

# A Short History of the United Church of Canada's Young Peoples Union (YPU)

## Introduction

The purpose of this short history is to ensure that the story of the Young Peoples Union movement in the United Church of Canada is remembered and preserved in the files of the Archives of the United Church of Canada.

Although this short history is based on the files, stories and achievements of one church; namely, Parkdale United Church of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, the same can be said of many United Churches across Canada during the period after Church Union in 1925.

The period from approximately 1930 to 1964 saw the development of the United Church Young Peoples Unions (YPU); some were called "Societies", (YPS) until 1935. They began to form in churches after the June 10, 1925 union of some of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches to form the United Church of Canada. It was organized at the National, Conference and Presbytery levels. The YPU had considerable autonomy given to it from the Board of Christian Education.

The YPU was born in the Depression years of Canada, 1929-1938, went through the Second World War period, 1939-1945, grew during the post-war period, endured the Korean War of 1950-1953, thrived in the late 50's as the population of Canada grew, and started to dwindle in the mid-1960s.

To examine the Young Peoples Union movement is to look at a very interesting stage of church development and to see

how one part of the United Church helped its young people to learn, grow and develop leadership skills and Christian values that have continued to this day.

### Who were these Young People?

Those who came out to the YPU meetings were usually over the age of 17, single, and were either in some sort of post-high school studies or were working. For instance, at Parkdale United Church in Ottawa, the YPU attracted many of the young ladies studying nursing at the Ottawa Civic Hospital site just up Parkdale Avenue, South of the church. Not only did they enjoy the activities, but also for those from out of the city, it gave them a social life and the chance to meet new people. As the United Church was young, the melding together of the component parts took some time and the YPU movement enabled the young people of the various churches the opportunity to get to know each other. During the war years, many younger men and women came to Ottawa either for training or to support the war effort. Many of these joined the various YPU groups across the city. Nancy Peters comments, "Looking back on our young adult years, we can appreciate how fortunate we were to belong to YPU". She remembers the fun and fellowship, "the Monday night meetings in the lower small Sunday School room at Parkdale UC, team games and spaghetti suppers in the larger room, worship in the chapel, Taps always closing meetings".

## The Programs of the YPU

There were many different types of programs in the various churches that had Young Peoples Unions. Using the 1960 to 1961 programs of Parkdale United Church will give an indication of the wide variety. There were 6 sections or areas of programs that year at Parkdale. They were:

Citizenship and Community Services  
Faith and Evangelism  
Missions and World Outreach  
Recreation and Culture  
Stewardship and Training  
Leadership Education

Each area had its convenor who developed programs for a specific YPU meeting. By publishing a “calendar” of these programs in advance, the YPU members could come to those programs, which interested them. Parkdale YPU meetings were held on Monday nights, starting at 7:45 pm in the church hall. The Executive opened the meeting with a short prayer and business session, and then the program of the night went ahead. There were refreshments at the conclusion.

Below are the programs for the year 1960 to 1961.

### CONVENORS

CITIZENSHIP AND COMMUNITY SERVICE  
 FAITH AND EVANGELISM  
 MISSIONS AND WORLD OUTREACH  
 RECREATION AND CULTURE  
 STEWARDSHIP AND TRAINING  
 LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

JOAN BAIN  
 TED BELLMAN  
 SHIRLEY HOWES  
 BILL PODD  
 JEANNE ARNASON  
 BOB FERGUSON

### PROGRAMS

Sept. 19		Our Opening Meeting
26	S. & T.	Christianity and the Isms.
Oct. 3	F. & E.	Our Faith in Action-Hamilton, 1960
10	M. & W.O.	
17	F. & E.	L'Eglise Unis Du Canada
24	C. & C. S.	A Social Worker
31	R. & C.	Hallow'een Howl
Nov. 7	S. & T.	What colour are Christians?
14	C. & C. S.	The Sunday Sports Issue
21	F. & E.	Protestantism 1960-A Beatnic Bible
28	C. & C. S.	Prison Reform
Dec. 5	S. & T.	Have We Lost the "Christ" at Christmas
12	M. & W.O.	Birth Control: The Answer to India's Problems?
19		Our Christmas Party

*COME AND JOIN US EVERY MONDAY NIGHT AT 7:45 p.m.  
 A FRIENDLY YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNION WILL WELCOME YOU.*

### CONVENORS

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 BOB FERGUSON

DATE	COMMISSION	TOPIC
Jan. 2	F. & E.	Prayer
Jan. 9	L. E.	"The How-to-do-it Meeting"
Jan. 16	S. & T.	Caravanning
Jan. 23	R. & C.	Our Toboggan Party
Jan. 30	M. & W. O.	Don't Slam the Door - or - Let's Make Friends
Feb. 6	S. & T.	Science vs. Religion
Feb. 13		Our Drama Night
Feb. 20	F. & E.	The Question Box
Feb. 27	S. & T.	Launching Your Soul into the Orbit of Life
March 6	R. & C.	Our Visit to City Hall
March 13	R. & C.	St. Patrick's Day Box Social
March 20	C. & C. S.	Alcoholism
March 27	M. & W. O.	What is the Ecumenical Movement?
April 10	F. & E.	A Careless Word
April 17	C. & C. S.	The need to know First Aid
April 24	M. & W. O.	Our Home Missions—Where? Why?
May 1	F. & E.	Facts about the Church
May 8	C. & C. S.	The Rehabilitation Center
May 15	R. & C.	A Tour of E. B. Eddy's Company
May 22	The Executive	Our Closing Banquet
June	The Executive	Our Closing Party.

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## Sports in the YPU

One of the “secrets” of the success of the United Church’s YPU was the social and fun aspect developed through sports. There were successful bowling, basketball and softball leagues, which brought the various different churches YPU members together. These leagues enabled many YPU groups to get together for lots of fun. Some of the rural United Churches, which had smaller groups, were able to interact with the larger city churches through sports. In softball, the winner of the Ottawa Presbytery league would play against the winner from the Montreal Presbytery. This, of course, led to connections being made with the YPU in Montreal. “One of the rules in softball was that there must be a minimum of three girls on your team. It was great fun.” (Len Baird’s article). Although softball was the most popular sport, badminton was played at the West End “Y”, hockey at outdoor rinks and tennis too. Skiing and hiking activities were held in the nearby Gatineau Hills over the years.

## Drama in the YPU

One of the big parts of the YPU was the putting on of dramatic plays on stage in the various churches. This gave many people the opportunity to try out their acting skills in front of live audiences. It also developed the organization abilities and leadership skills of other YPU members. This contributed to the social and cultural aspect of the groups. This move into putting on plays started in 1934 with Parkdale YPU putting on the trial scene from the Merchant of Venice under the direction of W.S. Mann. Parkdale won the Scriven's Trophy in the Ottawa Presbytery Drama Festival competition. Many other plays followed and from time to time these plays were taken to the smaller rural churches that put them on for fund raisers. Doing this was another link between the various churches in Ottawa Presbytery. There was also a Drama Festival for the Montreal and Ottawa Conference.



Parkdale YPU play, "You Can't Take It With You", 1960

## Camp Wantanopa

This “camp” was located on the Ottawa River at L’Original, Ontario, about half-way between Ottawa and Montreal. It is first mentioned in Helen Tullis MacKechnie’s excellent notes in 1936 when “seven members from Parkdale attended”. Here the young people from both Montreal and Ottawa were able to come together to enjoy swimming, sports, campfires, discussions and fellowship. Over the years, Parkdale YPU members were often the largest group to attend. The March 1962 ad for this camp, running from July 27 to August 5, notes the cost for the week, full-time was \$ 31.00 and if you came for the weekend it was \$ 7.00. The courses offered included, How to Lead, God in a Day’s Work, The Growth of Christianity and Drama. That year, Rev. George Clifford of Campbell’s Bay, Quebec was the leader.



## Special Events

Over the thirty-three year period from 1931 to 1964 there were many events and it would be impossible to list them all. But a few can be highlighted to illustrate what went on in most of these YPU groups across Ottawa.

Right from the beginning, skating parties were held in various parts of the city and rural areas. In 1931, one was held in Cumberland, which was then well out in the country. This is another example of how the city and country YPU groups were brought together.

In 1933, in the midst of the Great Depression, Parkdale YPU raised money through paper drives, a concert and a carnival to build a fireplace in the Church Parlour. Raising money to help needy neighbourhood families at Christmas time in 1934 was a goal of Parkdale YPU, and they did this by sponsoring a "Night of Mystery". In 1935, members delivered bags for the Ottawa Neighbourhood Services organization. The war years, 1939 to 1945 saw many young men come and go in the Young Peoples Unions. But "many new young war workers from all parts of Canada attended our meetings" (Helen MacKechnie). In 1941 a Fashion Review show was held to raise money for the war effort. The YPU sent "boxes overseas to our boys in the Armed Services". (MacKechnie) In 1945, the first Sadie Hawkins dance proved so successful that it became an annual affair. This was a dance "when the girls did the inviting and running. There would be 200-300 attending these functions. (Len Baird)

Various projects were run each year. In 1947 this included the collection of gifts for the Protestant Children Village, clothing for India, stamps for China and the setting up of a



Union lending library. In 1959 money was raised to provide a Brahman Bull for Tom Brown, our missionary in Angola. In 1963, a filmstrip projector was presented to the Parkdale Sunday School in memory of a former YPU President, David Stewart.

### Ottawa Presbytery and Montreal and Ottawa Conference

The YPU existed at all levels of the United Church of Canada, including the local Presbytery, the Conference and the National levels. Many churches had their own YPU group and these interacted with each other, often visiting each other and involving each other in their functions.

Ottawa Presbytery had its own magazine, the YUP, "Your Union Press" which came out monthly. It had its own staff from across the Presbytery and articles and reports came from the various YPU groups. The Presbytery offices were located in First United Church at Kent and Florence Streets in Ottawa. As Presbytery YPU had its own executive and ran Presbytery-wide activities, there was usually an opening article by the Presbytery President each month. In the Archives are the issues for the years 1961-1962. It is in the October, 1961 issue that there is a report of the Montreal-

Ottawa Fall Convention Highlights. This convention included a square dance, theme addresses, elective discussion groups, a banquet, a drama presentation, recreation events, presentations from groups from the Presbytery and Camp Wantanopa. It closed with a Communion Service.

The March 1962 YUP included an ad for a 3 Act Play, The Adorable Imp presented by Dominion United YPU and sponsored by First United YPU at the First United Church hall. It is interesting to note that adult tickets were 75 cents and children tickets were 50 cents. Some readers may think the YPU was an organization of the past, but the January 1962 issue has an article that could have been written today; namely, an article on "Sex Education". The Carp YPU and the Carp Anglican Young People's Association met in the United Church basement on Sunday, December 3, 1961 to discuss sex, love and marriage. The report goes on to say, "that it was pointed out that sex education should be exercised in school and churches". After the panel discussion, a film was shown to those in attendance.

There is no doubt that the YUP magazine was a uniting force and a much read document during the years it existed. It also gave experience to young reporters and writers of that era. The wide breadth of events that occurred in the various church YPU speaks so well for the young men and women who organized and ran those activities.

## Contributions of YPU Members

Over many decades, hundreds of YPU men and women have contributed greatly to the life of their churches, to their families and to their communities. Many of their skills they learned and developed while members of their YPU groups. It is interesting to look today at the leadership in church organizations and see how many of today's leaders had experience in YPU groups when they were younger. Some were and are Ministers of churches, others Elders or Stewards or on Official Boards and Church Committees.

The Purpose of the YPU was "to lead young people into Christian fellowship and active church membership and help each to know, love and serve God as revealed in Jesus Christ".

Whether it was leading in Sunday Church services or working and developing programs for meetings or helping less fortunate people in their communities, the YPU members gained knowledge and experience and fulfilled their YPU purpose over these years. It is noted that in 1960 at Parkdale United Church, "the union was represented by eleven members in the choir, fifteen on the Sunday School staff, two stewards, seven on the Ottawa Presbytery of Young Peoples, and one on Conference". (Helen MacKechnie) At one point, the Parkdale Church Board was considering cancelling the Sunday evening service, but the attendance of the Young People was so great the service was retained. Of course, after the service, those who came out retreated to Miss Westgate for refreshments! (Jim Ritchie)

In the Second World War, many YPU members went overseas to defend our values and way of life. Those at

home supported them in many ways. Many didn't come home and each November, YPU remembered them.

There is no doubt at all that the United Church of Canada was made stronger during these years by the active presence of the YPU organization.



Parkdale United Church



First United Church  
Ottawa, Ontario

## Social Activities

There was a healthy mix of church and social activities in the YPU program. Yes, many members went not only to church on Sunday mornings, but also to Sunday school in the afternoon and back to church in the evenings. Many YPU members took part in all three services from time to time.

The YPU programs discussed many serious topics that led to great discussion. But there was also time for fun and relaxation. Sports, trips to various interesting business sites, sleigh drives in the winter, summer camp and hikes in the hills have already been mentioned.

Another highlight was the New Year's Eve dance with a live orchestra in Parkdale's Memorial Hall, which brought hundreds of Ottawa Presbytery YPU members together. It was always a sellout event.

It was inevitable that YPU members would marry each other, and it is very interesting that even today, as this is being written, people who were friends in YPU days in the 50's and 60's are still together in Ottawa society and churches. These same former YPUers are still found giving leadership in their churches, are still seeing each other socially. One can't go to another Ottawa church without meeting a former YPU person. It was Dr. Norman Coll, Minister of Parkdale United Church who in 1958 "was a little concerned that there was a gap between the YPU and married couples in the church", so he formed a couples club, which we named the Ark Club because "we went in two by two". (Len Baird) This group still gets together 50-60 years later, and most of these people were from the YPU organization too.

Mida Betty Hunter recalls that In addition to Ski trips. Christmas caroling and other social activities, she also remember a group regularly went "square dancing" once or twice a month in town. "I remember the one winter's evening a group of us went up to Camp Fortune to a Square Dance and marveled at the beauty of the snow and the brilliance of the stars against the winter sky as we were leaving to come home."



Pat Little and Jim Ritchie-1959



Mel Wiens, Mary Gayle Anderson, Jim Ritchie, Bob Ferguson, Pat Little

## Special Memories

Nancy Peters recalls the fun and fellowship, especially, the Minstrel Show in the newer hall, sleigh rides, Saturday Night bowling on Wellington Street, Sunday night church services and delivering flowers to shut-ins afterwards, New Year Eve dances, house parties with Skip Evans' spirited piano playing.

She appreciated the inspiration of Good Friday and Easter Sunrise services at Dominion Chalmers United Church, the workshop retreats, conventions in Carp, Rideau Hill Camp, Camp Wantanopa, Mount Royal, some led by Burn Purdon, and being a delegate from Ottawa Presbytery to the National Convention in Olds, Alberta in 1962.

Jack Calderwood attended First United Church YPU when that church was located on Kent Street in Ottawa. He remembers the year that their YPU won the bowling and softball championships in Ottawa, then went onto win the M&O Conference softball championship. He appreciates the friendships that YPU developed and that have lasted over many decades. He still has coffee with Jack Franklin and Bud Smith, both of whom he knew from YPU days. He notes, too, that many YPU marriages took place and have lasted for many, many years in the Ottawa area. When he looks back at the formation of the YPU, he credits people like Bill Tate, a Sunday School Superintendent and a First United Church leader with being instrumental in creating the atmosphere where young people would be comfortable attending church functions and enjoying themselves.

Under the leadership of Doug Fleming, Gerry and Dorothy Durant, Dorothy Montgomery, Bill and Diane Holtzman

Dormer, three re-unions of former YPU members were organized and held almost 30 years after the end of YPU. Many hundreds attended on these occasions, including many from the Montreal area. It was a testament to the influence of the YPU on peoples' lives.

Bill Sandziuk met his wife Shirley Taylor at a Northern Ontario YPU camp, Camp Loraine, in the Haileybury/Cobalt area in 1953. They were married in 1959, came to Ottawa and joined the Ark Club of Parkdale United Church.

Mary MacDonald (Peters) met her husband, Jack, in YPU and the Choir at Parkdale United and were married there in 1953. Their first two children were christened there too.

Mida Betty Hunter remembers that in November 1959 Parkdale YPU sponsored a "Grey Cup Huddle". I don't remember who organized it but someone had connections with CBOT (the television station) and was able to get a machine that allowed those attending to watch the Grey Cup Game on a screen in the Sunday school auditorium. Afterwards there was a supper (I believe it was a spaghetti one) and then we had a dance in the Memorial Hall. I believe it was a fundraiser. (The reason I remember this event is because it was at that event that I met Don Lecocq whom I married in Parkdale on Sept. 8, 1962 with Dr. Coll officiating, assisted by Rev. Smyth. I still have the Family Bible, which was given to us from the YPU on the



occasion of our Wedding. I think that a Family Bible was a gift from the YPU to all its members on the occasion of their weddings.

Mida Betty also sends this story about Parkdale YPU stage contributions: "On February 9 and 10th, 1961 we also put on an original musical play, called "**The Fabulous Sixties**". The book and lyrics were written by Dave Hands (a member of the YPU) and Dave and G.R. Hicks wrote the music. The leads were played by Clifford Crompton, Mida Betty Hunter (yes, that was me!), Jim Ritchie and Barry Pratt. Other members of the YPU were in the chorus and the stage crew." Skip Evans was one of the musicians that accompanied us. The tickets were 75 cents. It was a lot of work but also a lot of fun and we had good audiences both evenings. I still have my original script!"

Marguerite Evans remembers, "The beauty of the softball team was its ecumenical aspect. Team members came from all walks of faith and even none. My late brother-in-law had attended All Saints Anglican with me as a youngster, but, became agnostic. He and my husband's late sister (also Anglican), met through participating in a car wash one

Saturday at a former gas station on Carling Avenue and became better acquainted by playing on the softball team. Thus, the team even supported the local economy. Our best batter was Roger Stanley who was from a large Roman Catholic family. My husband, Skip, brought out some of his fellow Chartered Accountant students and they not only increased the number of good looking males, but also provided the team with great players. The team and YPU also provided a place for some of the student and Registered Nurses from the Ottawa Civic Hospital to socialize and to play sports. One of our friends, Christine Frye, R. N., for example, bowled with us on one of Parkdale United's bowling teams. For those of us who used to participate in high school sports, living in the nurses' residence on Parkdale Avenue meant a loss in opportunity unless we reached out into the surrounding neighborhood. We are still in touch with several of the people with whom we played softball and/or bowled. Great long lasting relationships were cultivated through sports activities with Parkdale United Church."





Former Presidents of Parkdale YPU, October 1986.

Back row, left to right: Del Hansen, Gwena Beggs, Barbara Lee, Helen Tullis, Alf Percival, Dorothy Anderson Robb, Evelyn Lee Warburton, Len Baird.

Front row, left to right: Jean Thompson Hansen, Mary Gayle Anderson Pinkney, Dr. Norman Coll, Eleanor Campbell McLeod, and Art Cuthbert.

## Conclusion

The period from 1931 to 1964 was a time of development, challenge and change in the world. The church was part of this and the Young Peoples Union emerged, acted, progressed and, in the end, slowed down and dwindled, coming to an end as an organization in 1964, after the Board of Christian Education approved a YPU recommendation that YPU be replaced by a new organization for young adults of post-secondary school age. In 1965 Kairos succeeded the YPU. The churches developed new ideas and program structures for young adults, the YPU era was over.

But the achievements and contributions of the YPU remain today. I hope this short history will help retain that memory.

Bob Ferguson  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
December 2015

## Appendixes

### Presidents of Parkdale YPU

1931	Art Cuthbert
1932	Dave Jackson
1933	Dave Jackson
1934	Alf Percival
1935	Jack Little
1936	Jack Little
1937	Earl Olmsted
1938	Lon Campbell
1939	Lon Campbell
1940	Morgan Hackett
	Gault Dalglish
1941	Gault Dalglish
1942	Jean Thompson (Mrs. Del Hansen)
1943	Jean Thompson
1944	Del Hansen
1945	Del Hansen
1946	Isabel Gaukrodger (Mrs. Alan Tennant)
1947	Art Pigott
1948	Dorothy Anderson (Mrs. Frank Robb)
1949	Don Nevin
1950	Norma Rickey (Mrs. M. Marcellus)
1951	Don Nevin
	Evelyn Lee (Mrs. Tom Warberton)
1952	Doug Blair
1953	Barbara Lee (Mrs. Len Baird)
1954	Len Baird
1955	Helen Tullis (Mrs. Doug MacKechnie)
1956	Eleanor Campbell (Mrs. Roy McLeod)
1957	David Stewart
1958	Jim Ritchie
1959	Gwena Beggs (Mrs. Lawrence Code)

1960 Mary Gayle Anderson (Mrs. Lloyd Pinkney)  
1961 Bob Ferguson  
1962 Joan Bain (Mrs. Jim Ritchie)  
1963 Cliff Crompton

### YPU members who went into the Ministry

The number of members who became Ministers of the United Church shows the strength of the YPU movement. Here is an incomplete list of some:

Martin Rumscheidt  
Frank Meadows  
Lloyd Martin  
John Morris  
Stewart Hewlett  
David Stewart  
William E. McDowell  
Mary M. McDowell Wood  
John Peters  
Christine Frye  
Bob Warren (missionary pharmacist)  
Lydia McCullough (Deaconess)  
Doug Blair  
Ann Turner Durant

### The Years After YPU

It may be of some interest to note that many former YPU members married each other and have remained in the Ottawa area for decades afterwards. Many of these couples still meet socially with each other from time to time, i.e. The Parkdale Gang, and some remain very active as leaders in their churches in the greater Ottawa area. Here is an incomplete list of some of those marriages:

Doreen Bradley married Stewart Hewlett

Helen Tullis-Doug MacKechnie  
Diane Holtzman-Bill Dormer  
Helen Knox-Derek Fortune  
Barbara Lee-Len Baird  
Pat Little-Bob Ferguson  
Muriel Crawford-Ted Bellman  
Eleanor Campbell-Roy McLeod  
Joan Bain-Jim Ritchie  
Jean Thompson-Del Hansen  
Mary Gayle Anderson-Lloyd Pinkney  
Nancy Hill-John Peters  
Marguerite Huchcroft-James W. "Skip" Evans  
Mary Peters-Jack MacDonald  
Mida Betty Hunter-Don Lecocq  
Eva Hobbs-Lyall Sparling  
Marion Andison-Stan Baird  
Audrey Gould-Warren Blackburn  
Mary Ellen (Marty) Armstrong-Gerry Boon  
Carolyn Jowett-Don Cameron  
Dorothy Clarke-Arnold Hodgins  
Ruth Bennie-Bob Knapp  
Joyce Gould-Chuck Watts  
Marion Hodgins-Ron Workman  
Jean Morrison-Art Pigott  
Marion Dempsey-George Whitman  
Muriel Mitchell-Lon Campbell  
Yvonne Thompson-Paul Dunlop  
Jean Knowles-Doug Perrin

Thanks to

Helen Tullis MacKechnie who gave me her notes on the year-by-year activities of Parkdale United Church Young Peoples Union.



Len Baird who wrote a summary for a presentation on Parkdale's Anniversary Sunday.

Former YPU members who reviewed these notes, made suggestions and provided their memories.

Jim Ritchie, Len Baird, Stewart Hewlett, Nancy Peters, Doug Fleming, Jack Calderwood, Doug MacKechnie, Skip and Marguerite Evans, Mary MacDonald, Mida Betty Hunter Lecocq, Ed Turner.

Derek Fortune, who provided copies of Parkdale YPU's annual reports as found in the Parkdale Annual Church Reports from 1931-1964.

The archivists of Ottawa Presbytery, United Church of Canada, for accepting this material.

Electronic copies have also been sent to the webmasters of Parkdale United Church, Ottawa Presbytery, M&O Conference and the National Office of the United Church of Canada.



A Montreal and Ottawa YPU Conference in 1960 was held at First United Church in Ottawa with all these YPUers attending. The photo was in two sections to include all people.



Updated to July, 2018