industry and beyond. By 2015, 119 women had participated in the Culinary Arts Training Program, and with job placement support and counseling from the **YWCA**, 32 had gained permanent employment or registered for NCCC’s Culinary Arts Program.

Culinary Arts Students receiving training



Part of the food service training program requires the participants to cook for and serve meals to the public. To do this, monthly lunches were started in 2008 as an exercise for the culinary arts training program so students could experience meal planning, preparation and service. These lunches regularly attract 50 guests who get a delicious meal—much more gourmet than those served to the community almost 100 years ago by the **YWCA**! The lunches not only give the women in the program an opportunity to practice what they have learned, but also generates revenue to secure resources for the program.

In 2007, shortly after the culinary training began, The Catering Crew was started. The Catering Crew is a social enterprise that earns money for Carolyn's House. Since it started, The Catering Crew has served food at many community events. Each year, it now caters more than 50 events including business luncheons, class reunions, showers, weddings and other special events. The Catering Crew gets stronger and has a more visible community presence.

What is a Social Enterprise?

*A social enterprise is a venture that allows non-profits to advance their social mission by establishing a “business” that earns money for the non-profit. The goal is to allow the non-profit to move to more sustainable funding for its social programs. Typically the social enterprise also furthers the non-profit’s social mission. This is exactly the situation with the **YWCA**’s social enterprise, The Catering Crew. It allow the women who have completed the Culinary Arts Program to continue their training via internships and it allows them earn an income working in the “business”. For its social enterprise, the **YWCA** has received the National Award for Self-Sufficiency Programs from the **YWCA/USA**. To contact The Catering Crew to find out how they could cater your event or business meeting visit The Catering Crew website (www.cateringcrew.org).*

Since 2009, The Catering Crew has also operated the Niagara Falls International Airport Café. As the only food service for the almost 100,000 passengers that fly out of the Niagara Falls International Airport, the café employs on average 10 women, including many graduates of Carolyn's House Culinary Training program. The café is also a location for internships for women in the culinary training program, as well as an important source of funds for that program.

The Niagara Falls International Café is staffed and managed by The Catering Crew



In 2014, the **YWCA** was able to open a second culinary training program, this time in Lockport. The basement at 32 Cottage Street was renovated with a grant from Governor Cuomo's Regional Economic Development Initiatives and generous support from the Rotary Club. Modeled after the successful Culinary Training Program of Carolyn's House, the state-of-the-art kitchen and classroom welcomed the first class of women to program in the fall of 2014. Tuition is being provided by BOCES. The goals are to train students for employment in the food service industry or secure further training in culinary arts or hospitality, and to give graduates the "soft skills" needed for employment in any field.

In addition to career training, the **YWCA** continues to offer programs for the children of working women, including pre-school and after-school programs. The **YWCA** Integrated Program for 3-year-olds and the Universal Pre-School for 4-year-olds, are held at the John Pound Early Childhood Center. The latter are in collaboration with the Lockport School District. The goals of these programs is to provide a safe environment where the children can develop a positive sense of self and engage in stimulating activities that encourage curiosity. During the school year, the two programs serve more than 200 children ages 2-4.

Children in the Universal Pre-Kindergarten pick books to read



UPK Book Fair

The **YWCA** also continues to offer both before and after-school activities for children of working mothers. This program is offered jointly by the **YWCA** and the Lockport and Newfane school districts. With additional generous funding from the Grigg Lewis Foundation, more than 100 students each year participate at the Emmet Belknap School in Lockport and the Middle School in Newfane. The **YWCA** School Age Childcare Program focuses on providing safe, affordable, and dependable care for elementary and middle-school children in Lockport and for middle-school children in Newfane. Licensed by New York State Child and Family Services, the staff has programs for the younger students that help them learn and grow in self-esteem and curiosity. The program for the middle-school children includes support with homework, as well as an opportunity to do community service. The before-school program for the younger and the older students starts at 7 a.m.; while the after-school program runs until 6 p.m. The **YWCA** also offers child care for early release days, holidays and snow days.

Summer day camp for students in grades K-8 continues to be a very popular program offered by the **YWCA**. Serving Lockport students, this urban camping adventure is currently held at a school within the Lockport City School District. Each week of the program, a theme is chosen that becomes the basis for weekly field trips and a full range of activities, including arts and crafts, drama, and swimming lessons. As many as 100 students participate each summer. There is an opportunity for older students aged 13-14 to participate in the camp as "Summer Buddies," developing leadership and mentoring skills while serving as junior counselors.

2013 Camp Talent Show



Housing, Health and Safety Empowerment

In its most recent quarter century, the **YWCA** has devoted much of its energy on the closely inter-related issues of housing, health and safety empowerment. This is seen most clearly in the organization's extensive domestic violence program. Starting with a facility it rented in 1986, the **YWCA** now owns its own nine-bed crisis safe house for victims of domestic violence, which it purchased in 1998. In addition to providing a place to escape, the safe house staff offers the residents counseling and support services, including accompanying women to court and helping them find employment and housing options. Since its start, the **YWCA** safe house(s) have provided shelter for more than 2500 women and children of domestic violence.

Because the safe house only allows women to stay for a maximum of 30 days, beginning in 2000 with funding from the Homeless Housing Assistance Program (HHAP), the **YWCA** also started a transitional safe housing program for families leaving a domestic violence program. The goal of the transitional housing program is to provide safe affordable housing, case management and support services to assist women in achieving economic self-sufficiency, including employment counseling and referral to other social service agencies, if needed. In its first year, housing for four families was offered. This has now expanded to three buildings of six apartments directly owned by the **YWCA**. In partnership with Housing Visions of Syracuse, the **YWCA** has expanded this to provide an additional nine permanent and affordable homes in the Lockport Canal Homes Complex for women and families who are survivors of intimate partner violence. Each of the women in these homes is offered employment counseling and other support by **YWCA** staff.

In addition to housing, over the last 25 years, the **YWCA** has also developed a number of strategies to address the other needs of victims of domestic violence and to prevent further violence. The organization's Domestic Violence Hotline (now the Crisis Hotline for Intimate Partner Violence and Rape Assistance) is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. In any one year, close to 1,000 domestic violence calls come into the hotline. Callers are given counseling on the phone and help in determining what actions to take next. The **YWCA** also provides additional counseling for close to 300 women each year who are not residents in the shelter or transitional housing. This counseling includes information on domestic violence and abusive relationships and help in identifying options, safety plans and emotional support. Since the **YWCA** started counseling victims of domestic violence, in addition to the support it provides the women in its shelter, over 10,000 other women have received counseling.

In 1997, with help from the Women's Law Center at the State University of New York at Buffalo (SUNYAB), legal aid to domestic violence victims was begun. Today, the **YWCA** refers women who need legal advice to knowledgeable lawyers. It also has domestic violence victims' advocates within the Lockport Police Department and the Niagara County district attorney's office to provide comprehensive assistance to domestic violence victims, including counseling, court accompaniment and referrals to other agencies that can help the victim.

In its most recent quarter century, the **YWCA's** concern with domestic violence has not been restricted to the victims and their families; it has also developed a full complement of programs to prevent violence. In 1990, funded by the Niagara County Family Violence Intervention Project (NCFVIP), a consortium of agencies, the **YWCA** began offering educational outreach about domestic violence in schools in Niagara County. To date, this educational outreach has been offered age appropriate curriculum on domestic violence, dating violence and anger management to more than 100,000 children in the schools in Niagara County. In partnership with the NCFVIP, the **YWCA** each year also sponsors four workshops open to all members of the community on family violence prevention. These community educational programs provide critical support in combatting and preventing violence in Niagara County.

In addition to domestic violence, the **YWCA** has also taken on the issue of rape and sexual assault. Since August 2009, the organization has assumed responsibility for the Niagara County Rape Hotline (now the Crisis Hotline for Intimate Partner Violence and Rape Assistance). The staff of five employees and six volunteers has completed the New York State Health Department training program on how best to assist victims of rape, and are, thus, Certified Confidential Advocates. They answer calls and provide counseling to victims of both rape and domestic violence.

The **YWCA** also works with the Niagara County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), a team of county-wide Law Enforcement professionals and advocates who speak to students at area high schools and colleges about intimate partner violence. One of the other results of the SART collaboration was the recognition of the need for a forensic interview room and counseling area for child and adolescent victims of sexual abuse. With very generous support from the

community, the **YWCA** now has a specially designed space for young victims to be interviewed and for child and adult victims of sexual assault to be counseled.

Since its founding, the **YWCA** had always provided physical education programs for its members. The last 25 years, however, have seen the growth of many private exercise facilities like Curves and other women-only and gender-neutral athletic clubs. These for-profit “competitors” have been able to offer newer facilities, better equipment and a greater variety of classes and programs than the **YWCA**. The **YWCA** attempted to keep up with the market, changing locations, adding equipment, offering more classes and hiring new staff, but the cost of renting facilities, employing staff, and acquiring modern equipment soon far exceeded the income from its Fitness Center. Facing serious cost overruns that threatened its other programs and its financial stability, the **YWCA** Board reluctantly had to close its Fitness Center and end exercise programs for adult women. Sport programs for young girls, however, continue to be popular.

Girls learn the fundamentals of basketball in the YWCA’s sport program



Social, Leadership and Organizational Empowerment

The political, social and economic changes in women’s status brought about by the Women’s Movement and the changing employment status of women, presented many organizational challenges for the **YWCA**. With most women working, the clubs for stay-at-home mothers and even older women no longer attracted enough members to be viable. Relatedly, the Equal Employment Opportunity Act and Title IX, which had the positive result of opening many careers formerly closed to women, dealt a death blow to the broad business, professional and industry clubs that were so popular in previous decades. Working women found that career success required belonging to the professional organizations and/or white collar union in their specific field. Title IX, which had the positive effect of ending sex discrimination in school sports, also had the unintended negative result of making many of the activities of the Y-Teens, especially the athletic programs, no longer sustainable. Faced with all these organizational

challenges, including the accompanying declining membership, the **YWCA** could have folded as many other women's organizations did during this era. But as we have seen in the sections above, the **YWCA** found new ways to continue its mission and address the needs of the communities it served.

To help itself and other non-profit organizations overcome the challenges brought about by the social, economic and political changes of the most recent decades, the **YWCA** organized two conferences: Gates to the Future, in 1990 and Gates to the Future II, in 1992. Both conferences were open to women and men in non-profits who were either professional managers of volunteers or volunteers who managed other volunteers. Both conferences offered the leaders of non-profits dozens of workshops on how to run viable non-profit organizations and engage volunteers.

In addition to acknowledging its own volunteers, the **YWCA** continued to recognize women who both excelled in their careers and volunteered in the community. From 1990-1995, each year it honored dozens of women in the community at the International Women's Decade II luncheons. Featuring a successful woman as a speaker, these events celebrated the accomplishments of more than 230 women from 1975 to 1995. After this program ended, in 1997 the **YWCA** began a new program to recognize outstanding women with the Niagara Award. The first recipient was Mary Carol Marotta, who had served many years at the **YWCA** Executive Director. Coretta Scott King was the featured speaker.

Coretta Scott King with the first Niagara Award recipient Mary Carol Marotta and her family



For the first four years of the event (1997-2003), only one woman was recognized with the Niagara Award. The award categories expanded from 6 in 2004 and to 8 in 2008. Each of the

categories is funded by a local business or, in one case, by a trust fund. In 2013, a new category, Friend of the YWCA Award, was added. The other categories currently are: art, education, entrepreneur, front line, health and human services, management, public service, and lifetime achievement. Each year, 25 to 30 women are nominated. The event, now named *The Niagara Award: A Tribute to Women*, celebrates both those women who were nominated and the award winners. Held in the evening at a dinner at the Niagara Falls Conference Center, the event attracts wide media attention and an audience of approximately 350 guests every year. Like its predecessors, the annual dinner, the event is a major fundraiser for the **YWCA's** programs and a celebration of all that women and the **YWCA** does for the community.

Political empowerment

The **YWCA** has continued to take seriously its role in educating the public about the political issues of the day that impact women and children in the community. For many years, the **YWCA** sponsored talks on domestic and international affairs. The luncheons on public issues were especially popular. With more women working, however, it became a challenge to find a time and a place to meet that would accommodate women in the expanded region now served by the organization. So the **YWCA** reluctantly ended the series. The organization did not abandon its goals of advocating in support of social issues important to women and children. To better do this, the staff and board of the **YWCA** received training in public advocacy on how best to present issues of importance to the public and elected officials. Board members are also informed regularly about positions taken by the **YWCA/USA**. In recent years, the CEO of the **YWCA** of Niagara, Kathleen Granchelli, with the board's approval has written letters to the editors and/or taken positions on issues impacting women such as human trafficking and the proposed New York State Women's Equality Act. The organization has also been a co-sponsor of the Niagara County Poverty Conference which brings together local organizations and national and local leaders to examine the causes and cures for poverty in the community. The **YWCA/USA** also continues to take an active interest in global issues and the promotion of peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all peoples. To this end, the **YWCA** sponsored two International Fellows representing Liberia and Zimbabwe to learn from what the **YWCA** was doing and to give talks to the local community about their countries and customs.

The **YWCA** has also continued to be a strong advocate for women's rights. In the late 1990s, **YWCA** leadership was an important part of the Niagara County Task Force on the Status of Women. The task force did an extensive study of the problems on women in the county and the Niagara County Legislature later created the Niagara County Commission of the Status of Women to implement the task force's recommendations. The **YWCA** was appointed to be the fiscal agent for the commission. To encourage women in the county to take a more active role in politics, the **YWCA** for several years (2002-2007) also co-sponsored, with both the Democrat and Republican parties, the Institute for Political Leadership (IPL). The IPL used **YWCA/USA** materials and presenters the first year and local speakers the following years to train women who were considering running for office or who wanted to manage a political campaign. Many women attended the sessions and several have gone on to run for political office and/or become more active in local politics.

Programs to eliminate racism and discrimination

In order to be a member of the **YWCA/USA**, all local affiliates must agree to offer programs in their community around the organization's mission hallmarks: racial justice and economic empowerment. As we have seen above, the **YWCA** offers an extensive set of programs for the latter and it takes seriously the need to eliminate race discrimination in the community. In support of this goal, the **YWCA** has reframed its programs to include and recognize racial justice issues. It also participates in a **YWCA/USA** sponsored program to educate the community about the need to end racial discrimination. Each year in April the **YWCA** sponsors the *Stand Against Racism*. With the goal of bringing the community together to both recognize that racism still exists and that everyone must take action to eliminate it, the *Stand Against Racism* is held in many schools and public places in Niagara County. Participants all take the pledge to end racism.

The Stand Against Racism Pledge

As an individual committed to social justice, I stand with the YWCA against racism and discrimination of any kind. I will commit to a lifetime of promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all people in my community and in the world.

School children taking the YWCA Stand Against Racism Pledge



Organization and Financial Challenges

The financial and organizational challenges faced by the **YWCA** have changed during its most recent 25 years. Since 1990, one of the most important developments has been the growth of the **YWCA's** programs and the expansion of its services to the Western part of Niagara County with the closure of the Niagara Falls YWCA.

The YWCA of Niagara Falls

The idea for a YWCA in Niagara Falls was first proposed by women from the YWCA of Buffalo who made a convincing case for the good things a YWCA could do for the Cataract City. Like the founders in

Lockport, several prominent women including Grace L. Bliss and Edith Dennison served as the nucleus of the organizing committee. After mass meetings at the YMCA in the Shredded Wheat Auditorium, it was decided there was enough interest in the community to proceed. A major fund drive to raise monies for a building was started, and on April 17, 1916 the YWCA of Niagara Falls was officially founded. The first president was Mrs. Philip P. Barton. Other officers were Mrs. Robert L. Rice, Mary Grant, Edith B. Dennison, Mrs. George F. Nussbaum, and Grace L. Bliss. The home of the YWCA of Niagara Falls on Third Street was a hub of activity for the women and girls of the city with active chapters of the Y-Teens and many other groups. Like its sister branch in Lockport, the YWCA of Niagara Falls offered a full complement of physical education activities and educational programs. Early classes included English for Foreigners (which was free) and Parliamentary Law. The latter was advertised as a course in "What Every Club Woman and Suffragist Ought to Know." In the 1970s, declining membership and falling revenues forced the YWCA of Niagara Falls to close its doors.

With the expansion of both its programs and the community it serves, the **YWCA** has also experienced a significant growth in its annual budget. At its 75th anniversary in 1990, the organization had an annual budget of about \$327,500. In 2014, the annual budget was more than \$1.8 million. The funding sources for the **YWCA** programs have changed along with the growth in its services. In previous decades, the bulk of income for the organization came from the Eastern Niagara United Way, whose annual contribution was one-third of the budget in 1990. Program fees, fundraisers and donations contributed another third of the budget. Grants, while growing in number and monies, were only a small part of the annual budget when the **YWCA** celebrated its 75th year. As the **YWCA** celebrates its 100th year, many of its programs are made possible by federal, state and local grants, government contracts, and generous private foundation grants. In any one year, government grants and contracts make up about 40 percent of the budget, while private foundation grants often contribute another 12 percent. The before-school and after-school programs also rely heavily on local government and school partnerships. Generous foundation grants from The John R. Oishei, Grigg-Lewis, Verizon, Mary Kay, TJ Maxx, the WNY Women's Foundations, and **YWCA/USA** have been key to the ability of the **YWCA** to offer culinary training, support for victims of intimate partner violence, rape, pre-school, before-school, and after-school programs, summer camps, and housing and counseling for homeless women and their children. Without this government and foundation support, the organization would not be able to offer many, or perhaps any, of its programs. The dependency on these sources of funds, however, comes with costs. This was most apparent during the Great Recession (2008-2013) when tax revenue to governments declined and government officials looked for ways to cut or delay funding to social service agencies like the **YWCA**. Foundations also were impacted by the recession as the value of their endowment declined with the stock market. Even with the improved economy, the threat that these funds might disappear or a grant not be awarded continues to be a constant source of concern for the organization and its board.

The government and foundation funding, however, does not cover all the budgetary costs of the **YWCA's** offerings. In the last 25 years, the board has implemented a number of "fundraising strategies." The board currently has two key events that it organizes to provide operating funds: the Niagara Awards and the Cash Raffle. The former, discussed above, generally raises

more than \$20,000. The latter involves the sale of 250 tickets for a cash drawing of \$10,000, that also includes dinner prepared by The Catering Crew, a basket raffle, and a live auction in addition to the drawing for the winning tickets in the cash raffle. In addition to these events, the **YWCA** has an annual fund drive each fall that has replaced the membership drives of previous years. The Eastern Niagara United Way also continues to provide critical funding for the **YWCA**'s programs.

Many other organizations and individuals in the community have also sponsored events to support the **YWCA**, including the Rotary Club, the Lockport Mayor's Event, and an art auction. Generous individuals have often provided critical funding. Bequests from women who have remembered the **YWCA** in their wills have been especially critical for the support of existing and new programs. Recent generous benefactors whose estate included the **YWCA** are Ruth Downes and the funders of the Munk Human Scholarship Fund. This latter fund allows the **YWCA** to give money to women who are non-traditional students pursuing higher education and either residing in Niagara County or are participants in **YWCA** programs. In addition to gifts from individuals, other organizations have also supported the **YWCA** and its programs. Most notably, the remaining funds of the YWCA of Niagara Falls, which closed its doors in the 1970s, were transferred to the **YWCA**. The donation is used to support Carolyn's House and other **YWCA** programs.

A more innovative strategy pursued by the **YWCA** for securing needed monies is The Catering Crew. As noted above, this is an award-winning social enterprise. Catering events and the Niagara Falls International Airport Café both bring in needed funds to support the culinary program and the other services offered at Carolyn's House. To maintain and grow its services for the next 100 years, the **YWCA** continues to look for other opportunities to develop social enterprises.

In the past 25 years, even with all the fundraising efforts and grants, budgetary shortfalls have been more frequent than not. To address these shortfalls, the board has had to make some painful cuts in programs and staff reductions. The board and the dedicated staff of the **YWCA**, however, are committed to maintaining the many programs that it currently offers and to doing even more to serve the women and families in all of Niagara County.

The YWCA of the Niagara Frontier: Our Fearless Future

While the challenges as detailed above are many, it is an exciting time for the **YWCA**. The national organization, **YWCA/USA**, has been re-structured with new leadership and a plan to make the organization and all it does more visible to the nation. Already the new CEO of **YWCA/USA**, Dr. Dara Richardson-Heron, has been a more vocal advocate for women's rights, the end of racism and other social causes important to women and families. Locally, programs like The Catering Crew are winning national and local recognition and awards while serving as models for income-earning enterprises by other non-profits organizations.

Most recently in the spring of 2014, the **YWCA** assumed the management of the programs of the YWCA of the Tonawandas and the Niagara Frontier. By a vote of the members of both YWCAs, discussions of a merger were undertaken in the summer of 2014. The merger of these

two important community organizations was official in 2015, and the **YWCA** was re-named the YWCA of the Niagara Frontier with a promise to serve the needs of all of Niagara County.

As it celebrates its 100th year, a generous group of community leaders has developed a plan to provide a foundation of funding for the **YWCA's** next 100 years. It is hoped that many dedicated women and men will contribute to making the plan a success.

With a commitment to serve the girls and women in their community, a group of women 100 years ago established the YWCA in Lockport. The **YWCA** of 2015 celebrates the vision of these courageous women as it looks forward fearlessly to a future of doing even more to meet the needs of the women and girls in all of Niagara County.

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YWCA of Niagara Presidents*

Mrs. H. J. Babcock: 1915-1917
Mrs. William Jenss: 1918-1919
Mrs. A. B. Liebold: 1920-1921
Mrs. W.P. Weaver: 1921-1924
Armita Adams: 1925-1926
Doris Smith: 1927
Mrs. Warren A. Parks: 1928-1930
Mrs. Karl W. Strauss: 1930-1933
Eleanor (Nan) Taylor: 1934-1936
Mrs. Harry L. Ransom: 1937-1940
Mrs. Paul Morrison: 1940-1944
Mrs. J. Milton Woodward: 1944-1946
Mrs. J. Carl Fogle: 1946-1950
Jessie West: 1951-1953
Mrs. Lloyd Cochran: 1953-1955
Marjorie Upson: 1955-1956
Mrs. Leon Wendel: 1956-1957
Marjorie Upson: 1957-1959
Mrs. G.W. Gerstung: 1959-1961
Esther Prudden: 1961-1963
S. Elva Wendel: 1963-1964
Mrs. Aloysius Ulrich: 1964-1967
Mrs. Gilbert Hoch: 1967-1969
Mrs. Aloysius Ulrich: 1969-1970
Mrs. G. Curtis Lewis, Jr.: 1970-1972
Lois May: 1972-1973
Christine Bailey: 1973-1976
Sue Ann Fuller: 1976-1977
Mary Lou Chamberlain: 1977-1979
Dorothy S. Webster: 1979-1980
Suzanne Mullane: 1980-1982
Thea Brandt: 1982-1983
Esther G. Nixon: 1983-1986
Ann Ganyard: 1986-1988
Charlotte Baker: 1988-1990
Karen Langdon: 1990-1992
Barbara Ennis: 1992-1993
Susan J. Wendler: 1993-1995
Sue Diemert: 1995-1997
Jeanne M. Gumby: 1998-2000
Kathleen Greenfield: 2000-2002
Alice Hall and Suzanne Tomkins: 2002-2005
Dianne Cross and Sharon Sacco: 2006-2008
Martha Troia and Nancy McGlen: 2008-2010
Mary Murphy: 2010-2012
Catherine Braniecki: 2012-2015

*Until the 1970s, the record of the YWCA often only listed a married woman's husband's name. As a result, in many cases the woman's given names have been lost.

YWCA CEOs**

Charlotte Bullymore: 1915, four months

E. Louisa Woodford: 1915-1918

Florence McCarty: 1918

Clara Bartram

Ann Bellow

Harriet Williams: 1926-1936

Alice P. Holmes: 1936-1940

Clare Armstrong: @1940

Lucille Capelle: @1956

Kathryn Swain

Edna Shaw (acting)

Fay Crowe

Blanche Knowles

Enid Lowe: 1956-1960

Christine Loomis: 1960- 1971

Eleanor Bradley: 1972-1981

Mary Carol Marotta: 1981- December, 1994

Kathleen Granchelli: January 1, 1995- present

**Unfortunately, the dates of service of some of the earliest executives of the YWCA of Niagara have been lost.
This list is the most complete we have at this time.

Historical Highlights of the YWCA/USA and the YWCA

- 1855 YWCA started in England.
- 1858 Forerunner of the YWCA in the United States, Ladies Christian Association, established in New York City.
- 1866 Boston chapter is the first to use the YWCA name.
- 1886 State YWCAs form the National Association of the Young Women's Christian Association of the United States.
- 1890 The Student association of the YWCA establishes the Haworth Institute to fight discrimination against Native Americans.
- 1894 The American YWCA joins with the YWCA associations in Great Britain, Sweden and Norway to found the World YWCA.
- 1906 American YWCA adopts the title, YWCA of the USA (**YWCA/USA**).
- 1909 The **YWCA/USA** hires a staff member to work with black colleges and other programs.
- 1915 The **YWCA** is chartered in Lockport; first home is the second floor of Prospect Hall.
- 1918 **YWCA** moves to third floor of the Olson Building.
- 1918 At the request of the U.S. Ordinance Department, the **YWCA/USA** establishes 20 centers for the million and a half women working in munitions factories.
- 1919 Girls Reserve, Business Girls Club and four Industrial Clubs formed by the **YWCA**.
- 1923 **YWCA** moves to the old Hook and Ladder House at 20 Locust Street.
- 1927 **YWCA** purchases 32 Cottage Street, and moves into the building in 1932.
- 1940 **YWCA** celebrates its 25th year anniversary with a fashion show of what the founders wore.
- 1943 The Girls Reserve becomes the Y-Teens.
- 1946 Interracial Charter adopted by the **YWCA/USA**, committing the entire organization to work for racial justice.
- 1948 **YWCA** begins building campaign.
- 1952 **YWCA** dedicates the new addition.
- 1965 The **YWCA** celebrates its 50th anniversary.
- 1966 First Mistletoe Mart, a major fundraiser for the **YWCA**, is held.
- 1967 First black president of the **YWCA/USA**, Helen Clayton, is elected.
- 1970 The **YWCA/USA** adopts the One Imperative, requiring the association to thrust its collective power toward the elimination of racism. Wherever it exists and by any means necessary.
- 1975 International Women's Decade Coalition is started by the **YWCA** and the League of Women Voters, and the first International Women's Decade Luncheon is held honoring women in the community. In the next two decades, the International Women's Decade I and the International Women's Decade II luncheons will recognize 231 women for their accomplishments and community service.
- 1979 Task Force on Violence Against women is organized by the **YWCA**. Membership is drawn from the organization and other concerned members of the community.
- 1981 Latch Key After-School Program started at the **YWCA**.
- 1983 Domestic Violence Hotline started by the **YWCA**.

- 1984 Domestic Violence counseling started with funding from Assemblyman Matthew J. Murphy Jr. that made it possible to hire a professional social worker.
- 1986 With funding from New York State, the **YWCA** opens the first eight-bed dwelling for victims of domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Hotline expanded to 24 hours.
- 1987 32 Cottage Street is designated a Historic Landmark. In 2007, the building is added to the National Register of Historic Buildings.
- 1990 Educational Outreach to all area schools on family violence is started.
- 1990 The **YWCA** celebrates its 75th anniversary.
- 1990 The first Volunteer Leadership Conference is organized by the **YWCA**. A second Volunteer Leadership Conference is held in 1992.
- 1996 Because of its expanded service area, the **YWCA** adopts a new name, the YWCA of Niagara.
- 1997 The **YWCA** gives the first Niagara Award to Mary Carol Marotta who served from 1981 to 1994 as the CEO. Coretta Scott King was the featured speaker at the event.
- 1998 The **YWCA** purchases its own safe house for victims of domestic violence.
- 2000 The **YWCA** transitional housing program for families leaving a domestic violence program is started with four residences.
- 2003 Carolyn's House is opened with 19 apartments for homeless and low-income women and children. The residents are offered social support and job training in culinary arts to assist them in achieving financial independence.
- 2004 The Niagara Award becomes the Niagara Awards: A Tribute to Women. From 1997 to 2014, 78 women were given the Niagara Award.
- 2007 The Catering Crew is started. It is an award-winning social enterprise.
- 2008 The **YWCA** organizes the first Stand Against Racism events.
- 2009 The Catering Crew begins offering food service at the Niagara Falls International Airport Café.
- 2009 The **YWCA** assumes responsibility of the Niagara County Rape Crisis Hotline, later renamed the Crisis Hotline for Intimate Partner Violence and Rape Assistance. Certified Confidential Advocates respond to calls on both issues.
- 2014 The **YWCA** assumes management of the programs of the YWCA of the Tonawandas and the Niagara Frontier. Merger talks between the two YWCAs are begun.
- 2014 A second culinary arts training program is opened in Lockport in the basement of 32 Cottage Street.
- 2015 The **YWCA** becomes the YWCA of the Niagara Frontier with the merger of the two YWCAs in Niagara County and the **YWCA** that started in Lockport in 1915 celebrates its 100th anniversary as the newly-named YWCA of the Niagara Frontier.

Two former homes of the YWCA

