

## THE HISTORY OF THE UNITY CLUB OF MAPLEWOOD 1930 - 1980

As Unity Club celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, and your historian attempts to compile the record of that half century, it would be almost impossible to get, first hand, the origin and early doings of the Club, since all but two of our illustrious founders (long live Lou Sternrich and Lou Siegel) have passed on and are unavailable for comment.

Fortunately, your same historian faced the some dilemma in 1955, the time of our 25th, and at that time, many of these founders were still with us, and could supply the needed information. Hence, we are able to recall some of the early events in our "glorious history".

The year 1930 must have been a lucky one for the Township of Maplewood, for history records that in that year, Unity Club had its inception. The circumstances surrounding the formation of the Club -- the "whys and wherefores" -- are really nowhere written, and could only be gathered by conversation with "well informed Brethren".

We learned that late in 1929, or was it early 1930, when you could count the Jewish residents of Maplewood on your fingers, someone conceived the idea of getting the group together to get better acquainted.

Their first consideration was a purpose for the organization -- should it be civic? social? religious? maybe political? By decision, the Club began to function along civic and social lines (mostly pinochle).

We were able to dig up the names of these Unity pioneers: Irv Steinberg, Herman Ringel, Max Rosenstein, Lou Sternrich, Lou Siegel, Jack Nelkin, Jules Amsterdam, Jules Klein, Dan Mishell, Bert Cohen and Noah Kasen --(sincere apologies for any omissions). To this group were soon added such outstanding Maplewoodians as Al Brundage, Eddie Madden, Abe Adler, Jack Abramson and Charlie Donath -- (more apologies).

The "civic and social" pinochle games were held at member's homes (preferably those with finished cellars--more times than not it was at Irv Steinberg's). Nominal dues were paid, and refreshments were served. Max Rosenstein was temporary President, later served two terms as elected President. To him goes the credit for naming the club "UNITY" after a similar club in New York (but not nearly as good as ours). Irv Steinberg was the second President, succeeded by Lou Siegel.

The club, thus bolstered, soon numbered too many to meet in member's homes. Thereupon, in '34 and '35, they met in Rogosin's Hall in Irvington. At this time the social aspects of Unity broadened. The club took a flyer at social functions.

A memorable one was the "old clothes party", held in Rogosin's in '34. Some say it was Thanksgiving Eve, others say it was New Year's Eve, but all agree a hilarious time was had by all.

During '36 and '37 Unity met at the George Washington Inn on Ridgewood Road. Subsequently they used the Maplewood Club.

The years that followed are replete with Unity Club's activities and accomplishments. Around that time, the custom of the Stag weekends was inaugurated, the first one to Wolf Hollow, whose hills and cliffs were as naught to the "young"

Unity men of those years. For at least ten years following that, those outings were held, spring and fall, at Adolph Zukor's estate in New City, which in the first years of our visits was a veritable dream spot. We'd number 50 or 60, and at times were privileged to have old Adolph himself with us. And they never failed to provide some pre-release motion picture for Saturday night in that quaint little Playhouse. It is interesting to note that the charge for the first weekend was \$7.00, including room and four meals. To this we had to add green fees and \$1.00 per man to cover all the gratuities. (Happy days!)

To those who were privileged to attend, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary boat ride (June 1939) stands out in their memory. Arranged by Past President Bill Philipson, a 100-foot yacht left New York at noon on a beautiful June Friday, to steam up the Sound to Norwalk, Connecticut, there to partake of a fine seafood dinner and sail back in moonlight. Thirty-three couples attended (out of a total membership of 55).

The War years came and, of course, Unity did its share. Civil Defense was the order of the day, and Unity Club urged it upon us all. We had members in all branches of the Service and, of course, sons of members too numerous to mention. Bond drives, Red Cross, and U.S.O. were thoroughly supported. The highlight of our activity was the presentation of an ambulance to the Maplewood Defense Council. This was underwritten by six members, who inaugurated the idea, but was eventually subscribed (and oversubscribed) by 100% of the membership. Enough money remained in this fund to purchase another ambulance after the war for the Red Cross of Maplewood and the Oranges.

Our record of civic work is a proud one. Almost from the Club's inception, this phase of our activity was stressed. Individually and collectively we served our community, by membership in the Maplewood Civic Association, and by representation on Budget committees, school committees, and others. Our outstanding members in these endeavors were Nat Teiger, Jules Stein, Harry Kalb, Harry Fox, Morris Weinstein and Ralph Jacobson. Subsequently, some of these men went on to hold Town office -- Ralph Jacobson, Morris Weinstein and some others, and a long list of our present "pride and joy" -- J.P. Freeman, Morty Katz, Peter Valentine and Noel Siegel. I know I missed some - sorry.

Unity always partook of all new projects in town when participation was requested. In 1952 we bought therapy equipment for the Underhill Field House. In 1954 we furnished the auditorium at the new Shelter House. In later years we made important contributions to the Public Library.

Our Scholarship Fund is one of our pet projects. It was instituted about 25 years ago by the effort of Ben Lewis, and served subsequently by a long list of "old faithfuls" and so many more recent "new faithfuls" whom I hesitate to list for fear of omissions. Suffice it to say, a great job is being done by these dedicated souls.

Our 25th Anniversary Celebration was a Gala time, culminating in a weekend stay in the then luxurious Hollywood Hotel in West End, New Jersey. Sam Denburg was chairman and Arthur Slavitt was president.

The next 25 years are characterized by several outstanding changes, all of them for the betterment of Unity Club. First and foremost, we opened our rolls to a new generation of Unityites, our sons, and more recently, to our sons-in-law. These young stalwarts injected new blood to Unity Club, what with our old-timers aging, dying and moving to Florida. Without them, we might never have reached this milestone. Young energy and talent, new ideas, new outlook, all contributed to add new zest to our "going concern". The advent of country club membership had lessened our interest in stag weekends, but new projects entered our programs such as evenings in New York, and at Meadowland races, and tennis matches.

A brand new deal was the increase in the number of dinner meetings at the Chanticler, which upped our dues somewhat, but which upped our spirit even more greatly. During this time, greater attention was given to our scholarship and welfare fund activities.

In recent years, we played an annual softball game with the Village Club, and we all know who came out on top.

Lest we forget, let us here pay tribute to the various Bulletin editors throughout these years, those unsung heroes, who got so little cooperation from the membership, and yet managed so well in keeping us informed.

Unity today stands as a tribute to a small group of far-sighted men. We have grown from a membership of 15 to more than ten times that number. Charity has taken its place on our list of objectives. "Social and Civic" have assumed greater meaning with each passing year, whereas civic was once only a word to us, it has long since come to mean making ourselves a living part of our community. We contribute, we advise, and we are heard. Social has broadened from pinochle and gin to Father and Children's nights, to family picnics, theatre parties, dinner-dances and many other functions.

So, at our half century mark, we pause to take cognizance of our humble beginning, and to pay tribute to our Unity pioneers, who first conceived and who, through the years, have so ably assisted in building our Club . . . . to the men who followed, and continued in this wonderful work through Unity's years of growth . . . . and to the Unity men of the future, who have even greater pleasures and achievements in store for them as Unity goes from strength unto strength.

LOU HUCKMAN  
1980