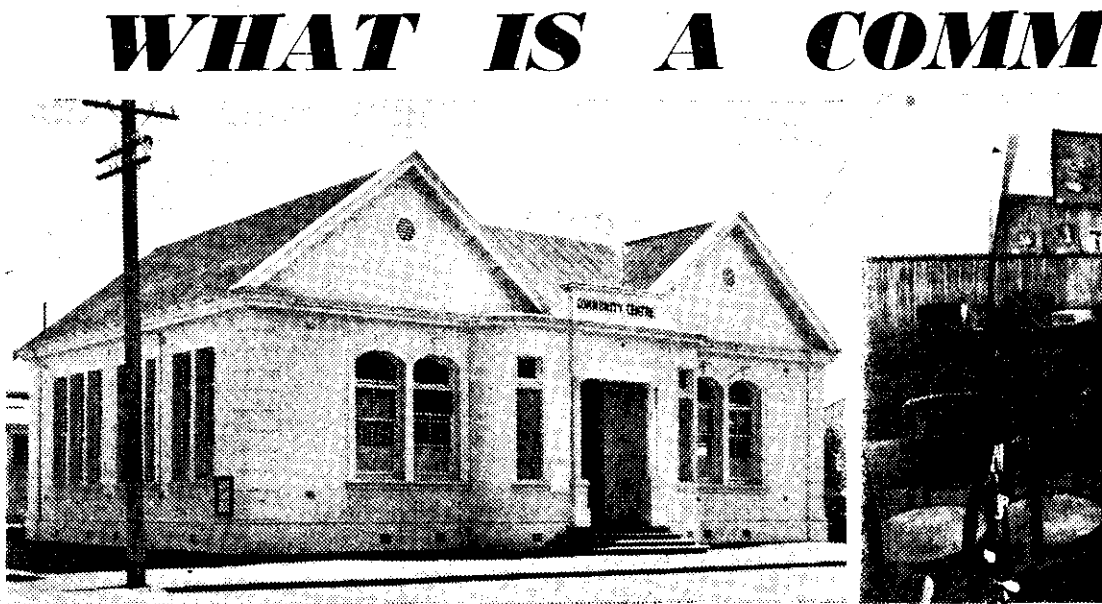




H. C. D. SOMERSET
"Interest is growing very rapidly"



THE FEILDING COMMUNITY CENTRE, formerly the Technical School. The building was two-storied until damaged by the Napier earthquake.

A CORNER of one "a p

INFORMATION WANTED

To the Editor,

Sir,—Would it be possible for you to arrange an article on a Community Centre?

Who owns the building?

Who controls the building?

Who provides the finance for upkeep, etc?

In my local district there is a movement afoot to provide club rooms and a hall for returned servicemen, but with the idea that some form of Community Centre be incorporated. The hope is expressed that the building will be the meeting place for all local organisations. As this is in a suburb, the problems are somewhat different from a country centre.

Is the idea of combining a Community Centre with an R.S.A. Club feasible?

This is a purely unofficial request for information, and I would appreciate any assistance you can give.—(—).

MR. SOMERSET REPLIES

INTEREST in the Community Centre is growing very rapidly. During the past 12 months, I have had letters of inquiry similar to that of your correspondent, at the rate of two a week. They come from all parts of New Zealand and from Australia.

This new interest in Community Centres, not only here but also in England, shows, I believe, that we are beginning to recognise two fundamental needs of man—his need for active membership in the community of his fellows, and secondly, his need to learn.

Influence of War

Both of these are made clearer during a war. The first thing that a war does is to break up the larger community as we know it. Our pre-war society, with its obvious imperfections, was based upon peace-time living; when war broke out, it was necessary for us to change rapidly to a new wartime order. In many respects a wartime order is simpler than a peace-time one. For the time being the issues are straightforward, and our purpose in living and dying is clear. It is to defeat our enemies; to replace Fascism with democracy and thereby to make a better world. To do this it is first of all

necessary to learn the war game. We play this urgent game according to the rules. We provide the means whereby the soldier learns effectively the science and art of war; men and women learn new parts to play in war industry. Victory depends entirely upon the amazing ability of tens of millions of adults to learn and re-learn. That is the great lesson of the war if we have the wit to make use of it.

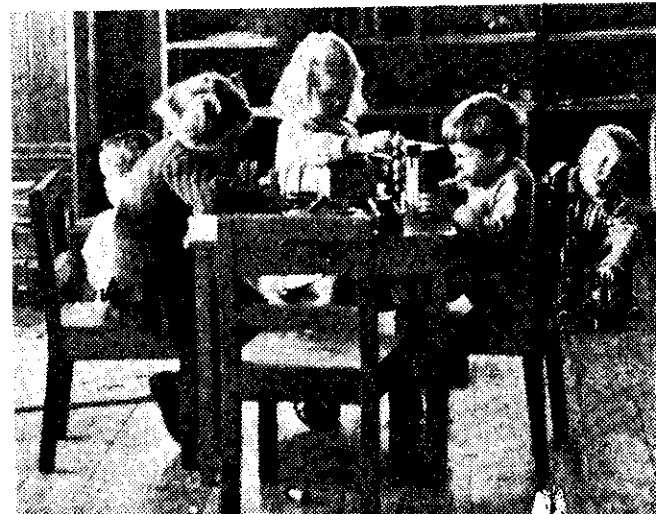
A Disastrous Fallacy

At the ending of a war there is a genuine desire to make a more effective human society. The strange thing is, however, that we act as though the new community will follow the war, as day follows night, without any effort on our part. We seem to think there will be some special act of creation in our favour. That is the most disastrous fallacy of our time, the fallacy that lost us the peace of 1918. The simple truth is that we lost the peace through our ignorance; we failed to get a new order of peace and plenty, because in the days between the Great War and the Greater we did not know how. This time we must know how—not just the experts, but all the men and women who make up our community. As people responsible for our destiny, we must know the direction in which we are moving and our reasons for moving. If democracy is to survive—and it has come within a hair's breadth of extinction—we must provide the means whereby men and women have the opportunity to think and learn in peace as they had to learn and think in war. So far, we have not provided for these needs, although they have long been understood. The various developments of adult education during the past 30 years have been attempts to meet the need, but the financial support they received was too niggardly to meet the situation in any adequate way. Those concerned with adult education, both here and abroad have come to the conclusion that the Community Centre is the best way of keeping men and women in touch with the intellectual and social life of the day.

More Than a Meeting Place

By this time you will have guessed that the Community Centre is something more than a mere meeting place

A WEEK or two back, our mail included the letter that was written by the secretary of a Returned Services Club we sent it to the nearest of the two men in New Zealand who H. C. D. Somerset, of Feilding (the other is J. E. Strachan). Here we give Mr. Somerset's answer, together with s



(Above) A corner of the Nursery.
(Below) "Keep Fit" Class.

for local organisations, something more than a place for passing the time. It has no essential connection with a Civic Centre, which is often a pretentious array of buildings based upon local government by day, local entertainment by night, and local pride at all times. There is, of course, nothing to prevent the Civic Centre from combining in its make-up many of the features of a Community Centre as well.

Your correspondent asks whether it is possible to combine a Community Centre with an R.S.A. club. This raises a very important point. No doubt clubs are very necessary in the larger centres for the use and convenience of returned men until their rehabilitation is complete. In the smaller centres I doubt very much whether the R.S.A. club is the best means of providing for our returned men. A little thought will show that to them rehabilitation means the taking up of their places, as quickly as possible, in the community. They are concerned with the future rather than

