

We're the YMCA of Greater Omaha, and our roots run deep throughout this great metropolitan area. We first opened our doors in 1866 to serve young Christian men working on the transcontinental railroad; today, we boast 10 locations throughout the Metro area, ensuring that everyone—regardless of age, income or background—has the opportunity to play, learn, grow and thrive.

2016 marks our 150-year anniversary of strengthening the Omaha community, providing "firsts" and lifelong memories to members and non members alike. Summer camp camaraderie, a weight loss transformation, racquetball partners turned forever friends, a first soccer goal, water therapy, swim lessons and more.

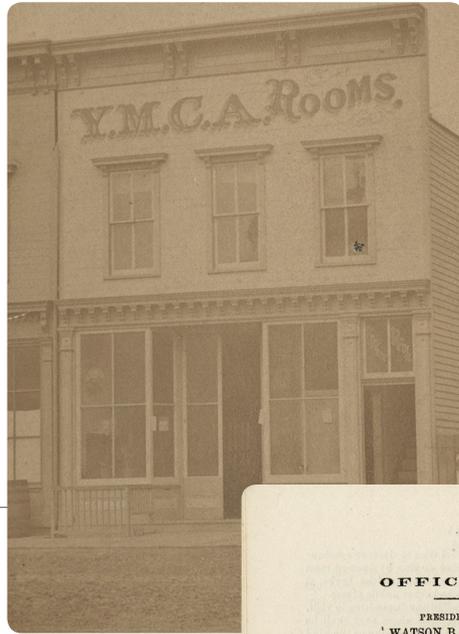
We can't wait to see what the next 150 years have in store...

This commemorative book is a tribute to our rich 150-year history, which wouldn't have been possible without the dedication and help of our volunteers, members, program participants, staff and donors.

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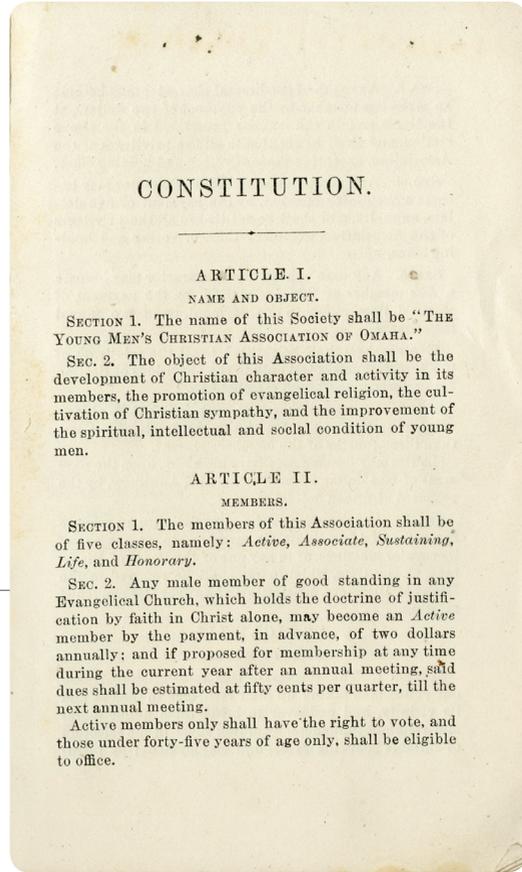
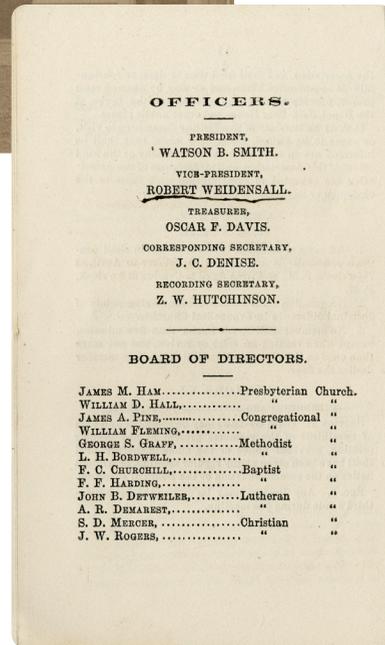
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The first YMCA building was located between Farnam and Douglas on 12th Street. Torn down after a few months, a new two-story basement frame building was erected at a cost of \$2,600.



1866

George Frost, purchasing agent for the Union Pacific Railroad, formed the first Omaha YMCA in 1866. Early work was primarily meetings, and the movement nearly died due to lack of support.



1868

In 1868, the Articles of Incorporation were filed; the constitution and bylaws were written; and structure was brought to the Omaha YMCA. Watson B. Smith, a local businessman, became president; and Dr. J.C. Denise, an Omaha physician, became the corresponding secretary. Membership types as listed in the bylaws:

Active for a \$2 yearly fee; Associate for a \$2 yearly fee; Sustaining for a \$5 yearly fee; Life for a \$30 yearly fee; and Honorary by a vote of no less than three-fourths of the members. Any male member of good standing in any Evangelical Church could become a member after being referred to the Board of Directors for election. Women could become Auxiliary members for a \$1 yearly fee or a Life Auxiliary member for a \$15 yearly fee.

“The first floor of the building was used as a reading room, a library and an office of the library. The second floor was used for all its meetings. The completion of the building was a great event.”

TO THE FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF OMAHA, NEBRASKA.

As this Report will be presented to many business men, who have but little leisure time, we have made it very brief, and hope you will not lay it down until you have read it through.

ROOMS.

Our Rooms were very much improved the first of the year by new carpets, matting and racks, so that we now have very beautiful, comfortable and convenient apartments. The Reading Room is supplied with daily papers from San Francisco, Denver, Lincoln, Council Bluffs, Chicago, New York, New Orleans, and Omaha. We also receive weekly papers from all parts of the country, as well as the best magazines. The Rooms are open from 8 A.M. to 9 P.M., and an average of 120 young men visit us daily.

LIBRARY.

Our Library has 850 select volumes, and the Committee are making every endeavor to enlarge and render it more attractive.

GYMNASIUM.

The Gymnasium is small, but affords an opportunity for exercising every muscle of the body. This is a new feature of our work, but the young men have already shown their appreciation. An average of 15 exercise daily.

BIBLE CLASS.

This class is for young men, and meets every Sunday morning at 9:15 o'clock. The Bible is studied in a practical way. The average attendance is 10.

GOSSPEL MEETING.

This meeting is held every Sunday afternoon at 4 o'clock, and though both ladies and gentlemen attend, the greater number are young men. The service consists of short talks, prayer and good singing. There were 30 requests for prayer during the quarter, some of whom we believe were afterwards hopefully converted. The average attendance is 115.

JAIL SERVICE.

From 1 to 2 P.M. every Sunday a service is held in the County Jail. The prisoners pay the best of attention, and seem deeply affected. A number request prayer every Sunday, and some are leading reformed lives since they were released.

CHORAL CLUB.

On every Friday evening the young people meet in our Hall to practice singing. Combined with this is a social, which makes it an evening of pleasure to many every week.

"THE SENATE."

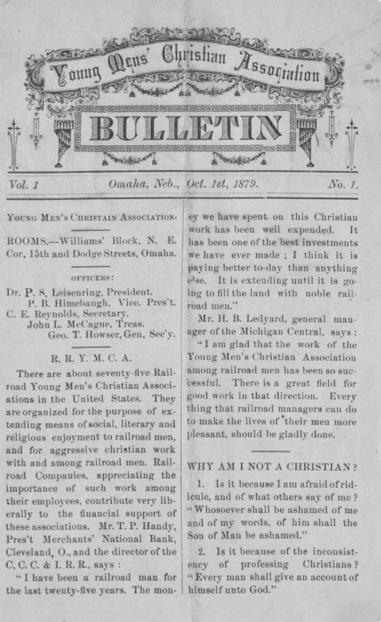
A Literary Society has just been formed, which is modelled after the United States Senate, and, in addition to practice in debate, has for its object acquaintance with the constitution and laws of the country.

1885

The 1885 Quarterly Report narrated successful programming including Choral Club, Sunday services for the County Jail, evening classes in penmanship and phonography, and a reportedly popular Stranger's Meeting "for the special purpose of getting acquainted with strangers."

The YMCA building acted as a meeting space for many groups, including the Women's Temperance Union who met at the YMCA every Thursday afternoon.

1879



YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION. ROOMS.—Williams' Block, N. E. Cor. 15th and Dodge Streets, Omaha.

OFFICERS: Dr. P. S. Leisenring, President. P. B. Himebaugh, Vice. Pres't. C. E. Reynolds, Secretary. John L. McGague, Treas. Geo. T. Howser, Gen. Sec'y.

R. H. Y. M. C. A.

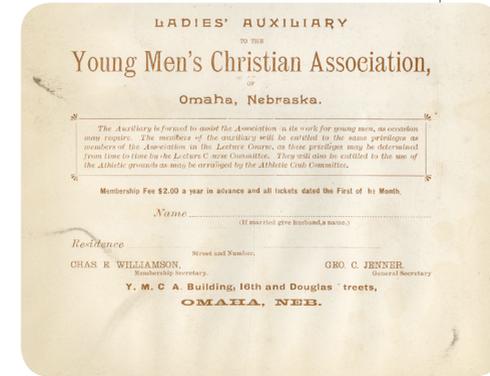
There are about seventy-five Railroad Young Men's Christian Associations in the United States. They are organized for the purpose of extending means of social, literary and religious enjoyment to railroad men, and for aggressive christian work with and among railroad men. Railroad Companies, appreciating the importance of such work among their employes, contribute very liberally to the financial support of these associations. Mr. T. P. Handy, Pres't Merchants' National Bank, Cleveland, O., and the director of the C. C. & I. R. R., says: "I have been a railroad man for the last twenty-five years. The mon-

ey we have spent on this Christian work has been well expended. It has been one of the best investments we have ever made; I think it is paying better to-day than anything else. It is extending until it is going to fill the land with noble railroad men." Mr. H. B. Ledyard, general manager of the Michigan Central, says: "I am glad that the work of the Young Men's Christian Association among railroad men has been so successful. There is a great field for good work in that direction. Every thing that railroad managers can do to make the lives of their men more pleasant, should be gladly done."

WHY AM I NOT A CHRISTIAN? 1. Is it because I am afraid of ridicule, and of what others say of me? "Whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed." 2. Is it because of the inconsistency of professing Christians? "Every man shall give an account of himself unto God."

1881

On November 4, 1881, Watson B. Smith, first president of the Omaha YMCA Association, was found murdered after he had conducted a lively and telling campaign against the gamblers and lower elements of the city.



1889

In 1889, women were offered the opportunity to become members of the Ladies Auxiliary at a cost of \$2 per year. The Ladies Auxiliary was formed to assist the Association as needed. Members were entitled to the same privileges as members of the Association in the Lecture Course and use of the Athletic Grounds, as determined by the overseeing committees.

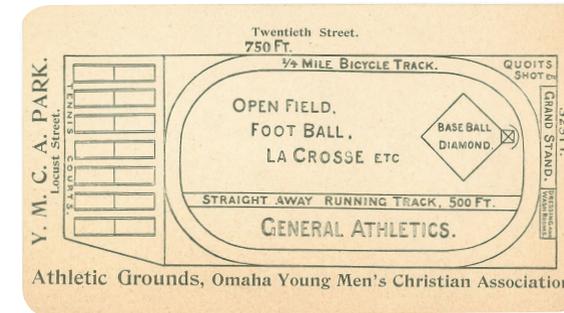
1896

Don't Shiver Around the Streets 1886-1896



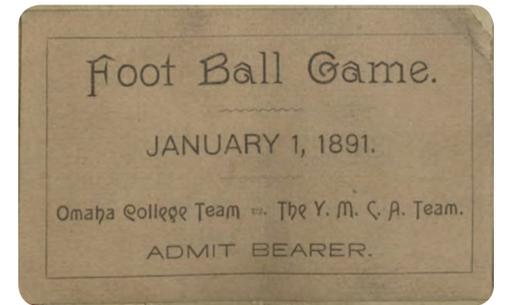
1888

Open April 22, 1888, at 20th & Miami Streets, only one rule was absolute at the YMCA Athletic Grounds, "Gentlemanly Conduct Demanded of All."



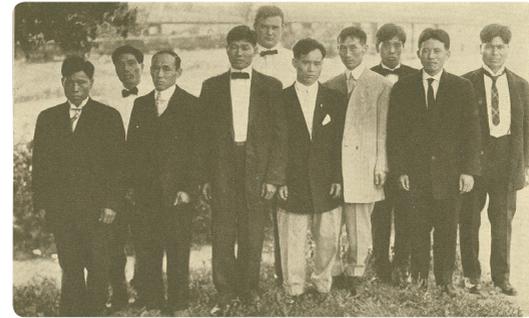
1890

The Omaha YMCA Football Team challenged many local universities to compete, including the University of Nebraska Old Gold Knights (today's University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cornhuskers) in their first ever game on November 27, 1890, with a score of 10-0 in favor of Nebraska. The YMCA also played the Omaha College Team on January 1, 1891.



1897

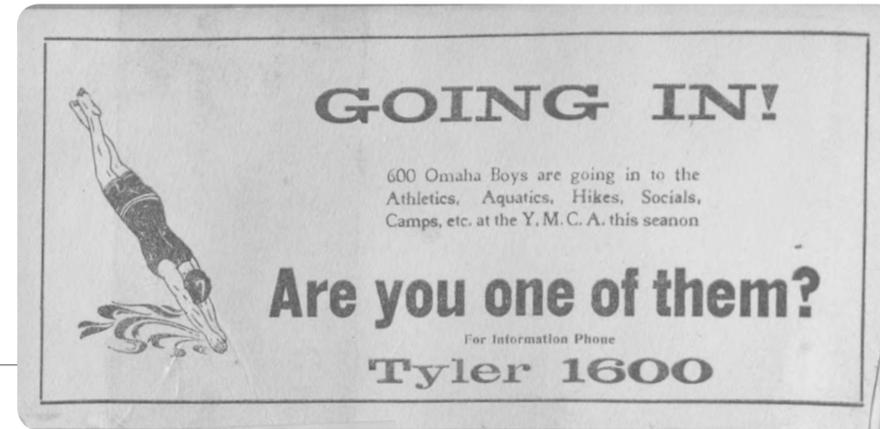
When basketball was invented in 1897, Omaha's YMCA sent a delegation of men to Kansas to learn the game and then organized a team, which swept away most opposition in the Midwest.



At the turn of the century, the Omaha YMCA offered English classes to immigrants, helping them to assimilate with American culture and obtain employment. Today, our Ready in Five program helps refugee families adjust by providing future students and their parents assistance to succeed in the American public school system.

1913

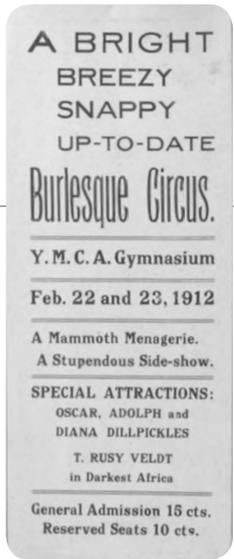
The Omaha YMCA positioned themselves as the "best swimming hole in Omaha," providing swimming lessons to every boy with a membership.



1908

1908 Membership Rates:
\$3 entrance fee for men and \$1 for boys.

MEMBERSHIP RATES			
The \$3.00 Entrance Fee for Men and \$1.00 for Boys, will be omitted until after Tuesday night, January 21st. The rates until that date will, therefore, be			
MEN			
Sustaining	✓	\$25.00 per year	
Full	✓	\$10.00	Limited ✓ \$5.00
INTERMEDIATE (16 and 17 years)			
Full	✓	\$7.00	Limited ✓ \$3.00
JUNIORS (12 to 15 years)			
Full	✓	\$5.00	Limited ✓ \$2.00



The Omaha YMCA began focusing attention on providing activities for boys, in addition to men.

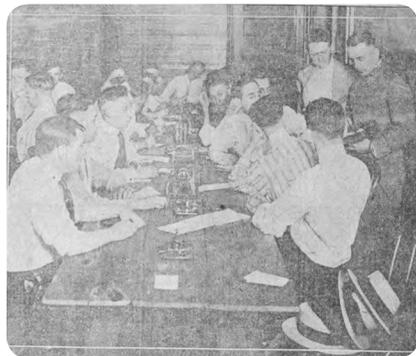
Thanksgiving Dinner. The 14th annual dinner had a total attendance of 175. The statistics gathered that night are of interest.
Occupations: Clerks, electricians, teachers, engineers, attorneys, merchants, tourists, salesmen, signal inspector, artists, laborers, apprentices, mechanics, students, physicians, bookkeepers, stenographers, dentists, ranchmen, ministers.
Average age was 25; average time in Omaha, 3 years, 2 months; one-half had been in the city less than one year. Their birthplaces represented 20 states, and Canada, Denmark, England, Germany, Ireland, Russia, Scotland, and Sweden.

1902

One hundred and seventy-five people attended the 14th annual Omaha YMCA Thanksgiving dinner. Guests included clerks, teachers, artists, students, physicians, ministers and more from 20 states and 8 countries. Today, the tradition continues with a free community dinner hosted at the South Omaha YMCA Program Center.

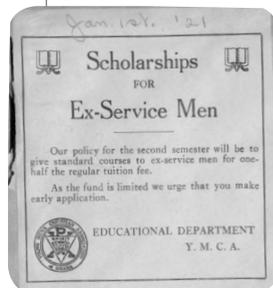
1918

In 1918, at special request of the War Department, arrangements were made to conduct a 12-week summer course for instruction in radio telegraphy for men preparing to enter the Army and Navy. The course was offered at no cost except for a \$1 enrollment fee.



1921

Scholarships were offered to ex-servicemen for Omaha YMCA educational courses at half the regular tuition. The YMCA of Greater Omaha continues to offer scholarships for programming and memberships today.



1919

Camp Sheldon was dedicated in 1919. Located near Columbus, Nebraska, this was a resident camp financially supported and staffed by the Omaha YMCA.



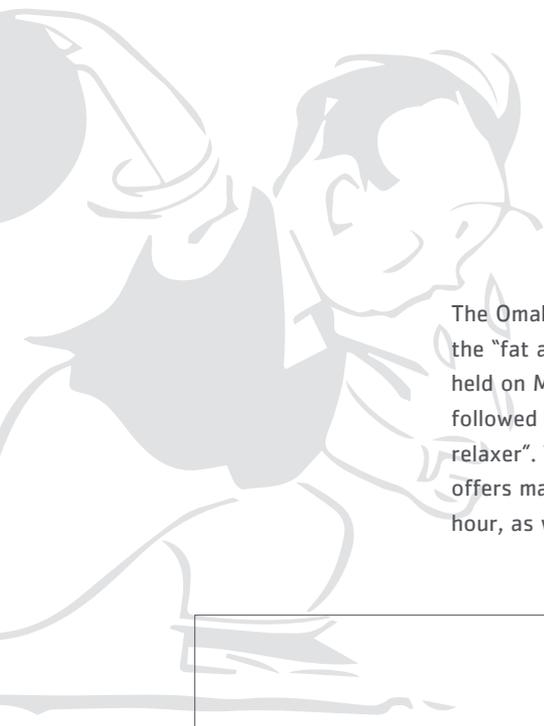
1924

Public speaking was the most popular evening course offered at the Omaha YMCA, with more than 200 students enrolled. Thirty-one other classes were available including accountancy, salesmanship, freehand drawing, electricity, citizenship and English as a Second Language.



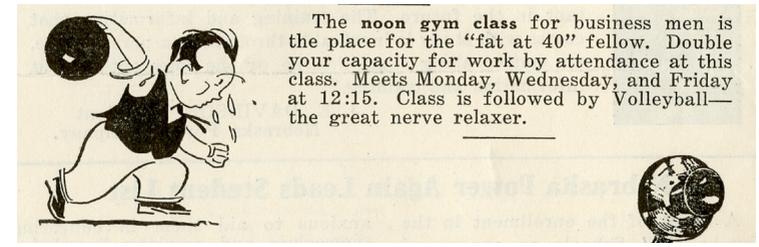
Exterior view of the Omaha YMCA at 17th and Harney Street. Note the 'Atlas' figures over the entrance and the 'What is a Boy Worth?' building sign on the left. The building featured a large gymnasium, indoor swimming pool and comfortable dormitories.

SOURCE: Omaha World-Herald, January 3, 1908



1929

The Omaha YMCA touted a noon gym class for the "fat at 40" businessman. These classes were held on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and followed by a game of volleyball, a "great nerve relaxer". Today, the YMCA of Greater Omaha offers many group fitness classes over the noon hour, as well as pick-up basketball games.



The noon gym class for business men is the place for the "fat at 40" fellow. Double your capacity for work by attendance at this class. Meets Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 12:15. Class is followed by Volleyball—the great nerve relaxer.



A boy's character depends on the use he r of his leisure time

A Strong Body trained to do what the mind dictates—a body that develops under a supervision that corrects, as well as strengthens; in a Gymnasium adequately equipped for instruction along physical lines.
A Strong Mind—a mind trained in the making of choices—a brain that sees clearly. To keep a mind clean it is necessary to watch what goes in through the eyes and ears. The books and magazines in the Boys' Division of the Omaha "Y" have been carefully selected with the idea of creating clean thoughts and ideals. The language heard in the Y. M. C. A. is entirely different from what boys pick up in the streets and this helps to create habits of right thinking.
An Enlarging Spirit that gives increased vision. Boys are taught that honesty, sincerity, kindness, friendliness, humility and brotherhood are ideals to be sought in the building of a life. The whole program tends to make the boy more Christian, a better spectator, and a real gentleman.



OUR IDEAL
A Strong Body—A Sound Mind—
—an Enlarging Spirit—makes for
honest men and better Christians.

Are You a Member of
The privileges of the Y. M. C. A. boys in Omaha over twelve years of church affiliation, on the following:
The Junior Membership (12 to 18)
The High School Membership year.
(These Membership fees are cash.)
Three months Summer Men's
This membership entitles ea privileges:
Physical: Two Gym cl
Two or three
Shower bath

In which group would you have your boy ?



1927

Boys canoe down a river at YMCA Camp Sheldon in Columbus, Nebraska.

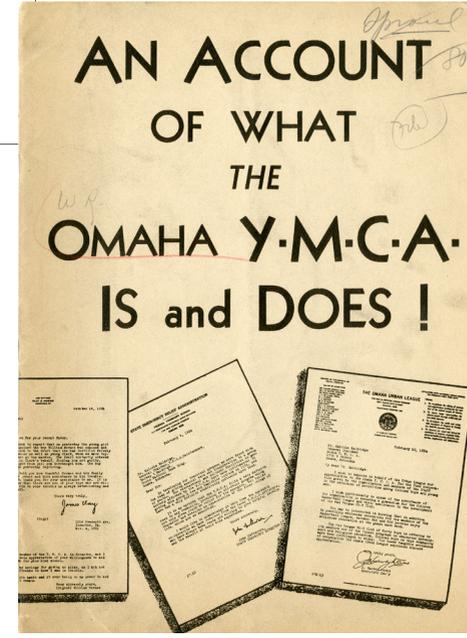


1928

This 1928 brochure encouraged young boys to participate in the YMCA.

1930

"YMCA objectives:
To plant ideals in the mind and heart of a boy.
To train the youth for leadership of his fellows.
To help the young man find his place in the world.
To give the man increased vision and opportunity.
To build leadership for a greater Omaha."



1931

From 'An Account of What the Omaha YMCA Is and Does': Sigma Phi Sigma Sorority.

This Organization was formed May 29, 1931 by a group of young women who had caught the spirit of the YMCA and desired to organize for definite service in the educational work of the Association.

A ship with three sails was selected as their emblem, the three sails emblazoned with, "Scholarship", "Fellowship" and "Stewardship".

The obligation, taken by every member in the initiation ceremonies, is as follows:

1932

Men and women in an Omaha Public Schools Americanization class at the YMCA.



" I hereby promise to be loyal to Sigma Phi Sigma and to the School, of which it is a part; in so doing I promise to maintain the highest possible degree of Scholarship; to do all in my power to promote fellowship among my fellow students; and, to develop personal stewardship in so far as I am able."

1938

YMCA boxer, circa 1938, training for the Midwest Golden Gloves Tournament.



1942

"One of the cheeriest places in the city is the Red Cross canteen opened January 12, 1942, at the YMCA to help make more pleasant the Omaha stay of 237 Naval recruits who are here awaiting transfer to training stations."

1942

The 1942 membership campaign reported a successful story of a boy who was stricken with polio in 1940 and unable to lift his arms to shoulder level. He began a reconditioning program at the Omaha YMCA, first in the water then in the gym. After approximately 13 months, he was able to lift 125 pounds overhead and join the Navy.

Today, the YMCA of Greater Omaha offers Delay the Disease™, designed to empower people with Parkinson's disease by optimizing their physical function.



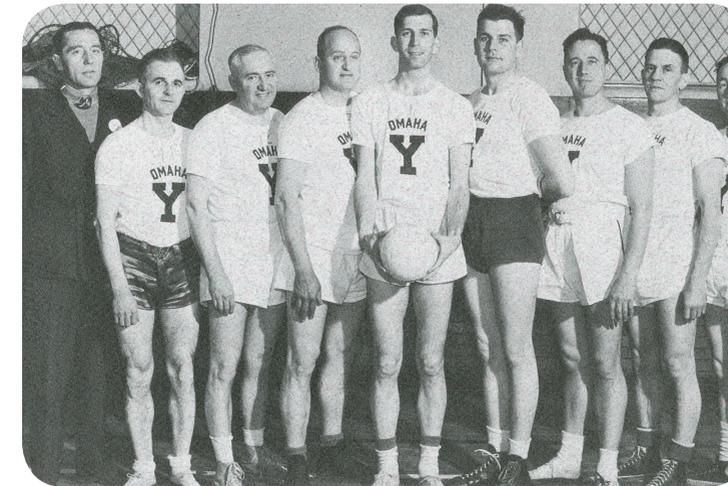
Source: Omaha World-Herald, February 9, 1938

1946



The Near Northside Branch YMCA organized around a USO Center concept to provide recreation and social events for black servicemen at Offutt Air Force Base as well as for local black residents on the Near Northside of Omaha. It was housed in a Northwestern Telephone Company annex building from early 1946 -1950. John R. Butler, an Omaha YMCA leader for more than 40 years, was a driving force in the effort. The Butler-Gast YMCA was partly named for him in 1995.

1945



The Omaha YMCA Men's Volleyball Team at the 1945 AAU National Championship in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

THE OMAHA YMCA FOUND MANY WAYS TO SERVE IN THE WAR EFFORT.

Men in uniform had free use of all "Y" privileges.

From 1942-1946, servicemen were provided:



991,207 services



211,833 lodgings



618,738 meals



1940s

In the 1940s, Indian Guides, a movement that began in St. Louis in 1926, began at the Omaha YMCA. It was a purely neighborhood club that fathers and their younger sons attended once a week held at the home of one of the members. The boys were taught Indian lore and craft. The club continued in Omaha for many decades: "The chief object of the Indian Guides is to acquaint the young boys with the history of this country, to keep them interested, and to bring fathers and sons closer together."

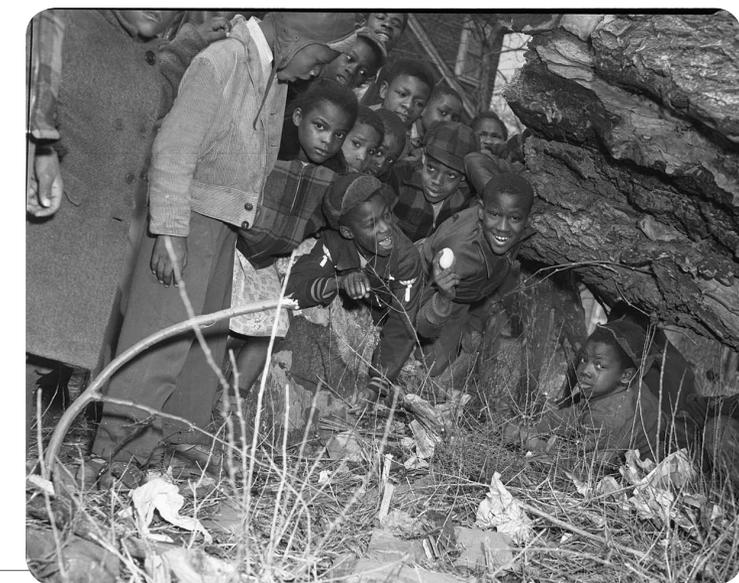


1948

The Omaha YMCA frequently promoted membership. In November 1948, a "YMCA Membership Roundup" was "corralled" by the Board of Directors. Pictured is "Big Boss" Bob Wilson, a YMCA board member.

1950

The Near Northside branch held an Easter Egg hunt for children with special prizes given to those who found a golden egg.



1950

The Omaha YMCA Board of Directors approved a change to the membership policy, adding a family membership to the list.

1947

In the summer of 1947, the Omaha YMCA developed a water safety program using a series of posters starring a friendly and watchful fish.



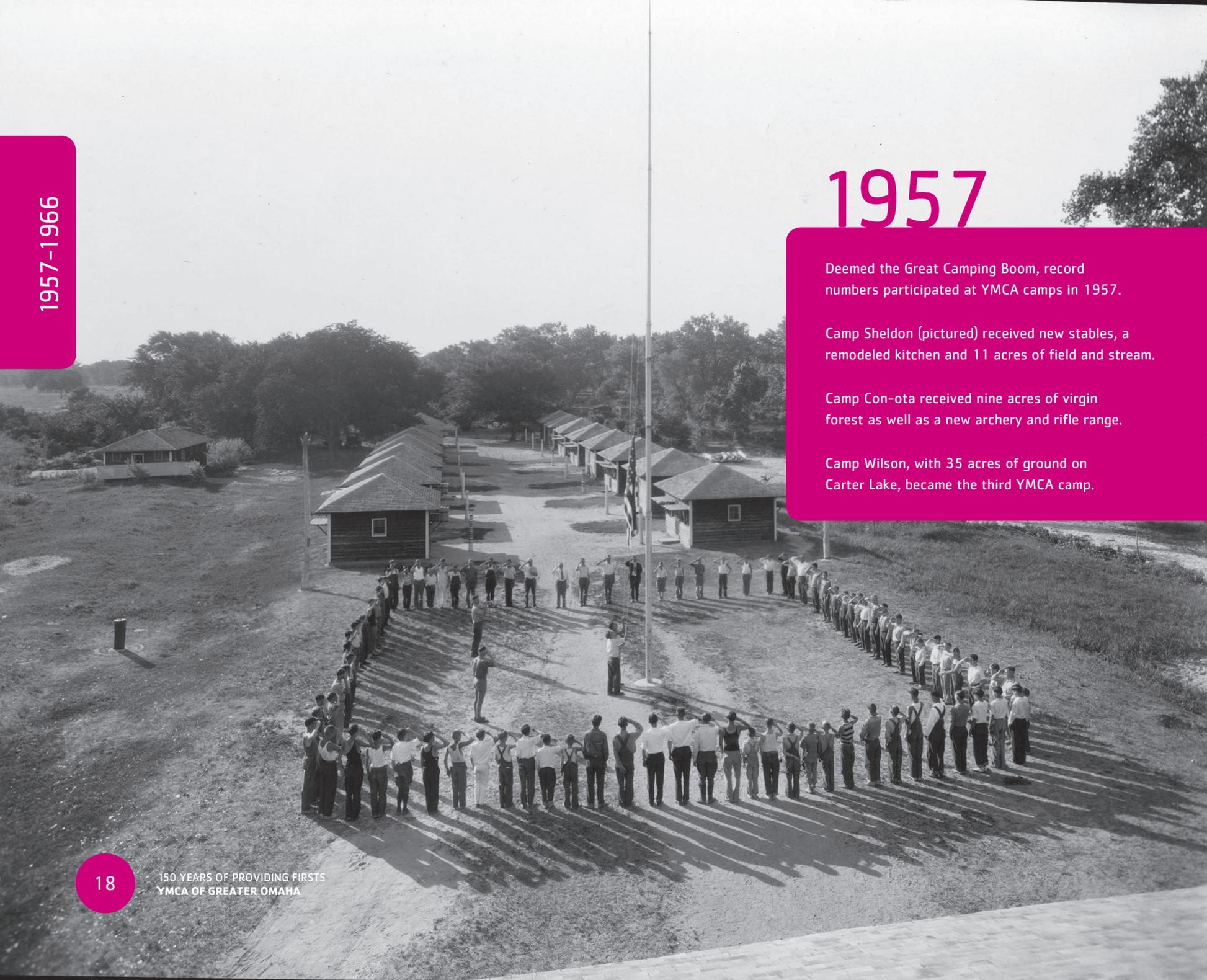
1957

Deemed the Great Camping Boom, record numbers participated at YMCA camps in 1957.

Camp Sheldon (pictured) received new stables, a remodeled kitchen and 11 acres of field and stream.

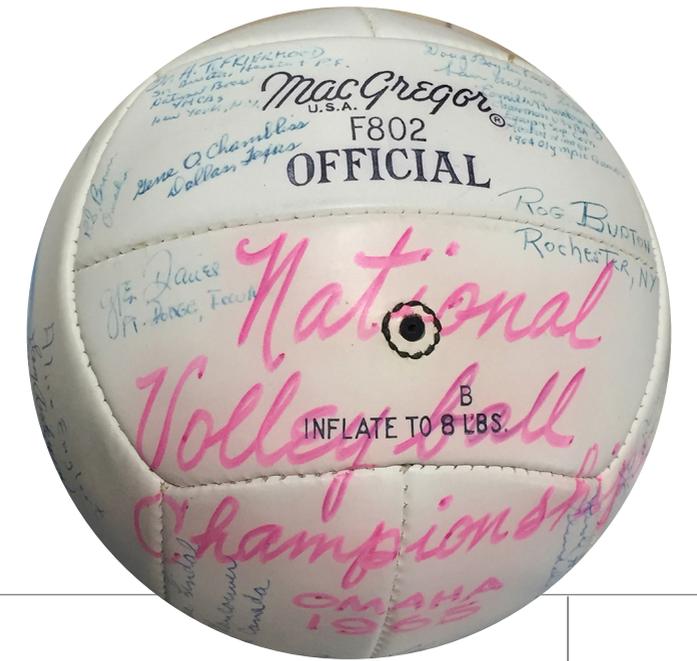
Camp Con-ota received nine acres of virgin forest as well as a new archery and rifle range.

Camp Wilson, with 35 acres of ground on Carter Lake, became the third YMCA camp.



1965

The Omaha YMCA volleyball team was a top competitor over several decades, participating in many AAU championships and winning the 1953 AAU championship, hosted at Boys Town.



1960s

YMCA programs and activities circa the 1960s.



In 1963, Sam Cornelius (pictured far right) became the executive director of the Near North Side branch of the Omaha YMCA. His primary focus was to address the poverty situation in the community, establishing programs to aid residents in training for and procuring jobs.

In 1966, Cornelius organized a "community relations experiment," part of project R.E.A.L. After a summer of riots in the Near North Side, Cornelius facilitated a discussion with law enforcement officers to ascertain a "better understanding between youth and police."

Cornelius applied for and received a \$35,000 grant for a summer youth program, and he utilized Camp Sheldon as a location for a summer camp. Six Omaha police officers (two were black and four were white) and 58 African-American youth from the Near North Side spent several days in an unstructured environment. There were no class schedules or planned activities, and, despite a few fistfights on the first day, natural leaders emerged. "The guys worked out their own power structure," according to Cornelius.

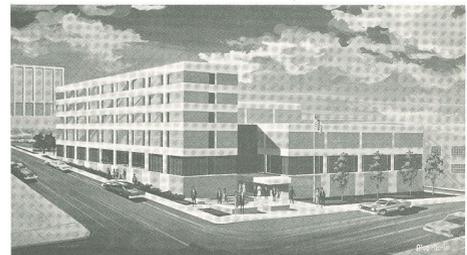
In 1967, the National Council of the YMCA voted to amend their constitution to end segregation in all YMCA branches.

Initially, there was very little interaction between campers and law enforcement. After several days and a successful fishing endeavor, the children warmed to the officers, and established dialogue about the problems plaguing the Near North Side community.

Cornelius was the driving force behind the National Council of YMCA's amendment to end segregation in all YMCA branches. During his tenure at Near North Side he, along with other Omaha community members, decided to take action to change the YMCA's segregation policy.

The group took the proposal to the regional YMCA office in Kansas City. In 1967, the National Council voted 294-11 in favor of passing the amendment and ending segregation within the organization.





*102nd Annual Meeting of the Young Men's Christian Association Omaha, Nebraska. Featuring the Dedication of the **New** Downtown Y.M.C.A. Tuesday June 10, 1969.*

1972

The Council Bluffs YMCA merged with the Omaha Association in 1972. Together, they formed the Omaha/Council Bluffs Metropolitan Area YMCA.

1969

The Downtown YMCA building located at 20th and Howard was dedicated to the Omaha community.

1977

West YMCA fitness class.



1986

In 1986, there were 16,307 community children participating in YMCA youth sports. Young players, coaches, officials and parents recited this pledge (left) before each game. The pledge is still recited before games today.



“ Win or lose, I pledge before God, to do the best I can, to be a team player, and to respect my teammates, my opponents and officials: and to improve myself in mind, body, and spirit. Amen. ”



1977

In 1977, women represented 40 percent of the YMCA of Greater Omaha membership. The Women's Fitness Center, located at the Downtown YMCA, was a physical expression of gratitude for the lively participation of women in the activities of the YMCA. The center included an exercise and lounge area, locker room and sauna.



1984

In 1984, 1,696 seniors enjoyed the YMCA Senior Citizens Program. The program provided a place for seniors to swim, exercise and enjoy a cup of coffee with friends. Since 1984, the senior program has evolved into our active older adults programming and SilverSneakers® Fitness Program, however gathering for coffee and conversation remains the same.

1988

A popular sport in the 1980s, racquetball was frequently played at the YMCA of Greater Omaha. Pictured below left is Carl Scheer, YMCA Board Member, Captain of the Omaha YMCA Volleyball Team in the 1940s and 50s, and inductee into the USA YMCA Volleyball Hall of Fame in 2006.



You'll find Duke Slater, 85, with Syd Cerne, age 66, Carl Scheer, 79, and Gene Jensen, 65, on the Downtown Y's racquetball court Mondays and Fridays.

1990

On June 18, 1990, a team of seven youth outreach workers from the YMCA "hit the streets" as part of YouthNet, a collaborative outreach program funded by the United Way of the Midlands. YouthNet provided prevention and intervention services for youth aged 11-15 who may be at risk of involvement in gangs, substance abuse and other negative behaviors.



1993

In 1993, the YMCA Annual Sustaining Campaign kicked off with more than 500 volunteers accepting the challenge to raise \$253,500. Funds raised enabled youth, families and senior citizens, who may be disadvantaged, to participate in YMCA programs. Now known as the Strong Communities Campaign, the YMCA of Greater Omaha's annual campaign continues to raise funds to support the community.



1994

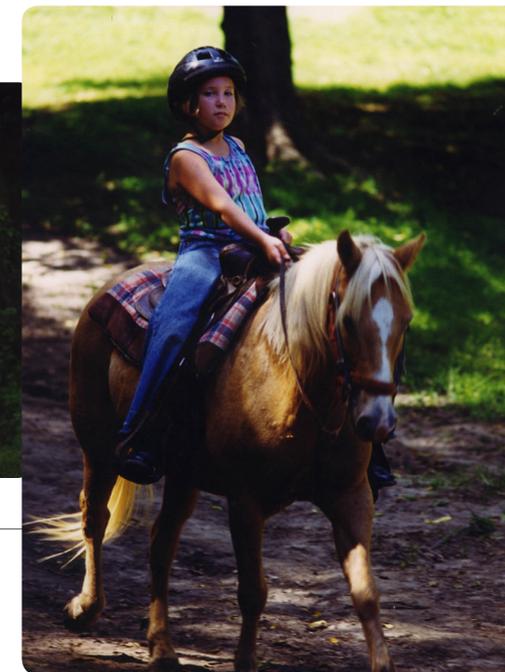
In 1994, Aqua-step Aerobics, a high-intensity, low-impact workout, was added to the group exercise schedule. The YMCA of Greater Omaha continues to offer many aqua group exercise classes.





2000

YMCA Camps were popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with 2,300 day campers in 2000. Pictured are campers enjoying Camp Elkhorn and Camp Pokemoke.



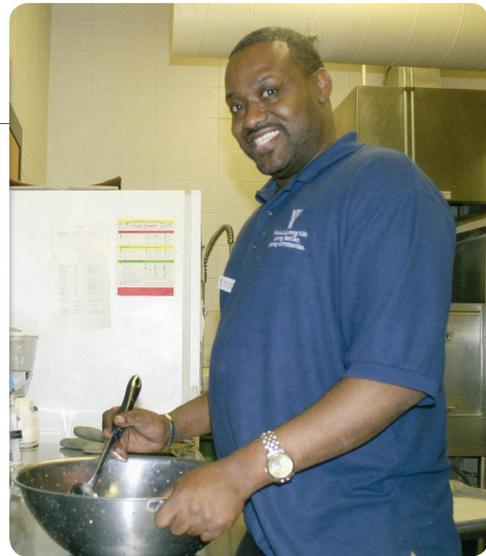
2001

In September 2001, the YMCA opened its new Community Development Teen Center just down the hill from the Butler-Gast YMCA. The building and land were donated to the Y by the Alegent Health Foundation. Designed to help youth and teens deal with social and environmental pressures, the center provided teens with a place to call their own. In 2001, 2,300 teens participated in teen programs. Today, the Y continues to provide adolescents a fun and positive space both after school and on the weekends with special Teen Night activities at both the North Omaha Teen Center and South YMCA Program Center.



2007

The LaFern Williams South YMCA opened the "Kid's Cafe" program, a partnership between the YMCA of Greater Omaha and the Omaha Food Bank. Hot meals are served daily to children in an effort to provide all kids a healthy meal.



2016

On April 14, 2016, Carl Fleming Jr. and Crystal Robinson were each awarded \$5,000 and lifetime memberships to the YMCA of Greater Omaha after being crowned the top weight loss winners of the first community-wide YMCA of Greater Omaha Weight Loss Challenge. The 12-week challenge also awarded 10 other individuals with \$500 and year-long memberships to the Y.



2010

In 2010, the YMCA of Greater Omaha hosted its first association-wide Healthy Kids Day, an event focused on promoting a healthy and active lifestyle for children. The YMCA National Initiative has grown to be a collaborative community effort for many Omaha area businesses, organizations and other non-profits. In 2015, more than 4,500 attended the event hosted in Stinson Park at Aksarben Village.

The Y's Impact Today

107,000 individuals served

60,000 members



20,000 youth sport participants



15,000 children in early childhood programs, summer day camp and out-of-school programs



11,000 swim lesson participants

\$1.2 million provided in financial assistance to

17,000 individuals

made possible by

3,200 donors and businesses



135 collaborations with schools, hospitals and agencies

Our Growing Y

- 1867 - One story building on 12th St. between Farnam & Douglas
- 1888 - 16th & Douglas Street
- 1908 - 17th & Harney Street
- 1945 - North Branch
- 1946 - Miller Park YMCA
- 1950 - Near North YMCA
- 1951 - 24th Street South Branch
- 1953 - West Branch (Maple Street) YMCA
- 1959 - New Miller Park YMCA
- 1969 - Downtown YMCA
- 1979 - Council Bluffs YMCA building
- 1981 - Southwest YMCA
- 1995 - Butler-Gast YMCA
- 1997 - Sarpy YMCA
- 1999 - LaFern Williams South YMCA
- 2001 - North Omaha Teen Center
- 2003 - Twin Rivers YMCA
- 2006 - Mills County YMCA
- 2008 - Armbrust Family YMCA
- 2017 - Charles E. Lakin YMCA

A special thanks to our Y150 sponsors
for making this celebration a reality.

Research and Writing

Amy Schindler and the University of
Nebraska at Omaha Criss Library

Vicki Hallberg

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Design

OBI Creative

Photographs

YMCA of Greater Omaha

Omaha World-Herald