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The Lowell Sun May 8, 1900

Lowell Boys' Club*

New and Interesting Charitable Institution

(image) J.H. Stewart, Superintendent Lowell Boys' Club

Comfortable Club Room Opened for all Boys from the Street - All Kinds of Books and Games for Their Entertainment Every Evening - Object of the New Club

“Hey there, Stewart: M-I-S-T-E-R Stewart! Here’s a kid dat wants to join the club and he’s afraid to come in. Com on in, you lob, wot er you ‘fraid of. Dis ain’t no reform school; come on in.”

Such were the words which The Sun reporter and artist caught as they climbed the stairway leading to the recently organized Lowell Boys' club in Thorndike Street last evening. The words were thrown at Mr. James II Stewart, the zealous superintendent of the new and decidedly novel addition to Lowell's great charities and they were thrown from the top of the stairway to somewhere which a large room beyond by a ragged urchin who was coaxing a timid companion beside him to 'get in de game' and walk boldly into the club room. From beyond the stairway came an old familiar and ear-grating sound that betokened the sight of a crowd of youngsters at the height of a jolly good time and the reporter wanted no time in getting in 'wid de push.”

The Lowells Boys' Club! If that isn't a warm institution, then Lowell has never had one. There were assembled last evening a motley gathering of about 100 youngsters from 15 years down, representing the poor and uncared for, the street gamins. If you will, and they were having about as 'swell' a time as 100 youngsters ever had in a good legitimate way. Some were reading, others were vainly trying to as several of their companions were making life miserable for them. Some were having hot and noisy games of checkers and dominoes, each player coached by from one to half a dozed leather-linged (?) critics.

“G'wan an' jump.”



“He can’t jump, he’s got a bum leg.”

“Come on (!)! Move! Anybody’d think it wuz cold de way yer freeze dere!”

“Well, if dat ain’t a rotten move! Say, you couldn’t beat my old buck!”

Such were a few of the remarks of the critics.

“We don’t profess to keep the best order here.” said Supt. Stewart apologetically as one youngster started around the reporter’s end and by a low tackle nearly put him down.

The courteous superintendent showed the newspaperman through this unique establishment and afterward gave them its history.

The Lowell Boys’ club occupies three large, (!) and well-lighted and ventilated rooms of the third floor of the great brick building on Thorndike Street between the Richardson Hotel and the northern canal and two of the rooms are made into one by the means of folding doors. In one of these two rooms is the library small but growing and in both are chairs and tables at which the boys read or play. The third room at the present time is in the biggest demand and it is thus necessary to keep its door locked when a certain number of boys get in it lest the entire attendance get in at once and raise Cain, for the sole attraction of that third room is the present great attraction of the whole institution, a fine, new punching bag, just put up. Each boy gets a turn at the bag, a time limit being placed on him.

When The Sun man entered last evening, a stocky-looking young newsboy was belting the bag, occasionally giving a side belt at one of the many juvenile spectators who talked to him while he punched.

“Just like Martin Flaherty only he doesn’t hold his face right!”

“He looks as if he wanted ter bite it.”

“Hey Chimmie, yer standin’ dink-toed,” and while Chimmie stopped to look at his feet the bag swung back on his face, to the huge delight of the assembly.

Supt. Stewart appears to be just the kind of man for the place. He is most amiable and jolly and understands boys thoroughly. Speaking of the club to the reporter, he said: “This club was started last February and has been, I may say, a howling success. The ideas, though new to Lowell, is not itself new for this club was started through the National Association of Boys’ clubs, the national secretary, Mr. J.E. Eastman coming to Lowell to organize this branch. When the club opened here, I took charge of it and have been very successful. Previously, I had charge of similar clubs at Roxbury and Newton and tush came here experienced. My wife is associated with me here, her duties being the care of the library while my other assistant is Mr. McDermott, who officiates(!) as doorkeeper.

The object of the Boys' club is to furnish a place where the street urchins may spend an enjoyable evening free from temptations and evil influences. It is purely a philanthropic work, all creeds, classes and colors being welcome. Our age limit is 15 years and no boys over that age are allowed. The club is open every evening from seven to nine and the boys employ the time at present as you see, though. We have greater plans for the future. We aim to get in the poor boys and those whose homes are not the best. Here they are kept away from evil associations until bedtime and we believe that by keeping boys from the streets at night we are aiding them in growing to better manhood. When I first started here, I had a number of tickets printed bearing the words, "Lowell Boys' Club Admit" thus making admission by tickets. I went out into the streets and gave away 27 tickets. That night 30 boys came, the 27 with the tickets and three extras who were promptly furnished with them. The second night 30 (?) boys came and the third, 100. Each new boy was given a ticket and his name placed on the roll and our membership roll now numbers (?) boys and our average nightly attendance is 150. Each ticket of admission is numbered and each boy is given a number. After the first night of membership, the tickets are taken up and deposited here. When a member enters, he gives his number at the door, and the doorkeeper finds him his ticket. Then he may go to the library and by presenting his ticket obtain any book or game that he chooses. He is held responsible for the safe return in good condition of whatever he may take. Upon returning the book or game he gets his ticket back and upon leaving for the night, he deposits his ticket with the doorkeeper. By this system we teach the boys responsibility. Our library, of course, is in its infancy. It contains (?) books of interest to boys and many volumes of magazines of the day. Then it also has dominoes, checkers, parchesi, (?) and other games in sufficient numbers to go all round. We would be very thankful for any books or games that the charitably inclined may choose to send us.

The club privileges do not cost the boys a single cent from one end of the year to another. We are glad to have them come. The club is supported entirely by subscription. I send out subscription blanks to the citizens and they may send what they choose. Since we started I have raised (?) Out of this after heating up the place and paying all the bills we have about (?) left in the bank. We have just completed a committee to look after the affairs of the Club and its members as follows: W.S> Southworth, A.C. Bachelder, L. E. MacBruyne, John J. (?) Esq., D. L. Page, A.G. Smith, C.A.R. (?), Franklin Nourse, A.M. Chadwich and F.R. (?) Next fall we have planned to obtain additional floor space and pursue studies in (?) training.

The boys as a rule are a bright lot and will improve themselves if given the opportunity. While it keeps one busy watching them, for they are full of mischief they make no trouble and I haven't found it necessary to send away a single boy since the club started. They get along finely together and I place no restrictions over them. They may talk, all they want to, occupy any seats they care to and (?) at will. When they become too boisterous, I speak to them and they change their cadence(?). We require that each boy shall come in with a clean face and hands and at the

entrance, as you see, is a sink, mirror, and comb and brush. When the doors open each night, they stand in line for a “wash up” before coming in and no one with dirty face or hands is allowed to enter for the boys themselves keep watch. They have organized several (?) teams and on Saturday afternoon the Boys’ club team defeated the (?) by the close score of 29 to 28.

I make it my business to get thoroughly acquainted with all the boys and learn their living conditions. While the club's rooms are only open in the evening I am engaged all day in the work. I visit the homes of the boys, learn from their parents what they do outside, what their good and bad qualities are, etc. for knowing them well, one can be more successful in teaching and advising them. The club up-to-date has been a grand success in every respect and we hope to have it continue a success.

The club rooms will be closed during the months of July and August but will reopen in September.