



THE "Y" OF THE GAY NINETIES

Back in the mid-nineties, when there were revival meetings in the winter, camp meetings in the summer and a general let-down in religious zeal during the spring and fall, the young folks thought it would be a good idea to organize a Y. M. C. A. The idea originated with Franklin E. Reese, the president of the Presbyterian Christian Endeavor Society. Young Franklin was a studious chap who pondered questions long and earnestly. He had acquired a diplomatic approach as a student at Columbia College. Before consulting the clergy and influential laymen whose support was indispensable, he encouraged his associates to tell their parents that the churches were neglecting the young people, which obviously was the case. Then, when Rev. Dr. William A. Rice, president of the Board of Education; Robert R. Sinclair, editor of Harper's Weekly; Charles T. Decker and P. G. R. Sjostrom agreed to help, success was assured.

Fortune favored a good start. Gales Club House, on Elm Street, was now available, the W. A. C. having moved into its handsome new home across the street. For two years of its brief and somewhat precarious existence, the Y. M. C. A. was popular. Fred Wherry, Princeton graduate and athlete, was the man who got things started. Fred was six feet two inches of wholesome personality. He liked boys and they liked and trusted him because he was a good sport and always willing to help them. A letter man in football and baseball, he organized teams, conducted "gym"

classes, and planned schedules for the little fellows as well as for the long-haired heavyweights.

Wherry's teams were the first of any importance to represent Westfield on the gridiron. Nearly all the town turned out to see them play. The Wherry brothers, Fred, Elmer and Bob; Ed Bussing, Oscar Richardson, Joe Vought, John Morrow, Harry Randolph, Al Coger and Bob Carberry were the regulars of 1895. Elmer Wherry was president of the Union County Football League of that year. In 1896, under Captain Carberry, they took the measure of an "unbeatable" Plainfield team. Fullback Strothers Rice, Hamilton College star, scored the winning touchdown and was carried off the field.

When Wherry resigned to practice law, the "Y" became just a place for the boys to go when time hung heavy on their hands, and because of "the annoyance of non-members" the directors ordered the building closed in the afternoon, pending the appointment of a general secretary. But secretary or no secretary, the boys no longer cared. They were tired of bowling on those "lop-sided, old alleys"; they could play pool and billiards at Pop Potter's, and football and baseball on the East Broad Street grounds, recently leased by the Westfield Club. It was the ambition of every kid to "belong" to the Club.

In 1897 the Y. M. C. A. was formally declared non-existent and its unpaid bills were dropped in the lap of President Charles T. Decker and a special finance committee.