MINNEAPOLIS SPOKESMAN

PHILLYS WHEATLEY HOUSE

The youth study made many years ago by the Women's Co-operative Alliance suggested to its president, Mrs. Rob- inson Gilman, that there was a need in the community for Negro boys and girls who could have an opportunity for wholesome supervised recreation. From this beginning there developed the idea of a settlement house for Negroes. Mrs. Gilman turned, naturally, to the Woman's Christian Association to under- take the new project. This appeal met with immediate response from the Association. Mrs. James Page, its presi- dent, presented to the Council of Social Agencies the need of a Negro settlement and an appropriation was granted to carry out the experiment. In the fall of 1921, Mrs. Page and Miss Georgia E. Taylor, in memory of their sister, Mrs. Mary T. Welcome, the current junior clerk; Mrs. H. G. Harrison, librarian; and Miss Mary Jane Pennington, the library, Women's Auxiliary, Minneapolis District Dental Association contributed financial assistance to get the establish- ments going. In addition to these furnishing numerous in- dividual gifts were received.

Phyllis Wheatley House, as its name implies, is a one-story building with a smoothly finished facade. The house numbers among its treasures a first edition of the poems of Phyllis Wheatley, published in London in 1773. This book was a gift to the house by Mr. Edward C. Gale.

Among the important possessions is a grand piano, the gift of Mr. James Ford Bell. This instrument is in the means of better music education. A trophy of a similar nature is a display case given by Mrs. Margaret Kendrick Birdsell in October 1921 to Miss Mary Jane Pennington, the first member of the Board of Directors of the Women's Auxiliary. These gifts and many others have enabled the establishment to become a real home in the heart of the Negro community.

The Board of Directors of the new settlement house chose as Head Resident, W. Gertrude Brown, executive sec- retary of the Federal Society for Service to Negroes in Dayton, Ohio. The arrival of the Head Resident coincided with the official opening of the House on October seventh, 1924.

In addition to Miss Brown, the staff consisted of an office secretary and a part time boys' worker.

The name, "Phyllis Wheatley," was chosen for the House in memory of a little African girl brought to Amer- ica on a slave ship. This little emaciated, eight year old girl, whom no one wanted to buy, because she was too weak to do hard work, was finally sold on the auction block in Boston to Mr. and Mrs. John Wheatley, for three bundles of tobacco. Phyllis spent her childhood years with the Wheatleys' little daughter, who was only three years Phyllis' senior. Then Phyllis was sent to a public school and with her parents' consent taught her to read and write. With Phyllis' industrious and retentive mind she had mastered four languages at the age of nineteen, and at twenty-one was skilled in hundreds of ancient and modern authors. In the development of Phyllis' mind was published. Because of her Christian char- acter, her faithfulness, her determination to take advan- tage of opportunities, it seemed quite fitting to call the new house "Phyllis Wheatley," in the hope that the people who came with its walls would catch the inspiration of her life.

Phyllis Wheatley House is wholly supported by the Community Fund, governed by a Board of Directors, with the assistance of the Phyllis Wheatley House Auxiliary. Special committees of the Auxiliary are responsible for house membership and assist with the house programs and activities.

On the sixteenth day of March, 1934, articles of incor- poration were filed under the name of Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House Incorporated.

The facilities of the House were soon outgrown. In 1928 a request was made to the Board of Directors of the Phyllis Wheatley House and the Woman's Christian Association was appointed to launch a building fund campaign, with Mrs. James Page as chairman, and Mrs. Hugh N. McDonald as chairman of the Board of Directors of the Phyllis Wheatley House Auxiliary. Special committees of the Auxiliary are responsible for house membership and assist with the house programs and activities.

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