

**COMMUNITY CLUBS.**

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fill a want in rural communities, and it has contributed in some measure to the improvement of conditions under which the farmer lives.

On the other hand, however, it has absorbed altogether too much of community business, business which could be done just as easily and just as efficiently through the local merchant. And as a result the rural centres are losing population, while the city is growing by leaps and bounds.

This is what concerns us—the preservation of the community centre—the town or village. For, if the present method of doing business continues, numbers of these centres are threatened with still greater depletion, if not with extinction.

Who is to blame for this? The merchant partly, and partly the farmers—six of one and half a dozen of the other. But, be that as it may, the fact remains that the situation is serious, and some "get together" medium should be supplied through which the farmer and the merchant could get each other's point of view and seek to understand one another better. Such a medium is provided in the community club. A sub-committee on community business could be appointed composed of progressive farmers and wide-awake business men; this committee could meet, go over the whole ground, and bring in recommendations as to what should be done to improve the relationship between these two essential factors in the rural community. Mutual confidence and understanding would follow, more business be done at home, and new life be given to the community centre, to the benefit of all.

Community health is another task facing most communities, especially as it is related to child welfare. Canada holds the unenviable record of losing 14 per cent. of her babies under one year of age, and it is well to remind residents of rural centres that the percentage is higher in the country than it is in the city. Winnipeg's infant death rate, for instance, is 10 per cent. When we realize that we lost only 2½ per cent. per year of our Canadian soldiers on the battlefields of Europe, the abnormal death rate of our babies is apparent. Faced with these facts, the building of a district hospital, or the securing of a district nurse—or both—are tasks which ought to be undertaken. For there is more or less of a direct connection between infant mortality and the presence or absence of a nurse or hospital. In two adjacent rural districts, where figures were secured by the writer, the community with a hospital had a death rate of 7 per cent., while in the one without a hospital the figure stood at 14.5 per cent.; just double the number of babies lost.

The Moving Picture is, however, one of the best and one of the easiest methods of rural entertainment. Up to now, most communities have had either to go without the moving picture show or accept the "penny-dreadful" and dime-novel type of picture—a programme of thrills, each scene "guaranteed to raise the hair on your head twice every minute," as a recent advertisement announced. Through the community club a great improvement may be made in this popular form of entertainment. For instance, we have twelve community clubs formed on the railway lines running from Rapid City to Minnola and from Arden to Russell. The community programme provides for a weekly meeting in each centre—one week the programme will be provided by local debates, extension lectures, etc.; the alternate evening we put on a moving picture programme. The services of an operator have been secured and he visits each club once in two weeks. The expense of this programme for eight months in these twelve communities we estimate will be about \$5,500. Box office receipts at a nominal admission fee of 30 cents for adults and 15 cents for children, is expected to meet this amount. No one makes any money out of it. The operator is paid a salary and his travelling expenses; the balance is absorbed in local hire of hall, printing and film rental. The plan mentioned had been in operation about three weeks when the epidemic of Spanish influenza compelled the cancellation of the moving picture programme. For the time that was in operation, however, results were very encouraging.

It is not, of course, necessary that clubs be formed to secure this moving picture service, nor indeed is it necessary that an itinerant operator be secured. Local

arrangements can be made, providing that the points to be served are on the one line of railway and the programme taken regularly.

**How to Organize a Club.**

A glance at the reproduction of the community wheel will give a good idea of how the club is organized. Any public-spirited man or woman may take the initiative in the matter. A public meeting should be called, care being taken that the ministers of the town and the officers of the various organizations be interviewed; representatives from the various churches, Grain Growers' Association, Board of Trade and other organizations noted on the community wheel should be present at the meeting. An address by a visitor from a nearby club or by the provincial community secretary could be given, and if thought wise, the organization proceeded with.

An executive of seven should be elected as follows:

President, who shall be convener of the Public Forum Committee; 1st Vice-President (convener of Better Business Committee); 2nd Vice-President (convener of Young People's Committee); 3rd Vice-President (convener of Public Health Committee); 4th Vice-President (convener of Recreation Committee); Secretary; Treasurer.

Care should be taken that these officers are elected from the various elements of the community life, town and country being equally represented.

In addition to the executive a general committee should be appointed of one or more representatives of the various organizations represented in the club.

**The Community Building.**

In most communities the matter of a building in which to hold community meetings will be a source of difficulty. Wherever possible we advocate the use of the consolidated school, if there is one; or a public hall, a lodge room or one of the churches may be used. In some cases an agricultural hall within the town limits might be built and used for community purposes; a community hall as a memorial for fallen soldiers has also been suggested.

**Results.**

Some folks, on reading this article, may ask what are the results of this community movement? My reply is that, as far as Canada is concerned, the movement is still in its infancy, and it is too early to ask for results. However, in the United States, where some clubs have been in operation for five years or more, splendid results have been attained. I might quote from the record of one community club, whose activities have been well described in a little volume entitled "Fear God in Your Own Village," by Richard Morse. This is a record of what was accomplished by a community club in a village of 1,200 population as revealed in the report of the fifth annual meeting. Membership fees ranging from \$1.00 to \$200 were secured, and \$3,800 spent in community betterment. In co-operation with the country councils, six roads running into the village were macadamized; producer and consumer, merchant and farmer, were brought together and community business boosted; and in co-operation with the school board, kindergarten, sewing and cooking classes and manual training classes were established. The village was situated in swampy country, and previous to the organization of the club as high as 75 cases of malarial fever would be reported in one year. At the instigation of the club the marshes were drained or oiled, the breeding ground of the mosquitoes destroyed, and cases of malarial fever reduced from 75 to 3. Similar good work was done through the neighbourhood house, the moving picture show, the fire department and the district nurse, all of which had either come into being or had been revived through the community club. And last, but not least, a splendidly efficient community church was in operation.

Similar results can be secured in Canadian rural centres; results that will mean the preservation of the community centre and the development of community life. For when the citizens of our rural communities have learned to think together, work together and play together, when community business flows through community channels, when the spirit of co-operation takes the place of the spirit of competition, when principles of social life and human service are made what they ought to be in the old home town—then, but not till then, shall we keep our boys and girls at home; then, but not till then, shall we stop the drift citywards and build up the local community.

This may seem a far-off ideal, but it is for us to make the ideal real. It is gloriously worth trying for, anyhow.