

# The Founding of the Hamilton YWCA

## *“We Mothers of the City” The Founding of YWCA Hamilton*

On March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1889, the Hamilton Spectator reported that approximately 150 women attended a special meeting held in the spacious lecture room of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) building. The women in attendance represented the religious and philanthropic organizations in Hamilton.

The object of the meeting was to “elevate the moral tone of the young girls of this city”. Mrs. Pratt, a pioneer of temperance work in Hamilton, occupied the chair and Miss E. A. Smith, secretary of the Women’s Christian Association (WCA) acted as a secretary. Ensuing discussions concerned the direction the group must take in order to assist the young women of Hamilton. Several proposals were made; one in particular caught the interest of all present. Mrs. Mary Baker McQuesten described a movement, where a girls’ club was formed with a reading room, a recreation room and a classroom. Girls from various situations would use these rooms in the afternoons and evenings to engage in social and educational activities. It was described as a “feminine YMCA”. This seemed an “excellent plan for the Hamilton women to adopt.” It was decided that a staff of workers should be organized, rooms taken and an effort made to make them as attractive as possible to the girls of the city. That gathering in Hamilton, in March of 1889, marked the beginning of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) of Hamilton and a concept of co-operative assistance, new at the time, which has proved to be exceptionally durable.

It is fitting that the YWCA building in Hamilton chanced to become neighbour to the McQuesten home known as Whitehern. It was Mary McQuesten who proposed that Hamilton have its own chapter of the YWCA in March 1889. She herself was a single mother after the death of her husband. Her husband struggled with addiction problems and died at the age of forty. His death was rumoured to be a suicide. She came from a wealthy family and married well, but her husband made such a mess of the finances that she had to struggle to raise her six surviving children after his death. She was a proud woman and she was proud of her part in helping the women of Hamilton. In 1902 she wrote to her son:

*“It was a lovely day & a large attendance of delegates, we took them to the YWCA for lunch and everything passed off well. The visitors were delighted with the building, domestic science arrangement &c.”*

How much more impressed would she be with the facilities now.



Mrs. Mary Baker McQuesten