Girl Life at Willard Hall

WILLARD HALL
12-24 GERRARD STREET EAST

Erected by
TORONTO DISTRICT OF THE WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION
The EDITH and LORNE PIERCE COLLECTION of CANADIANA

Queen's University at Kingston
For God and Home

Since the inception of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, over fifty years ago, it has been a dream of the organization to maintain in the heart of the city a real home for out-of-town girls, who have turned city-ward in their search for work or for further knowledge which their less urban homes could not provide.

The fulfilment started with the purchase in 1891 of 56 Elm Street, Toronto, and in 1911 it further matured with the purchase of the Gerrard Street property.

To-day, Willard Hall, situated at 12-24 Gerrard Street East, Toronto, is the ideal accomplished, and in the following pages an effort has been made to paint a word picture of this home, made by women for women.
Girl Life at Willard Hall

By

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Toronto District, Women's Christian Temperance Union, send out this booklet as a tribute of appreciation of the self-sacrificing work of our esteemed President, Mrs. F. C. Ward and her executive.
Girl Life at Willard Hall

WILLARD HALL is a home, not an institution. Officially it may be considered an institution, a pet child of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, but it does not smack of regulations, prohibitions and the routine of the ordinary organized institutional "home."

Without, it is the usual brick building with a window for every so many feet of impenetrable wall, but whether it is in the daytime, when the sun shines on the big W.C.T.U. sign which overhangs the pavement, or whether it be night and the electrically lighted sign twinkles and beckons in the darkness, there is an air of home about the building. A vagrant breeze stirs the white curtains at the windows and gives a peep at the gay chintz over-curtains. A sudden street noise and the windows frame interested, girlish faces. A curtain is swung back and a hand appears, watering the gay begonias and foliage plants and ferns which sun themselves on the broad window sills.

And about eight o'clock there will be a roadster or so in front of Willard Hall, and young men, striding the few steps from Yonge Street to the doors of Willard Hall, disappear within, and await the girls whom they are escorting to pleasure haunts within the reception rooms which are cosy and attractive, and from which emanates an atmosphere of home.

There are rules, of course, but they are not many nor onerous. The girls must be in by eleven o'clock at night. In fact, they are supposed to have their lights out at that hour, but twice a week they are allowed a late leave, which permits them to be out until half-past twelve. They are expected to make their own beds and keep their rooms tidy, but the actual cleaning is attended to by maids.

Not very harsh regulations; in fact, there is not more expected of the Willard Hall girls than would be expected of them by their parents if they were living in their own homes, and in exchange for obedience to
these few rules, and a very reasonable weekly sum, they receive their room, three meals a day, the privilege of reading-rooms, sitting-rooms and reception-rooms. For the use of the gymnasium and swimming tank a small fee is charged.

An outsider, having heard of Willard Hall and its accommodation, asked permission to see through it, and from the flat of the roof which hope sees converted into a charming roof-garden, and which commands a delightful view of city and bay, to the kitchens and store-rooms in the basement, the building was surveyed.

To the left, as one enters the building, is the first reception room, gay with chintz-upholstered wicker furniture. Rose side-curtains match in tones the rose-shaded standard lamp, and cushions repeating the rose tone in their floral chintz coverings are to be found on the sofa and in the easy chairs about the room. There is an open fireplace, flanked with a coal-scuttle of hammered copper, and a woven copper-wire fire-screen shows that safety is a first thought. Books are on the centre table and in the bookcase, a clock ticks off the minutes on the white mantel, and
the hardwood floor is covered with a rug in blue grey and rose shades. Through the wicker furnished reading-room, where thought has provided indirect lights, except on reading-table and side table, one passes, and so into the main and larger reception room, which is furnished in mahogany and mole colored velour, and in which room is heard the steady ticking of the mahogany grandfather’s clock with its brass inscription plate which was presented by a local union in memory of Mrs. Henry Gray, a faithful worker.

The reading-room, the second reception room and the board room are so laid out that they can with ease be thrown into one large room, and this is frequently done, especially over the week ends, when parties are in order. Sometimes a hundred of the boys from the “Y” will be invited over, and then the rooms are thrown into one, guessing contests, games and a general sing-song ensue, and at twelve o’clock the party is declared over. For these affairs the house provides tea or coffee and one kind of cake, and even for smaller parties, for the girls are allowed, by asking permission to use the rooms to entertain their own friends. These
refreshments are served free of any charge, and the girls, if they wish additional, are allowed to provide it for themselves.

The board room will hold more than three hundred people, and off it is a good sized kitchenette with electric stove, sink, and cupboards, where those using the board room may prepare the afternoon tea or small repast which is served at such meetings. There is a staff sitting-room which is attractively and comfortably furnished, an officers' board room with the blue and grey color scheme repeated, and a general board room for small meetings, and what is known as "plan of work," a conference of all the presidents of the various Unions, and here again the blue and grey note is seen.

In the large board room the girls meet at six-thirty every night for prayers, and there is a service there at half-past ten every Sunday morning, and while these are well attended they are not compulsory.

And, of course, there is that very important room, the dining-room: a big sunny room with rose side-curtains blowing against the white of the sash curtains, snowy cloths covering the fumed oak tables which seat six or eight girls, oak chairs, and in the centre of the big room a huge, old sideboard, rich in its time-mellowed wood and carvings, presides.

Meals are served at regular hours. Breakfast from seven until eight-thirty, lunch from twelve until two, and dinner from six until seven.

"Are the girls reducing, or trying to keep down to a certain weight, or are they hungry, and hearty eaters?" the Superintendent was asked.

"They tell me, in the kitchen, that they are eating more than they ever did before," was the smiling answer. "There was a night when we thought the plaster was going to come down on us, and we sent upstairs to see what on earth was going on, and found one of the girls had taken to rolling, in the hope of easing herself of a few superfluous pounds, but I don't think they are cutting down on their food rations. They are just normal girls, and most normal girls are hungry. Just last week one came to me about half-past ten and said she was hungry. ' Didn't you have your dinner, my dear?' I asked her.

"I did, and a good one, but I'm awfully hungry now," she told me, so we went out to the kitchen and that child ate about five slices of bread and butter."

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“Do they eat good breakfasts or do they just have a cup of tea or coffee and run?”

“They eat real breakfasts. You’d be surprised at the number who eat hot cooked porridge. There are always two or three kinds of cereal as well as porridge, marmalade and jam and all the toast they can eat, and tea, coffee or milk. Then several mornings every week we have bacon or eggs, and on other mornings fresh fruit, and the girls appear to thoroughly enjoy their breakfasts.”

The writer was invited to remain for dinner, and about half past six went into the big dining-room, filled with the buzz of happy voices, and enjoyed a splendidly-cooked dinner. Roast stuffed leg of veal, new carrots and mashed potatoes, brown and white bread and delicious butter, and a raspberry pie which defied one to leave a crumb. Tea was served, and on every table was a pitcher of milk, which it was learned, is the usual complement of every meal served at Willard Hall.
There are at all times six waitresses in the dining-room, but at night the housemaids and the chambermaids are also on dining-room duty, and, with the kitchen help, there is a total of eighteen women working at night in kitchen, serving-pantry and dining-room. The serving-kitchen and pantries are on the main floor, opening directly off the dining-room, and the food is brought to the serving kitchen by dumb waiter from the main kitchen directly below. Here is a huge refrigerator, well stocked with butter and perishables. There is a potato parer, a bacon slicer and a machine which at present cores and peels apples, but to which an adjustment is being fitted which will also slice the apples.

Four mammoth stoves range one wall, and apart from these is an auxiliary stove which is used only for the cooking of fish, which is not allowed to be prepared or cooked on tables or stoves common to other uses. The toaster, which makes twenty-four slices at once, and which is in use from seven o’clock until eight-thirty every morning, was inspected, and it was learned that special toasting bread is made for Willard Hall by a local firm, the loaves being made in special lengths, and thirty-eight of which loaves are used daily. Two and a half to three sides of bacon are used on “bacon mornings” and between two and three bags of potatoes are used daily at the minimum of five hundred and sixty meals which are served every day at Willard Hall.

The jam room, where the jam, bought in thirty-pound pails, is stored, was next visited, and in turn the vegetable larder, the dry store-room and the damp storeroom were opened for inspection, and the dietitian pointed out with pride her stock, and assured the visitor that the best grade of everything was always bought, and that the menus were carefully prepared, continuously varied, and well balanced. There is no “stew day,” “rice-pudding day” or “hash day” at Willard Hall. The girls do not come to dinner on Wednesday night knowing they will have braised beef and bread pudding; or Thursday noon to luncheon expectant of veal pot-pie and apple-sauce. The meals are uniformly good, but there is an absolute absence of monotony about them, which perhaps accounts for the appetites of the girls.

Back on the main floor again the visitor found herself facing an automatic elevator which serves the girls, and it took her and her guide upstairs where the bedrooms, bathrooms, and sitting-rooms were surveyed. There are two charming sitting-rooms for the girls upstairs, and to these rooms they are allowed to bring their girl friends, but their friends of the
opposite sex must be received in the reception rooms below. Fumed oak and leather upholstery is used in the first of these sitting-rooms. A pretty rug covers the floor, there are chintz-covered cushions about, and blue side curtains, chintz-bordered, hang at the wide windows. An open fireplace is another attraction, and on the mantel above, a white enamel clock ticks comfortably, while at either end tall candlesticks stand guard. The books, which are carefully chosen and then censored after the choice is made, are on the tables and in the cases, and the note of the whole room is one of comfort, homeliness and cultured taste.

Second Floor Sitting-Room

The second upstairs sitting-room is even more attractive. A softly-patterned, restful paper in shades of blue and grey covers the walls, and the rug repeats the same colors. A blue-tile fireplace is mantelled in white, and before the fireplace is a tiny wooden settee. Gay wicker and chintz furniture, a mole-colored velour sofa, a colonial clock, prettily-framed pictures, candlesticks, plants, and a piano, all unite to cast a spell of pleasurable comfort in this big room. The lighting fixture
is of oxidized silver in candlestick design, and there are wall brackets to match it.

In all of Willard Hall there is only one double bed. The single rooms are, of course, fitted with single beds, and the double rooms have twin beds.

In each single room there is, beside the bed, a bureau, a table, a clothes closet, a straight chair and a rocking-chair. On the inner side of the closet door is a rack for towels, and face towels and bath towels are provided, while the girls, or the transients, provide their own soap. The double rooms have the same equipment, although many of them have two clothes closets. All are freshly curtained, the walls are painted a delicate ivory shade, and the floors are hardwood. The building is so laid out that the ventilation is of the best, and all the rooms are bright. The girls are allowed to furnish the rooms up a bit, if they so desire,
and some of them have bright side curtains and valance, a rag rug on the floor, a dainty lamp on the bureau, and pretty dresser and table scarfs. There are college cushions and pennants, photographs of dear ones at home, and even—so utterly normal are the girls—the shiny photographs of the sheiks of movieland, pinned upon the walls.

"They don’t look like the rooms of girls in poor circumstances, or of uncultured taste," remarked the visitor, and she pointed out the silk lingerie neatly laid out ready for evening wear on one bed, the initialled ivory toilet articles in another room, the leather-bound book on a table, the rose bath salts and dusting powder on a bureau, a rose in a small silver vase on a table. ... These and the healthy, well-dressed girls who had trooped into the dining-room did not spell the rigors of poverty or of the hopelessness which has been talked of in connection with the lives of the girls who are alone in the city, striving in store or factory, or to make their way through school. Rather were they the visible signs of normalcy and of dainty, joyful girlhood, making its own way in work or in learning, but happy and protected and taking life as a good gift.

The bathrooms are large and airy, and from the ivory-tinted walls to the nickelled taps and faucets and the terraza floors, they shine with cleanliness and smell of fresh cold water, fresh air and soap. There are three wash-basins in each bathroom, and the two large tubs in each are in separate, walled enclosures, ensuring the maximum of privacy for the girls at their ablutions. There are six tubs on every floor, in addition to the basins and other sanitary essentials.

There are rooms, furnished much as are those of the residents, which are available for transients, and at a rate surprisingly low for the accommodation and the meals served, and sisters, mothers, and relatives of many of the girls who are in residence take advantage of the privilege, and make Willard Hall their headquarters when they come to the city. There are, in all, two hundred and sixteen beds.

On each floor there is located a telephone booth, and here the girls are at liberty to converse with their friends. They are supposed to limit conversations to three minutes, and there is, as a matter of fact, a five-minute limit to telephone conversations, but rumor has it that the limit is not strictly observed on all occasions.

The corridor windows are gay with plants, and they are airy and bright with sunshine. The element of safety has not been overlooked,
and two fire-escapes, which, of course, run the entire four-storey height of the building, are easy of access and frequently inspected to ensure that they are in perfect condition.

There are two other rooms, both on the topmost floor, and both full of interest. One is the trunk room where the trunks of the girls in residence are stored. The trunks are so arranged that each girl may go up and remove anything she has stored in her trunk, or pack something away in it, without having to disturb any one else’s. The visitor saw fibre trunks and leather trunks, steamer trunks and wardrobe trunks, trunks of corrugated metal and box-shaped ones covered with canvas or with hand-sewn leather. In fact, there might be a story in just those old trunks—the old and the new and their adventures and vicissitudes.

The other garret room, if so it might be styled, is the laundry, and here the girls are free to do their washings and ironings, for the sum of twenty-five cents a month. There are four porcelain tubs, five ironing-boards with wall plugs conveniently placed, four inside drying lines and several more out on the flat roof which some day, if hope is fulfilled, will be transformed into a roof garden for warm summer nights. The girls furnish their own soap and irons, and they are allowed to work in the laundry until eleven o’clock at night, except on Sunday.

Some of the bedroom doors were open as the visitor and her guide made their way down the corridors toward the elevator again, and within could be seen girls reading or writing or busy with a bit of sewing. One girl was giving another a marcel for the evening, and as the corridor was traversed, groups of girls were met going from one room to another, laughing, humming, talking earnestly on this subject or that, and there was pervading the entire building an air of care-free happiness, a hint of roguishness and mischief, and the clamor of youth which reminded one of the happy days of boarding-school pranks.

“Ever have any trouble with the girls?” the Superintendent was queried.

“No. They come to me with their troubles and with their joys. Sometimes they come for advice, for I try to act in the place of the mothers from whom they are absent, but they never seem to get into any grave difficulty. Once in a while there is an escapade. We had one girl who told her admiring audience of how she had come home late and got in by way of the fire-escape. The girl to whom she told it, innocently gave it
away, and when I interviewed the teller of the fairy story, if you could call it that, she confessed to telling the yarn, but vowed she hadn’t done the deed. She was an orphan and excited the sympathy of the other girls, and late that night I got a tip that there was something doing, and I went the rounds and found twenty-eight girls in one room, and they had pulled the girl who had told, innocently enough, on the orphan, out of bed, and if I hadn’t arrived when I did she would have been ducked. One girl had done all the organizing of the affair—a born leader she is, too."

Down below the street level the gymnasium is situated, a lovely big room, completely equipped for basketball, club-swinging, dumb-bells and wand work, and with the swings and horizontal bars and trapezes, which do their share in making physically fit the girlhood of to-day. There is a piano in the gymnasium, too, which is used to play the musical accompaniments for the various physical drills. There are two showers off the gymnasium and plenty of lockers for holding the gym suits which the girls wear. Both the gym and the swimming pool come under the

![Swimming Pool](image-url)
direction of the Recreation Club, and the swimming instructress. At a recent At Home of the Recreation Club there were thirty-four cups and three replicas presented as prizes for the year's work in the various classes.

There are four additional showers for use in connection with the swimming pool, which is open all year round from nine-thirty in the morning until the same hour at night, and there is also a hair-drying machine under which long locks or short can be quickly brought into a state of dry subjection and order. The pool itself is twenty-four by sixty feet and is four feet deep at the shallowest point and nine feet at the deepest. A spring-board and diving-tower add joy to the mermaids' hours.

The water is filtered and chemically treated, and fresh water is run into the tank daily, while any lint or sediment is drawn out of the bottom of the tank by suction operations every night. Eighty-eight degrees is the permanent temperature of the water, and only boys under ten years of age are allowed instruction and the privilege of the tank.

Back upstairs again the visitor's attention was called to the rising-bell which rings at seven and at eight o'clock every morning, and which will soon be arousing from sleep the third daughter from one home to be cared for within the walls of Willard Hall. Girls are not supposed to stay more than three years, there being an unwritten law that after that time they move on to make room for another. Some time ago one sister moved out of Willard Hall to make room for a younger one who was coming to the city to work, and now she too is moving out to give place to her younger sister who is coming to Toronto. Girls from fifteen to twenty-five years of age are given a home in this Gerrard Street building, and from the Superintendent, who greets the girls who come in, chaperons them when their boy friends come to call, gives them bread and butter to eat when hunger attacks them at odd hours, hears their joys and their sorrows, and advises, rejoices or condoles with them, from this Superintendent and each member of the House Staff there is an interest taken in every individual girl which stresses the "home-iness" of Willard Hall.