

**Records of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA),  
Northwestern University Chapter, 1901-1962  
Series 31/6/59  
One archival box, three drop-front boxes**

**History**

The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) is an international, non-denominational, Christian organization, patterned after, but independent of, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) which started in London, England in 1844. The YWCA, established in England in 1855, set as its goal to "protect and direct" young women, while instilling Christian values. By the middle of the nineteenth century, both the YM- and the YWCA were firmly established in the United States. The YM- and YWCA, past and present, had city, state, national, and international chapters, offering yearly memberships, community activities, and international conventions. From the late 1800s to the mid-1960s, campus Y chapters, which operated independently from community Ys, had a strong university presence nationwide.

The YMCA, Northwestern University Chapter, was established in 1869. It became affiliated with the National Intercollegiate YMCA movement in 1890, and in the same year the Northwestern University YWCA was formed. The Northwestern University YM- and YWCA were responsible for initiating and nurturing many organizations and services on campus which later became independent, such as Student Employment, Settlement House, Student Clubs, and the Inter-Racial Council.

The YWCA had an active presence on the Northwestern University campus between 1890 and 1963. Operating money was raised by the Advisory Board(s) and through the voluntary contributions of faculty, alumni, parents, and "other friends." Several faculty wives were active in the initial organization of the YWCA, and members of the Advisory Committee included Mrs. Patten, Mrs. Dyche, and other prominent Evanston women.

Activities hosted by the YWCA were social, civic, and religious. Over the years, activities included a *Universal Day of Prayer*, *Mission Study Program*, *Peace Week*, *Teas*, *Vespers*, *Mixers*, *Bridge Tournaments*, *Sunday Breakfasts*, as well as fieldtrips to a variety of places of worship. A specific contribution of YWCA was the *Practical Aid Committee*. In the early 1900s this committee reported that it had "placed 15 girls to work for their board and residence"; this service later became the University Employment Service.

The YWCA's activities mirrored concerns of the time. The 1908-1913 Scrapbook documents the beginnings of the Northwestern University Circus, which remained a traditional annual event for Northwestern University and community until 1950. The *Circus* began in the form of a County Fair, organized by the YWCA for the benefit of the Northwestern University Settlement Association. In later years Circus proceeds went to support both the YW- and YMCA, as well as the University's Student Loan Fund. In the 1940's, during World War II, the YWCA had a War Services Committee that cooperated with the University War Council. The Scrapbook for 1941-1952 contains a photograph of young women on this committee making bandages for the Red Cross. The YWCA also gave U.S.O. parties and helped promote "war work for girls." As the war came to a close, the YWCA Public Affairs Committee, which was part of the National Intercollegiate Christian Council and the National YWCA, hosted events addressing such issues as "Will there be jobs for returning service men?" and "What will be the role of women?" In the late 1940s the YM- and YWCA hosted a series entitled "Daily

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Adjustments in Married Life.” In the late 1950s and early 1960s the *Y's General Assembly of the Northwestern Model United Nations* created a program to foster world peace, with the goal of enabling students “to envision man as a member of a world community.”

In 1895, 30% of all Northwestern undergraduate students belonged to either the YMCA or the YWCA. Students of all faiths and socio-economic backgrounds were accepted; sororities and fraternities also assigned representatives to recruit members for the Y. Membership continued to rise until after World War II, when individual denominations created their own independent organizations on campus. In 1939-40, 44% of the Y's yearly operating budget came from the University; the percentage declined over the next few years until, in 1942-43, 0% of the Y's operational money came from the University. By that point, the Administration had decided that it could not continue support the Y without offering support to the other organizations. As a result, at the end of the 1942-43 school year the YM- and YWCA moved off campus. The Y's University Chapter continued to provide student activities, through an off-campus location, until 1963 when it disbanded, at the decision of the Advisory Board, due to lack of membership.

**Description of the Records**

The Northwestern University YWCA records document the activities and operation of the organization. The collection fills one archival box, one small and two large drop front boxes and spans the years 1901-1962, with the bulk of the records dating between 1940 and 1950. The records consist of a variety of formats of books and scrapbooks, falling into two categories: **Histories and Records**, and **Scrapbooks**. Contents have been retained in the original format whenever possible. Some of the scrapbooks are in fragile condition, due to the quality of the paper on which items were mounted. In a few of the scrapbooks the items have come off their pages. In these cases, contents of the book have been placed in an archival folder. Each book and scrapbook retains the title and date label placed on it by the YWCA. Records are arranged chronologically; there is some overlap in the date spans covered by the scrapbooks.

**Histories and Records** are comprised of five bound volumes which include Minutes of the Advisory Committee and Cabinet Meetings; the Constitution, By-Laws, and Amendments of the Northwestern University Chapter, as well as Cabinet Policies, Membership, Work Reports, and Social Function information, including a guest book for the 1940-46 events. This category gives a fairly detailed written account of the early growth of the organization between 1901-1937.

The seventeen **Scrapbooks** include a wealth of articles from *The Daily Northwestern* and the *Evanston Review* from 1901 through 1962. In addition to articles reporting on YWCA activities, articles also relate to many different religious functions and events, world affairs, including items providing insight into the racial/inter-racial climate during the period. The Scrapbooks also include photographs from outings, committees at work, and conventions; and Program Brochures, Flyers, and memorabilia. The articles trace the growth of the Association on campus, the contributions the YWCA made to the overall structure of the Campus, and its final days.

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**Provenance:** The records of the Northwestern University Chapter YWCA were donated to the University Archives by Marge Bradford on April 8, 1988, as Accession #88-76.

**Restrictions:** None

**Separations:** Two photographs were separated and added to the Archives' Photographic Files.

**Processor:** Vanessa L. Smith; February 2000.

**Container List**

<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>	<b><u>Dates</u></b>
		<b>Histories and Records</b>	
1	1	Minutes of the Advisory Committee	1901-1913
	2	Constitution, Amendment, By-laws, Cabinet Policy, Roll of Cabinet Members, Minutes of Cabinet Meetings	1912-1916
	3	Reports of Secretary	1926-1927
	4	Town Club Records	1930-1937
	5	Guest Book	1940-1946
		<b>Scrapbooks</b>	
2		1908-1913	
		1913-1914	
		1921	
		1928-1930	
		1939-1940	
		1940-1941	
3		1934-1935	
		1936-1937	
		1939-1942	
		1941-1943	
		1941-1952	
		1943-1946	
		1945-1946	
4		1946-1949	
		1946-1950	
		1959-1961	
		1961-1962	