

The Overseas Friendship Society Of Ottawa

UNDER the Colombo Plan and various United Nations agencies, an increasing number of students, fellows and trainees have been coming to Canada each year, with Ottawa the headquarters for arrivals and departures.

In the leading cities of the Western world, organizations such as International House and the Overseas League provide a centre for students and visitors from far countries. A group of Ottawa citizens felt that there was now a need for such a centre in Canada's capital city. They spent the summer of 1955 in arousing interest in the scheme and raising funds to finance it. The Overseas Friendship Society was the result of their efforts.

Friendship House, the main project of the Society, had a modest beginning in rooms in a private house on the Driveway. This space, however, soon became too small, and in 1957 quarters at 56A Rideau Street (near the centre of the city) were made available by the Government of Canada. This new home was officially opened by the Prime Minister on May 16, 1958. Mr. Sidney Smith, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, an Honourary President of the Society, was also present.

These quarters provide lounge and kitchen facilities, and a recreation hall large enough to seat 200 people. A radio with a record player, television and a library are there for those who wish to use them.

With the exception of festival days when there is a special celebration, the club is at present open only during the week-end. Entertainment is provided to suit all tastes. Friday evenings are usually devoted to dancing, bridge and other games. On Saturday evenings, Canada is shown to the visitors through films and once a month there is a "country night" when the visitors, in turn, with the aid of their embassies, put on a programme illustrating the history, development and culture of their countries. On Sunday afternoons there is tea and an opportunity to meet friends. This is often an occasion to entertain a distinguished guest from abroad, or a Canadian who is leaving for, or returning from, a foreign assignment.

Entertainment and hospitality are not confined to the club rooms. Arrangements are made for the visitors to be entertained in Canadian homes, to go skiing, to go on sleigh rides, to visit summer cottages, to see Canadian customs such as maple sugar making, or to visit points of interest outside Ottawa. In addition to entertainment, the Society maintains certain services such as locating accommodation for the visitors, making contacts in other cities across Canada, and generally helping them to become accustomed to Canadian ways and conditions.

The Overseas Friendship Society, responsible for all these activities, has a membership of over 200 residents of Ottawa. It is hoped to increase this number to 300 during the coming year. There are two types of members: first, those who think that the Society is worth supporting financially but who, for various reasons, cannot give much time to it and, secondly, the important group who contribute the modest fee and a good deal of time and energy as well.