The Boys' Parlors
Association of Germantown
Samuel B. Hoards
First let us consider the influences that surround the street boy with his home amid the slums; such a boy as it is the purpose of the Boys Parlor to reach. His first years are passed among mud piles in the gutter, accustoming himself to the sight of fights and drunkenness. As he learns to talk he learns to swear. When he arrives at the age of boyhood he joins a “gang” which sees what mischief it can get him into. Its meeting place where it perfects itself in chewing, smoking, pitching pennies and gambling is the street corner; its
field of activity is the fruit
tree in back yards. It is more
what more advanced age the boy
frequents pool rooms and taking
gaining here his first introduc-
tion to politics from the Irish
bar keeper. It certainly is
evident that somehow influ-
ence must enter if a boy with
such a training is to become
a moral, hard working man
and an honest citizen.

In many cases the
parents of the boy show him
only too well an example and
in almost all cases they can
give him but little incentive
to an honest, progressive life
of usefulness. Consequently
they did desire to thus
direct him and to keep him from the debasing temptations of the street, they are powerless. They know of no healthful place of amusement for him and they find that such a home as theirs cannot offer attractions sufficient to keep him from the street. The average home of this class consists of but a house or part of a hotel and has no grand or connection with it. The result of this is that no exercise can be engaged in at home. Fair opportunities for exercise on the other hand are to be found upon the street. The chief need however of those that work in the mills all day or in the brick yards is not exercise but mental
refreshment. This cannot be gained in the overcrowded rooms at their homes where kitchen and sitting room are thrown into one and where the rest of the family is worn out from work. The boys are too tired to sit quietly and enjoy a book. They wish some thing more stimulating and which will require no effort. This is found in joining a crowd of fellows on the street corner, the saloon or at the pool table, with their jokes and entertainment and also with their lack of any moral or refining influences and with their positive influence toward low standards, low aims and deportment.
It is in supplanting and countering the evil influences of the street and in supplying what necessarily is lacking in the home life that the Boys' Parlors find its usefulness. As expressed in a couple of leaflets the Parlors got out to advertise its work the object is, "The Moral and Intellectual Improvement of Boys of the Porter Class," and again, "The object is not that of a manual training school—it is the advancement and help of poor boys by means of bringing them under moral and Christian influence, with the purpose of making them truthful and..."
truth-loving men. The method employed to accomplish this result is to provide rooms sufficiently attractive to win boys from the streets. Here boys from nine to sixteen years of age can spend a pleasant evening with their friends, playing games, looking at pictures, reading or in some of the manual training classes. The helpers in these classes do not like to use the word teacher as it too often implies a feeling of restraint and a spirit of subordination on the part of the school. The helpers here are brought into very friendly and intimate relationships with the boys and by their personal influence...
and by quiet talks try to lead them from their rough manners and bad habits and to implant within them higher, nobler ideals.

This feeling of unity between the helper and the boys is one important factor in the influence of the helper. Mr. Blis in his book "The Children of the Poor" emphasizes this great advantage of Boys' Clubs. He says that giving the boys an interest in the management and thus touching their love of self-government will often change their attitude from opposition to further and make the difference between failure and success. The
plan of a self-governed club with elective officers, etc. is not introduced at the Germania
Boy's Parlor, but the general spirit and the essential part of such a scheme prevails. The boys are made
to feel that they and the helpers are equally interested in the same things, be it in a game of checkers, the work of the carpentry class or the welfare of the Par-
lors as a whole. To further this idea, some of the older boys' advice is asked and
several have had control of younger classes given to them.

Thus considered the reason of usefulness of the Boy Parlor fits
object and an outline of its method of work; let us look at its history. Before the Boys' Parlor started in German-town there was no systematic, denominational effort to help these street boys become useful, self-respecting men. And not twelve years later—it still continues to be the only one. It should be stated, however, that this winter the Roman Catholics have started an institution of somewhat the same nature, which indeed reaches the same class of people and has taken many individuals members from the Parlor.

The Boys' Parlor originated...
as a branch of the Germantown Young Women's Christian Temperance Union in the winter of 1886-7.
Starting in two small rooms, the first four years it occupied as many lobbies. By 1890, however, many of the trials and discouragements of beginning such a work had been met; the attendance grew, and the present house, number twenty-nine, or since the number has been changed number fifty-four, Rittenhouse St. was rented.
In December 1891 Y.W.C.A. gave up this work and the Boys Parlor's Association was then carried on as a separate institution consisting of forty-one members, all workers in the
institution. In April 1894, the organization obtained a charter.

From this incept that the Boys' Parlor arose gradually and has had opportunity to expand along the lines found to be most advantageous. Now it desires to carry on its work upon a larger scale. To this end it secured an option upon a well-located lot, plans for building have been procured, estimates obtained and about $4500 has been obtained by subscription toward the necessary $8200.

The everyday workings of the Parlor...
02 rather I should say the working upon Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, which are the days it is open, is something as follows. At a little before 8.00 P.M. a crowd of boys gathers before the brook. This crowd consists of boys from nine to sixteen, the majority nearer the former age. A few go to school but the great bulk work in the mills and a few in the brick yards. In former years about fifty per cent. were Roman Catholics but this year only twenty-five per cent are. On the stroke of eight this crowd is allowed to enter. Here they meet the corps of helpers for that night.
usually seen or eight num-
ber. The boys are now separated to their respective rooms which we will visit in order.

Upon the first floor are two rooms thrown into one large one. One and is filled with chairs, the other contains tables with games of various kinds such as checkers, halma, backgammon, crokinole etc., the games of skill being in special demand. Anyone who behaves properly may come in here to play games or read the few books and papers that are supplied. Since this room varies much in character, one night a gang
from one part of Germantown will come in and over-crowd it; another night another gang from a different section will come, also two or many that come regularly every night. Again, if there is a fire or other attraction the room may be nearly empty. One of the nights I was there a prize-fighting contest between a negro and a white man took place away. This is the room where trouble is most likely to occur as new boys come into this room and it is here that one sees the product of the slums—uncombed and unwashed. Most of the boys however who come
at all regularly wash their faces and brush their hair before coming, so that at first glance you do not think them so poor a lot as further investigation reveals.

Taking up the other rooms now, the only other room upon the first floor except the hall is a back room where is the carving class. This class as well as the others to be described are only for those boys who belong. That is to say the general run of boys go into the game room and those that come regularly and desire are proportioned to one of the several classes. The carving class is rather l
mentary, only one tool being used, yet not withstanding they have carved some very pretty picture frames. The most important feature however seemed to me to be the interest the boys took in it. Upstairs upon the second floor are the rooms for the hammock class, the coats and hats of the helpers and a room now little used, containing books and a case full of curiosities. The hammock class consists of eight. The boys have to pay for the materials used but the hammocks belong to the makers when finished. The third floor contains the scroll saw class which is the favorite one of them.
all. Here five foot saws saw
which keep the boys busy em-
ployed. In the third floor
also is the carpenter clamps large
enough for seven or eight. At
the time of my visits they were
making some very pretty
inlaid checker boards.

The work in these clamps
got on for an hour from eight
till nine behind locked doors
to prevent any disturbance.

At nine they all condescend
to the large room where the gam
were and take the seats that
occupied one half of it. The
tables for the gamels are removed
the organ opened and after all
have gathered several hymns
are sung with great spirit.
Another small part of the work are the entertainments. There are usually eight or ten of these a year, part given by outside talent, and part by the boys. The former consist of magic lantern exhibitions, talks on foreign countries or other interesting topics, sometimes religious. The entertainments by the boys, of which the chief always comes upon Christmas, consist of recitations, songs, music (derived from mouth organs, bones, jew's harps, and the like) and acrobatic feats. Once a year the donors to the Parlor are invited to one of these entertainments, and afterward the work
done the past year is reviewed and the records thrown open for inspection.

The institution is supported entirely by donations. The expenses are something under seven hundred dollars a year of which the rent of the house with lighting, heating and repairs takes almost a half and the superintendent's salary another large portion. These funds are supplied partly by regular contributors who give annually sums differing from one dollar up to twenty. For the last five years there have been between seventy five and a hundred of these, yield-
ing very nearly four hundred dollars a year. The rest of the
income is made up from irregular contributors. A permanent
fund has been started which in time is hoped will put the
institution on an independent footing but at present amounts
to about a thousand dollars.

The work of the
Parlors is carried on entirely by
the voluntary helpers, the self-
paid superintendent. The
helpers, some thirty to thirty-
five in number constitute the
members of the Boys' Parlors As
sociation and its operation is
entirely in their hands. These
are divided into committees to
look after the various branches.
The financial committee confers with and advises the treasurer in regard to investing funds, methods of raising money, etc. The house committee sees to the decorations of the rooms, to the supplies for the classes and is responsible for the condition of the house. The membership committee takes names of all that attend, looks them up to some extent and gives tickets to those whom it thinks are desirable. The regulating of membership is more important than at first glance. If left to take its course uncontrolled, a better and better class of boys tends to come, which drives out the rougher,
now the element which is the class most earnestly desired.

There is another committee also, small but important. This is the visiting committee. Its object is to visit the homes of the boys at least once a year and talk with the parents. By this it can see what work the Parlor are doing, what influence reaches the home and what view the boys and their families take of the Parlor. Also if any of the boys get sick or receive injuries they see what comfort and cheer they can bring.

The work at the Parlor requires a great expenditure of nervous energy. It is fatiguing work. There is a
constant strain to see that all goes well and an effort is required to throw oneself into it so thoroughly that the boys will see the helpers are interested themselves. Also, however it is interesting work and amusing in connection with a set of boys whose ideas and point of view are so entirely different from that of the people they ordinarily come in contact with. Even to the language this difference extends. For instance, it must have been very amusing when a half-witted, a different pair of trousers remarked on them to receive the answer—"Oh! Miss, I got them off. Miss—"
tiring another helper. Another boy could not understand why one of the helpers who was fond of swimming would not come and try the public swimming pool situated in the heart of the slums. If the association of the helpers with the boys is such a help to them and spices up to them new ambitions in life, it is also true to a lesser extent that the association of the boys with the helpers gives them a view of life they could not otherwise obtain and helps to give a broader understanding and love for those around them.

The Boys' Parlors are simply a small help.
in the right direction. The public schools for example surely do much more to raise the general tone of living among the fallen classes. Nevertheless, as things stand at present, the Boys' Parlors seem to have a large field of usefulness. Not a few cases could be cited of individuals that did not attend school or come under influences of any large civilizing institution, who, from connection with the Boys' Parlors, have changed about, have gotten some steady employment and started upon the road to success. The result in proportion to the
Expenditure seems to be very large. The cost was not very heavy and if the work of the helpers seems considerable yet I am sure they would all admit they are fully repaid for their time and energy by the experience and the feeling of time well spent. If the old proverb is true, "A pound of prevention is worth a pound of cure," money spent in the Boys' Parlors pays far better than the inestimable. 