

The History of the Boys and Girls Club Movement in Hartford

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The Boys and Girls Clubs of America began in Hartford, CT in 1860 with a little-known organization called The Dashaway Club. The Club organized in the 1860's, but the problems on the street developed in the previous decade. In the late 1840's and early 1850's a large influx of Irish and German emigrants crowded cities. Uncontrolled immigration more than doubled the cost of poor relief. Equipped with few skills or minimal English, foreign-born citizens struggled to find substantial and secure employment. Mechanization and the factory system minimized the value of traditional crafts and skills and in the process reduced the bargaining power of the individual worker.¹ The average factory-employed man worked a twelve-hour day, six days a week earning an average of five cents an hour. Despite the quantity of work men struggled to feed their families. If workers disliked their job or pay, they were easily replaced. The average life expectancy was less than forty-five years of age.² Conditions proved to be especially hard for immigrants trying to establish their lives in a new country.

Almost 30% of the people living in Hartford were foreign-born.³ Working long hours forced parents to leave their children unattended. Immigrant children often played in the streets in cities. The children amused themselves with childhood games such as playing ball and marbles. In addition to the harmless games many of the children fought, swore, and stole from local food wagons and stores. Boys found themselves in the most

¹ Robert H. Bremner, From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1992), 4.

² Mabel Collins Donnelly, A Century of Service: Hartford Neighborhood Centers, 1872-1972 (Hartford: Hartford Neighborhood Center, 1972), 13.

³ *Ibid.*

trouble engaging in violence, vandalism, and petty thievery.⁴ Reformers feared the immigrant children would destroy American middle-class values of hard work, honesty and morality. People everywhere at all levels of society, but particularly middle and upper class women, were “goaded by the pulpit, press, and popular expectations to personally [aid] the sinner and the poor.”⁵ Financially stable women had the free time and the financial means to volunteer their time rather than seeking paid employment. Society disapproved of wealthy women working outside of the home. Aiding needy children allowed women to be publicly active in an acceptable way.

To remedy the negative environment on the streets, reformers created alternative environments to remove the children from the over-crowded slum environment.⁶ Bringing the boys to a clean and safe house or building helped the women show the boys how to act in an orderly environment. The women taught the boys how to act indoors and around adults. Women saw this as an opportunity to make a difference in the boys’ lives. They did not have the right to vote or make political decisions, but aiding the boys allowed them to influence society in a meaningful way. Helping the poor and reforming children allowed women to fulfill the expected role of females at that time. Society expected men to work and financially support the family while the females stayed home, took care of the house and the children. The wealthier women performed the role of surrogate mother to the boys whose parents were forced to work and be away from home for most of the day.

⁴ Peter C. Baldwin, *Domesticating the Streets* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1999), 147-148.

⁵ Kathleen McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige: Charity and Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago, 1849-1929*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3.

⁶ Baldwin, 148.

Reformers reminded women of their motherly duty to society. The History of the Asylum Hill Congregational Church⁷ and Hartford Immigrants⁸ cited Father David Hawley of the Christian Missionary Society and a moving 1860 speech he presented as being the driving force behind the surge in social work in Hartford in the 1860's. Speaking from the Pearl Street Church in 1860 Hawley said, "Dear friends, don't leave me to do all the mission work in the city. We can all be missionaries."⁹ As a result of this speech it is documented in a letter from Mrs. Marian Metcalf to her friend, Mrs. David E. Bartlett, that Hawley's speech inspired Metcalf to start Sunday school. Metcalf went door-to-door enrolling students and secured the necessary funds from local businessmen. Her Sunday school became affiliated with the Asylum Hill Congregational Church (AHCC) when it opened in 1865.¹⁰ Women chose different methods of bettering the boys but most revolved around religious organizations.

The Dashaway Club

Shortly after Father Hawley's speech the Dashaway Club formed in 1860 by Mary and Alice H. Goodwin, Elizabeth Hamersley, and Louisa Bushnell. It was believed that the founders of the Dashaway Club attended Hawley's 1860 speech requesting assistance with missionary work. If they were not present it is likely that they socialized with many of the people who heard the speech and learned about Hawley's message from friends.

⁷ Lillian M. Mansfield, The History of Asylum Hill Congregational Church, (Hartford, Connecticut Printers).

⁸ Robert Owen Decker, Hartford Immigrants, (New York: United Church Press, 1987).

⁹ Mansfield, 2.

¹⁰ Ibid.

The Boys and Girls Clubs of America publication recognized the Dashaway Club in Hartford as the first effort to provide structured, daily, out-of-school activities for disadvantaged boys.¹¹ The three¹² women invited street boys into their homes for tea or coffee and cake and eventually began meeting at the Morgan Street School. The positive behavior and appreciation surprised the ladies, so they asked the boys back several more times. Due to the success of the visits the women sought a place for the boys to attend regularly throughout the day; however, when the Civil War increased demands on the citizens the project was discontinued.¹³ An unidentified newspaper clipping preserved by Mary Hall¹⁴ from around 1910 reported similar reasoning for the disbanding of the Club.

The book Domesticating the Street by Peter C. Baldwin also credited the Dashaway Club with being the earliest club in Hartford, but suggested a different reason for its breakup. Baldwin told his readers that the women running the Club imposed too many rules without enough fun, so the boys stopped attending.¹⁵ Based on the lack of proof it is difficult to judge which statement was correct, but the 1910 newspaper article is a primary source and therefore more likely to be correct.¹⁶ Logically it makes sense that war would require more work from citizens. With men away fighting, boys were needed for manual labor and women were left alone to care for the house, property and family. The new obligations for both women and boys would restrict their free time for club activities.

¹¹ Connections: The Quarterly Magazine of Boys Clubs of America (USA: Boys Clubs of America, 1981), vol. 1 no. 3:4.

¹² The Boys and Girls Club only credit three women with founding the club, but do not mention names.

¹³ "History and Tradition of the Boys and Girls Club Movement" (Boys and Girls Club of America), 8.

¹⁴ Mary Hall Scrapbook, (Unpublished scrapbook on file at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center), Vol. 12

¹⁵ Baldwin, 149-150.

¹⁶ Hall Scrapbook, Vol. 12.

Founding Women

Similar to the Dashaway Club it is difficult to find specific information about its founders: Mary and Alice H. Goodwin, Louisa Bushnell and Elizabeth Hamersley. The Christian Missionary Society, now known as the Christian Activities Council, did not have a record of those in attendance at the speech given by Father Hawley and few sources link the women to the Club. Typical for most women of the time, the four Club leaders left no traceable diaries or business records of their Club or their lives. As a result much of the information about the women and their accomplishments were lost.

Decker's book Hartford Immigrants credited Misses Elizabeth Hamersley and Mary and Alice H. Goodwin with creating the earliest boys' club known as "A Dash-Away Club."¹⁷ Decker credited the women with using the Club to get the boys off the street and motivate them to develop their potentials. He reported that the Club disbanded when most of the members went into the Union Army as drummer boys.¹⁸ Decker provided no additional information. He cited his source as the Hartford Courant April 1876 but provided no day.

Studying the genealogy of the four women provided additional information but with limited detail. The family history of Alice Goodwin provided minimal information about her life, but mentioned detailed information about her husband Edward Goodwin, also a cousin. Learning that Alice was Mrs. Edward Goodwin provided the link to a primary document crediting Mrs. Edward Goodwin with being a founder of the Dashaway Club.¹⁹ The undocumented newspaper article preserved by Hall discussed the

¹⁷ 117.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Mary Hall Scrapbook, "Hartford to Have a New Club House," (Unpublished scrapbook on file at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center), Vol. 12.

construction of a new building for the Good Will Club. The article credited Hartford with creating the first Boys' Club. The author wrote, "It all began back in 1860 when the Dashaway Club was started in the old Morgan Street Mission. Its founders, Mrs. Edward Goodwin... (tear in the page)... an honorary director of the Good Will Club today."²⁰ No Goodwin appeared on the directors' list in the annual report of the Good Will Club.²¹

No other published information directly linked the women to the Dashaway Club, but sources proved Elizabeth Hamersley worked closely with Father Hawley. In an undocumented newspaper clipping in Mary Morris' scrapbook at the Connecticut Historical Society the death notice of Hamersley recalled her as a positive force in social, philanthropic and religious life²². Her heart went out to all humanity within her reach but named no specific causes she supported.²³ The vague information in her obituary proved to be of little assistance.

The biggest piece of information on Hamersley's life came from two "letters to the editor" written around the time of her death in 1898. An unsigned letter to the editor of the Hartford Courant on December 14, 1898 recognized Hamersley as a pioneer in the movement to reach "by personal visitation and by all helpful means, the poor and disadvantaged class of our citizens."²⁴ The writer then specifically mentioned her involvement with the "famous Morgan Street School" and her working relationship with Father David Hawley.²⁵ Although the Dashaway Club was not named specifically it provided the first piece of evidence connecting her to the Dashaway Club because it was

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ No Bushnell or Hamersley were also listed.

²² Mary Morris Scrapbook, (Unpublished scrapbook on file at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center), Vol. 33, 59-62.

²³ Morris, Vol. 33, 59-62.

²⁴ 5.

²⁵ Ibid.

known that the women met with the boys at the Morgan Street School. It also provided reason to speculate that if Hamersley worked closely with Father Hawley, she may have attended his 1860 speech asking for missionary assistance.

In the second letter, which appeared in the Connecticut Courant on December 19, 1898, H. Clay Trumbull recalled Hamersley's work as groundbreaking and acknowledged her connection to the Morgan Street School and her working relationship with Father Hawley. Adding an additional potential connection to the Dashaway Club, Trumbull's letter included Louisa Bushnell and other women in a category of what he called "the choicest young women to be active in Christian work."²⁶ For Trumbull to mention Bushnell in a letter honoring Hamersley it was probable the two worked closely together. Although Decker did not credit Bushnell as being a founder of the Club, it is possible that she offered her assistance once the Club was established.

In closing, Trumbull included two antidotes of Hamersley's teaching career. He praised her work in a tough school with pupils that "no man was capable of managing. Only Miss Hamersley was competent to that."²⁷ For example, when one of the boys intentionally interrupted a talk she was giving, he asked, "Is there a railroad to hell?" She responded promptly, "Yes and I'm afraid you've a through ticket," and went on with her earnest talk.²⁸ In a final story of her teaching, Trumbull showed the reader that her students cherished her commitment to them. When a fight broke out in class one of boys said, "Don't be afraid, Miss Hamersley, we'll see that you don't get hurt."²⁹ While these

²⁶ H. Clay Trumbull, "Grateful Memories of Miss Hamersley," Connecticut Courant, 19 Dec. 1898, 4.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

are only two of the tales of her life, it gave the reader valuable insight into her kind heart and quick wit and proved the boys appreciated her work.

Studying the genealogy and obituaries of Mary Goodwin and Louisa Bushnell provided a link to charitable and social work, but not specifically the Dashaway Club or Father Hawley. Mary Goodwin was the daughter of James Goodwin and Lucy Morgan. The family history told of the successful businesses he ran while his wife absorbed herself in charitable work. It was said of Lucy, "every charitable institution of Hartford had her lively sympathy, her willing efforts, and her constant support."³⁰ Mary clearly took after her mother's charitable heart and together they built and endowed the parish house adjoining Christ Church in Hartford.³¹ An 1889 article described an alter piece donated in Mary's memory nine years after her death.

Mary Hall's scrapbook contained the death notice of Miss Frances Louisa Bushnell. The notice was undated and mentioned little about Bushnell's personal life except that she was the eldest daughter of Reverend Horace Bushnell. The obituary stated that she taught at the Hartford Public High School and worked with the activities of the Union for Home Work.³² This indicated that she was involved in charitable organizations, but does not provide a specific link to the Dashaway Club.

Good Will Club

Although the Dashaway Club disbanded quickly, similar organizations appeared locally and nationally. In Hartford three clubs succeeded the Dashaway Club: The Sixth Ward Temperance Society, the Boys' Reading Room, and the Boys' Club. Similar to the

³⁰ The Goodwins of Hartford Connecticut (Hartford: Brown and Gross, 1981) 703.

³¹ *Ibid.* 711.

³² Mary Hall Scrapbook (Unpublished scrapbook on file at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center), Vol. 8.

Dashaway Club all three desired to instill Christian morals in the boys who lived in the slums.³³

In 1879 Mary Hall began working with a group of boys who would later form the most successful boys' club of the 1800s known as the Good Will Club. The Good Will Club had its origins in the Boys' Evening School, as the Boys' Club was called in its final years. In addition to supervising the Boys' Club three evenings a week Hall met separately with a few boys at her home to give them lessons. Within the year she severed ties with the Boys' Evening School and moved the meetings to the building where she had her law office.³⁴ Although it is not known why Hall separated the Good Will Club from the parent organization, it may have been because of religion. Unlike the first four clubs created in Hartford, the Good Will Club was secular.³⁵ Hall welcomed all religions including Catholics and Jews and therefore did not attempt to impart her religious views on the boys.

The first official meeting of the new boys' organization was held on April 2, 1880. Nine boys attended the meeting. They pledged to make a constitution and by-laws, elected officers, and picked a name for the club. The boys chose the name D.C. Club after the Honorable David Clark who often spoke with the boys and provided them with guidance. He declined the honor and chose the name the Good Will Club instead. To show his support for the boys and the Club, he donated the money to purchase fifty of Harper's best publications for the beginning of a library.³⁶

³³ Baldwin, 150.

³⁴ Ibid., 150-151.

³⁵ "Historical Sketch Of The Good Will Club 1880-1889," *Annual Report for 1890*, Hartford: The Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1900) 3.

³⁶ Ibid., 7.

The first permanent quarters for the Club were in the Hills block of the Broker's Board. In the fall of 1882 the Brokers' Board changed its quarters and the Good Will Club was without a meeting place for the first time in two years. Hall quickly found a new location and the boys began meeting at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) on Prospect Street. While renting the space the president of the YMCA, Charles A. Jewell, favored the group with advice and his presence. After residing in the building for a while, he encouraged the Club to change its name to "Boys' Branch" of the YMCA.³⁷ Although Hall consented to change the Club's name, she did not change the aim and purpose of the club. Moving to the larger quarters of the YMCA allowed the organization to accept more members. The average attendance hovered around eighty members and the entire list of visitors totaled over two hundred names, but at this point the number of Catholic boys started decreasing. Hall investigated and found that many of the Catholic parents feared that because the Club was closely affiliated with the YMCA it would meddle with religious beliefs. Miss F.E. Burr wrote sketches of the Club to help bring the Club's aim to the public. "Ours was a moral world, and that we aimed to set the boys on the road to nobler aims and higher purposes."³⁸ After verbally setting the record straight, Hall recognized the conflict of associating with the Christian organization and after two years in its building she looked for a new location to meet. On January 1, 1886 the Club resumed its original name and made its own badges.³⁹ Every boy over twelve who signed a pledge promising good behavior and pledging not to drink and smoke received a badge. The badges contained the symbol of a star and crescent combined with the letters GWC. A badged member had the privilege to vote, was eligible to office, and

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁹ Prior to that time the boys wore YMCA badges.

had certain rights and privileges in a room at the Club set apart from the general members.⁴⁰

Despite the religious conflicts caused by holding Good Will Club meetings at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Club benefited from locating in a bigger space. With more room, additional boys could join the Club. Soon after moving into the YMCA, Hall had an accident that took her out of work. Prior to her accident Hall worked alone and was comparatively unknown. She feared the Club would disband with no one to supervise the boys' activities, but she soon found help. Mrs. Daniel Howe volunteered to help while Hall was out of work for six weeks. Through Howe a circle of valuable helpers from Prospect Street emerged as volunteers.⁴¹ When Hall came back her efforts were strengthened by the support of new help. Gradually volunteers increased from a half a dozen to about eighty. The volunteers divided the work so that a certain number attended each night to help the boys. The majority of the workers were women but during the winter they received help from Trinity College and the Theological Seminary.⁴²

In the spring of 1886 the Club moved out of the YMCA building and severed all ties with the Christian organization. By the end of the fall the Club moved into Marble block on Central Row.⁴³ By 1889 the organization moved again. On February 22, 1889 a new Good Will building, formerly the Hartford Female Seminary, opened at 96-98 Pratt Street. The Club was purchased by funds provided by Henry Keney and A.E. Burr,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁴¹ Ibid., 8.

⁴² Ibid., 4.

⁴³ Ibid., 10.

publisher of the Hartford Times. The Club continued to expand and in 1911 a larger building on Ely Street became the home of the Good Will Club.⁴⁴

As the Club accepted more membership the locations and the activities grew. Through the Good Will Club, Hall assisted thousands of boys by taking them off the street and providing them with a place to learn and play. As early as 1909 fourteen Good Will Club members enrolled at Yale and several went to medical and law school.⁴⁵ One former club member became a manager of one of the largest banks in Hartford and served as acting mayor of the city.⁴⁶

In a November 28, 1903 New York Tribune article Hall said, "My helpers have been mostly women and I can truthfully say that they have been women of great strength and character."⁴⁷ This indicated that women provided the hands-on help and supervision for the boys, while the men assumed the business role of securing a building and funds. The separate roles for men and women gave valuable insight to the ideal gender roles of women as motherly and nurturing while men provided financial support.

Men worked at and for the Club but their roles appeared to be more on the business and fund raising side. The men served as trustees while the women were known as directors. Looking down the list of names of both the trustees and the directors many of the volunteers were married couples. For example, Mr. Charles Clark served as a trustee and the Club treasurer. His wife listed as Mrs. Charles Clark served as a director. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Curtis and Mr. and Mrs. Atwood Collins were two other examples of couples that helped the Club. Again it appeared the men volunteered their financial

⁴⁴ Baldwin, 152.

⁴⁵ Mary Hall Scrapbook, (Unpublished scrapbook on file at the Connecticut Historical Society), Vol. 1.

⁴⁶ Hall Scrapbook, Vol. 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

and business support while the women worked hands-on with the boys. The one major exception was Mary Hall. She served both as a director, manager and president to the organization.

Daily Activities

Articles written about the Good Will Club indicate that sessions began in late October or early November until April. In the early years of the Club boys participated in activities such as gymnastics, woodworking, and cadet drills. As the Club grew older and the number of boys increased the activities expanded. As the years progressed the articles noted new and improved classes and activities within the organization.

In April of 1903 the Club began publishing a newspaper called the Good Will Star. Published three times a year it discussed daily activities, new classes and special announcements. Hall preserved several copies of the paper in her scrapbook. I located an issue as late as 1916.⁴⁸

Looking at the Club papers provided a listing of the new activities which occurred at the Club. Expanding from its original format of reading and games, the boys began learning to cook, take tailoring classes, American history classes, sewing classes, clay work, woodcarving, carpentry and plumbing. Volunteers of the Club organized an engineering society, a baseball team, a ten-piece orchestra, a debate team and a savings bank. The savings bank and the debate team proved to be two activities of the organization that taught considerable lessons.

The Penny Provident Bank opened prior to the 1900s. By January 6, 1902 the bank recorded twenty depositors and after thirteen club meetings the number increased to ninety-one. The bank taught boys to save their pennies rather than foolishly spending

⁴⁸ Hall Scrapbook, Vol. 12.

them. By April of 1902 the bank contained \$69.95 - a considerable savings for young boys.⁴⁹ By its ninth season the bank recorded 417 depositors with 201 open accounts.⁵⁰

In addition to learning to manage their money, the boys were taught to use their thoughts and words wisely as members of the debate team. The first debate recorded resolved the argument that the Army rendered more service for the country than the Navy. Boys from the Club led the debate and carefully presented their cases. Each boy listened to the other group's arguments and then presented their opinions. The boys discussed a variety of topics but Hall carefully monitored all the debates to keep religious beliefs out of the discussion. Hall commented that in the past the parents of Hebrew boys refused to allow their children to go to the Club for fear that religion would be taught. Hall resolved the misunderstanding and committed herself to keeping the Club secular. She said, "This Club is strictly for moral and not religious purposes. If a boy wishes to come here and behave himself he is welcome, no matter what his religion."⁵¹

As early as 1908 there is evidence that the Good Will Club began a miniature municipal government known as "Good Will City." The City taught boys the roles and values of governmental positions. The object of the City was to teach morality and citizenship by practical means. The City included the buildings and grounds of the Club. Divided into three wards, the City had a legislative, executive, and judicial branch. Every member over the age of the twelve who took the membership pledge was a citizen with the power to vote in city elections. The mayor held the authority with the consent of the

⁴⁹ Ibid., Vol. 9.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Vol. 8.

⁵¹ Ibid.

common council to appoint the judge of the Police Court and the city clerk. The City accepted officers of all race and ethnicity.⁵²

Articles provided evidence that the Club took the duties of the City officials seriously. An article in scrapbook #11 told of the job of the City police. It was an officer's responsibility to enforce that any man accused of a crime was sent home and not allowed to enter the Club until his right to trial. A clipping in the later pages of the same book announced the 3rd session of Good Will City Police Court. The article recorded the sentencing of two members accused of fighting. The court ruled that Harry Cion serve three nights in the game room for assaulting Louis Jaffer. Mr. Jaffer was prohibited from playing games for three nights for assaulting Mr. Cion.⁵³ Other articles record similar punishment for similar crimes.

The Good Will Star May 1909 issue also discussed discipline. Boys received suspension for minor offenses but could return after they apologized and promised not to repeat the offense. Expulsion followed repeat offenses of a graver nature often repeated, but there were no recorded instances of permanently removing a boy from the Club.

In addition to activities held at the Good Will buildings the boys received the opportunity to leave the city environment. As part of The Courant fresh air fund the boys took trips to parks and country groves. The clean environment and open spaces allowed them to take walks, play baseball, go swimming, or take boat rides.⁵⁴ Following the success of the day trips the boys began taking week long vacations to Hall's hometown of Marlborough, Connecticut. The boys stayed in Overton Place owned by Mary Hall.

⁵² Ibid., Vol. 11.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Vol. 8.

While in Marlborough the boys performed gymnastic and military drills for the townspeople.⁵⁵ The summer trips proved to be a favorite activity among the boys.

Membership

Newspaper clippings preserved about the Club provided insight into the racial and ethnic background of the Good Will Club members. An article in Hall's scrapbook proves that the Club was racially integrated. The undated clipping told of a military drill performed by Good Will Cadets. The first prize of a \$3 savings deposit for the best cadet went to Leon Williams, a colored boy.⁵⁶ Williams' name did not appear on the list of regular members from 1880-1900⁵⁷ implying this contest may have occurred after 1900. It would be an assumption that a non-member could not perform in a demonstration or receive a cash prize. This does not give concrete evidence of the date of integration, but it does prove that the Club integrated at some point early in its history.

Another article preserved by Hall proves the Club was ethnically diverse. Hall saved a copy of the January 4, 1908 *Congregationalist and Christian World* article called "The Advance of the New Neighborliness v. The Sociological Approach," by Reverend John L. Sewall. The article praised the Good Will Club for its ethnic diversity. It stated that at first the majority of members came from Irish decent until 1908 when the Jews outnumbered any other class, but noted that the Italians continued to pour in rapidly. The author then recalled the membership of some Negroes and a sprinkling of all nationalities. There was no discrimination against anyone.⁵⁸ The proof of non-discrimination can be viewed in the list of members and in the list of elected official of

⁵⁵ Ibid., Vol. 9.

⁵⁶ Hall Scrapbook, Vol. 1.

⁵⁷ p31-34.

⁵⁸ Sewall, 2 (In Hall Scrapbook Vol. 11).

the Good Will City - the mini-government formed in the Club. Names of "aldermen" included Louis Nachamofsky, Max Levine and M. Suchawolsky. Sewall assured readers that the bearing of the sociological effects of assimilation of immigrants was manifest in the enjoyment all the boys shared at the Club.⁵⁹ Hall helped the boys of different ethnicities learn to get along and play together. Through the Club the boys learned to respect the beliefs of one another.

Although the Club did not discriminate based on race, religion, or ethnicity, members were restricted based on sex. Society saw boys as a bigger behavior problem than girls and despite being a strong advocate for equality for women and Connecticut's first female lawyer, Hall chose to exclude girls from the Club. Instead of integrating her Club she pushed for someone to open a separate club for girls. In a September 2, 1893 clipping Hall recalled Harriet Beecher Stowe saying, "keep the boys busy and you will save them from crime."⁶⁰ Hall claimed it to be equally true of girls and around the time of the 1911 opening of the Club on Ely Street Hall attempted to get more volunteers. She urged citizens to help the Good Will Club, but also wanted someone to open a club for girls and young women. She closed with "There is a pathetic side... the girls of the city have no similar club or institution."⁶¹ Hall said that girls came to her office daily with tears in their eyes because they did not have a club where they could have a good time. The Hartford Social Settlement, the Visiting Nurses' rooms for children on Charter Oak Avenue, and other clubs supplied the desires and needs of the children in some measure, but there was a great and empathetic need of at least one large house for girls similar to

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁰ Hall Scrapbook, Vol. 7.

⁶¹ Ibid., Vol. 12.

the Good Will Club.⁶² No records or articles suggest that Hall's requests for a girls club were ever met.

The Formation of A National Organization

By the time Hall organized the Good Will Club, other cities began creating similar clubs. Clubs appeared in Rhode Island in 1868; Salem, MA in 1869; New Haven, CT in 1871;⁶³ and New York in 1876.⁶⁴ By the 1890s, the Boys' Club Movement extended from coast-to-coast when a club was formed in San Francisco in 1891. In 1903, the movement spread south of the Mason-Dixon line to make the creation of boys clubs truly a national movement.⁶⁵ Similar to the early clubs in Hartford, the clubs started in other cities were often sponsored by middle-class Protestant churches and missions.⁶⁶

Miss Hall took an interest in all of the boys' clubs. In an undated article in her scrapbook it told of a trip she took to Fall River, MA to meet with workers interested in boys' clubs. It was a general conference on the various details of how to better facilitate the improvement and development of boys. Miss Hall was not the only woman present but she was the only female manager and therefore allowed to participate directly in meetings.⁶⁷ Upon returning home Hall was pleased to note that her Club was ahead of many of the other clubs. Other managers discussed a way to provide well-behaved boys with special privileges over the rank and file. Hall told the others that at the Good Will Club there were rooms downstairs for those who showed themselves worthy of exceptional behavior. The boys who received recognition for their positive conduct

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Connections, 4.

⁶⁴ Baldwin, 151.

⁶⁵ Connections, 4.

⁶⁶ Baldwin, 151.

⁶⁷ Hall Scrapbook, Vol. 8.

could play with special games in the reserved rooms. Rewarding well-behaved boys provided motivation for members to improve their conduct in hope of special privileges. The other managers praised Hall for her ideas and planned to implement similar systems at their clubs.

In addition to sharing ideas from their clubs, the managers discussed the possibility of trying to link the clubs together so they could continue to share their problems and solutions. The newspaper article mentioned a strong likelihood of a national association being formed by managers of boys' clubs. They planned to meet in Hartford the following year.⁶⁸

By 1906, fifty-three boys' club organizations were operating. As hinted in the clipping of Hall's trip to Fall River, MA on May 13, 1906 representatives from most of the existing organizations met and discussed the formation of a national federation of boys' clubs.⁶⁹ The idea was accepted and on June 22, 1906 they adopted a constitution and by-laws, thus forming the Federated Boys Club. Social worker Jacob Riis was elected as the first president. The national headquarters declared its purpose to act as headquarters for all existing clubs, to keep records, secure and train workers, help establish new clubs and extend the knowledge of the importance of social work throughout the country.⁷⁰ The movement continued to grow and in 1915, the name was changed to the Boys Club Federation, which included clubs in other countries including Canada, Australia, and India. In 1929, to distinguish it from the like-named foreign organizations, the name was changed to the Boys Federation of America. In 1931 the word Federation dropped creating the name Boys Clubs of America, Inc. In 1956, on the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ I do not know if the meeting was in Hartford.

⁷⁰ Connections, 4.

50th anniversary of the national organization it received a congressional charter and dropped Inc. from its name. From 1956-1990 the organization became known as Boys Clubs of America.⁷¹

By 1989, over 90% of the Clubs in the Boys Club Movement responded to the changing needs of local communities and began allowing both boys and girls to join. At the May 12, 1990 National Council meeting of the Boys Club of America, a majority voted to change the name of the national organization to Boys and Girls Clubs of America. The change officially occurred on September 12, 1990 and continues to be the official name in 2002.

Trinity College Connection

Trinity College assisted in aiding the early clubs in Hartford and also helped expand the organization by creating a new club. Trinity College's earliest connections with the Boys' Club Movement can be seen in the Historical Sketch of the Good Will Club from 1880-1889. In a summary of activities it is stated that on Monday evenings Mr. Conover, a student volunteer from Trinity College, taught three classes. He instructed 290 boys in dumb-bell exercises, fencing, and boxing.⁷² The next reference to Trinity College appeared in the sketch stating that during the winter of 1891 Professor Ferguson of Trinity College provided funds for equipment and the salary for a teacher to begin a woodworking class.⁷³

Trinity's greatest contribution to the Boys and Girls Club came in 1998 when it established a club-college partnership to help transform an entire neighborhood block

⁷¹ "1906: A National Organization Is Born," vol. 1 no. 3, Connections (USA: Boys Club of America, 1981) 4.

⁷² "Historical Sketch", 1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8.

adjacent to the college campus. Under the leadership of former Trinity College President Evan Dobbelle, a member of the Boys' Club as a child, the college helped to launch a public-private venture to build a club associated with the college. The Boys and Girls Club at Trinity College is positioned in the heart of the Learning Corridor which includes a new middle school, a magnet high school and a performing arts academy. Dobbelle said "I am thrilled that the institution I now lead can enlist some of its most important resources - our students - in the club mission of nurturing children's aspirations and helping them become responsible, caring citizens."⁷⁴ Almost 400 children attend the club across from Trinity on a regular basis. The college's close alliance with the club provides the kids with access to Trinity's facilities. For children who only know crowded urban streets and housing developments, the Trinity swimming pool, theater and playing fields are a wondrous change of scenery. For many of the children, it is their first view of the advantages of higher education. The club hoped the exposure to the college would encourage more members to strive to obtain higher education.

Present Day Organization

In the spirit of the original efforts of Mary and Alice Goodwin, Elizabeth Hamersley, Louisa Bushnell, and Mary Hall, the Boys and Girls Clubs have accepted the poorest and the most socially endangered since its founding. Membership costs are low so that they do not deter poor children from joining. Then and now the clubs followed the same successful philosophy:

A Boys Club does not want a membership limited to [members] of good character only. It wants to help [members] to continue in good character, but it also wants to help guide boys [and girls] who may be in danger of getting wrong attitudes and acquiring wrong behavior.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Connections, Fall 1999, 2.

⁷⁵ Connections, Summer 1981, 13.

The clubs focus on helping at-risk children gain skills to improve their lives.

The demographics show that, similar to the late 19th and early 20th century, most of the children attending clubs live in the city and come from low-income families. Targeting the at-risk children from impoverished homes, the profile of today's youth served shows 71% live in urban or inner-city areas, 61% come from minority families, and 42% from families with annual incomes below \$22,000. The biggest membership shift from the past is reflected in the fact that 44% of current members are female.⁷⁶ Accepting girls to the club acknowledges that young girls are also at risk and need guidance.

In addition to allowing girls to join, the clubs' activities have evolved with the changing needs of its members. The clubs continue to offer educational, sports and leadership programs. In addition to many of the activities offered by earlier clubs, today's clubs teach HIV/AIDS education, drug and alcohol prevention and gang intervention. The increased seriousness of the programs reflects the increased dangers children face in the lives of today's youth.⁷⁷

The reality of the problems children face are frightening but statistics show the clubs help. From 1998-2000 clubs in housing developments helped create a 25% reduction in the presence of crack cocaine, a 22% reduction in overall drug activity and a 13% reduction in juvenile crime.⁷⁸ The clubs aim to continue to reduce those numbers until the problems no longer exist.

⁷⁶ "Profile Sheet" (Published by the Boys and Girls Club of America).

⁷⁷ "National Programs," (Published by the Boys and Girls Club of America in 3/01).

⁷⁸ "Studies Show: Boys and Girls Clubs Work," (Published by the Boys and Girls Club of America in 3/01).

Millions of American youth have benefited from belonging to a Boys and Girls Club. There are presently an estimated six to ten million living club alumni worldwide. Former members include Bill Cosby, Jennifer Lopez, Bill Clinton, Michael Jordan, Derek Jeter, Muhammad Ali, and John Antioco, Chairman and CEO of Blockbuster Entertainment.⁷⁹ Members do not only include famous athletes and businessmen but average citizens whose lives improved because of the clubs. In a 1999 study by Louis Harris and Associates, Boys and Girls Club alumni confirmed the positive influence the clubs had on their lives. 80% said Club staff helped them learn right from wrong, 95% indicated the Club was the best thing available in their community, and 52% went as far as saying participating in the Club "saved [their] life."⁸⁰ These statements justify why *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* ranked the Boys and Girls Clubs of America as the number one youth organization for the eighth consecutive year.⁸¹

Hartford and other cities owe gratitude to the women who started reforming youth through the original Boys' Club. Current clubs reflect the original values and goals of the first organizations. The volunteers and workers continue to help the cities' youth in a similar spirit of compassion and hope for those in need. Continuing the legacy of Hall and her predecessors the Boys and Girls Clubs presently serve some 3.5 million youth annually in more than 3,000 clubs across the country and the numbers continue to grow daily.⁸²

⁷⁹ "Boys and Girls Club Alumni" (Published by the Boys and Girls Club of America).

⁸⁰ "Studies Show: Boys and Girls Clubs Work."

⁸¹ "The Positive Place for Kids: 141 Years Young," (Published by the Boys and Girls Club of America).

⁸² Ibid.

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