

## Jewish Community Center

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and depressed men and women who came to Roadside for information, for advice, for help, for the mere comfort of talking to a friendly neighbor, and thus lightening their burdens by putting them into words.

All the plans made through the years have not been carried out. There have been mistakes and discouragements. Much that was hoped for is as yet not accomplished. Vision outruns achievement. Nevertheless, a house stands "by the side of the road" in southeast Des Moines in which those who built it endeavored, and those who live in it endeavor, to be "a friend to man."

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### JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER

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In 1907 a committee consisting of Rabbi Eugene Mannheim, Mr. I. Friedlich, and Miss Flora Dunlap, Head Resident of Roadside Settlement, made a study of the number and the place of residence of the more recent foreign born Jewish arrivals in Des Moines.

It was found that Bremer School, located at East Second and Des Moines Streets, had a large number of Jewish children enrolled, and, after much consultation with other interested persons, it was agreed that some activities for Jewish people should be inaugurated in the Bremer School neighborhood. Miss Dunlap undertook the general supervision of the new project which was called the Jewish Branch of Roadside Settlement. Miss Anette Mann, a Jewish social worker, was employed and took up residence in Roadside Settlement.

The first need of these Jewish people who, with other races and nationalities, were coming to the United States in such large numbers during these years, seemed to be instruction in the English language. For like most of our foreign immigrants, these people found that their major difficulty was an almost total ignorance of the tongue of their adopted country. This ignorance was an obstacle to, and made even more difficult, the acquaintance with, the adjustment to, and the assimilation of American customs and traditions so necessary if our Melting Pot was and is to produce citizens of the heart and not merely of residence.

The Des Moines School Board gave the use of rooms in the Bremer School building, where in October, 1907, evening classes in English were opened in which any foreign born adult might enroll. One hundred and fourteen men and women enrolled the first evening! About half of them were Jewish and the others were from various European countries.

For the first year instruction was given entirely by Miss Mann and a corps of volunteer teachers. The second year a supervisor, Miss Ida Jacobs, a member of its regular teaching staff, was provided by the Des Moines School Board. The third year not only Miss Jacobs continued as supervisor, but two other teachers were provided by the School Board.

The students were so eager to learn and the attendance so large and regular that other subjects were added to English. Later on the instructional classes were moved to the East High School building and the maintenance and teaching part of this phase of the project was taken over entirely as part of the public school system.

From this small beginning by a private agency thirty years ago, there gradually developed the present adult evening school program of the Des Moines School Board, which now includes a very wide range of subjects, taught by a large staff of instructors, and attended by hundreds of students.

Evening educational classes were not the sole activity of the Jewish Branch. A Mother's Club, a story hour group, a sewing school, and some other informal groups, all meeting in Bremer School, were organized. The attendance and interest increased so rapidly that two years later, in 1919, through the courtesy of Mr. Frank Mattes, who gave the use of rooms on East Locust Street without charge, a gymnasium was fitted up and was used to capacity. Later on, larger quarters were secured in the rear of the Capital City Bank building and activities were carried on there.

In 1910 the Jewish Branch of Roadside Settlement became a separate organization. The Director and the activities moved into the Jewish Settlement House, a large house at the corner of East Fifth and Maple Streets put at the disposal of the new organization by Mr. Aaron Younker.

The members of the Board of Directors of the new Settle-

ment were: Mesdames A. H. Cohen, M. Becker, S. Davidson, Meyer Rosenfield, S. Weinstock; Miss Jennie Younker, Rabbi Kaplowitz, Rabbi Zeichick, Rabbi Mannheimer; Messrs. A. Friedlich, Morris Samish, J. R. Cohen, Louis Davidson, Anselm Frankel, and Morris Mandlebaum. Mr. Aaron Younker was an honorary member of the Board.

The Jewish Settlement increased in attendance, influence, and interest each year from its beginning, as the successive moves into larger quarters indicate. Like so many other districts in the growing city, the Bremer School neighborhood changed from a residence to a commercial district. The number of pupils in the school decreased. The school property became a site for a factory.

Families moved into other sections of the city, and in 1920 the Jewish Settlement also moved. A fine old home at West Eighth Street and Forest Avenue, located in a neighborhood in which a considerable number of Jewish families lived, was purchased by the Settlement Board. The house was remodeled, a gymnasium, swimming pool, auditorium, and a Talmud Torah building added. All the funds for the extensive remodeling and the additions were contributed by members of the Jewish Community, and the name was changed to Jewish Community Center.

The Jewish Community Center, like Roadside Settlement and the three other Des Moines Community Centers, now receives the major part of its budget from the Community Chest.

The Center's activities cover a wide range. A station of the Public Library is located there. The gymnasium, swimming pool, and auditorium are in constant use, and there are classes in dancing, dramatics, music, handcrafts, sewing, etc. The activities are non-sectarian, and the majority of those using the House are non-Jewish.

For the last three summers a Home Camp has been an outstanding feature of the Center's activities. A course of lectures followed by discussion and called the Community Civic Forum has been conducted since 1925. The Community Civic Forum brought annually to Des Moines well known and important speakers and lecturers, and was in part, at least, the

inspiration for the city wide Forums later inaugurated by the Des Moines School Board under a grant from the Carnegie Corporation to the American Association for Adult Education.

The present members of the Board of Directors are: Mesdames Saul Davidson, A. I. Blotcky, S. Weinstock, Harry Ginsberg, M. L. Kahn, Sam Abramson, Nathan Frankel; Rabbi Eugene Mannheimer, Rabbi Monroe Levens; Messrs. Robert Lappen, Ben Sherman, Harry Goldman, L. H. Cohen, M. O. Kohn, Sol Panor, A. H. Blank, Burton Joseph, Ben Hurwitz, Ellis Levitt, and Louis Adelman.

The Directors have been: Annette Mann 1907-1908; Mildred A. Coffman 1908-1909; Rosetta Stone 1909-1910; Caroline Morrell 1911-1912; Sadie Block 1912 (three months only on account of illness); Faye Biederman 1912-1925; Julia B. Mayer 1925—.

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### SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY HOUSE

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The South Side Community House was established in 1919. While the distance between South Side Community House and Roadside Settlement House is not great, they are separated by the Des Moines River, and serve communities quite unlike in background and tradition.

At the close of the War a group of Des Moines citizens made application to the National Catholic War Council for funds to establish a Community Center in Des Moines. A survey was made as to the need for a Center and as to its location. Funds were granted by the Council for the purchase of the Knights of Columbus hut at Fort Des Moines and for its removal and reconstruction at 1204 Indianola Road, which is in a district largely made up of people of Italian birth or parentage.

During the period of reconstruction of the building, class organization work was carried on in a small cottage adjoining the present building under the direction of Miss Anita Dapalonia. For the first six months the National Catholic War Council financed the project, and the National Council of Catholic Women for the next six months. In 1920 the Center became one of the agencies financed by the Des Moines Community Chest.

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