

NORTH AMERICAN FELLOWSHIP OF YMCA RETIREES WEIDENSALL CHAPTER

The Robert Weidensall Chapter of the then named organization: International Association of Retired Directors (**IARD**), was chartered in 1952. The area assigned for its service centered on Colorado, but included neighboring states of Wyoming, western Nebraska, western Kansas, and northern New Mexico. Working for the YMCA, at any time in its distinguished history, has been like a “fraternity” of professionals working together toward the same purpose, common goals, and results that made that purpose part of our lives as each had a commitment to serve Jesus Christ.

There is little early history of the chapter, but certainly the history of Robert Weidensall is a beacon for chapter members to respond to in perpetuating the life of this YMCA giant among men who took the YMCA from a founding meeting in Boston, during 1851, to the Christian influence of today, in nations around the world.

Weidensall, born in 1836, attended Pennsylvania College in Gettysburg, PA, participating in some theological studies and teaching Sunday school for a class of youths. He had some background in black smithing and carpentry, and during the Civil War served in the Quartermaster Corp and Construction Corps of the Union Army. He was introduced to the YMCA, following the war, by a program the YMCA conducted to help returning soldiers be reunited with their communities.

Many of the young men and families, following the war, turned their personal challenges to the western United States, and so Robert Weidensall moved to Omaha to seek his fortune. He took a job with the Union Pacific Railroad, in the railroad car shops and because of his practical experience, soon became a foreman of frame construction. He also stayed connected to his Christian “roots” and was a key volunteer in starting the Omaha YMCA. His energy and commitment to the YMCA was noted, as he was made Vice President of the Omaha Board and soon was contacted by the national office to serve the YMCA by traveling throughout the western states and territories, helping communities form their local YMCA’s.

His contribution to the growth of the YMCA was significant as he initiated country YMCA work, the Student YMCA, and provided advise and counsel to the emerging YWCA programs. He helped with the formation of state and regional associations and was instrumental in uniting the southern area YMCA’s into a tight association.

One of his major contributions, over the years, was to be a strong advocate for training of the Secretaries. Involved with the development of Springfield College and George Williams College to prepare young men for a career, he also was a key member in providing “on the job” training to young YMCA Secretary families through summer training, which led to George Williams College Camp at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

In 1919, at a National Convention in Detroit, Robert Weidensall was introduced to the 3100 delegates and honored for his fifty-one years of service to the YMCA. He would pass away in 1922, one of the most highly respected and well known YMCA Secretaries of his time.

Since the inception of the Weidensall Chapter in 1952, the organization, although representing a limited number of YMCAs, has been first a haven for retirees to continue their commitment to the YMCA through supportive projects, especially YMCA World Service and in the early years, Buildings for Brotherhood.

In the early 1990’s, IARD, took on a new image which has made it an important arm of the YMCA. Beginning with the 1994 Reunion in Toronto, Canada, the organization was renamed: North

American Fellowship of YMCA Retirees (NAFYR). The Weidendall Chapter has played an important part in the strong development of the new organization, through some of its key members.

- Howard Kustermann was a chapter member upon his retirement as Associate Secretary General of the World Alliance in 1973. He then served as IARD President during the 1981-1984 term, followed by serving as Chapter President.
- Waldo Toevs retired as a regional staff member helping local YMCA's conduct fund raising and financial development programs. and continued in retirement to serve the chapter professionally. During 1991-4 he served IARD as VP-West completing his term at the newly formed NAFYR reunion in Toronto, Canada. The actual reunion was held At the Geneva Park, Canadian National YMCA Conference Center.
- A point of information: NAFYR was officially incorporated in 1995 and the new name was approved at a Reunion, Board, and General Council meeting held in conjunction With the APD Conference being held in Nashville, TN Stew Brown was our chapter representative. (APD = Association of Professional Directors)
- John Stone, completing his YMCA career as President/CEO of the Colorado Springs YMCA, continued his dedication to the YMCA in the Weidensall Chapter serving as Chapter President in the mid 1980's. John had a city park named after him, next to one of the Colorado Springs YMCA branches. The "'Y'" does the programming for the park.
- Roy Smail, serving as a Fraternal Secretary in China, upon retirement served as Secretary-Treasurer of the new NAFYR organization.
- Syd Carne, a YMCA legend in Physical Education, has maintained a career-long relationship with the National Center for Christian Athletes while being an active member of the Chapter..
- And chapter members have come from a wide range of positions. Public Relations, camping, physical education. Youth work, administrative, fund raising and in fact, every aspect of YMCA programs and services. And members have come to the Chapter from other agency work, because of their previous YMCA connections, fellowship, and dedication of members to a Christian Association.
- In 2006, Dick Thornton was honored by the Boulder YMCA for his long and dedicated service as CEO, by having their building named after him.

During 1998 the chapter was asked to give leadership to a triennial Reunion of North American members in the fall of 2000. It accepted the challenge, and with the help and support of other West District chapters, conducted the most well attended reunion to date at the YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park Center in Colorado. 600 participants were registered, but with health and last minute cancellations, the actual number was 550. A historic five day program was conducted. What a fantastic job the chapter did in coordinating all aspects of the reunion, as well as to provide for hospitality, travel arrangements, and tours.

The NAFYR Reunion Chair, Stew Brown, was then elected President of NAFYR. A number of positive experiences happened during that triennial, which reflected on the Weidensall Chapter. These included stronger relationships with APD, YMCA of the USA, Y Retirement Fund, Springfield College and George Williams College of Aurora University. All NAFYR members became eligible for EAF Funds and NAFYR became an important contributor to EAF. NAFYR also initiated an Endowment for Secours Speciaux, the International EAF. And major changes to election bylaws were made to advance the efficiency of the organization. It conducted the next Reunion, 2003, as part of a Caribbean Cruise.

Chapter member, Jim Lipscomb (Primary membership with Grand Canyon Chapter) served as NAFYR Vice President – West: 2000-2003 and NAFYR President: 2003-2005.

In 2004, Richard E. Hill, CFO of the YMCA Retirement Fund, joined the Weidensall Chapter as he retired. Rich continued to serve the YRF as a field representative to all the chapters and is the Fund's liaison with NAFYR and YRF. What a positive connection that is.

For 2006, Chapter member Peter Gabel was honored by receiving the William Stahl Award for Public Relations and Communications. Peter ended his career by serving the Denver YMCA in that role, but in retirement was responsible for all printed material related to the 2000 Reunion, edited the chapter newsletter for ten years as well as the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees (WFYR) newsletter, "Bridges" for eight years.

During 2006, Chapter President Paul McLain, and his wife, Marna researched the names and addresses of all retirees in our chapter service area, and wrote each one inviting them to be part of our chapter events. Copies of a recent WANDERINGS was included. The seed has been planted.

And for 2007, former Chapter President, Ed Glass, has been elected NAFYR Vice President for the West District, and will be involved with visiting western chapters to help with chapter program improvement and membership development.

The Robert Weidensall Chapter, having a legacy from it's name sake, for a total dedication to the growth and development of the YMCA, has proven that it's retired members continue in that dedication to be of service, not only to the YMCA, but to NAFYR and WFYR.

Past Presidents - Robert WEIDENSALL Chapter - NAFYR
(Vice President)

1981 – 1984: Jerry Hyle
1984 – 1986: Howard Kustermann
1986 – 1989: John Stone
1989 – 1992: Waldo Toevs
1992-1995: Darrel Maifeld (J. Stanley Fixture) (Jim Alexander)
1995-2000: Stew Brown (Jim Alexander) (Norma Hansen)
2000-2003: Ed Glass (Emily Cark) (Bill Ellisor)
2003-2005: Bill Ellisor * (Paul McLain)
2005-2007: Paul McLain (Mary Lou Glass)

- Changed to two year terms to coincide with national bylaws.

Past Secretary-Treasurers – Robert Weidensall Chapter NAFYR

1981 – 1986: Marie Pate
1986 – 1994 – Priscilla Auten
1994 – 1997: Marnie Toevs
1997 - 1998 : Stanley Pedzick (3 months.) – Thelma Gabel
1998 – 1999: Janie Kustermann *
* Position divided following this term: **SEC / TREAS**
1999 - 2001: Paul McLain / Janie Kustermann
2001 - 2003: Paul McLain / Marnie Toevs
2003 - 2005 : Norma Hansen / Thelma Gabel
2005 – 2007: Norma Hansen / Richard Hill

Chapter Meetings

**SEPTEMBER – Annual Meeting held at the YMCA
Of the Rockies – Estes Park Center**
SPRING – One day, luncheon event
SUMMER – Travel to unique Colorado location

2009 and a TURN for the CHAPTER

As with other Chapters in NAFYR, the Weidensall membership began to decline, and new members were not replacing those that had moved or passed away. But the main difficulties was a lack of leadership for the chapter, no one wanting to assume the President's position and those who had held the major positions earlier didn't want to do it again.

So, after much discussion, formal vote, and consultation with the Grand Canyon Chapter (New Mexico and Arizona), we decided to merge our chapter with that group, but continue to be a cluster of that Chapter. Clark and Nancy Lupton, co-Presidents of the GC Chapter, and members of the Weidensall Chapter were instrumental in making the change and working out details.

The GC Chapter has four clusters: Phoenix, Albuquerque, and Tucson, and now the Weidendall Cluster (as we keep our original name). Each cluster will take a turn in hosting a major annual fall event, and continue to have their own local seasonal meetings.

For Weidensall, a volunteer (s) will accept responsibility for the next meeting, and Stew Brown will send notes of meeting, my mail or e-mail. WANDERINGS may continue with one issue a year. Membership dues will now go to the Grand Canyon Chapter from 2010 on. Our own Mary Lou Glass will be serving as Cluster Coordinator for the GC Chapter.

NAFYR's name change as we move into 2010 is AYR, Association of YMCA Retirees.

Stew Brown
Chapter Historian