

Neighborhood House At Curtis Bay Is Factor In American Citizenship

Brown Memorial Church Started, Thirteen Years Ago, Community Activities At Curtis Bay That Have Resulted In Increased Local Interest In Health, Happiness, Civic Betterment And Americanization.

By EMILY EMERSON LANTZ

THE Curtis Bay Neighborhood House, 101 Cherry street.

The address had a pleasant sound and the road leading there, across the new Hanover Street Bridge spanning the Patapsco river, is picturesque even in mid-winter. Rifts of snow streaked the open country and a glinting fringe of thin ice followed the course of waterways. At midday when the visitor journeyed along the well-paved road that led to the Neighborhood House, the sun shone warmly and a few hours later, when returning to the city, the setting sun touched with fire the flowing river and wide expanse of landscape.

The Curtis Bay settlement, now within city limits and scarcely five miles distant from the City Hall, is a thriving manufacturing center and its residents, separated by the river from the bustling life of the metropolis, have a distinctive neighborhood life of their own.

Neighborhood Melting Pot.

The register of the Neighborhood House abounds in foreign names. Greek names, Scandinavian names, Polish, Russian, Bohemian, Lithuanian, German and Hungarian. The manufacturing activities of Curtis Bay attract many industrial workers to this strip of land so recently annexed to Baltimore, and here their families are settled and their home and social interests center.

Until the Curtis Bay section was gathered beneath the sheltering wing of municipal care, that portion of Anne Arundel county was wholly cut off from many benefits now enjoyed as part of Baltimore. Then municipal workers along many lines must needs confine their services to within the city limits. And so, some 13 years ago, when the Curtis Bay settlement was far more isolated than is now the case, some members of Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church, encouraged by the Rev. Mr. Vanek, then pastor of the Bohemian Moravian Church, and the Rev. Dr. John T. Stone, of Brown Memorial Church, who were both interested in social and religious work at Curtis Bay, started a little sewing class there and later a kindergarten. From these two education activities developed the Neighborhood House as it now exists, and which in spirit and work is all its name implies.

A Social Homestead.

Its local habitation is a substantial brick edifice with small belfry, formerly occupied as the schoolhouse of the village. When, to meet increasing community needs, a fine new public school building was erected upon a commanding site adjacent to the old schoolhouse, the membership of Brown Memorial Church purchased the old edifice, which is admirably adapted to community needs. Classroom partitions were removed, converting the lower floor into two large assembly rooms, one occupied as an assembly and kindergarten room, the other as a gymnasium. The edifice is well built, well lighted, and recently, through the interest of Brown Memorial congregation, comfortably heated by modern methods.

The house is shaded in front by two tall maple trees planted years ago by school children on Arbor Day, and the building is surrounded by a spacious yard planted with trees. To the main building an addition has been made that includes a physician's well-equipped office, a waiting room for patients and a lavatory with shower baths that may be used by all members of the Neighborhood House. This dispensary, with its physician in charge, is supported by the industrial activities of Curtis Bay and once a week a dental clinic is also held there. The Instructive Visiting Nurse Association has a nurse in attendance who also, under the auspices of the Red Cross Society, conducts a class in home nursing.

On the upper floor of the building is a kitchenette with portable stoves that are easily lifted into large classrooms for lessons in domestic science or the social diversion of a taffy pull. Here also are the table furnishings of the house, tasteful china, glass and knives and forks and large tables whereon the members of the Woman's Club, who assemble once a month for social intercourse, spread the viands for the luncheon that is a pleasant feature of their gatherings.

Community Activities.

Since Cherry street leads directly past the Neighborhood House to the schoolhouse on the hill, children passing daily to and from school must needs go directly by the hospitable door of its social center, and during the 13 years of its existence the group of workers have become the cordial friends of the whole community and the house the objective point of young and old. For men and young men there are classes in English and American citizenship with use of the gymnasium and shower baths. For women and young women there are the Woman's Club, the Home Nursing Class, the Camp Fire Girls, the Vacation Camp and the Public Athletic League. The Boys' Club is a feature and the Boy Scouts and the others enjoy also the summer camp and Public Athletic League. There are also the senior and junior gymnasium classes. Chair-caning and basketry are also studied by the boys.

The girls have music lessons, a sewing school, sewing machine, cooking and gymnasium classes, while the social pleasures that young and old enjoy are club parties, dramas and music.

For the little children there is the morning kindergarten and the Saturday Handwork Class. For the sick the daily dispensary, the visiting nurse, the dental clinic, and for everybody the shower baths, the library, the savings bank and opportunity for using the rooms for birthday parties and socials.

488 Families Represented.

The idea of it all is that the Neighborhood House needs the sympathetic interest of the community in its efforts and the community needs the Neighborhood House, both for pleasure and profit. As a result the workers are in touch with 488 families of the locality and few live at Curtis Bay who are unacquainted with Miss Frances M. Page, director of neighborhood activities, and the staff of warm-hearted and cultured men and women who are associated with all the varied interests of the house. Agencies co-operating with the Brown Memorial Church in the work carried on are: The Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Public Athletic League, the Boy Scouts of America, the Instructive Vis-

iting Nurse Association, the Camp Fire Girls of America and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

To slip into the Curtis Bay Neighborhood House, either day or night, is to find, at all times, something doing. The assembly room is a cheerful place, with a piano and large aquarium filled with shimmering goldfish. To delight little people, framed colored prints upon the walls visualize thrilling adventures recorded in "Mother Goose," while, to inspire patriotism in the hearts of all, the place of honor is given to a fine portrait of George Washington, beneath whom are stacked the national flags used in drills and patriotic exercises. The sweet eyes of Mme. Vigee Lebrun, clasping her little daughter in her arms, smile down upon the visitant of Curtis Bay Neighborhood House as tenderly as they smile upon the traveler who stands entranced before the original painting in the Louvre.

There are good American Indian pictures, too, and it is interesting to watch a group of Camp Fire Girls cutting out and embroidering or appliquing insignia upon their camp fire costumes. The laws of health, of love and of work are these the Camp Fire Girl obligates herself to obey. The birth month of a member is indicated by the symbols wrought upon her costume. Thus February is "the month of the hungry moon" and its symbol the crescent moon and the head of the lean gray wolf that prowls in search of food. Beads worn upon a cord about the neck and varied in color are also full of significance, each bead signifying some definite act conforming to the laws of love, of health and of work performed by the wearer that entitles her to possess it.

In the gymnasium other groups of girls were fleeing swiftly to and fro enjoying an exciting game of basketball, while from the nearby lavatory came sounds of splashing shower baths.

A Neighborhood Party.

Children on their way home from school stopped in to examine pictures of

places under consideration as objective points of interest for hikes planned to begin as soon as spring opens. And between whiles cheerful women slipped in and up stairs to the Women's Club meeting held that day. Amid laughter and neighborly conversation the luncheon table was spread, each woman contributing some food in the preparation of which she was regarded as proficient. Young mothers were there with their babies in their arms; good babies, far too interested in what was happening about them to cry, and older women as well, and the chief topic of interest was a community play in which all might have opportunity to participate.

The physicians and nurses had concluded their labors for the day, and the men's class in citizenship had not yet assembled, but Miss Page, who had come early, was staying late. One group of workers were arriving as another group departed, and for each she had a cordial word of welcome or farewell. The Neighborhood House has its own little motorcar for the use of the district nurse, who, after she leaves the dispensary, visits the sick in their homes throughout the district. Mrs. S. B. November, who taught the first sewing

class, 13 years ago, at Curtis Bay, was there, as helpfully interested today as then. Altogether a place of kindly, co-operative effort, where folks find fellowship, sympathy and healthful pleasure, an environment in which Americanization is learned in the simplest way and intelligent citizenship is fostered.

The Working Staff.

Mr. Alexander Hardeastle is chairman of the committee of the session of the Instructive Visiting Nurse Association. Dental clinic, Dr. J. Fred Emerson; men's English classes, Mr. E. M. Morgan, of the Young Men's Christian Association; women's English classes, Miss Margaret Coale, of the Young Women's Christian Association.

Kindergarten, Miss Elizabeth Congdon and Miss Byrd Barclay; sewing school, Mrs. S. B. November, Mrs. H. R. White, Miss Hazel Miller, Miss Frances M. Page, Miss Hattie Frush, Miss Jessie Little, Miss Helen Lacy, Mrs. Bevan, Mrs. Joseph West, Miss Eleanor Carter.

Public Athletic League gymnasium class, Mr. Grafton Rogers.

Girls' clubs and campfires, Mrs. S. B. November, Mrs. Lawrason Riggs, Miss Eleanor Carter, Miss Frances M. Page, Miss Jamart (Public Athletic League gymnasium class for girls).

Woman's Club, Mrs. S. B. November, Miss Page.

Curtis Bay Boys' Club, Mr. W. Reid Hayden, Mr. Brauns. Senior Public Athletic League, Mr. Grafton Rogers; Boys' Handwork clubs—basketry, Mrs. Steinbach, Miss Mabel Tudor; chair caning, Mr. Lemont Hackett.

Junior Girls' gymnasium class, Mrs. H. A. Warner, Miss Nancy Shaw.