

DAUGHTER WRITES OF FOUNDER OF OUR Y. M. C. A.; MEMORIAL SUGGESTED

William Welsh Left Record
of Much Good
Work.

To The Editor,
The Evening Times-Star,
St. John, N. B.

Dear Sir:—
I have read with interest an article in the issue of the Times-Star of July 31, 1923, entitled, "Men who conducted Y. M. C. A. here in 1897" and in view of my recent activities during my present visit to your city, in memory of my beloved father, William Welsh, in connection with the Y. M. C. A. of long ago, which activities may have caused to be brought forth from the archives of the past, the article above referred to, I shall appreciate it if you will publish the following, which I believe will be of interest to many of your readers.

While much that I am about to relate happened before my time, my statements may be relied upon as to their accuracy, for I have before me both printed and written data to substantiate same, as well as the recollection of numerous conversations with my father in the past, which data is at the disposal of the officers of the Y. M. C. A. if desired.

The 1897 Organization.

The association spoken of in the article referred to as existing in 1897, was in many respects quite different from that which later came into existence. It was a group of Christian young men, among whom was my father, that were active in the interest of the moral uplift of the city and in Christian work in the community, but they met in a room or rooms and had no established association building of their own. At first the public manifested great interest in this association of young men, but as the years passed, this interest began to languish. My father, realizing this, became possessed with an over-riding desire to establish a Y. M. C. A. in St. John that would be a permanent institution, a monument to the city and one that neither time nor change would ever despoil.

Having heard of the progress of a Y. M. C. A. in Halifax, Wm. Welsh, with a group of other gentlemen, attended a convention held there and, on their return, my father, with his determination further strengthened, called a meeting in St. David's school room and the present organization was effected. At this time the young men were meeting in a room that I believe was in a building located in what was called Horner's Corner.

Charlotte Street Building.

With the assistance of earnest workers, my father then began a crusade to raise funds for the project. Concerts were given at which some of the finest artists in the city participated, donating their services to the cause. Bazaars were held and a large amount of money was subscribed, many leading citizens promising substantial aid. A building committee was appointed and a contract signed with Messrs. D. and T. Sullivan, for excavating for the cellar and drain and for building the foundation walls for their new building in Charlotte street. To quote further from the newspaper record before me:

"The work has been commenced and will be pressed forward rapidly. Advertisement for tenders for the other portion of the building will be made in a few days and the committee hopes to have the building ready for occupation on the first of May next. The building committee are, Messrs. Wm. Welsh, John Stewart, H. B. White, John E. Irvine, E. McLeod, G. Bertheaux, W. H. Fairall and Joshua Clawson. The first five gentlemen named, together with T. W. Daniel and Isaac Burpee, are the trustees under the Act of Incorporation. (A lot was purchased from Mr. Archibald Sinclair). The building will be 10,000, with a passage of 9 feet reserved as an entrance to a lot in the rear. There will be two stores on the ground floor, 11,500 and 17,500, with good cellars. The main entrance will be 8 feet wide. The apartments for the use of the association will consist of a lecture hall, class room, parlor, committee room, office, gymnasium, dressing room, bath, etc. With the many questionable places of resort open in the city, the great need of such a building as the new one being erected, must be obvious to everyone who has the welfare of our young men at heart."

My father, Wm. Welsh, was president of the association, which office he held for six years until his departure for England and was without question the founder of the Y. M. C. A. of St. John, as it is today; a permanent institution in the city. His labors in the cause were unceasing. He devoted so much time to the work that he would find it necessary to spend the early morning hours, frequently till two and three o'clock, at his desk in his office, to accomplish his duties in connection with his shipping business; the shipyards being on the Martin Road.

The Smallpox Days.
When the smallpox epidemic raged in St. John and many of the merchants left the city with their families to escape infection, Wm. Welsh remained and worked day and night to relieve the awful suffering in the community, sending food to the homes of the afflicted, often taking it there himself and caring for the burial of the dead. Frequently an undertaker would say: "Mr. Welsh that man died of black smallpox, I cannot bury him," and would rush from the house leaving my father alone with the dead, and he would have to find another undertaker to complete the task of burial and would then accompany the body to the grave, the only mourner. To quote from the words of the Rev. Dr. Hutchins of Brooklyn, N. Y., at the time of my father's death: "I used to see a manly form sitting among you, the form of one we were all glad to see; a noble, kindly, accomplished Christian gentleman who did you and your pastor and me, much good. I feel very sad when I think that Mr. Welsh is gone. He belonged to a rare class of men."

Again I quote from a letter written to my father in 1884, from a great friend of his in England. It is a word picture:
"I fancy I see you standing up to him in your intent, earnest way, looking him right in the eye with those bright orbs of yours, the words coming right from your heart. Who could re-

sist you." A wonderful tribute from one man to another.
All Enthusiast.
My father's ministrations to the sick and dying and his self-sacrificing spirit, were beyond understanding. Among his many other activities he held service in the Marine Hospital as well as cottage prayer meetings and outdoor services. He presided at the Sunday evening services of the Y. M. C. A., playing the organ and leading the singing. It is said by those that recall the early days—and but few now remain—that never in the years since has such enthusiasm prevailed in the Y. M. C. A., as then. The hall would be crowded to the door, and the stairs leading to the street, as well as the street itself, the opposite pavement would contain a mass of people, all joining in the service of song, the singing being heard at a distance of many blocks—a thing unprecedented in the annals of the association. So popular did the Y. M. C. A. become during my father's presidency, the churches complained that their services were being interfered with as their congregations flocked to the meetings of the Y. M. C. A., so the time for holding the meetings had to be changed.

Another important work carried on by my beloved father was a mission on Sheffield street, in which work he was assisted by D. M. Stearns, who afterwards became the Rev. Dr. Stearns, a noted preacher in Philadelphia. My father's efforts in the cause of temperance were also unceasing and I have today newspaper copies of two wonderful letters written by him at that time, which would doubtless be well worth reproducing today. His philanthropic work and interest in the welfare of the city and people of St. John, were unparalleled. For years my father was superintendent of the Old Kirk Sabbath School, later removing to St. David's Church, where he became an elder and teacher of a young women's Bible class.

Went To England.
The esteem and love in which my father was held by the community were made manifest at the time of his departure for England. I have in my possession the newspaper record of the banquet held in his honor in the Y. M. C. A. and have a copy of the menu of said banquet—I presume the only records of the occasion in existence.

A large number of gentlemen gathered to unite in the entertainment of Wm. Welsh, Esq., the retiring president, and to witness the presentation to him of an address and accompanying present, indicative of the feeling of the association towards him. The supper tables were spread in the class room. John E. Irvine, Esq., presided, with the guest of the evening on his right and Rev. Dr. Waters on his left. Hon. E. Willis, Dr. Botsford, T. W. Daniel and other prominent citizens laid seats at the president's table.

A splendid address, engrossed on vellum and richly bound in leather, was read by Mr. Irvine and presented to Wm. Welsh. I have the record of my father's response. Another address was presented to my father by T. W. Daniel, Esq., on behalf of the Evangelical Alliance of which he (father) was the vice president. Brief addresses were made by Dr. Waters, Rev. Geo. Armstrong, Dr. Botsford, Hon. Mr. Willis.

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