

Reeves Center Drew Large Support

By NANCY DAMRON
Staff Writer

Reeves Community Center grew out of a dream of local civic leaders who believed the area needed better recreational opportunities.

The movement got under way with the leadership of James F. "Jim" Yokley, who spearheaded the effort. Yokley, determined to see the development of the center, started a campaign to raise funds in 1943.

Yokley was supported in his efforts by prominent business leaders such as J. Raymond Smith, John Frank, D.C. "Dio" Lewis and J.D. Sargent. The men lobbied local businesses, industries and individuals in their quest to raise \$1 million.

Yokley outlined his plans in a letter to *The Mount Airy News* about 1943, after citizens organized the Mount Airy Foundation Inc. with the goal of making donations over a five-year period to build a community or civic center.

The charter members of the foundation included Mayor John D. Thompson; school board Chairman Dr. Moir S. Martin; an unidentified member of the local Ministerial Association; and the unnamed president of the Merchants Association.

Other members included J.D. Sargent, Hugh Merritt, D.C. Rector, W.L. Glancy, Dr. John Ashby, R.D. George, John Sobotta, D.C. Lewis, H.O. Woltz, J.H. Crossingham, John M. Reeves, George Sparger Jr., John Frank, Lindsay Holcomb, Ben



John P. Frank



J. Raymond Smith

Graves, L.P. Wrenn, Hugh Hennis, W.F. Carter Jr. and J.R. Smith Jr.

"The project, as planned by the board of directors, comprises lounging rooms, library and recreational rooms, together with bowling alleys and (a) gymnasium; with the possibility of including a swimming pool," Yokley wrote in his letter.

"This is a very comprehensive program, and the estimated cost is

approximately \$250,000. We are happy to announce a figure of \$50,000 — \$25,000 in 1943, \$25,000 in 1944, towards this project, through Mr. John M. Reeves of Reeves Brothers, New York City, as a memorial for Mr. M.R. Reeves of the Reeves family."

It was Yokley who made several trips to the Big Apple and managed to

Reeves

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land the large gift.

M.R. Reeves, the namesake of the community center, was born in Surry County in 1877, and in 1906 went to New York to work for The Hunter Manufacturing and Commission Co. In 1915, he set up his own Gray Goods Department with the firm of Harding, Tilton & Co.

In 1919, Reeves helped form the selling house of Reeves, Jennings & Co., and a year later joined his brother John to establish Reeves Brothers Inc., serving as president.

The partnership went on to buy textiles in Greenville and Woodruff, S.C. Later, in an effort to bring the entire process of cotton textile manufacturing under the Reeves management, Fairforest Finishing Co. was built in 1928.

M.R. Reeves apparently did not live to see that day.

the 1940s to raise funding for the center. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held Jan. 30, 1951.

The center was dedicated in May 1952 in ceremonies featuring the state's senior senator, Clyde R. Hooper of Shelby, and Rep. Thurmond of Chatham of Elkin.

In December 1952, C.W. "Bunny" Cockrell was named as the center's first general secretary. It was under his guidance that the facility became affiliated with the national YMCA, a relationship that lasted for years.

In April 1985, the center's board of directors launched "The Second Century Challenge," in an effort to raise \$750,000 for renovations, maintenance and expansion of the facility.

Organizers managed to raise more than \$1 million. Of that, \$150,000 was donated by Virginia M. Reeves.