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The Boys Town Hall of History: A Case Study in Public History and Exhibition Methods

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THE BOYS TOWN HALL OF HISTORY:
A CASE STUDY IN PUBLIC HISTORY AND EXHIBITION METHODS

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of History

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Jacqueline Ann McGlade

November 1986

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

Name	Department
<i>Fred Simmons</i>	<i>History</i>
<i>...</i>	<i>...</i>

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Chairperson

11-2-86
Date

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The lessons I learned as a graduate student and teaching assistant within the History Department have greatly aided my professional growth outside the "gates of the academy." This thesis is a tribute to my professors and their efforts to instill in students professional insight, courage, and dedication to history. One professor in particular, Dr. Jo Ann Carrigan, deserves my greatest debt of gratitude. As my mentor, teacher and friend, she has provided patient wisdom and steadfast direction during the rugged course of my academic and professional career. I only hope that this thesis satisfies her insistence on "evidence of a mind at work." A special note of thanks is due to Dr. Jerold Simmons to whom I often turn for personal, academic, and professional support. I am also grateful that Dr. Orville Menard of the Political Science Department agreed to serve on my thesis committee.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge persons outside of the academy who have provided personal aid and support. In fond remembrance, I dedicate this work to my uncle, Jerry Jensen, with whom I discovered my love of history, and to my grandparents, August and Margaret Jensen, from whom I learned all things are possible. To my family, especially, my mother, Jane, and my father, Richard, who often puzzled over but always supported my life's choices, I offer deepest love and affection. To Michael O'Connor, who opened

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Preface

Present-day historians are extremely fortunate. Increased public interest in history has afforded historians the opportunity to expand their professional influence and convey their scholarship through new forms of communication. In order to satisfy a public hunger for history, historians must learn to use information methods rooted in popular appeal and leisure-time activities. Among the current options, the display of linear history and material culture through exhibitions is one of the most overlooked and understudied areas in public history.

The retelling of history through the medium of the museum exhibition can be a highly rewarding yet intellectually frustrating experience for a historian. The exhibition process holds the heady promise of reaching thousands of viewers with the historical message the historian desires to convey. No classroom, scholarly article, or professional conference allows a historian's ideas so much exposure in so short a time. Undoubtedly, on any given topic a trained historian could easily prepare an article or monograph that educates, enlightens, and sometimes amuses a reading public. Can that same historian describe a historical era or subject, its themes, individuals, and contributions to the history of the American past in seventy-five words or less? What if no words were available and the historian could only portray a historical era in sight, sound, and touch?

This thesis, "The Boys Town Hall of History: A Case Study in Public History and Exhibition Methods," will examine many aspects of "doing history" through material culture studies and historical exhibitions. Chapter One will explore the evolution of the field of social history and its future as a guiding force in the study and display of material culture. The chapter will describe how social history as a field has "cycled" toward the study of material culture and its importance for the closure of the "information gap" present in museums and historical exhibitions.

Chapter Two of the thesis will present methods and processes involved in conceptualizing and writing history for public exhibitions. Emphasis is placed on the importance of history, not objects, as the focal point of an exhibition. It will be argued that historians can change past "history exhibits" from mere displays of material culture into carefully conceptualized historical exhibitions of informational value to the public. As a remedy, the thesis will offer ways in which historians can direct the presentation of historical images and information in an exhibition. The discussion will be accompanied by an extensive description of the processes necessary for the conceptualization, research, development, and implementation of an exhibit storyline. Attachments show the evolution of the Boys Town Hall of History through its various stages of planning and implementation.

Chapter Three will contain an expanded, annotated version of the historical script conceived for the Boys Town Hall of History in an exhibition catalog format. The chapter will discuss the potential of

a catalog to "exhibit" historical information through the written word. Two conclusions are presented for the "exhibition catalog" in an attempt to convey the limitations often placed on history written for the public. In addition to a typical catalog ending, the "Epilogue" offers a more scholarly appraisal of the history of Boys Town.

Throughout this thesis, special attention will be given to the limitations, caveats, and rewards of "doing history through artifacts." Chapter Four will attempt to outline some of the difficulties faced by historians engaged in the practice of public history. The chapter will also examine material culture studies and historical exhibitions as avenues for scholastic and professional growth both in and outside of the academy.

Finally, it is hoped that this thesis will act as a useful guide for historians interested in "doing history" through exhibitions. The larger goal of this work, however, is to aid historians to refocus their present vision of history to include items of the three-dimensional past.

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Chapter One

Social History: Cycling Into A New Dimension

In the 1960s, the field of history as an academic discipline experienced radical change and growth. Influenced by the pre-World War II French Annales School of historical thought, many American scholars rejected the endless rehash of history in narrow political terms and turned their attention to the social causation of significant events and trends.

According to historian Carl N. Degler, "The 'remaking of the content of the American past' occurred as a result of 'the new self-consciousness among various social groups during the 1960s. In his 1980 presidential address before the Organization of American Historians, Degler asserted that "social history has become the most prominent subfield within the discipline, even overshadowing and [reshaping] political history."¹ Heightened consciousness of social groups and their interaction provided a new rhythm to historical studies dominated not by, in annalists' terms, l'histoire événementielle, the history of events, but by the longue durée, history of the long span of time.²

¹Carl N. Degler, "Remaking American History," Journal of American History 67 (June 1980), 9-10.

²Fernand Braudel, On History (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 27.

One of the leading Annalists, Fernand Braudel contended in his 1958 essay, "History and the Social Sciences," that current scholarship in history had evolved into three distinctive categories. As described by Braudel, the categories encompassed ". . . traditional history, with its concern for . . . individual and the event, . . . the new economic and social history put[ting] cyclical movement in the forefront of its research . . . : [and] . . . a history to be measured in centuries . . . , the history of the long, . . . the very long time." The longue durée, according to Braudel, "for a historian . . . entails a readiness to change his style, his attitudes, a whole reversal of his thinking, a whole new way of conceiving of social affairs." French Annalists such as Braudel, Lucien Febvre, and Emmanuel LeRoy LaDurie advocated the employment of other academic disciplines including geography, anthropology, sociology, and psychology to achieve the "plurality of social time . . . the instant of time and time which flows only slowly."³

The "new" American social historians adopted the philosophy of the Annalists to reveal the "totality" of community and group histories. The brevity of American history, however, limited the ability of social historians to investigate their subjects over the longue durée. Unable to review the American past in terms of the slow movement of centuries, the "new" historians opted for the faster-paced cyclical interpretation of social change. Historian Peter N. Stearns defined the rhythm of "new" social history as one "uncomfortable with events." In his article, "The New Social History: An Overview," Stearns asserted that social

³Ibid., 26-27, 33.

historians "deal . . . with processes, with distinctive trends within the period they mark out." In agreement with Braudel's views, Stearns proposed that the cyclical or process approach promoted the greatest change in traditional history. The "new" social historian strove to realign time, not within the narrow scope of political eras or events, but in terms of human development and change.⁴

To study "history from the bottom-up" or "the history of ordinary people and events" required the new social historians to reevaluate and redesign the types of tools traditionally used to unearth a body of historical research and thought. The mass of information gleaned from private, governmental, and corporate records required a mathematical or "quantified" method of organization in order to interpret its importance to the history of a social group or organization. Many historians adopted the use of statistical methods and computer technology in pursuit of their work. As the case with their Progressive Era predecessors such as Charles Beard and Carl Becker, social historians welcomed "scientific" approaches to research and reporting history.

The "research methods revolution" posed by social historians renewed scholarly debate on the validity of history as a "social science." "Pure" scientists such as physicist/philosopher Karl Popper long had objected to the "subjective" and "impressionistic" nature of history. In 1966, Popper went as far as to pose the question, "Has

⁴Peter N. Stearns, "The New Social History: An Overview," in Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History, edited by James B. Gardner and George Rollie Adams (Nashville, Tennessee: The American Association for State and Local History, 1983), 6.

History Any Meaning?" in his work, Open Society and Its Enemies, and answered that "history has no meaning." Popper's central defense for his position stemmed from his belief that historians do not employ any valid scientific methods in the formulation of historical conclusions. The absence of a testable hypothesis rendered, in Popper's opinion, all historical interpretation academically null and void. Popper belittled the importance of history and declared it to be "selective," "trivial," and concerned with the presentation of "moral perspective" in its interpretation of events.⁵

Historian Burleigh Taylor Wilkins directly disputed Popper's assertions in Has History Any Meaning? A Critique of Popper's Philosophy of History, and stated that "Popper has erred not in giving too much to science but in giving too little to history." Wilkins implied in his work that historians do use "scientific methods" but "as a rule without being aware of them."⁶ The crux of the Popper-Wilkins debate lay not in the failure of history to doggedly adhere to specific scientific methods but in its inability to identify and verify the logical process employed by historians in their studies.

Identification of the logical process involved in historical interpretation has plagued and continues to plague many historians. French Annales historian Marc Bloch in his work, The Historian's Craft,

⁵Karl R. Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies; The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath, vol. 2 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962), 259-80.

⁶Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, Has History Any Meaning? A Critique of Popper's Philosophy of History (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), 29.

equated the dilemma to that of "a journeyman who has long handled the ruler and the level, without imagining himself to be a mathematician."⁷

In 1932, historian Carl Becker declared that the solidity of facts served as the "scientific" root of historical inquiry and that "The secure foundations of . . . logic have been battered to pieces by the ascertainable facts"⁸

In an attempt to formalize the logical process employed by historians, David Hackett Fischer stated in Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logical Historical Thought that:

The logic of historical thought is not a formal logic . . . [comprised] . . . of Aristolien syllogisms, or Ramean dialectics, or Boolean equations. Nor is it precisely an inductive logic, like that of Mill or Keynes or Carnap History is, in short, a problem-solving discipline. A historian is someone . . . who asks an open-minded question about past events and answers it with selected facts which are arranged in the form of an explanatory paradigm.⁹

The "new" social historians' use of computers and statistical methods to answer "open-minded question[s] about past events" theoretically eliminated subjectivity and provided a scientific and logical framework for historical studies. In his work, The Historian and the Computer, socio-techno historian Edward Shorter maintained that quantification broadened the base for historical studies and eliminated the need for selective profiles of representative individuals to illustrate

⁷Marc Bloch, The Historian's Craft (New York: Random House, 1953), 19.

⁸Carl Becker, The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), 25-26.

⁹David Hackett Fischer, Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1970), xv.

historical change over time.¹⁰ The "new" social historians such as Shorter maintained that the use of computers and quantified methods made possible the previously unwieldy historical task of studying the many facts of many people.

Battle lines drawn, traditional historians rose to defend narrative and representative history against the attack of "pure scientists" and the "new non-traditionalists." In 1961, historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. forcefully asserted that "almost all important questions are important precisely because they are not susceptible to quantitative answer." Critical of the desire of the "new" social historian to deliver visible proof on all questions of history, Schlesinger maintained that the "spirit" of an era should reign supreme in historical studies.¹¹

After twenty years of wrestling with the dilemma to quantify or not to quantify, historians seem to agree that all historical data, whether gathered through "scientific" or "non-scientific" methods, must be employed to learn the "total" history of a subject or group. In addition to the political, economic, and social facets of a historical question, recent scholars have recognized the need to include the human factor in their studies.

Historian Peter Stearns asserted in his essay, "The New Social History," that "the first excitement surrounding the surge of social history . . . centered on the claim that the common folk--not just the

¹⁰Edward Shorter, The Historian and the Computer (Englewood Hills, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Co., 1972), introductory chapter.

¹¹Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Humanist Looks at Empirical Social Research," American Sociological Review (December 1962), 771.

movers and shakers of politics or intellectual life--have a vibrant past and contribute to larger historical processes." But social history remained incomplete, according to Stearns, until historians realized the need to "deal both with behavior and with values and attitudes" in the study of a group or organization.¹² In order to achieve a new historical synthesis between people and the meaning of their actions, historians will be required to grapple with the non-tangible issues raised by subjects such as age, folk-tradition, superstition, belief, and political culture.

Whether defined in the whimsical terms of the Traditionalists' "spirit of history" or in the complex Annalists' l'histoire mentalités, social historians must examine human motivation in partnership with quantifiable data. The insertion of non-quantitative considerations does not dismantle the field of the "new" social history but, instead, demonstrates its importance and flexibility as an academic discipline. The inclusion of non-tangible elements of human behavior aids historians in the removal of the one-dimensionality of quantitative methods and subjective interpretation. Human motivation and material culture studies provide American historical scholarship with the basis to achieve the Annalists' ideal of the longue durée or the totality of history.

Social history is once again on the threshold of change in another direction. It is change prompted by internal academic need and public demand. Historians need to study the public in order to supply answers to the questions of human behavior and culture. To relate to the public,

¹²Stearns, "The New Social History," 3-4.

historians must first learn a new language; a language, not understood in words, but in sights, sounds, thoughts, emotions, and dimension. Historians must become fluent in the "new" language in order to relate their findings back to the studied public. If historians choose not to master the "new" language, the public will look elsewhere for its interpretation of history and its meaning in their lives.

The public thirst for knowledge of history and its place within it is growing at an accelerated rate as a result of the recent information and communication revolution. Whether through television, film, exhibitions, or the printed word, history is a hot commodity being dealt with by inexperienced traders and sellers. The inaccessibility of the "ivory tower" historian has propelled antiquarians, "buffs," and "public relationists" into the lead as the interpreters and disseminators of historical information and culture.

Not all historians have shied away from a closer association of historical scholarship with public interests. In 1932 historian Carl Becker warned his colleagues of the education and information gap which had formed between history scholars and the public. In an inspired presidential address to the members of the American Historical Association, Carl Becker maintained that history must be reduced to its lowest terms in order that "Mr. Everyman" could understand and realize his place within it. Becker defined history as "the artificial extension of the social memory" and argued that scholars should be "Mr. Everyman's historian as well as our own." In his address, Becker foreshadowed the public rejection of a history profession mired in its own ivy:

Berate him as we will for not reading our books, Mr. Everyman is stronger than we are, and sooner or later we must adapt our knowledge to his necessities But we do not impose our version of the human story on Mr. Everyman; in the end it is rather Mr. Everyman who imposes his version on us If we remain too long recalcitrant Mr. Everyman will ignore us, shelving our recondite works behind glass doors rarely opened.¹³

Several questions arise upon review of the current relationship between historians and the public. One wonders why historians have taken so long to examine history in terms of society. What factors prompted academic historians to isolate themselves and their scholarship from the public? Finally, why have historians failed to satisfy the "grass-roots craving for the past?" Left to its own designs, the public has turned to non-professionals who have created a sub-profession within the field of history distinguished by unconventional methods and practices. Skeptics have only to look to the popularity of history-related television series, films, novels, festivals, games, and social clubs for evidence of the existence and potency of the new sub-profession. Much of the public, consciously or unconsciously, searches for an identity or affinity with the history that they find at hand. Closer examination of the public perception and arrangement of history illustrates, in part, why humans embark on individual and group discoveries of the past.

Identity within time begins with individual choice. Each person, knowingly or unknowingly, decides to explore the issue of his or her existence. For some, discovery of individual historical identity comes

¹³Carl Becker, "Everyman His Own Historian," American Historical Review 2 (January 1932), 231, 235.

after a journey of the self highlighted by personal revelations such as the tortured assertion of Rene Descartes, "I think therefore I am." For most individuals, personal historical identification is achieved through social and cultural interaction. The alignment of humans into groups occurs for many reasons including birth, geography, economics, politics, and, most importantly, interest. Groups achieve identity with the past by the creation of social and cultural systems intended to remain intact in the future. The establishment of social and cultural "signposts" and "mirror images" within a group aid in subsequent individual explorations in search of the historical self.

In 1980, historian Carl Degler defined public interest in the past as "All human beings seek[ing] to locate themselves in the stream of time; it is history after all, that provides a sense of personal identity by being the memory of one's neighborhood, community, nation, race, ethnicity or gender."¹⁴ French historian Germaine Bazin in his work, The Museum Age, suggested that the individual search is a reaction to the uncertainty created by "absolute time." Tribal people through ritual and myth eliminated the search for self, dictating that "individual human existence becomes, then so intimately integrated with that of the group that it is seen as part of a natural, universal continuum." According to Bazin, "The burden of time increased when humanity became conscious of individual destiny--of secular destiny--holding itself responsible for its own actions, when the individual disengaged from the

¹⁴Degler, "Remaking American History," 22.

group thought of himself as cause and no longer just as effect."¹⁵ Contemporary illustrations of social history bear out the assertions of Bazin. As established by historian Perry Miller, seventeenth-century Puritans developed a complex theological epistemology to justify their historical existence within "life eternall (sic)." To the Puritans, history remained "a mappe and shaddow of the spiritual estate of the soules of men."¹⁶ To cope with the demands of nineteenth and twentieth century urban, technological and industrial change, Americans created "mental maps" and their own "sense of place" to establish order and stability in their disrupted lives.¹⁷

The efforts of humankind to discover its place in time stimulated a view of history based on romantic notion instead of studied thought. As summarized by Bazin, "When the present become[s] unbearable, there are two means of escaping it: the past and the future." In a nostalgic return to the past, "Man consoles himself for what he is by what he was."¹⁸ The information and education gap created by scholars increased the tendency of the public to view its history in nostalgic and often

¹⁵ Germaine Bazin, The Museum Age (New York: Universe Books, 1969), 5-6.

¹⁶ Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1939), 228.

¹⁷ Urban Geographer Kevin Lynch introduced the theory of "environmental imaging" as a means by which urban dwellers identify and structure their living patterns in his work, The Image of the City (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1960). Many urban geographers and historians have employed the term "mental maps" to describe the urban imaging theory pioneered by Lynch.

¹⁸ Bazin, The Museum Age, 6.

mythical terms. Without a comprehensive "studied past" to view and understand, the public rooted its historical expectations in subjectivity, escapism, and a desire to be entertained.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Americans built large monuments and held spectacular expositions and fairs to pay tribute to their gargantuan sense of history. Universities, libraries, and museums survived the philanthropic excesses of the Victorian Age to establish identities as educational and cultural institutions worthy of public participation and monies. Only the museum, however, held the exciting promise of exhibiting history beyond the confines of the written word.

In their work, Museums U.S.A., authors Herbert and Marjorie Katz theorized that the rise of American museums paralleled the development of democratic ideals within American society: "The treasures of Europe were still in the private possession of princes and kings; but a group of American patriots had already begun to collect and put on to view, for the enjoyment of people, objects illustrative of their country's brief past."¹⁹ Eighteenth-century Americans organized these fledgling "treasure houses" through individual pursuits in collection, study, and display primarily in the areas of military and natural history. Often persons with mutual interests banded together to form a "society" dedicated to the display of the objects they had collected. Many societies operated out of the home of one of its willing members until funding and

¹⁹ Herbert and Marjorie Katz, Museums U.S.A. (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965), 4-6.

public interest could be secured for larger quarters. Many contemporary state historical societies, house museums, and historic sites evolved as a result of individual and group interest in a subject of history.²⁰

In the eighteenth century, however, only a few societies grew beyond their original purpose as a "warehouse" for historical documents and objects. Notable exceptions such as the Tammany Society of New York City or Charles Wilson Peale's "The American Museum" in Philadelphia provided the impetus for the exhibition of objects on a grand scale for the education and amusement of the public. In 1790, the Society of Tammany received New York City Council approval to utilize a room in City Hall for the purpose of displaying "all that could be found of Indian literature in war-songs, hieroglyphic writings on stone, bark, skins, etc." for an admission price of two shillings. The Tammany Society signed over the rights to the displays in 1795 for their eventual reorganization into the "New American Museum" in 1816. Located in larger quarters in New York City Hall, the museum offered:

. . . space for a lecture hall and demonstrations of a more or less scientific nature. In the center of a large room containing a forest scene in which eighty mammals, snakes and birds were realistically displayed Nearby, a gallery displayed minerals, ancient coins, and thousands of shells and butterflies. Crowds flocking in to the tune of "Yankee Doodle" played by a brass band paid twenty-five cents for the privilege of viewing the wonders.²¹

P. T. Barnum biographer, Neil Harris outlined the importance of early "curiosity" exhibitions such as The New American Museum:

²⁰Ibid., 4.

²¹Ibid., 6.

American museums were not in the Antebellum period segregated temples of fine art, but repositories of information, collections of strange or doubtful data. The American Museum, as well as Barnum's elaborate hoaxes, trained Americans to absorb knowledge Onlookers were relieved from the burden of coping with more abstract problems.²²

The "cabinets of curiosities" and their displays provided the nostalgic and mythical escape sought by New Yorkers to alleviate the pressures and struggles inherent in contemporary urban living.

In the late nineteenth century, the victorian pomposity of the world fairs and expositions transformed the display of history from the visually stimulating and pleasing arrangements of unexplained objects to the organization and exhibition of cultural statements on an enlarged scale. Historians such as Alan Trachtenberg in his work The Incorporation of America have commented on the effects of turn-of-the-century fairs and expositions in the shaping of culture and character within American society.²³ Americans desired more than entertainment from history displays; they expected visual revelations and the discovery of the historical self. Illustrative of the nineteenth-century public

²²Quoted in Harold K. Skramstad, Jr., "Interpreting Material Culture: A View from the Other Side of the Glass," Material Culture and the Study of American Life, ed. by Ian N. G. Quimby (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1978), 77.

²³Many cultural historians have demonstrated the importance of turn-of-the-century fairs and expositions on the formation of mass cultural values and trends in early twentieth century American society. In addition to Alan Trachtenberg's The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), see David F. Burg, Chicago's White City of Eighteen Ninety-Three (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1976) and R. Reid Badger, The Great American Fair: The World's Columbian Exposition and American Culture (New York: Nelson-Hall, 1979).

quest for historical identification through culture, Harold Skramstad in his article, "Interpreting Material Culture: A View From the Other Side of the Glass," quoted the impressions of author Henry Adams upon viewing the 1893 Columbian Exposition: "Jostled by these hopes and doubts, one turned to the exhibits for help, and found it Historical exhibits were common, but they never went far enough; none were thoroughly worked out."²⁴ In addition to setting popular cultural trends, the fairs and expositions established public expectations for the display of historical information and objects. Historical objects could no longer be exhibited for their own sake. The public required interpretation of an item in terms of its significance to their past, present, and in some instances, future existence.

The popularity of world fairs and expositions led to the development of permanent institutions dedicated to the exhibition of human art and history. As described by Herbert and Marjorie Katz, "nothing in all of Europe suggest[ed] the way in which the museums of America, in a democratic response to a general demand, spread from coast to coast."²⁵ Twentieth-century "progressive" urban dwellers saw museums as a device to instill in the laboring masses a reverence and respect for history and "culture." The "uplifting" encounter experienced by immigrants upon viewing museum exhibits would aid in the erasure of their cultural differences and ease their transition into American society. Museums, however, did not fulfill the early twentieth-century promise to serve as a

²⁴Skramstad, "Interpreting Material Culture," 178.

²⁵Katz, Museums U.S.A., 5.

"social instrument" for the enlightenment and instruction of the American public. The fault rested not with the progressive supporters and philanthropists but with the museums themselves. Few Americans identified with the European high-style of the exhibits organized by museum curators and staff. As explained by museum critic Theodore Low:

The progressive ideas expressed by many of the founders of both our large and our small museums testify to the fact that the institutions which they were establishing were destined to play an important part in community life It was logical that newly born museums should concentrate their initial attention and effort on physical growth Instead of temporarily postponing the fulfillment of their duties to the community, they became hypnotized by the charms of collecting and scholarship.²⁶

Curators participated in the Neo-Classical orgy of the early twentieth century to uphold the reverence of European ideals and failed to "realize . . . that there could be such a thing as a museum with distinctly American characteristics."²⁷ As the guardians of culture, museums lost sight of needs of the masters they intended to serve. As a result, early twentieth-century Americans abandoned the cold classical beauty of urban museums and forged a popular culture based on the hot-blooded appeal of lavishly-decorated amusement parks and movie palaces.²⁸

²⁶Theodore L. Low, The Museum as a Social Instrument (New York: The Association of American Museums, 1942), 9.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸For an extensive examination of the history of amusement parks and their role in shaping American mass cultural values see: John F. Kasson, Amusing the Millions (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978)⁴. Patrick

In the decades since World War II, history museums have attempted to woo back the public with complex exhibition techniques. Designed to "interact" with as well as educate, the displays often astound instead of inspire the museum-going public. Jacques Barzun and other enthusiasts of the "new" exhibition techniques using "light, shapes, colors, sounds, touches, and smells" believe the displays "to be our simultaneous instructors, converging on the expanded psyche, filling the gaps in our attention, reproducing without effort from us the totality of experience."²⁹ One questions the validity of any experience that is so "total" as to leave little room for emotional response or reflective thought. Regardless of its "new wrappings," few history exhibitions pass the dual test of public interest and scholarly praise. The new "hands-on," "interactive," "computer-generated" and "abstract" exhibition techniques, at best, invade briefly into the attention span of the museum-going public and, at worst, represent a contemporary rearrangement of Mr. Barnum's "curiosities" cabinets.

Museum exhibitions fail when unable to provide a meaningful interpretation of history through a popular display of material culture.

Bratlinger in his work, Bread & Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983) offers an interesting chapter entitled, "Crowd Psychology and Freud's Model of Perpetual Decadence," 155-83, outlining the development of mass culture as "unconscious action" to alleviate "the anxieties produced by the frustrations of mass living." Bratlinger, unlike Kassan, does not see crowd-forged leisure activities as an enrichment of societal culture but as a path for cultural sterility and decay.

²⁹ Address by Jacques Barzun in Exploration of the Ways, Means, and Values of Museum Communication with the Viewing Public: A Seminar (New York: The Museum of the City of New York, 1967), 77.

Museums are not entirely at fault for the informational bankruptcy of history exhibitions. Traditionally, academic historians have shunned the importance of material culture for the study and display of history. Their involvement, for the most part, in the conceptualization, planning, execution, and review of history exhibits has been peripheral and consultative. In an effort to remain abreast with changing trends in contemporary popular culture, museum curators spend their energies collecting and preserving, leaving little time for research and interpretation of the gathered items.

Scholars employed in museums seem to perceive the "exhibition education gap" with greater intensity than their academic colleagues. Historian and Smithsonian Institution Curator Edith Mayo contended in her article, "Connoisseurship of the Future" that the academic education of curators ". . . should be based on the same grounding in historical disciplines, with additional emphasis on training in . . . historical and cultural trends."³⁰ In 1968, Wilcomb Washburn, Director of the Smithsonian Institution's Office of American Studies, posed the question, "Are Museums Necessary?" in a critique of museum practices. He questioned the emphasis placed by museums on the procurement of objects without regard for their adequate interpretation and valuation as items of material culture. In his article, Dr. Washburn cited the gap between museum material culturists and academic historians and the informational void present in many museum collections. He suggested that museums

³⁰Edith Mayo, "Connoisseurship of the Future," Twentieth-Century Popular Culture in Museums and Libraries (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1981), 13, 15.

alter current policies of continued collection to include the development of visual retrieval systems for the research and scholarship of collected items. In 1984, Dr. Washburn once again heralded the interpretational crisis found in history exhibitions and asked, "Why are the ideal and the real so far apart in the museum world?" In his article, "Collecting Information, Not Objects," Washburn established that museum professionals overvenerated conservation and display relative to the importance and meaning of an object within a historical era. Until museum professionals learn that an object should serve as an illustrative prop, not the central character, the informational and educational gap will continue in historical exhibitions.³¹

Historian Thomas Schlereth, a "cross-over" academic and museum material culturist, presented the other side of the issue of the informational crisis within historical exhibitions in his 1985 essay entitled, "Social History Scholarship and Material Culture Research." Schlereth stated that:

Academic social historians have tended to write only for other fellow specialists, showing little interest in disseminating their data, methods, and conclusions outside the academic compounds of the universities. By a curious irony, an elite that has sought to study the history of the masses has been reluctant to translate its research to a wider professional audience, much less the general populace.³²

³¹Wilcomb E. Washburn, "Collecting Information, Not Objects," Museum News (February 1984), 5, and "Are Museums Necessary?", ibid. (October 1968), 9-10.

³²Thomas Schlereth, "Social History Scholarship and Material Culture Research," Material Culture: A Research Guide (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 158.

An increase in the participation of academic historians in the museum field, particularly in the areas of storyline development and label writing, could aid in the installation of exhibitions organized around historical themes and ideas instead of objects. The challenge for historians will lie in their ability to incorporate three-dimensional objects, materials, images, documents, and audio-visual media as the illustrators of their linear knowledge.

Many historians have already escaped the confines of the university classroom for careers in the growing field of public history. Faced with the academic employment crunch of the early 1970s, many historians sought and found a place for their research and writing skills within the public and private sectors. Employment in business and historical archives, historic preservation, urban planning, and editing and publishing provided individuals with a somewhat different approach to studying history apart from the academy. Though work in public history involves certain limitations on access, research, and reporting of materials in corporate and government archives, the field has greatly showcased the versatility and utility of a historical education. Even within this fledgling "cross-over" field of public history, however, the historian rarely breaks with the tradition of the linear format of historical reporting. Public historians may sport a new gray flannel suit but they still wear the same old hat.³³ Academics bemoan shrinking teaching and scholarship opportunities, public historians are limited by their

³³Reference to the title of the article by Candace Floyd, "The Historian in the Gray Flannel Suit," History News 39 (May 1984), 5.

employers' time and money, and museum professionals search for solutions to their information retrieval crisis. When viewed as a whole, the history profession continues to employ outdated methods in its presentation of historical information to the public.

This all leads to the question of who is minding the store of available historical information when the public comes to shop? If left on their own, what items of information do people take with them when they leave? Most importantly, are the shopkeepers doing all that they can do to serve the public effectively? Generally, when people go to shop for history, they do not pull from the shelf Toynbee's multi-volume History of the World, pop some popcorn, and settle in for the night. Of the published options presented by academic historians, only those subjects which deal with war, technology, and geneology seem to sell. Social history becomes fodder for romantic and "popular" novelists, whose works, grounded in myth and nostalgia, are cranked out in frightening proportions.

Fortunately, when most individuals feel the need to enlighten themselves, their children, and friends on a topic of history they will visit a museum or historical society. If they are met with an unexplained artifact, or worse, lengthy labels decipherable only by their author, the public will once again retreat to the fiction bookshelves and television "mini-series" for their orientation to the past. Unquestionably, the primary role of a historian is to educate the public about the past. In 1958, museum director and designer Lothar P. Witteborg declared that education is the single most important function of a

museum and its exhibitions.³⁴ Historian Jacques Barzun in 1967 went so far as to suggest that "the school, the museum, the lecture"³⁵ were the primary forms of educational contrivance in contemporary society. With education as their common goal, academics and museum professionals must join ranks in order to insure the accurate display and dissemination of historical information to the public. More simply, academics have the seeds while museums have the equipment and fields for sowing.

The central difficulty in the organization of a historical exhibition is the arrangement of linear fact with three-dimensional objects to create an educational and informational experience beneficial to the public. It is within this process that many exhibit historians fail to deliver to the public the historical message they intended to send. To interest and involve the public, historians must structure historical ideas and themes in a thoughtful yet entertaining method. An exhibition should lead the public on an easy journey enroute to a higher plane of historical understanding. Frustrated in efforts to present complex historical themes and ideas, many exhibitions surrender their educational and informational potential to the false gods of display technology and design. The resolution of the "exhibition information gap" remains within historians' grasp if they are willing to work for its closure. Historians need only to apply the skills and standards required of academic scholarship joined with an appreciation of

³⁴Lothar P. Witteborg, "Design Standards in Museum Exhibits," Curator 1 (January 1958), 29.

³⁵Barzun, "Exploration of the Ways," 74.

material culture to aid in the completion of meaningful historical exhibitions. The greatest challenge lies in developing popular formats and arrangements of complex historical themes and ideas. Historian Jacques Barzun commented on the difficulty of finding "a radical remedy" for the "common anesthesia" when faced with efforts to educate the public:

Well, the 20th Century is committed to education, and that effort is often the chief cause of our unhappiness and despair, for education is the worst game of chance invented The best we can do is consider how to fit the teaching to the taught.³⁶

More pointedly, Carl Degler declared in 1980, "I believe that it is our conception of history that the public should also know. For if we can make clear the interpretation of past and present, then the average American will not only have a sounder conception of what we do as historians, but a more exciting, useful and complex idea of the American past."³⁷ Historians have a duty in the conceptualization of exhibits to "fit the teaching to the taught" without sacrificing the integrity of the material presented. Thomas Schlereth stated in his article, "It Wasn't That Simple," that the true problem in achieving educationally significant and accurate exhibitions stems from the oversimplification of historic ideas, trends, and events. As Schlereth noted: "Textbook authors rely on the simple linear order of their chapters to show change over time; museum curators resort to simplistic single factor explanations in exhibitions designed to demonstrate historical change. Both

³⁶ Ibid., 74.

³⁷ Degler, "Remaking American History," 25.

historical genres are prejudiced in methods that show only development, not decline."³⁸ Edward Alexander in his work, Museums in Motion, further commented that: "History is a stream, a sequence, a continuum. The museum, in contrast, is concerned with things. It is basically static. The totem pole is the end product of many hours of work that tells us little of the work itself."³⁹ The task for historians in the preparation of exhibitions remains clear. They must merge their linear perspective of history with the display skills of the museum professionals in order to construct exhibitions rooted in scholarship yet flexible enough to document historical change.

Ironically, the object may provide the common ground from which social historians and material culturists can develop meaningful displays and chart historical change. In their article, "Things Unspoken: Learning Social History From Artifacts," Barbara and Cary Carson stated that: ". . . [as] artifacts and man-made environments are the tools everyone used to engaged in everyday activities, today they can be reused to reveal, once again, the interdependencies and working relationships through which men and women practiced the art of living."⁴⁰ The object

³⁸ Thomas Schlereth, "It Wasn't That Simple," Museum News (February 1984), 62.

³⁹ Edward P. Alexander, Museums in Motion (Nashville, Tennessee: The American Association for State and Local History, 1979), 92.

⁴⁰ Barbara and Cary Carson, "Things Unspoken: Learning Social History From Artifacts," Ordinary People and Everyday Life, ed. by James B. Gardner and George Rollie Adams (Nashville, Tennessee: The American Association for State and Local History, 1983), 195.

will help complete the story as told by the social historians and provide a new "dimensionality" to their studies.

If the key descriptive term for academic historical studies in the 1960s proved to be "quantification," and in the 1970s "cyclical," then it may be projected that the 1980s qualifier will be "dimensionality." For two decades historians have targeted, researched, documented, and written on subjects of society's past. It is now time for them to illustrate their findings. Dimensionality will serve as the "master tool" for historians to convey their message to the public. Material culture provides the solid evidence and an additional source to test and confirm the linear conclusions drawn by social historians. In turn, artifacts will receive a new source of interpretation or "dimensionality" at the hands of historians in search of the broader context of social history.

Some historians will argue that it is not necessary to view or be exposed to an object to assess its historical worth. In 1982, technology historian and museum curator Brooke Hindle offered a differing opinion:

Is there truth inhering in the three-dimensional survivals that is missed when they become mere illustrations, even in exhibits reflecting the best possible historical understanding? . . . three dimensionality is a matter of spatial perspective, through sight, sound and touch of a real tool or machine. The best verbal historian has no possible way of attaining this except after coming in contact with actual technological artifacts.⁴¹

⁴¹Quoted in Schlereth, Material Culture, 11.

"Cross-over" historians such as Cary Carson and Thomas Schlereth contend in their writings that objects work as primary historical sources devoid of the dangers inherent in documentary archives, i.e. altered, incomplete, and/or non-existent records and correspondence.⁴² Surviving objects used in "everyday life" compensate for the absence of documentary evidence left by "ordinary people." In analyzing objects as a primary source of historical information, a historian must avoid the tendency of material culturists to overemphasize the importance of an object because it survived. A historian must conduct a careful survey of the object's place within its classification of other like objects to assess its historical importance. While many social historians will resist the incorporation of material culture into their studies, Peter Stearns believes that the choice will, ultimately, be not theirs to make:

Contemporary historians are at pains to distinguish their research from 'pots-and-pans' history . . . which they saw as too narrow and often too anti-quarian In fact, it is now clear that social historians moved too far away from material culture Within their own ranks, social historians evolve. They extrude new topics, and they switch emphasis, as in the extent of their reliance on quantification or in some renewed attention to material culture, but their basic approach and self-definition are novel no more.⁴³

Social historians, then, have been presented with a new avenue for research and scholastic development. It is hoped that historians will study material culture, not as an academic gold miner intent on

⁴²Ibid., 40.

⁴³Stearns, "The New Social History," 9.

panning out a new field for short-term personal gain, but in the learned manner suggested by Fernand Braudel, in terms of the "long time, the very long time."⁴⁴

Coupled with the motive to study material culture, social historians have also received an invitation to aid museums in their quest to display and explain the items they have so lovingly collected. As Historian and Director of Research for the Williamsburg Foundation, Cary Carson argued that: "Social historians have a clear calling to put that story together into a single, coherent, general account that explains how the fragile social contract of modern civilization has been formed out of innumerable earlier states."⁴⁵

The invitation has been made, the challenge has been set. Historians must go beyond dates, matrixes, and documents and utilize the material culture collected by museums and historical societies to flesh out the stories they have told. They must decipher the information inherent in material culture and interface it with their findings in social history. Historians, then, possess invitation and motivation, two of the three essential elements necessary to achieve dimensionality in their studies. The third element, methodology, serves as both the impasse and the key to the successful dissemination of historical information in a three-dimensional manner.

The absence of literature which outlines academic and public processes for the conceptualization, organization, and development of

⁴⁴Braudel, On History, 27.

⁴⁵Carson, "Things Unspoken," 201.

material culture studies thwarts the orientation of historians to practice in the field. The interdisciplinary nature of the material culture field supplies a partial reason for the dilemma. Historians "doing history" through material culture often join forces with cultural anthropologists, geographers, folk life specialists, linguistic experts, and archeologists. Each academic profession possesses a methodology for cultural exploration unique to its field. Each discipline offers arguments for and against a central methodology in material culture studies. While some scholars believe that a set methodology would limit the participation of multi-disciplines in material culture studies, others such as Dr. Wilcomb Washburn have pointed to a lack of continuity as the cause for the "information gap" within the field.⁴⁶ I believe that the development of a methodology rooted in historical inquiry is crucial to the professional and academic life of the field of material culture studies. The central purpose of this thesis is to present a methodology for the research, conceptualization, and completion of a historical exhibition. In the following chapters, I will relate the methods I have developed and the experience I have gained from "doing history through artifacts" in the development of exhibition storylines, labels, audio-

⁴⁶Dr. Washburn has authored several articles that speak to the informational deficiencies in material cultural studies particularly in the fields of ethnohistory and museum studies. In addition to "Collecting Information, Not Objects," Museum News (February 1984), see Wilcomb E. Washburn, "A Moral History of Indian-White Relations: Needs and Opportunities for Study," Ethnohistory 4 (Spring 1957), 47-57. I had the privilege of discussing several subjects in regard to the current state of material culture studies with Dr. Wilcomb Washburn and Dr. Cary Carson at Williamsburg, Virginia on September 18, 1986.

script writing, display organization, preparation, and implementation. The guidelines that I will propose may be useful to others interested in the public presentation of history in a three-dimensional manner.

Chapter Two

Methods for an Exhibition

The organization of an exhibition is similar to having an existential crisis in reverse: in the beginning there is nothingness. A successful exhibition project requires the detailed consideration of elements including size, space, budget, content and availability of collections, label writing, and design. Essential to all of these elements, however, is the formation of an exhibition's purpose and scope.

Typically, an individual or group forms an idea or desire to display an illustrated story of a historical subject in a public manner. The informational and educational value of a proposed exhibition relies heavily upon the ability of the individual(s) involved to outline and define the purpose and scope of the project. Without a clear concept of how to organize and portray a historical subject in a three-dimensional format, many project directors lose track of their objectives and flounder before completion of the task. Many groups commit the common error of turning to an architectural or interior design firm to provide the "concept" for their project. As a result, many exhibitions lack historical and informational value and provide little more than "window dressing" for objects and themes on display.

Exhibitions are in desperate need of the hands and minds of historians to direct storyline research, organization, and development.

As the backbone of an exhibition, the storyline defines and expands the seminal ideas and themes of its displays. A storyline must be scholarly enough to merit academic praise, interesting enough to hold public attention, and flexible enough to accommodate methods of design. Storyline development requires the synthesis of a linear perspective with the dimensional reality of material culture. Writing a storyline challenges a historian to investigate, define, evaluate, and translate traditional and non-traditional sources of historical information into an exhibition format. For historians, the experience of conceptualizing an exhibition storyline can be frustrating, yet "many . . . consider the intellectual and creative stimulation of developing a major exhibition one of the most important influences on their scholarly career."¹

The central aim of an exhibition storyline is the creation of images rooted in historical scholarship, supported by items of material culture, and housed by elements of design. In order to achieve this goal, historians must organize the ideas and elements of an exhibition into several workable themes or "exhibit sections." Each section plays an integral part in the structure of the entire exhibit but must remain informationally complete enough to stand on its own. The application of this dual standard aids in the identification of weak, disconnected, or unnecessary exhibit sections and keeps alive in the mind of an exhibit's author the adage, "the whole is only as good as the sum of its parts." Immersed in many aspects of a subject, a historian emerges

¹Skramstad, "Interpreting Material Culture: A View From the Other Side of the Glass," 176.

with a plan to display historical themes and ideas with objects and images to complement and replace words.

An exhibitable storyline requires a sharply defined historical perspective and three-dimensional method for public display. It is within the realm of three-dimensionality that many historians retreat from the challenge of exhibit storyline development. Many feel uncomfortable with the prospect of interpreting items and images of material culture, citing lack of scholarly training and experience. In fact, storyline development closely mirrors the process employed by traditional historians to prepare classroom lectures, educational materials, and textbooks. Whether from a lecture, textbook, or exhibition, the public cannot absorb in a short time all of the knowledge acquired by a historian on any given topic. In the translation of complex historical ideas and events, a historian renders a series of value judgments regarding the material to be presented and the audience it is to be presented to. Assessing the scholastic and time limitations of an audience, a historian "tailors" lectures and textbook materials to convey major themes and ideas. In addition, a historian suggests readings and source lists for individuals desiring a more detailed examination of a historical subject.

Exhibits historians apply similar tools when organizing the historical content of a storyline. The central difference between "doing history" in an exhibition as opposed to a classroom lies within the elements of space, budget, and design. A historian must become familiar with the proposed space for a project and budget considerations in order to develop a workable exhibition idea or storyline. The initial

parameters of an exhibition revolve, not around ideas and themes, but the amount of space slated to showcase them. The spatial opportunities available for an exhibition determine the limits of the history to be presented. Obviously, large subjects such as the history of the civil rights movement or the urban development of a community cannot be effectively displayed in a small space. Three-dimensional history needs room to show conflict, change, evolution, and growth. Many historical exhibitions err in trying to tell too big a story within too small a space. As a result, audiences view disconnected displays and ideas and are left to draw major historical conclusions on their own.

Space determines the initial financial considerations for an exhibition. Architectural restoration and space restoration costs (i.e., painting, carpeting, lighting, etc.) dictate how much of the fund remains for exhibit organization, design, and construction. Budgets directly affect the preparation of an exhibition storyline. The amount of monies budgeted for interactive, audio-visual, and mannequin displays outlines the visual options open to a historian to illustrate the content of an exhibition storyline. Surprisingly, budget constraints can aid in storyline development causing a historian to refine and tighten the amount and types of historical information and images to be displayed. Conversely, exhibition budgets should remain flexible to accommodate unanticipated ideas and factors in storyline development and design.

The conceptualization and identification of main exhibit themes and/or sections are achieved in many ways. Some are the product of group effort while others demand individual attention. In most cases,

however, the central ideas of an exhibition are formulated through the blending of individual and group inquiry, research, and production. To insure the proper presentation of the images they have created, historians must stand their scholarly ground in the face of administrative and design changes and demands. It is more difficult to explain how to write an exhibition storyline than to actually produce one. The hardest lesson for most historians to learn is to change their perception of "doing good history." A historian must be willing to explore new avenues in the informational pursuit of a historical subject. Traditionally, a scholar gathered facts from available materials and drew historical conclusions, usually in written form. To answer historical questions pursued, historians present detailed descriptions and citings of fact bound up in lengthy articles and monographs. In their efforts to explain the meaning of many things, academic historians developed a motto, "longer is better." The written word and the printed page provided an endless frontier for the scholarly homesteading of historical ideas and information.

Historians writing for an exhibition and for many forms of public history (such as audio-visual, brochure, report, and grant writing) do not have the luxury of expounding intricate details on a chosen subject. The limits of audience attention, material culture collections, and design technology force historians to convey historic meaning through broader and more visual means. A historian must first ask the key question, "What information is this exhibition trying to deliver to the public?" In an effort to explain meaning through many things, an exhibits historian translates the acquired knowledge of a historical

subject into an abbreviated, visually-oriented format. A central theme or "image" must be defined before the process of illustration through writing and collection can begin.

Many academic historians have raised concerns on the issues of historical imaging and "doing history" for public hire. In 1981, MARHO (Marxist Historians Organization) devoted an entire issue of Radical History Review to the caveats, opportunities, and foibles of doing history for the public. In his hard-hitting and insightful article, Michael H. Frisch warned historians of "the trap of treating historical intelligence as a commodity whose supply they seek to replenish, whether by bringing down the illuminating fire from elite heights or digging mineshafts from the bottom up." To Frisch, the value in public history stemmed from:

. . . seizing an opportunity not nearly so accessible to conventional academic historical scholarship . . . the opportunity to help liberate for that active remembering all the intelligence . . . of a people long kept separated from the sense of their own past.²

Historian John Bodnar in his article in the June, 1986 issue of the Journal of American History agreed with Frisch's "supply-side" estimation of public history:

Historians in the employ of any institution must realize that in the very act of performing their service they are participating in a larger cultural and political process. Their work is not tied

²Michael Frisch, "The Memory of History," Radical History Review 25 (October 1981), 22.

solely to the past but can have express functions for the maintenance of power and influence in the present.³

Both Bodnar and Frisch raised important points regarding the limits and legitimacy of doing history under the employ of private, corporate, or governmental concerns. Having experienced many times as a public historian the frustration of producing history "by committee," I can heartily agree with Bodnar's assessment of the process, and fully understand Frisch's uneasiness with history produced as a means to a paycheck.

At this crucial juncture, I must depart, however, and strongly disagree with academic finger-pointing at the "historical inadequacy" of the fruits of public historians. As a group, public historians have not had the time nor opportunity to reverse two hundred years of badly-displayed American history. In the public sector, non-university historians frequently must dispel the widely-held notion that "anyone can do history." In addition to the pressures of employers' demands and project budgets, often a public historian must defend her or his right to "do history" at all.

Most assuredly, mercenaries in history operate both inside and outside of the ivory tower. I would like to establish that the main issue at hand is not legitimacy of public history but the extent to which historians should compromise their work to satisfy outside interests. Though not a popular assessment, academic scholarship is not immune from compromise. In academic scholarship, as in life, there is

³John Bodnar, "Symbols and Servants: Immigrant America and the Limits of Public History," Journal of American History 73 (June 1986), 176.

no such thing as a free lunch. Academics often select their topics and sculpt their work to suit the demands of students, editors, administrators, fund-granting agencies and colleagues to attain or hold tenure positions within universities. Public historians face the same career pressures to modify their work to appease corporations, designers, bureaucrats, and special interest groups. If a public historian leaves out a historical event or simplifies a theme for display, is it more damaging than academic efforts to bring history to the "level" of the collegiate audience? As proposed by Carl Degler in 1982, academic and public historians must gradually lift the public's "historical consciousness" instead of simply bowing to over-simplification and compromise.

The key to heightened public perception of history lies in the ability of the historian to relate complex themes and ideas in a popular manner without dilution of the message. The public can grasp complicated history if presented in a non-complicated form. By "reexercising" their writing abilities, historians can develop skills for the summation of history using a minimum of words. It is at this point that the most academically maligned form of communication, the development of an "image," can serve as a historian's greatest tool in reaching the public.

The issue of "imaging" historical subject matter has touched off a raging debate among academic and public historians. John Bodnar, in his recent article entitled "Immigrant America and Public History," presented a critical view of the National Park Service and its "act of manufacturing historic symbols." Central to Bodnar's article is his attack on "historians inside and outside the academy (who) engage in

history for hire but seldom discuss the context in which such work is performed or the uses to which it is put." His critical review of exhibitions created through the Historic Sites Act of 1935 maintained that:

Historical complexity was sacrificed for a particular vision of the past. Public historians working for the government rendered regional, minority, or class-related symbols inappropriate for historic preservation by directing their efforts toward prominent structures and patriotic events. As the state moved to preserve its own history, it erased any record of social tension and individual struggles.⁴

Historian Daniel Boorstin in his work, The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America, argued that the rise of the image in American society occurred in direct relation to the decline of ideals. Boorstin believed that twentieth-century advertising, print, and mass media industries spurred a "Graphics Revolution" rooted in image production and icon promotion. Bombarded and manipulated Americans, according to Boorstin, aspire not to reality as it is but to the manufactured reality of images. Historians, in Boorstin's estimation, contributed to the general "mistrust in ideals" by embracing "new" social history research techniques rooted in "statistics . . . norms, modes, medians and averages." The "fact-founded" social historians rejected the humanist-historians' idealized individual portraiture of the past and opted for a "group caricature" lacking in definition and scope. Boorstin further contended that historical images,

⁴Ibid., 147-48.

oversimplified and popular in nature, filled the void left by the removal of idealistic absolutes.⁵

Unfortunately, Boorstin's idealistic alternatives to the morally sterile offerings of "new" social history involve public faith in and scholastic allegiance to debatable terms such as "equality, peace and justice." Regardless of such debates, the reality of public history dictates the employment of simple images to express complex historical ideas. It would seem, then, that the tragedy in historical image-making lies not in the convention itself but in its past use. It remains the responsibility of present and future public historians to unite the "ideals" and the new and complex "facts of history" in the creation of public historical images.

By its nature, an image holds a tremendous potential as a public communication, propaganda, and educational tool. As defined by Boorstin: "An image is synthetic. It is planned: created especially to serve a purpose, to make a certain kind of impression."⁶ In addition to visual images, "verbal" images and their interpretation also stimulate public response and identification. To the history profession's discredit, the historical image has suffered greatly at the hands of overzealous public relations and advertising firms intent on packaging and selling their version of the American Past.

⁵Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America (New York: Antheneum, 1962), 78, 185, 198, 201-03.

⁶Ibid., 185.

In exhibitions, images, not words, leave the most lasting impression on the minds of the visiting public. Too often in the past, historians allowed designers and technicians to create the dominant images of an exhibition. As a result, large objects and graphics have been displayed for their own sake separate from the history trying to be told. If sensitive to the mechanics of exhibition organization and design, historians can direct through their writing the creation and installation of meaningful historical images. As the powerful projection of a thought or idea in visual, verbal, or audio form, an image requires brevity. The challenge for historians lies in their ability to translate complicated issues of the studied past into simple historical images for public exhibitions.

The following case study outlines the methods and skills I employed, as a historian and museum director, to organize and complete the Boys Town Hall of History. Taking into consideration individual style and the changing needs of exhibits projects, the account suggests basic steps for the writing and development of a historical exhibition.

The Boys Town Hall of History stalled for five years as a museum project for want of historical scholarship and storyline direction. In 1979, several administrators, alumni, and friends of Boys Town formed a committee to establish a museum dedicated to the institution's history. The Hall of History Committee assigned various artifact, document, and oral-history-gathering tasks to its members, selected a building site, and commissioned an architectural firm in Omaha, Nebraska, to plan the interior of the museum and its displays. Though well-intentioned and

enthusiastic, the committee members lacked essential historical investigatory and exhibition organizational skills.

An analysis of the 1979 architectural proposal for the Hall of History submitted by Leo A. Daly and Sons, Inc., reveals the lack of historical vision and direction of the project. The committee targeted for renovation the former grade school dining hall as the possible site for the Hall of History, its displays, and offices. Built in 1935, the 20,000 square foot red-brick structure contained a main hall, several smaller dining rooms, and a large kitchen and pantry area. Aesthetically, the building appeared ideal; structurally, it posed serious architectural and financial considerations for successful renovation as a museum space. Closed as a food preparation and dispensary facility in 1973,⁷ the grade school dining hall acquired the problems created by vacancy, i.e., vandalism, water damage, decay, insect and rodent infestation, and structural neglect. Architectural omissions and obsolescence established the need for central heating and air conditioning systems, tuck pointing, and roof, electrical and plumbing repair.

The Daly Plan (Attachment A, page 73), failed to propose workable historical exhibits and concentrated on the renovation of spaces suitable for administrative and visitor service areas. The Daly Plan demonstrated the inability of the architects to determine the historical purpose and scope of the Hall of History. Unfocused and sparse,

⁷The adoption of the family living model of child care at Boys Town in 1974 eliminated the need for two on-campus food preparation and distribution facilities. A lower grade school census and meals taken at home prompted the administrative decision to close the grade school dining hall in 1975.

the proposed main hall exhibits consisted of a hodgepodge of public-relations-oriented displays surrounded by unexplained artifacts, photographs, and graphics. On October 9, 1979, the firm's Vice President, Robert E. Owens, corresponded with Hall of History committee member Tom Burnes to confirm project costs. In his letter, Owens estimated renovation and interior display costs for the Hall of History at \$350,000 and made no special allowances for exhibit research, development, production, and implementation costs.⁸ Without a central historical theme, the Daly firm could not provide a plan attractive or significant enough to warrant approval and completion by the Hall of History Committee. As a result, Boys Town administrative commitment and support for the museum project ebbed. In 1981, interest resurfaced in the Hall of History project. New committee members attempted to identify and collect on-campus items for historical displays. In a memo dated September 29, 1983, a list of committee members' findings included, "the world's largest Stamp Ball, a Coke--not Pepsi--machine, comfortable lounge chairs for elderly visitors and scrapbooks [to be] displayed under glass."⁹ Without a comprehensive storyline to outline the historical importance of what they had found, the committee could find little use for their collection of sentimental junk.

Two factors spurred the formation of a new Hall of History Committee in the fall of 1985. In his ninth year as Boys Town's

⁸Each attachment is lettered and page numbered for reference. They are appended to this chapter following page 72.

⁹Correspondence file, "Pre-1984 Hall of History Correspondence and Plans," Boys Town Hall of History Archives.

Executive Director, Father Robert P. Hupp desired the completion of a substantial display on the history of Boys Town to include an assessment of his administrative era. He directed Boys Town Legal Counsel, John C. Burke, to organize a committee, choose a site, plan, and complete the Hall of History. After committee selection, the newly-appointed members chose to investigate the interior alteration of the Boys Town Music Hall as a potential site for the Hall of History.¹⁰ Erected in 1947, the Music Hall served as a showcase for the talents of the world-renowned Boys Town Choir in the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to entertaining audiences in the interior, the choir performed from a balcony on the exterior face of the Music Hall. National and local radio and television stations broadcasted choir programs and lecture series such as "America's Town Meeting of the Air" featuring as guest speakers novelist James Michener, U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, and Vice President Richard M. Nixon. As in the case of the vacant grade school dining hall, new youth care programs instituted in the early 1970s reduced the exposure of Boys Town students to the public and placed a larger emphasis on family-based leisure activities.¹¹ By 1983, Boys Town administrators welcomed ideas that fostered use of the vacant and near-vacant buildings.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid; see also "Committee List for Hall of History Displays" within file.

¹¹ Father Robert Hupp, Executive Director, Boys Town, interviews with author, March-April, 1984.

¹² Correspondence and Brochures file, "Music Hall," Boys Town Hall of History Archives.

The committee commissioned the Omaha architectural firm of Bahr, Vermeer and Haecker to explore the possible renovation of the Music Hall to house small displays on Boys Town's history. Submitted in January, 1984, the Bahr, Vermeer and Haecker plan (Attachment B, pp. 74-75) suggested the removal of 300 of the 1660 seats in order to level the floor for an exhibits room in the interior of the Music Hall. Reminiscent of the Daly plan, the Bahr, Vermeer and Haecker plan stressed architectural considerations and overlooked historical organization and design of the exhibits. The committee decided to implement the Bahr, Vermeer and Haecker plan and hire a "museum curator" to execute completion of the Hall of History. The decision of the committee to involve a person trained in historical scholarship and exhibit techniques changed the Hall of History project from a hope or a dream into a museum reality.

Hired as the Director of the Boys Town Hall of History project, I received the rare opportunity to recommend an on-campus site and draft a large budget for a sophisticated display of the history of Boys Town. Upon review of the past architectural and committee reports, proposed sites, and Boys Town's historical collections, I recommended that the grade school dining hall be converted into the Hall of History.¹³ In addition to planned exhibits, the vast space and room

¹³Several committee members openly admitted in discussions with the author in late February and early March, 1984, that the Hall of History project was an attempt to save either the grade school or Music Hall from being torn down or turned into administrative offices. When the author joined the Hall of History project in February, 1984, the committee had already begun a campaign called, "Save the Music Hall,"

divisions of the dining hall held great potential for the development of future exhibits, storage, and archival collections facilities. With comparable renovation costs of \$350,000, the dining hall yielded 20,000 square feet of available exhibition space as opposed to the Music Hall's 7,000 square feet. Since neither architectural proposal investigated the costs of exhibit design and construction, the deciding factor for the size of the exhibition rested with my assessment of Boys Town's history and its collections.

As a method to obtain cooperation and support for the project among various members of the Committee, I decided to encapsulate the goals of an exhibition into a single "statement of purpose." A drafted "statement of purpose" provides a synthesis of all ideas of interested parties and determines the parameters of the history to be presented. The statement acts as a "code of ethics" and a deterrent to the tendency of groups to lose sight of the objectives of a project. The purpose of an exhibition statement should be simple, outlining the major objectives of the project. Ideally, it serves as the thesis or central theme of the exhibition storyline. For an example, the statement of purpose drafted for the Boys Town Hall of History established the importance of the placement of Boys Town's history within a national context:

The purpose of the Boys Town Hall of History is to collect, preserve and display documents, artifacts and other memorabilia that depict in a humanistic manner the history of Boys Town and its institutions. The museum's acquisitions,

complete with posters and fundraising brochures, in anticipation of the location of the museum in the building.

collections, programs and displays will acquaint the public with Boys Town's unique contributions to national social reform, child care and adolescent history.¹⁴

Once drafted, the statement of purpose acts as an insurance policy against attempts to substantially modify the storyline content and design during production. Many exhibit projects fail because members, unacquainted with the cost and time factors involved in production, insert objects and information that alter the planned displays. A thoughtful exhibits historian should anticipate subjects of historical controversy and ambiguity and create an exhibit storyline, sound in scholarship, yet flexible to accommodate change. It became my responsibility as historian and director of the Hall of History to guide the committee toward a historically enlightened and sophisticated exhibits plan. I studied the mythicized past and institutional symbols of Boys Town to gain better knowledge of the perspective of the Committee. I reviewed available administrative files to learn the history of the project. I knew my research would provide the essential information necessary to work with the Committee. My studies aided in my knowledge of the purpose or "mission" of Boys Town and the mechanics of the institution's daily operations.

To supplement my archival research, I interviewed committee members to gain historical insights and locate source materials dated prior to 1973. From my discussions, I targeted departments that housed valuable historical youth care and correspondence files. My search revealed

¹⁴Jacqueline McGlade, "Hall of History Initial Report," Boys Town Hall of History (March 1984), 6-7.

a wealth of historical materials highlighted by two newspaper archives, the Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal (1918-1936), the Boys Town Times (1937-1975), 165,000 photographs, two million documents, large scrapbook and newspaper clippings files, historic timelines, oral history interviews, brochures, pamphlets, publications, audio-visual presentations, films, and numerous artifacts which documented Boys Town's history from 1917 to the present. A preliminary survey of the materials supplied important information about Father Flanagan and his family and personal activities prior to 1917.

Badly cared for and scattered across campus, the historical collections had fallen victim to administrative reorganization, elimination, and control. Often items served as "spoils of war" in administrative power struggles, entrenched in departments unaware of their care or worth. The committee met my attempts to consolidate materials for historic preservation purposes with vigorous administrative resistance. A Hall of History committee member voiced his opinion, "We have found the best stuff, why should we spend money to take care of the rest?" My suggestion to donate materials not used in the exhibits, to an interested historical agency, received an equally unfavorable reception. As a result, archival materials at Boys Town hung in administrative limbo, deteriorating and unorganized as in previous decades.

My survey of the documents, photographs, and items of material culture yielded several premises regarding the history of Boys Town. First, I learned that a comprehensive historical study had never been undertaken. Several attempts by commissioned literary authors produced watered-down versions of the history of Boys Town focusing on

"heart-felt" incidents involving Father Flanagan and his boys. One such vanity publication, Father Flanagan of Boys Town, published in 1949, serves as the present-day "official" history of Boys Town.¹⁵ Deprived of a historical sense of identity, Boys Town residents, administrators, and alumni have retreated to the psychological comforts of nostalgia and myth. I realized that my reassessment of their history would be met with institutional resistance, controversy, and skepticism. Academic historians have the luxury of time to change the historical perceptions of a public. As an exhibits organizer, I had three months to suspend disbelief and gain committee support for my reassessment of Boys Town history.

Secondly, I realized that my committee had greatly underestimated contributions of Boys Town to the history of juvenile delinquency and child care. As I studied documents and photographs, I developed a growing academic interest in the early social and child care reform efforts of Father Flanagan. I discovered Father Flanagan's previously unstudied philosophy and activities as a Progressive Era social reformer.

As an academic historian, I realized the importance of a thorough examination of the local and national placement of Boys Town in the history of child care and juvenile delinquency. As a public historian and museum professional, I recognized my responsibility to investigate and present several options or "levels" of history for committee review. It is at this point in an exhibition project that the final parameters

¹⁵William C. and Fulton Oursler, Father Flanagan of Boys Town (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1949).

are determined, not always to the advantage of history. Fortunately for the Boys Town Hall of History, the committee gave its full support for the research, design, and construction of an extensive historical exhibition.

I formed my initial impressions of the history of Boys Town through a survey of the institution's public image and symbols. Ironically, my understanding of the historical value of the symbols prompted me to work for their redefinition and alteration. Countless public relations and advertising firms had attempted to mold the symbols into shapes and phrases, sentimental in tone and value. Boys Town administrators leached the images of historical significance in their quest for public donations and support. I resolved to reinterpret past symbols and create new images rooted in the documented reality of Boys Town history.

Established in 1917 by Father Edward J. Flanagan, Boys Town evolved from an inner-city home for "wayward" boys in Omaha, Nebraska, to the present-day youth care township independent in wealth and resources. In 1938, Boys Town gained fame as the subject of a blockbuster Hollywood film. In 1972, Boys Town gained infamy as the target of a Pulitzer-prize-winning newspaper expose. Both events propelled Boys Town into the national limelight, but with conflicting results. The release of the MGM film, "Boys Town," starring Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney, galvanized the admiration and financial support of several generations for Father Flanagan's "City of Little Men." Increased public attention and donations spurred an astonishing thirty-year period of urban and institutional growth. Despite its mounting wealth,

Boys Town continued to project a national image of a small, struggling hamlet dedicated to the care and education of orphaned boys. In 1972, the bubble burst with the publication of a series of articles by the Omaha Sun Newspapers, which revealed Boys Town's net worth in excess of two-hundred million dollars.¹⁶

Follow-up newspaper and magazine articles directed printed barbs at the misleading nature of Boys Town's donation and public relations materials. In an effort to recoup public support, Boys Town significantly updated its youth care and community services activities to include treatment of ghetto youth, girls, and children with speech and hearing defects.¹⁷ Symbols dominated the public's past as well as present perception of Boys Town and its history. A "mythicized" history of Boys Town which highlighted the saintly, self-sacrificing efforts of its first director, Father Flanagan, permeated public relations activities from 1943-1972.

As the iconoclastic head of Boys Town, the face and words of Father Flanagan emblazon souvenir items such as ashtrays, coffee cups, and postcards, and decorate administrative offices and waiting rooms. For the public, possession of a paperweight, silk pillow, or plaster statue graced with Father Flanagan's image became equated with owning a "piece of the true cross." The religious "Elvis" of his generation, Father Flanagan's popularity as a public icon peaked in the 1940s and

¹⁶"A Tale of Two Cities," Omaha Sun Newspapers, 30 March 1972.

¹⁷For a complete discussion of the 1973 scandal and its effect on the administrative and youth care programs at Boys Town, see Chapter Three of the thesis, 230-42.

1950s. His attributed words, "The work will continue, you see, for it is God's work, not mine," serve as a theological justification for any and all administrative action. The mythical image of Father Flanagan continues to blur present public and historical perspectives of the man and his work.

The dominant symbol of Boys Town's lore, however, remains the figure affectionately referred to as "He Ain't Heavy." The image of a young boy carried on the back of a teenager evolved as Boys Town's main historic symbol through the administrative whims of the moment. In 1921, stationary for the Home featured a stylized drawing of two youngsters with their arms crossed on top of their shoulders in a gesture of friendship and camaraderie. Father Flanagan supplemented the two boys image with photographs of all of his boys lined up or marching in patriotic dress. As the post-World War I fever cooled, Father Flanagan abandoned his military drill images in favor of a photograph of two of his boys taken in the summer of 1921. While on an outing with Father Flanagan and his boys at Omaha's Krug Amusement Park, photographer Louis Bostwick snapped a shot of an unidentified older boy toting a seven-year old polio victim, Harold Loomis, on his back. In 1943, Father Flanagan commissioned a drawing based on the photograph--a young boy, head bent in slumber or exhaustion, carried by an older boy identified by the caption, "He Ain't Heavy, Father, He's M'Brother." The phrase had originated as a caption for a cartoon in an insurance agency newsletter called The Louis Allis Messenger. Father Flanagan secured the right for its exclusive use, added the word, "Father," and presented the

new symbol on all of the institution's promotional and administrative materials.¹⁸

In the 1950s and 1960s, several sculptors and painters presented Boys Town with their versions of the internationally known institutional symbol. One portrait, in heart-rending detail, showed the boys, poorly-clothed, struggling to reach a distant Boys Town through a snowstorm. This serves as the dominant illustration on all of Boys Town's donation-seeking materials from 1951 to the present. Official Boys Town stationary and publications exhibit a more stylized graphic transformed from an older boy with a shapeless figure on his back surrounded by a double-circled "halo" to the present "shadow-contrast" symbol which depicts a vigorous teenager determinedly hoisting a good-sized, seemingly alert youngster on his back. The public relations efforts of present-day Boys Town have transcended the "He Ain't Heavy" symbol beyond its past message of ordinary brotherly love onto a higher, more "spiritual" plane. According to recent administrative translation, "miracles of the heart" occur every day at Boys Town, and the statue embodies the "spirit" of this unseen process. In conclusion, "creative" public relations interpretations substantially altered the "Father Flanagan" and "He Ain't Heavy" images and devalued their significance as symbols of Boys Town's institutional meaning and historical past.¹⁹

¹⁸Brochures and Correspondence file, "He Ain't Heavy" and "Initial and Final Label Copy Files: Hall of History Exhibits." Boys Town Hall of History Archives.

¹⁹"He Ain't Heavy" file and "Initial and Final Label Copy" files. The term, "miracle of the heart" has been introduced by the Boys Town External Affairs Department in several public relations campaigns since

On the whole, Boys Town has maintained a lower national profile since 1973. Boys Town's trustees and board of directors responded to the 1973 financial scandal in a knee-jerk fashion. Over a course of several months, Boys Town Board decisions replaced executive directors, rapidly spent endowed funds, instituted radical program changes, and expanded the youth care system. Highly sensitive to the negative public reaction, Boys Town's public relations policy dramatically changed from aggressive solicitation to that of an inhibited watchdog poised in defense of attack. The Hall of History Committee members transplanted many of the guarded, defensive postures into the organization of the museum's storyline and design. The Hall of History Committee seemed content to cling to Boys Town's "mythicized" past instead of moving toward a clearer historical perspective.

As my last consideration, I searched for a common historical thread important to all potential viewers of Boys Town's history. I found a sincere desire among administrators, students, alumni, and visitors to learn more about the past living experiences of children at Boys Town. Public interest in the daily history of the Home confirmed my belief that community identity and cultural awareness can and should be presented in historical exhibits. In addition to seeking knowledge, exhibit-goers, consciously or unconsciously, place value on the objects or images they have viewed. Often, their only standard of measure of historical value is how those material culture items relate to and give

1985. In 1986, Columbia Broadcasting Company, a subsidiary of Coca-Cola corporation, adopted the term as the title of a made-for-television film produced at Boys Town and aired in March-April, 1986.

insight into the mechanics of their daily lives. It is the responsibility of the interpreters of material culture, i.e. curators, historians, designers, etc., to discover and present historical conflict, change, and comparison to the public through the medium of the exhibition. With all of this in mind, I chose to structure the Hall of History's exhibits around the elements, issues, and occurrences of the past and present everyday life of Boys Town.

As with any academic account, the architecture of an exhibition storyline requires many drafts, thoughtful revision, and careful editing before taking its final shape. Some exhibit sections demand the dual attention of a project historian and designer to determine the informational and visual content of the displays. A historian must orient a designer as completely as possible to the intended scope and themes of an exhibition subject. Supplied with the proper perspective, a designer can more readily determine which exhibit sections require heightened or reduced elements of design. Conversely, a designer should make a historian aware of the visual "statement" that she/he would like to make through elements of design. Devices such as brief "thumbnail" sketches and initial storyline drafts facilitate an awareness between the designer and the historian and consolidate the visual, informational, and intellectual goals of an exhibition. I find it fruitful to include designers in the conceptualization phase of storyline preparation. In addition to a healthy exchange of ideas, it promotes maximum channels of communication during the design and production phases of an exhibition.

After reporting my intentions to portray the history of everyday life at Boys Town to my committee and designers, I set about the task of writing the storyline. The preliminary drafts of the storyline lend insight into the process of exhibition conceptualization, writing, and organization. My first attempt, a historical timeline, supplied little more than a compendium of facts devoid of visual meaning and practical use (Attachment C, pp. 76-77). I abandoned its completion in favor of a scholarly review of topics such as juvenile delinquency, juvenile justice, child care, and early twentieth century social reform groups and reformers. My research greatly aided the placement of the history of Boys Town into a national and local historical perspective.

Armed with a widened sense of juvenile and social history, I returned to the Boys Town documents and discovered images and phraseology reflecting Progressive Era ideals and philosophy. In addition, the documents revealed that Father Flanagan developed a unique style of public presentation and solicitation in tandem with standard early twentieth-century reformist rhetoric. With photographer Louis Bostwick, Father Flanagan apparently staged a series of photographs which depicted the conditions of "street children" living in Omaha in the 1910s. In the style of New York reformer/photographer Jacob Riis, the photographs showed young boys asleep in alleyways, fighting in street brawls, smoking cigarettes, and shooting "craps." Father Flanagan combined the images with phrases such as "saving the wayward boy" and "the boy whom nobody wanted" to strike a sympathetic and generous chord with the public.

A review of reformist literature from 1900-1915 yielded many special insights into the early ideas and actions of Father Flanagan. In an attempt to define the plight of children, Progressive Era reformers such as Hannah Schoff Kent, Judge Ben Lindsey, and William Forbush wrote works which described "the boy problem," "the wayward child," "the dangerous life," and "juvenile delinquency." Through literature, activists called for the reformation of American youth and suggested that "the revolt of modern youth" be checked by juvenile court systems, "boys clubs," and "progressive" detention and care facilities.²⁰ Father Flanagan incorporated such phraseology and proposals in his philosophy and activities with delinquent boys.

As my historical knowledge of Boys Town grew, so did my dilemma of how to conceptualize the exhibition. I had established the central premise of everyday life, while I searched for significant events that had signalled historical transition and change. I resisted the "easy option" to focus the exhibit sections around the lives and administrations of former Boys Town directors, Monsignors Flanagan, Wegner, and Hupp. As a historian, I worried that director profiles would dominate the exhibition at the expense of the everyday life displays. The residential impulse at Boys Town for icon-worship had already been established through its veneration of institutional symbols such as "He Ain't Heavy" and "Father Flanagan." Displays which explain the lives of many, i.e. the boys, through the actions of a few, i.e. the directors, often

²⁰For an extensive listing of Progressive Era reformist literature, refer to the thesis' bibliography.

dilute the public's grasp of complex ideas and themes through "hero worship" historical interpretation. Since I had made it my purpose to redirect the resident and public perception of Boys Town's history, I had to search for methods to present a more realistic and complex view of the institution's cultural and social past.

A public historian must be aware of the dangers of displays which highlight the lives of "great" men or women in history. Too often in exhibitions larger social issues fall victim to an overemphasis on "larger-than-life" historical persons. The inherent difficulty with "great men and women" profiles is where and with whom do you stop? The definition of a "great person" remains too subjective and individualistic for evaluation by an exhibition. I have found that for every one person displayed, there are two more that a committee or group think should also be highlighted. Profiles should act as a punctuation of the themes presented in an exhibit area. They should not dominate or detract from the public's extraction of broader social and cultural issues. I believe that the public views "great persons" displays with a reverential interest but are equally attracted to profiles of "ordinary people" engaged in "everyday life." For the historian, "ordinary persons" profiles act as an important tool to inform and involve an audience with the past. Properly conceived and displayed, the profiles should evoke historical identification and empathy among viewers.

In the conceptual stage, non-museum professionals often draw on past museum experiences to anticipate the final shape of an exhibition. Within the limits of their knowledge, "great persons" exhibits make "great museums." A public historian must consider individual and group

preferences but not let them dominate an exhibition storyline. In my own experience, I will first evaluate an idea in terms of its importance to the history to be portrayed. If inappropriate, it is my job as a public historian to explain to a committee, individual or group my reasoning for its rejection as an exhibitable feature or item of history. On the whole, I have discovered that an exhibit storyline dedicated to the "big picture" of a historical subject provides flexibility for the insertion of material culture items and images. In the case of Boys Town, I informed the committee that the building lent itself to the creation of a separate room devoted to the lives of the institution's former directors. Upon explanation that large visual portraits of the directors would detract from the fulfillment of the exhibition's statement of purpose, the committee accepted my recommendation for the Directors Room. Throughout the project, I discovered that the key to the committee's confusion lay in their absence of historical knowledge and perspective. Once informed, the committee generally accepted my direction in regard to the conceptualization and organization of the exhibition. As I continued to study the history of Boys Town, my consultants drew up a preliminary plan for exhibition design (Attachment D, page 78). In comparison to the previous architectural proposals, the plan substantially increased exhibition areas and decreased administrative and work space areas. An improvement on past plans, the initial design proposal failed, however, in its spatial organization of Boys Town's history. The plan illustrated the results of an exhibition storyline that does not show historical conflict and change. The designers translated the elements of Boys Town's everyday life into

exhibits defined by the number of boys served over time. The design plan established the premise that the only change experienced at Boys Town had been its increasing ability to care for more children. The homogenization of everyday life had created disconnected displays devoid of the personality and texture within historical eras. I rejected the "number of children served over time" approach in favor of a more "layered," in-depth presentation on the history of the institution. The history of Boys Town was not like a fast-food restaurant. It was not important how many children had been served through the youth care programs at Boys Town, but, rather how they had been served. Though I had vetoed its use as a plan for the exhibition, the design plan did determine the function of several spaces including the Directors Room, introductory theatre, office, archival, and work spaces within the Hall of History.

At this point in the project, I confided in my design consultants the storyline dilemma posed by the history of Boys Town. I informed the designers, Jerry Eisterhold and Benjamin Lawless, and the exhibit consultant, Anita Llewellyn, of my reluctance to organize the exhibit around the administrative eras. I told them that I felt a portrait of the everyday life of the children would be overshadowed by displays on Boys Town directors and administrative staff. Unfortunately, the historical evidence documented that significant change and growth within the institution occurred in direct relation to each administrative era. As a group, we decided to brainstorm our knowledge, ideas and perceptions of the project to find a workable solution. Former Director of Exhibitions for the Smithsonian Institution and Primary

Project Consultant, Benjamin Lawless chaired the session. He requested that I give my initial impressions as to "eras" or divisions in Boys Town history. Attachment E, pages 79-81, shows the product of our discussion and, ultimately, the basis for the completed storyline.

To begin, I presented my view that the installation of each director effected the greatest amount of historical change in the pattern of everyday living at Boys Town. The work, education, and leisure activities of the boys reflected administrative programs and "beliefs" instituted at Boys Town for youth reform. As an administration changed, so did the lives of the boys. In addition, I stated my impressions of the Flanagan Era. I suggested that the era be portrayed in several exhibit sections to distinguish between the inner-city and rural periods of Boys Town's historical development. Mr. Lawless drafted an initial historical outline as I and the other consultants gave our impressions of Boys Town's history. As we reviewed the outline, I defined the emerging exhibit sections with themes and titles. As a group, we recalled items and artifacts as possible illustrations for each section. The outline reassured me that everyday life could be housed in the chronology of an administration without diluting its potency as cultural and social history.

Provided with a new exhibit outline, the design consultants discussed an alternate plan for exhibit organization. Though crude, the floor plan sketch of Attachment E demonstrates the increased clarity and direction given to a historical exhibit when organized in a chronological fashion. In discussion of current history of Boys Town, my consultants and I realized that the era identified as 1973-1985 would

require highly conceptualized displays. In addition to explanations of complex youth care programs, the displays would have to compensate for the absence of historical documents and artifacts. The recent era of Boys Town exemplified the problems and concerns exhibit historians have authoring storylines for "current history" or history contained within a short period of contemporary time. Current history lacks the informational depth gained through historical comparison. Without the "test of time," the recent history of institutions, organizations, and corporations often resembles the public relations rhetoric of an annual report. Secondly, current history produces few historically significant material culture items. Only time can sift through the remains of an era and uncover items worthy of historical exhibition.

The exhibits which depicted the current history of Boys Town proved by far the hardest to conceptualize and to gain approval for. The committee could not agree on the focus or content for the recent history displays. The overriding concerns of the committee centered on the size and words for each exhibit area. Indicative of administrative politics, the committee repeatedly changed the displays as youth care programs gained and lost favor over the eighteen months of the project. The issue of inclusion of the 1973 financial scandal in the exhibit storyline presented another major problem. Highly sensitive to its discussion, the committee expressed an overwhelming desire for the exclusion of the scandal from the exhibit. As an academic historian, I realized the tremendous importance of the scandal to the recent history of Boys Town. As a museum director, I worried that its insertion would seriously jeopardize committee support for the entire project.

As a public historian, I believed that the public display of Boys Town's everyday history outweighed the exclusion of a single historical episode. In simple terms, I chose not to "throw the baby out with the bath water." I pursued with the designers methods to show historical conflict and change through design.

To determine the content of the recent history exhibits, my designers and I focused on the simulation of family living situations at Boys Town. The concept of "My Room," a cubicle which exhibited the living and learning experiences of current Boys Town students, provided a sharp contrast to the institutional "dormitory" styled living of previous eras. In "Father Hupp's Living Room," visitors sit in comfortable chairs to view a videotape in which Father Hupp states, "When I arrived in 1973, I found a good home in need of great change." The exhibits make visitors aware that Boys Town has implemented dramatic program changes since 1973 but are not directly informed as to the historic reasons why.

In addition to the 1973 scandal, many innovative ideas for the recent history exhibits fell victim to the conservative nature of the committee. In an attempt to portray the frustrations and experiences of inner-city youth schooled at Omaha's Father Flanagan High School, the consultants and I conceived of an exhibit maze. Visitors would enter the maze and encounter images, audio sounds, and labels which represented the difficulties underprivileged students face to stay in school. Several proposed video presentations such as a documentary which utilized national news footage to describe the Boys Town U.S.A. program drew negative committee reaction. Portrayal of the diagnostic,

research and testing services of the Boys Town National Institute proved an especially difficult task. The highly complex and scientific nature of the Institute's work rendered standard exhibit techniques useless. The exhibit for the Institute required displays that went beyond the limits of graphic and word descriptions. Many interactive displays were suggested based upon six months of tours, interviews, and consultation with staff members of the Institute. In an effort to communicate the diagnostic and testing services of the Boys Town National Institute, I proposed that x-ray film which contrasted the physiological differences between cleft-palate and normal speech be shown in the exhibit. The suggestion, as well as proposals to measure the range and pitch of speech and to test the hearing of visitors, were rejected by the committee. As the case with many of its decisions, the committee voted non-approval, not after a review of the informational importance and content of the displays, but after examining the cost. While "The Families of Boys Town" currently houses exhibits of informational and educational value, it narrowly misses description as a public relations display. It serves as an excellent example of history limited by administrative power and politics.

The final area for exhibit design, the foyer, generated many ideas among the committee, the consultants and myself, all diametrically opposed in focus and content. Initial images greatly affect the public's memory of an exhibition. The beginning of an exhibition determines the first and often the last impressions that visitors have of a subject of displayed history. In addition, initial images establish the historical perspective of the public as they view the remainder of the exhibition.

Designers strive for artistic distinction and innovation in the opening section of an exhibition. Creativity in design does not always serve the best interests of history. I believe that it is crucial for historians to direct the form and content of the initial images of an exhibition for several reasons. First, a historian must supervise opening images to establish the informational purpose of an exhibition. If a historian can not translate the historical importance of the exhibition subject into visual images, how can visitors be expected to extract information from what they will view? The historical premise of an exhibition should be molded in the hands of the project historian, not the designer. Secondly, the initial images presented by a historian should act as a guide or measure for the public in their extraction of historical themes, ideas, comparisons, and parallels throughout the exhibition. Finally, historians should supervise the formation of the initial images of an exhibition to temper excessive or historically insignificant design and design displays.

During meetings to determine the exhibits for the foyer, the designers favored lining the walls, similar to dedications in a high school scrapbook, with the signatures of every boy that had stayed at Boys Town. The designers had translated what they believed the opening statement for the exhibition should be, a return for alumni to the "romance" of Boys Town, into a display overtly sentimental in message and form. In addition to an unfavorable historical reaction to its romantic tone, I informed the designers of several practical reasons for why their idea could not be carried out. Of the thirteen thousand children that have attended Boys Town since 1917, many have had or continue

to have criminal records. Members of the alumni had previously expressed their concern over the display of any class portraits in the museum without the permission of all the individuals pictured.

I reminded my consultants that convicted mass-murderer Charles Manson had been a "Boys Town Boy," and I hoped that the suggestion would die on its own merit. The committee, on the other hand, strongly desired the installation of a giant "He Ain't Heavy" statue in the foyer.

Unwilling to start an explosive discussion about my intention to debunk historically defunct institutional symbols, I defused the argument by suggesting that the statue would produce a more dramatic effect at the close of the exhibition. After a vigorous reminder to the committee and the designers of the intent of the exhibition statement of purpose, I proposed that a graphic depiction of the plight of Progressive Era children would better serve the purpose and scope of the exhibition. The committee grudgingly approved my idea only after voicing their preference for a display of the Oscar won by Spencer Tracy in 1938 for his role in the film, "Boys Town" or a large picture of Father Hupp.²¹

Throughout the discussions with my designers and committee, I had been writing initial drafts of the exhibition storyline. Attachment F (pages 82-103) served as the storyline submitted for committee comment and review. As the final storyline, Attachment G, pages 104-145, included artifacts, documents, and graphics with text to outline each exhibit section for the designers. The final storyline provided

²¹"Minutes of the Meetings for the Boys Town Hall of History," Boys Town Hall of History Archives (May 1984).

the historical themes developed in the exhibition labels and audio-visual presentations.

When writing scholarly elements into an exhibition storyline, a historian must keep a key question in mind, "How do I portray what I have written?" Without the luxury of a footnote, an exhibit historian relies on material culture items and images to document and illustrate historical themes. To tally items or collections alongside academic ideas and information aids the historian's perception of "exhibitable history." The exhibit-going-public can not obtain a copy of the labels written by a historian to fill in the informational gaps in an exhibition. In addition, it has been established by the Smithsonian Institution that the public rarely reads beyond seventy-five words of an exhibited label. In order to convey complex historical themes, a historian must communicate meaning through a visual "layering" of images and objects. If a storyline is tightly conceived and written, words are not necessary to portray complicated subjects of history. Mindful that exhibitions are viewed by persons of all ages and intellectual capacities, a historian must "create" images that convey the history of a subject at a single glance.

Persons approach exhibitions in many various manners and styles. Some race through beginning to end, only to stop occasionally at a point of interest, or not at all. Some give their individual attention to each display but at different paces in a range from rapid to leisurely. Few conduct the ideal behavior of a meticulous inspection of all words, items, and images presented in an exhibition. When questioned on the contents of an exhibition, visitors will declare, "There was nothing to

see" or "I could have stayed all day." An exhibits historian has the power to direct the attention and interest of an audience in a historical subject. When I write storylines, I try to anticipate the needs of an audience and provide different "levels" of visual information throughout the exhibition.

The levels should build upon each other and not alienate the public from acquiring a historical sense of the subject of an exhibition. On a primary level, an exhibit utilizes graphics, artifacts, mannequins, dioramas, and photographs to visually stimulate public understanding of a topic. Intellectual stimulation provided on a secondary level through label copy and "interactive" displays invites visitors to expand their knowledge of an exhibit subject. For the detail-oriented visitor, specialized object labels and in-depth audio-visual presentations fulfill a third level of informational need.

In addition to academic training, the historian's greatest tool for the architecture of an exhibition storyline lies within the collections of an exhibition. A historian must research and reflect on the historical meaning(s) or message(s) inherent in artifacts, photographs, and documents to develop them to their maximum exhibit potential. Linking material culture items strengthens the ability of an exhibit to communicate complex historical themes to the public. In addition, material culture links aid a historian in "layering" exhibits within a storyline. Finally, material culture links help the public to "connect" exhibit subjects into an overall historical perspective. Displayed in singular form, the material culture items within Boys Town's collections would have provided little historical insight into the activities

of daily living. The exhibits of the Hall of History demonstrate the informational value of linking complementary material culture items and images within history displays.

The exhibit sculpture, "The Boy in the Box" (Attachment H, page 146) evolved from my desire to recreate the living conditions of neglected children at the turn of the nineteenth century. After a review of "street children" photographs by Louis Bostwick, I chose the image of a small child in ragged clothes asleep in a crate lined with discarded newspapers and trash. I decided that a written label could not adequately serve the historical poignancy of the image. I gained committee support to write and produce an audio presentation, narrated by a young male actor, to accompany the sculpted image. Today, a visitor views the sculpture and listens as "Billy, the Boy in the Box," explains his tragic circumstances and ill-fortune before his "rescue to his new home" by Father Flanagan. In addition to a portrayal of Progressive Era social conditions, the image provides historical information on the messianic philosophy and actions of a young Father Flanagan and the operation of Boys Town's first homes.

The Juvenile Entertainers Show Wagon (Attachment I, page 147) posed the exhibition problem of what to do with a "white elephant" artifact. Constructed in 1967 by the Boys Town Alumni Association, the wagon attempted to replicate a tour wagon used by Father Flanagan and his "juvenile entertainers" in 1921. Poorly constructed, the wagon in its original state had two full sides, painted in red with white lettering. The documentary and material culture evidence of the Juvenile Entertainers Troupe was limited to photographs, some pamphlets, and a

travelling trunk--hardly enough items to fill an exhibit case, let alone a wagon. The committee, however, expressed a strong wish to display the wagon regardless of the problems posed for historical documentation and presentation. I decided to confer with my designers on the possibility of a recreation of the Juvenile Entertainers life on the road. We decided to remove one side of the wagon and outfit it with plexiglass to create a "period room" for the display of artifacts and memorabilia.

It became my task to research, identify, solicit, purchase, and collect items that would have been used by the troupe on its travels. I conducted oral histories with "ex-Juvenile Entertainers" to expand and verify my knowledge of troupe life and activities. In an interview with Mr. Charles Kenworthy, known as "The Boy Orator," I learned that the troupe had written and performed original lyrics to the tune of popular songs. Upon my request, Mr. Kenworthy recorded an a capella version of the troupe's opening tune, "How Do You Do, Old Friends and New." Originally, I had planned to rerecord the version submitted by Mr. Kenworthy with the aid of members of the Boys Town choir and band. Upon hearing it, I discarded my idea in favor of the heartfelt rendition of Mr. Kenworthy. Gravel-voiced and off-key, Mr. Kenworthy had sung the song as if he were, once again, performing in the Juvenile Entertainers Show. I felt that visitors would receive a greater sense of history through a comparison of the elderly singing voice of Mr. Kenworthy with photographic images of the youthful troupe. The tape serves as an audio accompaniment to the items displayed in and around the show wagon. The historical "layering" of the wagon utilized photographs and program booklets for the recreation of costumes, stage backdrop, and song

announcement billboards. Cooking and leisure items, researched and verified in 1921-22 Sears catalogs, were obtained for the wagon. The Juvenile Entertainers Wagon illustrated the informational value of material culture objects "linked" together to "recreate" history.

Film footage, regardless of its "cinematic value," rapidly places visitors within a historical era. The Boys Town Hall of History video presentations utilized film clips obtained from varied sources such as the University of Southern California Radio, Television and Film Archives and the Boys Town Field House. The discovery of football game films from 1946-1965 served as inspiration to install Boys Town's 1951 athletic touring bus as an exhibit theater (Attachment J, page 148). A visitor steps into the bus, honks the horn, activates a video sports documentary and watches it amidst the decorative trappings of historic game posters and sports equipment.

In an exhibition, a historian may or may not be involved in the organization, accessioning, and care of items selected for display. Most certainly, however, a historian will be involved in the label-writing process for an exhibition. If a historian has adequately exhausted the visual possibilities of a historical subject, an exhibit label will act as a linear "identifier" of presented themes. As a museum professional, I strive to remain within the seventy-five word limit prescribed by the Smithsonian Institution. As a historian, I am constantly frustrated by this measure of words and consistently violate it in my first label drafts. I solved the dilemma through the application of some simple rules I learned by writing "journalistic-styled history" for exhibitions.

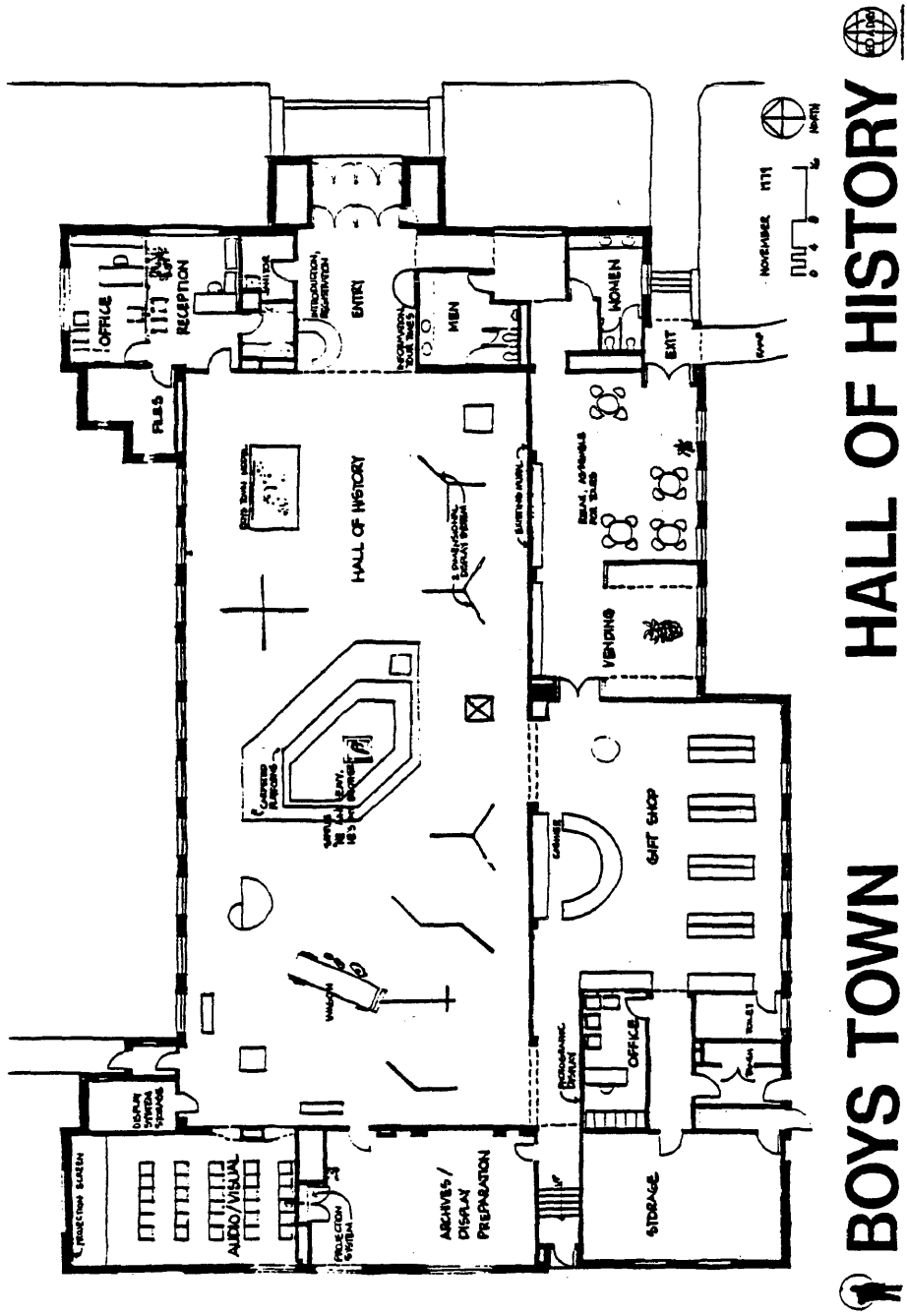
In the organization of a storyline, I assign ideas and themes an "A," "B," or "C" level of historical importance. An "A" level usually encompasses major themes difficult to exhibit but critical to visitor awareness of a historical era. As an example of an "A" label, "The City of Little Men, 1921-1948" (Attachment K, page 149) explains the decision of Father Flanagan to establish an urban community for delinquent boys in a rural setting. The displays in the exhibit section supported the main themes presented in the "A" label. "B" labels identify and provide detailed information for singular historical themes illustrated by specific images and artifacts. Within the exhibit section, "The City of Little Men, 1921-1948," the "B" label, "The Importance of Play" (Attachment L, page 150) complements a sculpture tableau of young marble players and addresses the topic of inexpensive leisure-time activities at Boys Town.

Finally, a "C" label comprises one, two, and in some cases, a three-line description of an artifact, document or photograph. Similar to a footnote, a "C" label rarely communicates complicated historical themes or ideas and serves only for clarification and quantification. Attachment M, page 151, serves as an example of a "C" label written for "The City of Little Men" exhibit section in the Boys Town Hall of History.

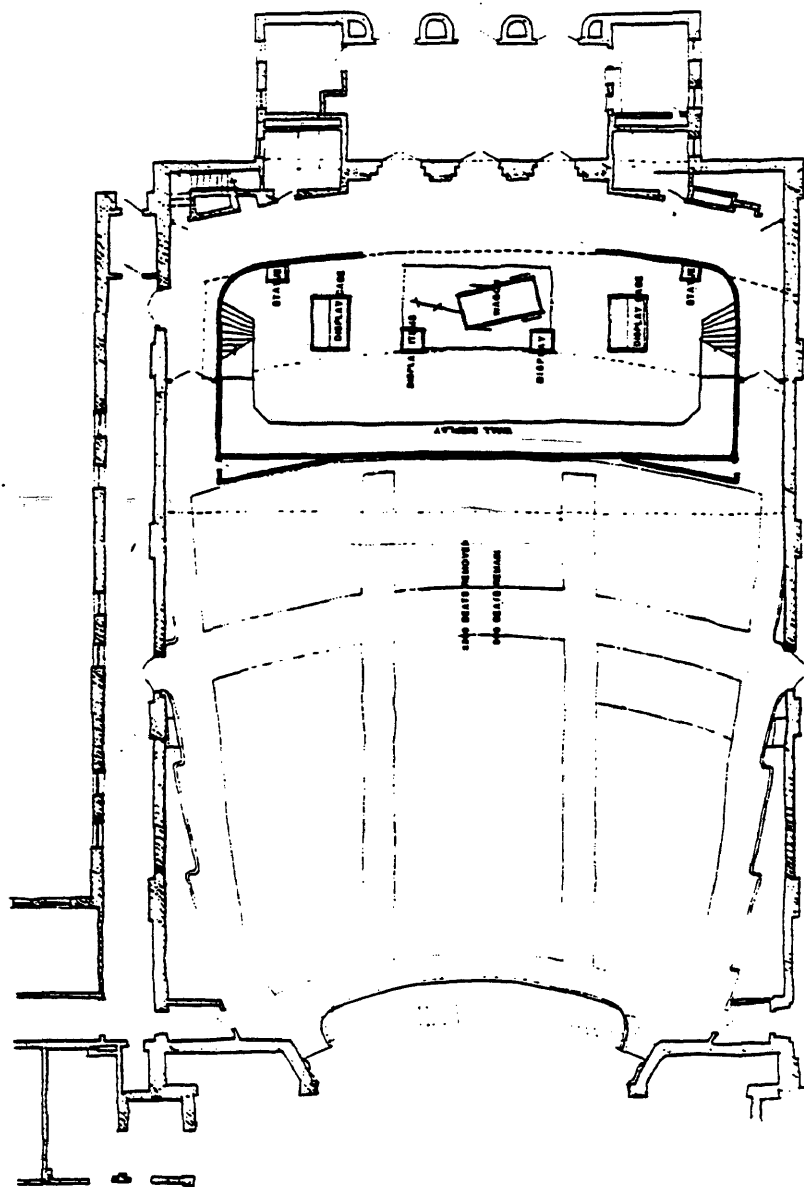
After a historical subject receives an A, B, or C designation, I proceed to research material for and to write the first label copy drafts. To organize gathered information, I answer the primary historical considerations of who, what, where, when, and why. The level designation of the label determines whether I expand or contract information

on its historical topic. I identify additional research areas before the completion of the first draft phase. After the inclusion of all available information, I review the initial label drafts for grammatical and stylistic error. I compare the content of the labels with the objects, documents, and photographs in an exhibit area to insure that it complements, not detracts, from the planned visual message. In addition, I distribute initial label drafts to various individuals, i.e. academic consultants, co-workers, grammarians, for critique. I incorporate suggestions, refinements, reductions, and additions into a final label. As with an academic work, label copy is born of the individual pen but benefits from the parenting offered through multiple review.

In this chapter, I have attempted to present methods for the conceptualization and completion of historical images, storylines, and labels for an exhibition. Ultimately, the ability of a historian to envision and implement historical exhibitions comes through time, experience, and practice. As an exhibits historian, I have learned that each exhibition requires a unique historical perspective but rarely new methods for its organization and completion. I offer the final floor plan for the Hall of History (Attachment N, page 152) as proof of the difference a historian can make in an exhibition project.



A. Boys Town Hall of History architectural proposal, Leo A. Daly and Sons, 1979

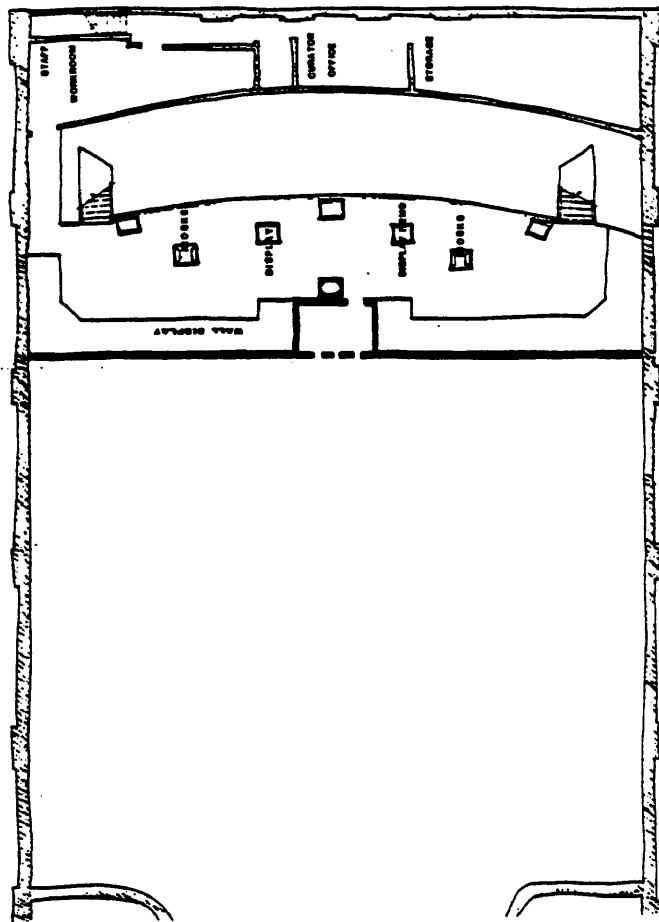


SCALE: 1/8"=1'-0"
 1000 OF TOTAL

**BOYS TOWN
 HALL OF HISTORY
 FIRST FLOOR PLAN**

**THE OFFICE
 OF BAH
 VERMEER
 & HAECKER
 ARCHITECTS**

B. Boys Town Hall of History architectural proposal, Bahr, Vermeer and Haecker, January 1984



SCALE: 1/8"=1'-0"

THE OFFICE
OF BARR
NEWMAN
& HACKETT
ARCHITECTS

BOYS TOWN
HALL OF HISTORY
MEZZANINE
1/11/10

C. Initial Historical Timeline,

Boys Town Hall of History Exhibition Project, March 1984

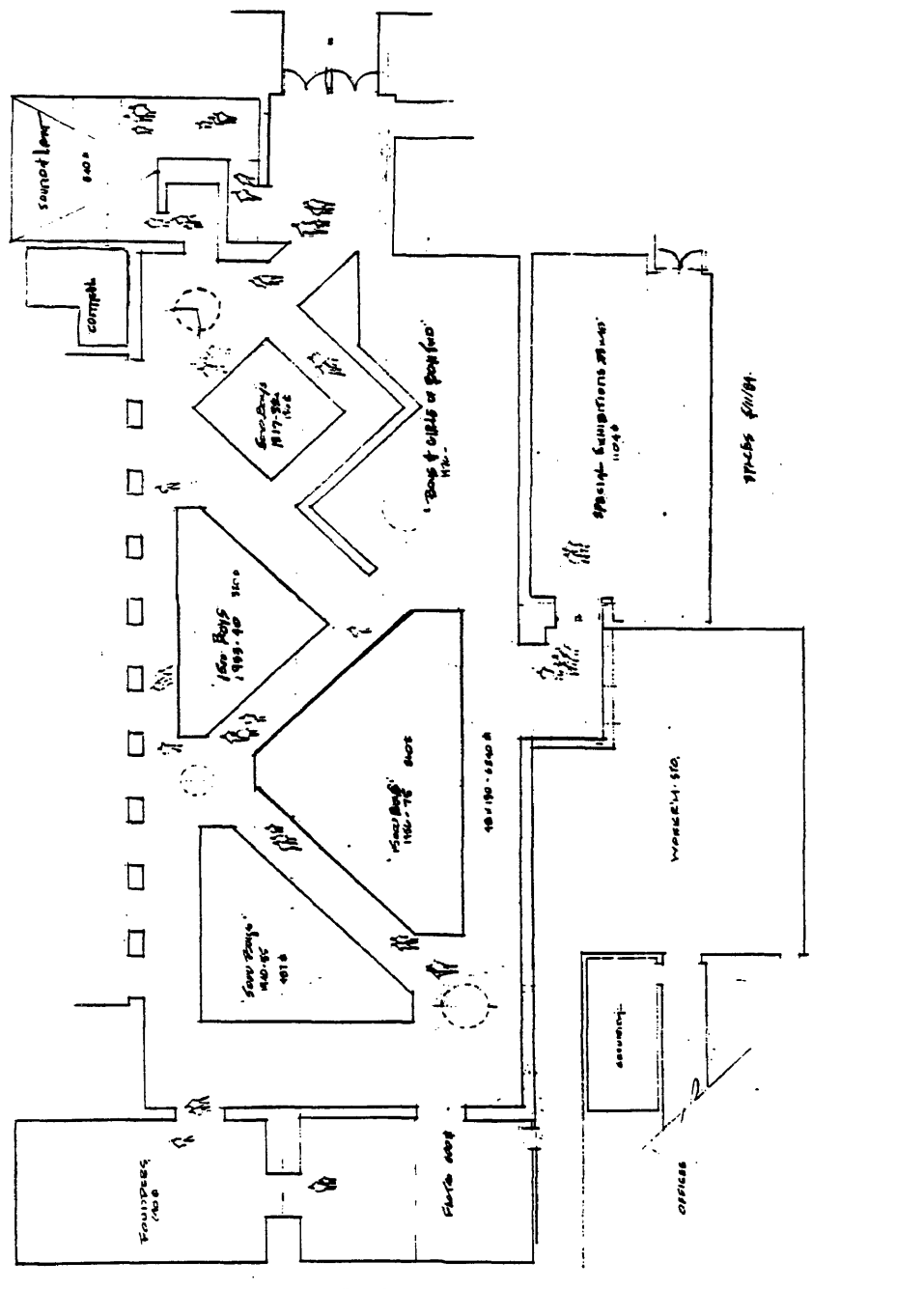
BOYSTOWN HISTORICAL OUTLINE - FIRST DRAFT

FIRST 500 BOYS, 1917-1937

- 1917 While running Workingmen's Hotel for down and out men, Flanagan begins contact with Douglas County courts to parole youth into his care.
- 1917 Dec. Flanagan borrows \$90.00 from unknown source and begins home for "wayward youth" at 25th and Dodge Sts. One floor shack housed first five boys, two nuns, one novice and Flanagan.
- 1918 June Flanagan rents German-American Home to house growing staff and 12 boys. Omaha German community afraid of WWI anti-german sentiment rent former clubhouse at 4206 South 13th St. with belief that a priest would save guard the structure from bombings.
- Home contained bowling alleys and pool tables in basement. 1st floor visitor's room and kitchen. 2nd floor meeting rooms turned into dormitories for sleeping. Flanagan struggles for food and clothing for boys. Boys Home population swells to 200, many as wards or convictions from Omaha/Douglas County courts.
- 1919-21 Flanagan begins fundraising methods with beginning of boys band and newspaper. Omaha black band leader Dan Desdunes becomes bandmaster and juvenile minstrel show director. Lou Gehring and Babe Ruth visit home before exhibition game for the Western Baseball League in Omaha. Dan Coleman, stage comedian, raises \$1,405.99 for start of permanent home fund. Flanagan buys North Omaha farm, "Seven Oaks" but sells to Notre Dame nuns in the face of residential opposition to the location of a permanent home for "Flanagan's Delinquents". "Father Flanagan's Boys Home" incorporated under the laws of the State of Nebraska.
- 1921 May Flanagan buys Overlook Farm, 160 acres @ \$625.00 per acre. Boys Home Band wear surplus WWI uniforms and travel in free pullman car across U.S. to raise funds for the Home. Two-reel film of Flanagan and boys produced by Omaha photographer for fundraising when band travelled.
- 1921 Oct Flanagan, nephew Patrick Norton, and 200 boys move to Overlook Farm with one van, most on foot and begin erecting temporary shelters with borrowed lumber. 1st building had no indoor plumbing and one coal-burning pot belly stove for heat through Winter, 1922. Campaign to raise \$200,000.00 building fund headed by Omaha attorney Albert Monsky.
- 1922 Under the direction of Norton and Desdunes, the "World's Greatest Juvenile Entertainers" leave to tour Nebraska towns from May-Sept. to raise funds for the Home. Four wagons, four sets of horses, two adults and 10 boys travelled twenty miles a day to reach

P. 2

- 1922 show destinations. KKK threaten caravan because of black youth performing with white youth on same stage.
- 1922 Mar Ground broken for 1st building. Five stories - 1st floor reception and offices, 2nd floor chapel and infirmary, pool room, 3rd fl classrooms, 4th floor dormitory for under 14 yrs old, 5th floor for 14-16 yrs. old.
- 1923 Juvenile troupe discontinued. Boys Band continues to travel by train. 7 Sisters of Mercy join Flanagan as staff. Flanagan's mother and sister cook and organize Mother's Guild to provide clothing and blankets for children.
- 1927 2nd building completed - Flanagan's residence. Mother and sister join him to live at Overlook farm. Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig visit Flangan Home after World Series. Nurse on campus, joined by Doctor from Elkhorn twice a week. Pres. Cal Coolidge requests Boys Band to play for him while visiting Black Hills.
- 1929 Incorporation articles amended to include Bishop of Omaha as Director of Board. Ground broken for trades building, office, gym and convent. Military system of youth governance established. Flanagan begins travelling throughout U.S. on train passes to have convicted and imprisoned youth released into his care. "The Kid's Judge" Ben Lindsay, founder of Denver Juvenile Court system visits Boys Home.
- 1930 Power house partially destroyed by fire. Rebuilt along with completion of dry cleaning plant and laundry. Dedication of buildings, Oct., 1930. School includes grades 5th through 8th. Farm in operation as means to feed staff and boys at the Home.
- 1932 Fundraising switches to mailings from lists compiled on boys tours. Two mailing a year of 100,000 pieces on Dec. 8th and during Lent. Pres. Franklin Roosevelt visits Boys Home during unannounced trips to visit friends 20 miles west of Boys Home.
- 1934-35 Two-year high school began at the Home. Pres. Roosevelt appoints Norton as Postmaster at new incorporated village of "Boys Town". Military gov't discontinued in 1931 and replaced by democratic system of election of Mayor and Town Council. Population of BoysTown listed at 275.
- 1936 High school expanded to 4 yrs. and accredited by State of Nebraska. Post office is constructed. Flangan receives large endowment from Mrs. Mary Dowd for memorial chapel.



D. Boys Town Hall of History Preliminary Design Sketch, Benjamin Lawless, April 1984

E. Boys Town Hall of History Exhibits Organization and Design Concept,
 Jacqueline McGlade, Benjamin Lawless, Gerald Eisterhold, and Anita Llewellyn,

April 1984

1917-22 SURVIVAL WAY WM
 GIVE A BODY A GOOD MAN TO...

- PHOTOS
- CLOTHING & BAGGAGE
- ROOMS
- FUND RAISING APPEALS
- CROCK & SACKBANT.
- NEWSPAPERS -

- a. Rescue Effort.
- v. Survival
- c. Hope.
- ~~D. Training~~

1923-48
 NO BIRD PAYS

- SIGN
- WAGON
- TRAINING EQUIPMENT
- FARM EQUIPMENT
- SCHOOL EQUIPMENT
- FILMS BOPTON
- GAMES
- STUDENT GOVT

- a. VISION
- b. STRUCTURE
- c. DEFINITION
- d. COMMUNITY
- ~~e. HISTORY~~
- e. TRAINING & EDUCATION

48-73 HE SIN'T HEAVY HE'S IN BOOT WEGNER

- SPORTS
- FRANK.
- CHOIR
- VOCATIONAL TRAINING
- TOURS

- a. SPIRIT
- v. PRIDE
- c. GROWTH
- d. CHANGE
- e. MYTH.
- f. America's Biggest Struggling Problems

74-80's

THE FAMILY'S RECEPTION

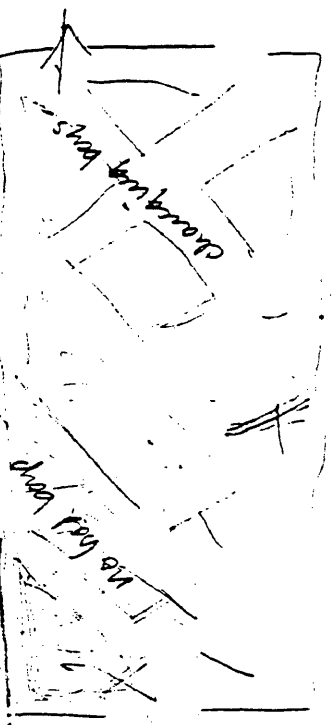
- Photos
- Rooms
- TRAINING FILMS
- ~~- RESEARCH~~
- ~~- COLLECTOR~~
- ~~WOMEN~~
- OTHER INST. PHOTO

- R. TRANSITION
- S. REFINEMENT
- C. VISIONS OF REALITY
- D. EVOLUTION
- E. OUTREACH
- F. DEFINITION
- G. COHERENCE
- H. STABILITY
- I. MODEL
- J. INNOVATION
- K. WOMEN
- L. SOPHISTICATION
- EXPANSION
- INDIVIDUALIZATION
- BIRTH

1. give a very good man to not depend Rescue

2. No Big Boys coming

3. HE AINT HEAVY HE'S MY BROTHER (socialization)
1. with the family - Pimp to the (Family W)



F. Boys Town Hall of History Storyline for Committee Review,

May 1984

The Boy Problem

Early in the 20th Century, there were great strains on some families in America. Poverty trapped many immigrant families in urban slums. Parents who succumbed to long hours of crushing physical labor, poor food, and disease left orphans behind. Just to survive, families sent their children into factories where there were no laws to protect them. Sons and daughters often learned English more rapidly than their immigrant parents, driving another wedge into the family.

Some children--abandoned, orphaned, or abused--learned to live by their wits in the streets. A public outcry against such "boy tramps" appeared in the press. The court often treated young delinquents like adult criminals; they were sent to reformatories and prisons, even executed. Responding to this harsh treatment, urban reformers began to speak up on behalf of such children. They explored new ways of dealing with "wayward" youth.

Saving the Wayward Boy

"There are no bad boys. There is only bad environment, bad training, bad example, bad thinking."--Father Edward J. Flanagan

In 1913, a young Irish immigrant priest, Father Edward J. Flanagan, opened a hotel for homeless men in Omaha. For three years, he provided food and shelter to thousands of destitute men. But while he was able to ease their hunger, Father Flanagan found it difficult to reach the souls of these rootless men.

Boys, he decided, who had led hard lives but who were still young enough to learn moral values and to change would become his life's work. In 1917, Omaha judges began to release young delinquents and orphans into his care. Father and the boys met weekly to discuss their activities, school work, and home life. He organized a baseball team, found jobs for some of the boys, and had them all attending church. Soon, however, he realized that these boys "whom nobody wanted" needed more than park-bench meetings--they needed a home.

The First Home

Borrowing \$90 from a friend, Father Flanagan rented a large home at 25th and Dodge Streets in Omaha. On December 10, 1917, Father and his first five boys—three wards of the court and two newsboys who had been living in alleys—moved into the home. A rented horse and wagon took the boys to school. Three Sisters of Notre Dame taught the boys how to cook meals and clean the house while Father tended to their spiritual needs and moral training.

Almost immediately, other boys arrived from the courts, were referred by citizens, or wandered in on their own. Because local attention was focused on the war effort, Father Flanagan found the task of raising funds constant and exhausting. But whenever his shoestring budget seemed about to run out, a timely donation paid one more month's rent or bought another pair of shoes. The boys' first Christmas dinner was a barrel of sauerkraut that arrived at the last minute.

The Boys' Home Journal

To generate public goodwill toward the Home, Father Flanagan and his boys began to publish a monthly newspaper in 1918. Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal sold for a quarter and was filled with stories about the boys' activities and the Home, spiritual advice columns written by Father, recipes, jokes, and home remedies. Although some people thought newsboys an unscrupulous group—streetwise and tough—Father Flanagan's "newsies" sold the journal near churches and schools and gained a reputation as "little gentlemen, clearly polite and graceful."

Y The German-American Home

Father Flanagan soon found his home overcrowded, and he began looking for larger quarters. Omaha's German-American Home, at 4206 S. 13th Street, had been abandoned during World War I. Father Flanagan moved his boys into the spacious house for a modest rent in the spring of 1918. The boys, who now numbered 150, slept in dormitory-style quarters on the top floor. Father Flanagan and several nuns taught classes in converted parlor rooms.

After finishing school work and daily chores, the boys played baseball and marbles on the playground or used the bowling alley and pool tables located in the basement. In the evenings, the boys sang along during family piano concerts or listened to stories told by Father Flanagan. On special occasions, they rode trolley cars downtown to see a movie or enjoy the amusements at Krug Park.

The Sewing Club and Mothers' Guild

Women were an important source of early aid and support to the Home. Father Flanagan's mother, Nora, and sister, Nellie, organized a Thursday sewing circle to make needed quilts and linens. Raffles of candy and homemade bread during the sewing sessions built a club fund. The Sewing Club made donations of food and clothing and purchased Boy Scout uniforms and the Home's first laundry mangle for pressing clothes. Later known as the Mothers' Guild, the club had more than a dozen chapters in Nebraska, Iowa, and surrounding states by 1940.

The Move to Overlook Farm

The boys gathered excitedly outside the German-American Home on October 22, 1921, anticipating the journey to what Father Flanagan had promised would be the "mecca of their dreams," Overlook Farm. Two trucks loaded with furniture led the procession along Dodge Street past the city limits. Boys followed on foot, pushing wheelbarrows or carrying suitcases holding their scant belongings.

Turning in at the farm gate, the boys, many of whom had known only alleys and city streets, saw a grove of birch trees and acres of open fields. Their new home included barns and chicken coops, an ice house, a cattle shed, and a group of wooden barracks. The temporary barracks had concrete floors and were heated by corn-cob-fed potbelly stoves. In these buildings, the boys would live, study, work, and play.

City of Little Men, 1921-1948

"There are no iron bars, no steel windows here, we win over a boy through a planned program of activities to develop his mind and broaden his interests."—Father Edward J. Flanagan

The Home's growing reputation as a haven for homeless youngsters soon brought hundreds of boys—wards of the courts, victims of broken homes, orphans, and runaways—to its doorstep. Crowded quarters forced Father Flanagan to accept only those boys whose situations were most desperate. Once again, he began to look for a larger, permanent home.

Father Flanagan envisioned a rural community, self-sufficient and removed from the disrupting influences of urban life. He wanted the space and opportunity to build an educational, spiritual, and recreational program that would give his boys a new chance in life. Ten miles west of Omaha he found Overlook Farm, 160 acres of rolling farmland and plenty of room on which to build his "City of Little Men."

Overlook Farm

The boys began in the spring of 1922 to turn Overlook into a working farm again. Using teams of mules, the boys planted corn, alfalfa, and potatoes. Others tended the fruit orchard and vegetable gardens. By 1923, the Home had Holstein cows and milking machines, but 35 gallons of milk still had to be purchased daily to feed the boys. Food was often scarce, and donations were needed. On one occasion, the gift of several Poland China hogs provided enough pounds of pork for one week of meals in the dining hall.

By the late 1930s, increased crop yields and livestock production made the Home more self-sufficient. A vocational training program in agriculture and 4-H Clubs gradually took over most of the farm work.

Drought

A severe drought devastated farms across the Midwest in 1933. At the Home, the hot, dry summer destroyed 19 acres of potatoes, 100 acres of corn, and the spring planting of oats. Without grain to feed the livestock, milk and poultry production faltered. Stories in the Boys' Home Journal informed the public that the Home's "cupboard is bare." For two summers, the boys battled the drought by forming bucket brigades to water the vegetables.

Building the City

In November, 1922, just a year after moving to the farm, the Home took on a more permanent look when the boys moved from their wooden barracks into a five-story brick building that housed dormitories, classrooms, a dining hall, chapel, infirmary, and offices. It was called the "Omaha Building" to honor the loyal, local group of supporters who led fund drives to pay off the mortgage.

When the Home's population reached 280 by 1930, more permanent buildings were needed. During the height of the Depression, local citizens helped Father Flanagan raise \$400,000 to build a trade school, faculty building, and gymnasium. Sleeping quarters were expanded in 1939 when four new dormitories were constructed. Incorporation and the opening of a U.S. Post Office legally established "Boys Town" as a Nebraska village by 1936. The town continued to grow through private donations that helped build Dowd Chapel in 1940 and Eagle Hall in 1941.

Life in the City

"A boy seems to require the constant use of his arms, legs, and body to consume the energy he generates."—Father Edward J. Flanagan

Daily life was busy in the City of Little Men. The boys woke to the trumpeter's reveille at 6:30 a.m. to make their beds before breakfast in the dining hall. School work and vocational training courses filled the day. In the evenings, the boys enjoyed hobbies such as stamp collecting or model building and listened to the radio. With the sound of taps at 9 p.m., each boy returned to the "apartment" he shared with 25 roommates to get ready for bed. The boys kept their apartments clean and earned money for completing their work. They spent their weekly allowance of 25 to 40 cents on candy, apples, or personal items in the Boys Town store.

The whole community gathered for meals daily, a regular Sunday night movie, and religious services on the weekend. Special events and holidays, plays and musicals, an annual Fourth of July picnic, and a large Christmas celebration fostered community spirit.

"He Ain't Heavy, Father . . . "

As early as 1921, Father Flanagan used illustrations of two boys helping one another to represent the Home on its literature. A single boy with outstretched arms was another early symbol. The picture of the two brothers came to Father Flanagan's attention as a line drawing in a company publication, the Louis Allis Messenger. He asked the company for permission to reproduce the two boys in full color and to change the caption to "He ain't heavy, Father . . . he's m' brother." A statue and painting were commissioned, and the painting was copyrighted for Boys Town's exclusive use in 1943.

The two brothers symbolize the fundamental spirit and mission of Boys Town. One of the first boys admitted to the Home, Howard Loomis, could not walk without the aid of crutches, and the larger boys often took turns carrying him about on their backs.

Government by the Boys

Learning to be responsible citizens was vital for boys who had seen too much of life outside the law. Several early experiments in self-governance failed, but in the 1930s there was renewed interest in a "boy government."

The boys organized two parties, the HOTS (Help Our Town) and BBT (Build Boys Town), and formed slates of candidates. In January, 1935, they filed into the barbershop to cast their votes for the first mayor. A municipal court of students enforced the rules. Breaking the rules usually resulted in extra work or study assignments.

Tony Villone

In 1935, 17-year-old Anthony Villone became Boys Town's first mayor. Campaigning for six weeks on the HULLO Boys Town ticket, Villone promised to be fair and stick up for the "little" ones. He defeated Joe Renteria of the Help Our Town party, and on January 20 was sworn in by Postmaster P. J. Norton.

Villone served as senior class treasurer, football quarterback, second baseman for the baseball team, sports editor for the Boys' Home Journal and played baritone in the band. He delivered the salutatory address at his 1937 graduation. The 1937 senior class issue of the Journal remembered Tony as "the boy who was very short but how he could play quarterback!"

Guiding the Spirit

"No motive for good lives can exceed religion in its power. God and God alone in the lives of . . . boys and girls can best teach the laws of right and social living."--Father Edward J. Flanagan

Father Flanagan recognized that wayward boys needed more than food, shelter, and an education to turn their lives around. A boy's spiritual needs, he believed, must also be fulfilled. From the beginning, Father welcomed boys of any religion to Boys Town. He insisted that they continue to learn and worship in their accustomed faith. Daily life at the Home stressed the importance of moral values, strength of character, and each boy's personal relationship with God. Perhaps most influential was the example of Father Flanagan himself.

Running the City

For more than ten years, Father Flanagan, his nephew P. J. Norton, and nuns, aided by the boys, handled most of the tasks in running the Home. By 1930, however, the Home's population neared 300, and more help was needed. Paid employees managed the farm, ran the switchboard, typed correspondence, sewed clothing, and cooked meals. Some of them also taught classes in the trade school. A welfare committee considered applications for admissions, a job that Father had always handled alone. A local physician called at the Home daily to treat ailing boys and perform minor surgery. Creighton University dental students assisted an Omaha dentist once a week in cleaning and filling the boys' teeth.

Learning

"I want every one of my boys to be an honest citizen when he reaches manhood, and it seems the best method of insuring this is to teach him a trade at which he can earn an honest living."—Father Edward J. Flanagan

When his boys left the Home, Father Flanagan wanted them to have "two strikes in their favor:" an academic education and training in a trade. Knowing the skills of a job, he was convinced, would help the boys become responsible adults. Woodworking and broom making were taught in a carpentry shop that opened in 1921. Baking, barbering, tailoring, printing, agriculture, and other vocations were added later. Work in the trades program also benefited the Home; apprentice bakers, for example, prepared 100 loaves of bread daily, and students printed the monthly newspaper in the school print shop.

Many of the boys had little schooling before arriving at Boys Town, so the academic program focused on remedial learning. An emphasis on math and science complemented the trades program. The junior high school earned state accreditation in 1935 followed by the senior high in 1944.

The Importance of Play

"Some of the finest people in the world go through life under a handicap because they never learned how to play when they were children."—Father Edward J. Flanagan

The boys were expected to study hard and work hard, but play and organized sports were also daily activities at the Home. Father believed athletics demanded discipline and built character. In the early years when there was little money for sports equipment, he encouraged the boys to hold marble tournaments and boxing matches, fly kites, or go swimming and fishing. Later, sports attention focused on the high school's basketball, baseball, and football teams. The football team, using the "T" formation and a fine passing attack, played in stadiums across the country. Called the "Blues," the team compiled a record of 37-0-1 between 1935 and 1940.

Playing for Keeps

Marble playing was easily the most popular sport among the boys at the Home through the 1930s. Players needed only marbles, open space, and a stick to start the action. The boys used a special vernacular to describe the game: They "knuckled down" to use their "shooters" to win "migs" and "bumblebees" in games called "tearing up the pea patch" and "ring taw." Marble tournaments at the Home produced a champion who advanced to citywide school contests in Omaha. In the 1940s, the boys abandoned marble playing as interest in team sports such as baseball and football grew.

On the Road

In 1920, Father Flanagan organized a group of boys--up to eight vocalists and an orator--who performed to raise donations. They made up in enthusiasm what they lacked in training as they toured Nebraska, Iowa, and other nearby states. Between songs and jokes, the boys admonished parents to raise their children in a loving home. The troupe carried a projector and showed a motion picture about the plight of wayward boys and the necessity of Father Flanagan's work.

Soon, a more ambitious show and tour was planned. Two or three troupes of "Father Flanagan's World's Greatest Juvenile Entertainers" toured 2,500 to 4,500 miles every summer from 1922 to 1928. After 1922 they sometimes rode, courtesy of the railroad, in a special Pullman car called the "Overlook." In some towns, the welcome wasn't always cordial. A few hotelkeepers and restaurateurs refused to serve the mixed group of boys. More ominous threats of tarring and feathering also marred trips into areas of Ku Klux Klan activity.

Juvenile Entertainers

In 1922, Father Flanagan organized a larger entertainment group to tour farther afield. Bandleader Dan Desdunes rehearsed 15 boys for a minstrel show to go to nearly 50 towns in eastern Nebraska. A local cartwright donated four secondhand circus wagons. Teams of draft horses in decorated harness pulled the bright red caravans that provided sleeping, eating, and traveling quarters. On May 7, the "World's Greatest Juvenile Entertainers" set out behind an advance agent who prepared advertisements, theater bookings, and campsites. Each two-hour show included band numbers, a minstrel show, vaudeville skits, an oration by a boy, jokes, and a talk by Father Flanagan.

The crimson wagons made an unforgettable sight but proved slow and expensive. The \$90 daily cost to keep two dozen people and eight horses on the road was often more than a day's receipts. At the end of the summer of 1922, the troupe reached home flat broke, a hapless conclusion for such a colorful experiment.

On the Radio

On Sunday afternoons in the 1920s, thousands of Americans tuned in their radios to hear Father Flanagan's latest message from Boys Town. Broadcast from several Omaha stations, the "Links of Love" program featured addresses by Father and music by the Boys' Home Band. Father's talks exhorted youth to "Dare to Be a Dreamer" and "Have Courage to Succeed." Soon, Father Flanagan and the boys accepted invitations to appear as guests on other national radio programs.

In the 1950s, the highly acclaimed "America's Town Meeting of the Air" was broadcast from the Music Hall. Thomas E. Dewey, Walter Reuther, Richard Nixon, James Michener, and others traveled to Boys Town to speak on current issues before a live audience.

On the Silver Screen

"It will never sell, there's no sex."—MGM President Louis B. Mayer

In 1938, a film producer for MGM Studios happened to read an article about an Omaha priest who believed there were no "bad boys." Movie agents visited the Home to discuss making a film about Boys Town. Father Flanagan, assured that it would not be "another Oliver Twist orphanage story," agreed to a movie.

Spencer Tracy, Mickey Rooney, director Norman Taurog, and the crew arrived at Boys Town in June to begin filming. Despite the heat and glare that hampered filming, they completed 90 percent of the movie in 10 days. The boys performed as extras in the film and helped prepare a farewell barbecue picnic for the crew. Back in Hollywood, MGM President Louis B. Mayer shelved the film for several months, convinced it would not prove popular.

The Premiere

"It will be an epic production. Mark my words, it will make Hollywood history."—Boys Town Director Norman Taurog

Boys Town premiered in Omaha on September 7, 1938. More than 20,000 movie fans jammed Union Station to await the arrival from Hollywood of actors Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney. Only 2,000 had tickets for the screening at the Orpheum Theatre, while outside, 150 police and firemen worked to control a crowd estimated at 30,000. Locally, Boys Town was an immediate hit as people waited in long lines to see the film two and three times.

Released nationally, the movie broke box office records with sold-out showings across the country. Boys Town became the most successful film of 1938, winning Academy Awards for Best Actor (Spencer Tracy) and Best Screenplay.

The Brotherhood of Boys Town, 1946-1973

"Given the love, care, and guidance which is the heritage of every boy, he will grow to useful manhood, a credit to himself, to Boys Town, and to his community."—Monsignor Nicholas H. Wegner

While on a tour of European youth centers in the spring of 1948, Father Flanagan suffered a heart attack. He died in the early morning of May 15 in Berlin. Monsignor Nicholas H. Wegner was named to succeed him as director of the Home on September 15, 1948.

Under Monsignor Wegner's direction, Boys Town underwent an expansion of buildings and boys. Admissions increased, and a building program was undertaken. In thirty years, the Home had changed from an isolated rural community into a bustling town with a national reputation. Home, school, and sports activities at Boys Town reflected a growing sense of community pride in the "brotherhood of boys."

Community Growth

An ambitious \$13-million expansion program in 1948 transformed Boys Town from a rural village into a small city. Twenty-five cottages supplemented the traditional dormitory quarters for the boys and their counselors. A new High School and Trade School housed expanded academic and vocational training programs. A new Music Hall held 1,400 seats; nearby the Field House contained a basketball court, swimming pool, and indoor track. Other buildings constructed in 1948 included the High School Dining Hall, Post Office, Town Hall, Welfare Administration, and Visitors Center.

Village services expanded to serve a growing population and maintain the many new buildings. A power plant and water mains supplied utilities to the residences, schools, and farm buildings. In 1951, a 40-bed hospital staffed by dentists, physicians, and nurses provided health services. The village board held monthly meetings in the Town Hall to consider health and sanitation matters. Police and volunteer fire departments safeguarded Boys Town residents.

At Work .

Monsignor Wegner encouraged the boys to work after school and on weekends at jobs that would put their vocational training to practical use. Many students assisted in the tailor and shoe repair shops, dining hall, or on the farm. The employment program taught the boys good work skills and the value of an earned wage.

The boys deposited their earnings in the Boys Town Bank to establish a "going away account" that could be withdrawn after graduation. They also could take a portion of their wages as an allowance, issued by the bank in a special Boys Town scrip, to spend at the town store or bowling alley.

At School

"Children are quick to learn. The lessons learned early in childhood are powerful influences in the character development of the individual."—Monsignor Nicholas H. Wegner

In a time when college was beyond the reach of many, Boys Town first tried to give each boy the job skills with which to earn a living. The Trade School offered courses in tailoring, barbering, auto mechanics, pottery, and industrial arts. Each senior in the tailoring class made his own graduation suit. A scholarship fund made sure that those students who excelled academically had the opportunity to enroll in a university.

Like most other high schools, Boys Town held junior proms, "Last Will and Testament" ceremonies, senior banquets, and pep rallies. Other extracurricular activities included a strong Scouting program, clubs for model building, stamp collecting, and short-wave radio transmission.

Home

"When a teenage youth gets himself into trouble and ends up in juvenile court, it is a pretty safe bet that somewhere in his past there has been an evasion of responsibility and a breakdown of authority in the home."—Monsignor Nicholas H. Wegner

For the boys, "home" was a large apartment or cottage shared with about 20 roommates and a male counselor. The boys ate meals together in the Dining Hall. Each resident had assigned chores in the living units and in meal preparation. After homework in the evenings, the boys watched television, played games, or worked on hobbies. They sometimes held group meetings in the apartments to discuss home or school events.

During summer vacations, the boys could fish, swim, and hike at Lake Okoboji in Iowa. From Christmas to the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6, special daily events took place, culminating in a Twelfth Night celebration when Boys Town's teachers presented a play to the boys.

Lessons in Faith

"The physical needs of a child, as great as they are, shrink to minor significance when compared with its moral and spiritual needs."—Monsignor Nicholas H. Wegner

Monsignor Wegner believed children needed to learn the lessons of worship, reverence, good will, and moral responsibility that religion could teach. He cultivated in his boys religious personal and social habits such as solitary prayer and regular church attendance. He believed that children respond more readily to actions than explanation so he strove to provide for the boys a loving environment monitored by exemplary adults. Boys Town guided each youth in the discovery of faith and the moral duty to be his "brother's keeper."

Agriculture

The Boys Town farm served as a classroom as well as a source of food for the community in the 1940s and '50s. The boys learned new farming techniques for successful crop production and worked with demonstrator farm equipment such as the John Deere "B" tractor. In the animal husbandry program, they raised sheep, swine, and cattle.

Members of the 4-H Club, the Boys Town "Aggies," produced champion livestock and entered them at fairs and expositions. In 1949, the club began hosting the Boys Town Royal Livestock Show in the Fieldhouse every August for 4-H Clubs from the Midwest.

Athletics

Nothing else at Boys Town rallied community spirit more than its athletics program. Now called the "Cowboys," the football, basketball, baseball, swimming, and track teams chalked up victory after victory in the 1950s and '60s and won several state championships. Before joining the Omaha Metropolitan League in 1964, the Boys Town football team played exhibition games in 21 states and Washington, D.C., before crowds of as many as 35,000 spectators. Each year, athletes from all sports were honored at the Boys Town Athletic Awards Banquet.

The Flex

Part of the great athletic tradition established at Boys Town from 1951 to 1973 was the "Flexible Flyer"—nicknamed the Flex—the team bus that carried Boys Town athletes to opponents' schools throughout the country. Team members often demanded that the driver travel particular highway routes to guarantee victory and a "jinx" a winning streak.

Choir

The Boys Town Choir started to perform in 1936, but not until Father Francis Schmitt took over its training in 1941 did the choir gain a national reputation. Radio and television networks broadcast its Christmas Eve concerts from Dowd Chapel. On annual tours, the choir sang in cities across the United States, Canada, and Cuba.

The choir has performed in Carnegie Hall, at Disney World, and on Ed Sullivan's television program, "Toast of the Town." In 1948, the boys entertained President Harry Truman. The choir also recorded albums of Christmas music with the Everly Brothers in 1962 and Gordon MacRae in 1978.

The Families of Boys Town: 1973 to Today

"As times have changed so is Boys Town changing. With the grace of God and the support of our kind benefactors, we hope to touch the lives of more troubled youth than ever before."—Father Robert P. Hupp

When Monsignor Wegner retired in 1973, the Rev. Robert P. Hupp became the new executive director of Boys Town. Father Hupp soon initiated moves to expand the mission of the Home. He decided to phase out the dormitory style of life and moved the boys into homes where they were cared for by married couples called "family teachers." As the family home program proved successful, other youth care facilities across the country adopted it and affiliated with Boys Town through the National Group Home Program. Girls from the local community had been attending classes at the Vocational Career Center for years, but in 1979 Father Hupp opened the residential as well as educational program to girls.

Two other new programs were also added. The Boys Town National Institute for Communication Disorders in Children now treats thousands of hearing- and speech-impaired youngsters annually. The Boys Town Urban Program operates Father Flanagan High School where high-risk inner-city youth get what often is their last chance to complete school.

A Day in the Life of a Family Home

Whatever their background, the boys and girls who come to Boys Town need a stable family life in which to grow. Many parents of these youngsters have personal, economic, or psychological problems that prevent them from providing for the emotional needs of their children. Some of the youths here have been abused, others had difficulty in school, were in trouble with the law or delinquent, or came from broken homes. Each has a problem serious enough that he or she cannot live at home.

One of Boys Town's primary goals is to reestablish, in a family environment, the sense of love and discipline so necessary during a child's adolescent years. In 1973, the Boys Town Family Home Program replaced the dormitory lifestyle. One professional, highly trained family teacher couple and an assistant serve the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of eight to ten children in each home. Every day provides learning experiences in faith, education, competition, and cooperation as the family teachers show by example what it means to be part of a loving family.

Boys Town National Institute for
Communication Disorders in Children

In 1977, Boys Town opened a new facility in midtown Omaha dedicated to identifying and helping communicatively-handicapped children. The Boys Town National Institute (BTNI) offers evaluation and diagnosis, parent education and counseling, speech therapy and corrective surgery to any child, regardless of the family's ability to pay.

Boys Town Urban Program

The Boys Town Urban Program began in North Omaha as Dominican High School. The Archdiocese of Omaha operated the alternative school for inner-city students in an old grade school from 1968 until 1980. Although struggling month to month with more bills than money, Dominican developed a core of social services to help troubled teenagers. Encouraged by the Rev. James Gilg, who became principal in 1972, community support for the school strengthened with each success.

Demolition threatened the school in 1979, when the grounds were purchased for the North Freeway. With no money for relocation and no suitable building in the area, concerned leaders at Father Flanagan's Boys' Home offered expertise and funds to assure the program's continuation in a new building and under a new name, Father Flanagan High School.

Father Flanagan High School

Father Flanagan High School opened in 1983. Uniquely designed to help the high-risk student stay in school, it offers an education to teenagers who might otherwise never earn a diploma. Many of its students do poorly in traditional schools that are ill-equipped to deal with unstable family situations, drug addiction, poverty, or teenage pregnancy.

In addition to a full curriculum, Father Flanagan High provides support services to help students with difficult problems. Often the school gives the teenagers what family and society have not: a nurturing environment coupled with the friendship and guidance of concerned adults. In 1984, the Council for American Private Education (CAPE) selected Father Flanagan High as one of 60 exemplary models of private education in the country.

Extending the Boys Town Family:
Boys Town National Group Home Program
Boys Town USA

Boys Town cannot hope to take in every child in need of a nurturing family environment. But if the children can't come to Boys Town, Boys Town can go to them. Since 1978, child care professionals at Boys Town have been working with communities nationwide in the National Group Home Program, based on the family-teaching model used here. For those communities with a need as well as true commitment to the program, Boys Town provides the support, training, workshops, and evaluation necessary to make its model of youth care succeed in other settings.

In addition to this program, Boys Town plans to open a number of homes run by family teachers in a program called Boys Town USA. Children who are removed from their homes for whatever reason can benefit from remaining in their communities, near their own families. Boys Town USA differs from the National Group Home Program in that its homes are owned and run by Boys Town, but the purpose remains the same: to provide a quality living and teaching environment for children and teenagers in trouble.

Monsignor Edward J. Flanagan

Born in County Roscommon, Ireland on July 13, 1886, Edward J. Flanagan decided early in life to become a priest. As a seminarian he witnessed the misery of big city slums in America and Europe and decided to devote his life to helping the poor and unfortunate.

After his ordination in Innsbruck, Austria in 1912, Father Flanagan held his first parish assignments in O'Neill and Omaha, Nebraska. In Omaha, he embarked on his life's work by first providing a "hotel" for homeless men and later establishing his home for wayward boys.

Despite his challenging role as the founder of Boys Town, Father Flanagan never lost sight of his obligation to serve God as a priest. In Dowd Memorial Chapel, Father Flanagan performed daily Mass, baptisms, and the weddings of many of his former boys. In 1937 Father Flanagan was elevated to the rank of Monsignor in recognition of his faith and service.

In 1947 the U.S. State Department asked for Father Flanagan's help in solving the problems of orphaned and displaced children in post-World War II Asia and Europe. Father Flanagan travelled aboard the U.S.S. Fall River to Tokyo, Japan where he met with General Douglas S. MacArthur to discuss the details of his Far East mission. Father Flanagan visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki, war orphanages, and child detention centers in the Philippines and Japan. His recommendations for American aid to war-torn Asia greatly impressed President Harry S. Truman. At President Truman's request, Father Flanagan journeyed to Europe in 1948 to prepare a report on the status of war orphans. While in Berlin, Germany, Father Flanagan suffered a heart attack and died on May 15, 1948.

"Boys Town was his heart's desire."

—Sister Herman Joseph Wegner, sister of Monsignor Nicholas H. Wegner.

Nicholas H. Wegner was born in Humphrey, Nebraska on July 6, 1898. He survived a diphtheria epidemic that claimed the lives of six of his twelve brothers and sisters. As a child he enjoyed playing "priest" and saying "Mass" for his older sisters.

Monsignor Wegner was installed as director of Boys Town on September 26, 1948. Boys Town benefited from his exceptional administrative skills and experienced tremendous growth and prosperity. Monsignor Wegner made many personal appearances on national radio and television programs such as the Ed Sullivan and Arthur Godfrey shows to inform the public about Boys Town.

At Boys Town, the students knew him as Monsignor "Nick" who believed strongly in educational excellence and loved sports.

Realizing his son's desire to become a priest, Nicholas' father arranged for him to attend high school and college at St. Joseph in Teutopolis, Indiana, from 1912 to 1916. After graduation Nicholas excelled in his seminary studies in St. Paul, Minnesota and Rome, Italy. On March 7, 1925, Father Nicholas Wegner was ordained into the priesthood at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Before coming to Boys Town in 1948, Monsignor held many positions within the Omaha Archdiocese including Director of the St. James Orphanage and Archdiocesan Chancellor. In 1975, Monsignor Wegner celebrated his Golden Jubilee as a priest with friends and family at Boys Town's Dowd Chapel.

As Boys Town's director, Monsignor Wegner rapidly earned a national reputation as an authority on the care of children. U.S. Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower consulted him on the problems of juvenile delinquency in America. In 1954 the U.S. State Department asked Monsignor Wegner to tour India, Japan, and the Philippines and report on the condition of children overseas.

"We see far when we stand on the shoulders of giants. Fathers Flanagan and Wegner provided the frame for me to climb on."

—Father Robert P. Hupp

On July 3, 1915 Robert Paul Hupp was born the first of nine children to a young Clearwater, Nebraska farm couple. As a young boy, he helped his family with farm chores, attended classes in a one-room schoolhouse and dreamed of being a musician. His high school days were filled with football practice, hunting trips, playing the banjo, and acting in traveling shows for his parish church.

His decision to become a priest led Robert to study at Conception College and Kenrick Seminary in Missouri. In May, 1940 Father Hupp returned home to celebrate his first Mass as an ordained priest.

After serving in World War II, Father Hupp was appointed chaplain for Omaha's Good Shepard Convent, a home for wayward girls. In 1950 he continued his work with young people serving as advisor to Wayne State College's Neuman Club. He established Omaha's Christ the King parish in 1953, holding Mass in an amusement park until completion of the church and school buildings in 1961.

In 1943, Father Hupp was called into the United States Navy. As chaplain for the naval destroyer, the USS Corrigedor, he served as an inspiration to his shipmates during World War II. Father Hupp used his naval Mass kit including an altar stone, chalice, and vestments to say Mass on ship decks and on the hoods of jeeps on the war-torn islands of the South Pacific.

In 1973 Father Hupp took on the most challenging assignment of his career as executive director of Boys Town. During his tenure Father Hupp expanded the mission of Boys Town nationwide to include children in other communities, abused and neglected girls, high-risk inner-city youth, and children with communication handicaps. In recognition of his accomplishments, Father Hupp was invited by President Gerald R. Ford to serve as special representative to the United Nations during the "Year of the Child" in 1976.

The Man from Boys Town

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child. I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things." —1st Corinthians 13:11

As a graduate of Boys Town, a student enters a brotherhood, unique in scope and proud of its accomplishments. Alumni have carried the lessons and values they learned at Boys Town into the work place and the home.

In 1949 the founding of the Boys town Alumni Association enhanced a deepening sense of tradition at the Home. As members of the association, graduates raise funds and provide scholarships for current students. In 1984 the association welcomed the addition of female graduates to its ranks, beginning a new tradition for Boys Town alumni.

Many Boys Town graduates became heroes on fighting fronts during World War II, and the Korean and Vietnam wars. More than sixty lost their lives often listing Boys Town as their only next of kin. Their courage and bravery has received international attention and recognition.

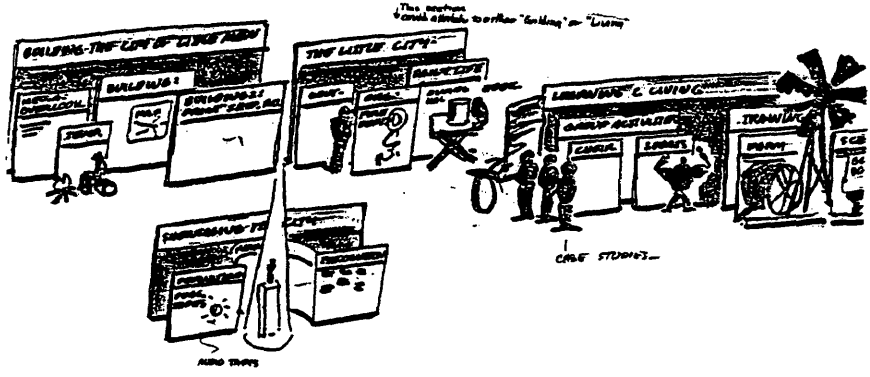


VISITOR ENTERS A FOYER (COMMON LIT)
OF 24-POST-ESQUE MERRIDGES.
AT UNMOUNTED HEIGHT, ETC. VISIBLE
BEYOND IS SIGN, BRIGHTER LIT -
"BOY'S TRAIL - WELCOME"

TRIPLE ROW, LOW VOLTAGE PIN LIGHTS - ACE
FROM DOWN -
REFLECTS REPRODUCED ON SMOKE PAPER,
SUSPENDED FROM CEILING

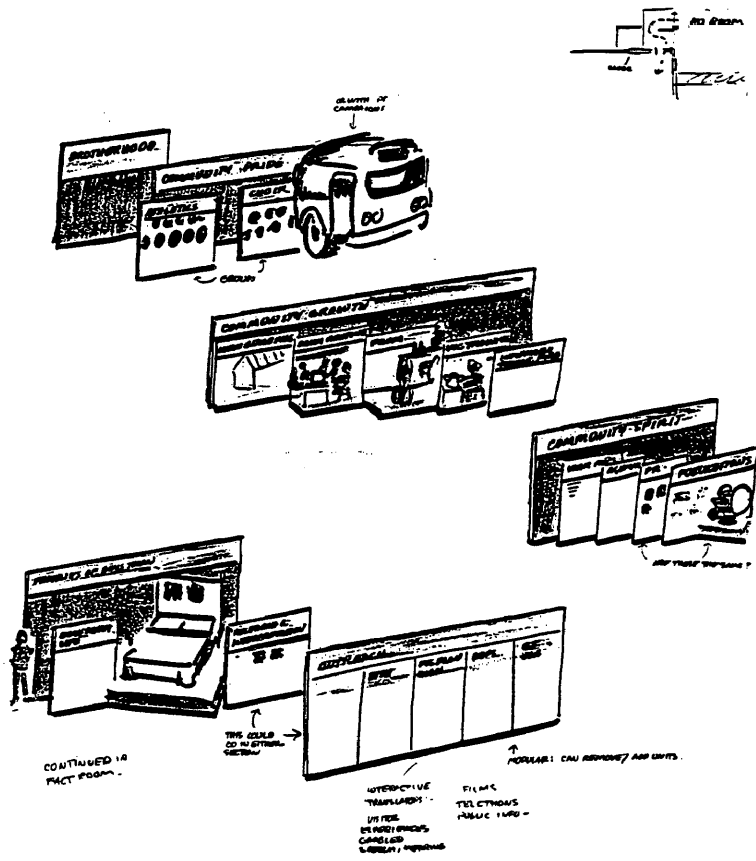


triple recessed
- glass
- one central (recessed)
- plus 12, painted (probably reflective paint)
- 6. Ground of theme, table suspended on formica.



The section
could extend to other "Building" or "Living"

CASE STUDY



G. Boys Town Hall of History Final Storyline and Design Outline,

August 1984

HALL OF HISTORY EXHIBIT
SECTIONS

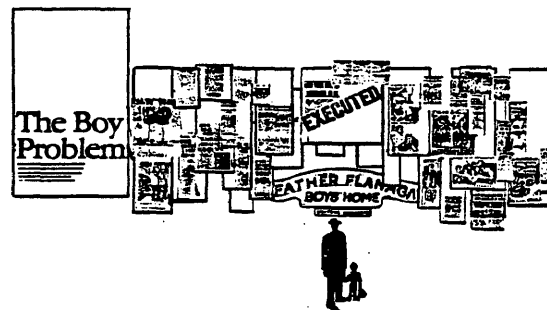
- 1.1 OPENING CREDITS - acknowledgements, no artifacts
- 1.2 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME - label copy
- 1.3 COMING TO BOYS TOWN - audio presentation on stories of youth's plight, artifacts, documents
- 1.4 THE BOY PROBLEM - through graphics, documents depiction of national plight of youth in the early 20th century.
- 1.5 SAVING THE WAYWARD BOY - examination of Father Flanagan's early efforts to help adults and then children from a life of delinquency and vagrancy.
- 1.6 THE FIRST HOME - description of the beginning of and daily routine of Father Flanagan's first home for boys. Profile of Boys Home Journal.
- 1.7 THE GERMAN-AMERICAN HOME - increase in youths and commitment result in the expansion of F.F. Home for Boys into larger quarters. Women's Auxiliary Guild is highlighted.
- 2 THE CITY OF LITTLE MEN - title panel (1921-1948)
- 2.1 THE MECCA OF THEIR DREAMS: THE MOVE TO OVERLOOK FARM - graphics, documents show Father Flanagan's motivations and efforts to relocate his boys away from the "corrupting" influences of urban life.
- 2.2 THE FARM - a productive farm required alot of effort on the part of all the residents of F.F. Boys Home. Profile of growth of farm and drought of 1931.
- 2.3 BUILDING THE CITY - through graphics, documents and artifacts a chronicle of the growth of the city of Boys Town through its stages of temporary buildings, fundraising for first permanent buildings and donated buildings in the 1940's.
- 2.4 LIFE IN THE CITY - profiles the daily schedules and activities of boys with a special look at Father Flanagan's efforts to guide the spirit of the youth. Examination of the growing administrative needs for the Home will also be included.
- 2.5 LEARNING TO LIVE - examination of educational and vocational programs at the Home in the 1930's and 1940's.
- 2.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY - profile of sports and sporting events through documents, artifacts, photographs.

- 2.7 ON THE ROAD - Juvenile Entertainers Troupe and Father Flanagan's Boys Home Band are highlighted.
- 2.8 ON THE RADIO - Examination of early radio programs broadcast in the interest of the Home with an emphasis on Father Flanagan's speeches and programs utilizing youth.
- 2.9 ON THE SILVER SCREEN - The movie "Boys Town" is taken through production to its premiere.
- 3 THE BROTHERHOOD OF BOYS TOWN (1948-1973)
 - 3.1 COMMUNITY GROWTH - Increase in admissions and prestige allows Boys Town to experience community boom. Profiles of new buildings included.
 - 3.2 VILLAGE SERVICES - Service needs for residents in the growing city spur the development of Boys Town's police, fire, clinical and utilities departments.
 - 3.3 AT WORK - Efforts of students to learn skills through youth employment on campus is examined. Student bank is central artifact.
 - 3.4 AT SCHOOL - primary emphasis on vocational training and Boys Town's efforts to prepare its graduates for the job market of the 1950's and 1960's. Grade school is also profiled.
 - 3.5 AT HOME - Institutional dorm living and cottage residential programs is highlighted through video and photographs. Dining hall operation is also included.
 - 3.6 COMMUNITY PRIDE: ATHLETICS - through artifacts, documents and photographs Boys Town's athletic history is presented with a tribute to Coach Skip Palrang.
 - 3.7 CHOIR - Boys Town's choir and its tours are profiled.
 - 3.8 AGRICULTURE - Boys Town's 4-H program and livestock shows are profiled.
- 4. THE FAMILIES OF BOYS TOWN (1973 - Present) Still in development. Youth care, BTNI, Father Flanagan High and Boys Town USA/Affiliated Homes will be profiled.
- 5 MEMORIAL ROOM
 - 5.1 DIRECTORS OF BOYS TOWN - Separate exhibit profiles of the lives and accomplishments of Father Flanagan, Monseignor Wegner and Father Hupp.
 - 5.2 FAME AND RECOGNITION - Gifts, photographs and artifacts given to Boys Town by famed individuals.

- 5.3 MEN FROM BOYS TOWN - Memorial to war veterans and medals winners from Boys Town. Profile of Alumni Association.
- 5.4 DONOR RECOGNITION - panels dedicated to separate donor categories, Major Donors, Benefactors, In-Kind Gifts, Tribute to Omaha Community, Tribute to Common Donor.

SAVING THE WAYWARD BOY 1917-20

This section will examine the plight of underprivileged, neglected and abused boys in cities during the early part of the century, setting the stage for Father Flanagan's much-needed work. It will introduce Flanagan, his interest in wayward boys and detail his struggle to establish a home for these children.



The Boy Problem

This section opens dramatically with graphics and newspaper articles documenting the plight of delinquent and orphaned children at the turn of the century. Discussion of the juvenile court system and the efforts of reformers in child care will lead into Father Flanagan's work to help orphaned and wayward youths who had nowhere else to turn.



The Boy Nobody Wanted

Here, visitors will see the early work of Father Edward J. Flanagan, his determination to help wayward boys and his efforts to keep them out of adult prisons.

Artifacts

Father Flanagan's briefcase
Gavel*
Flags*
Records*
Prison wall*

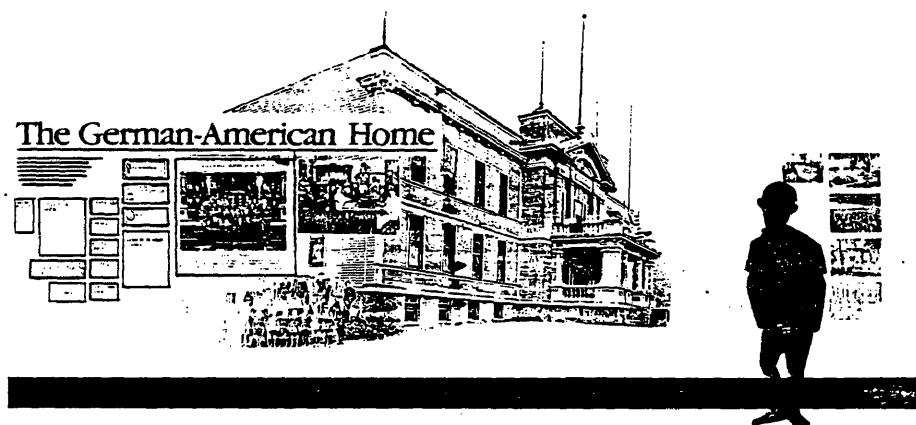


The First Home

This shows the first home started by - Father Flanagan to house his boys, the methods he used to change their behavior and his struggle to find money, clothes, food and help for even more youths in need. The story of one of the first boys can be highlighted.

Artifacts

Boys Town Journal
 Marbles
 Mannequin of boy selling papers*
 "Sanitary Home Products" sold by boys*
 Sled*



The German-American Home

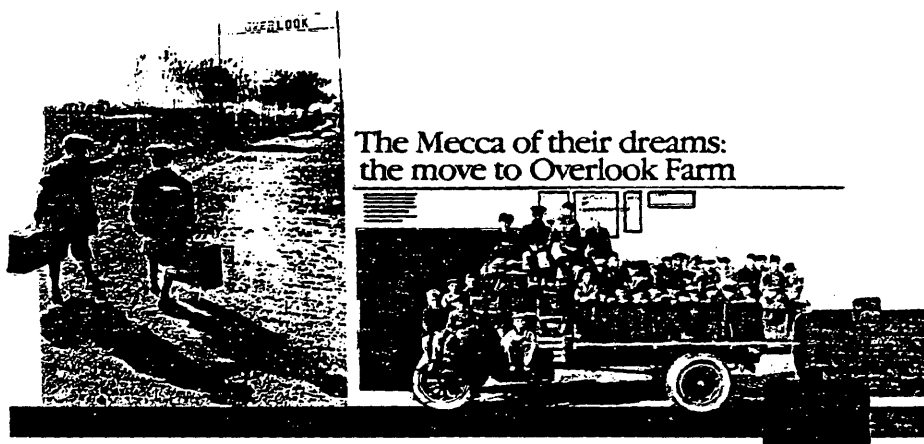
This section shows the growth of Father Flanagan's home as more and more juvenile offenders and orphans were put in his care. Daily activities and the support of community groups will be discussed.

Artifacts

Quilt*
 Period wallpaper*
 Furniture*
 Tableware*
 Sauerkraut jar*
 Children's games*

THE CITY OF LITTLE MEN 1921-48

These exhibits will explore the realization of Father Flanagan's dream: an independent, nearly self-sufficient rural community for his boys. The move to Overlook Farm and the building of an incorporated town and farm complete with school, chapel, practical instruction in trades and all the day-to-day activities will be highlighted. Also shown will be Flanagan's efforts to gain wide support for his community through a variety of media, culminating in the making of the popular motion picture, "Boys Town."



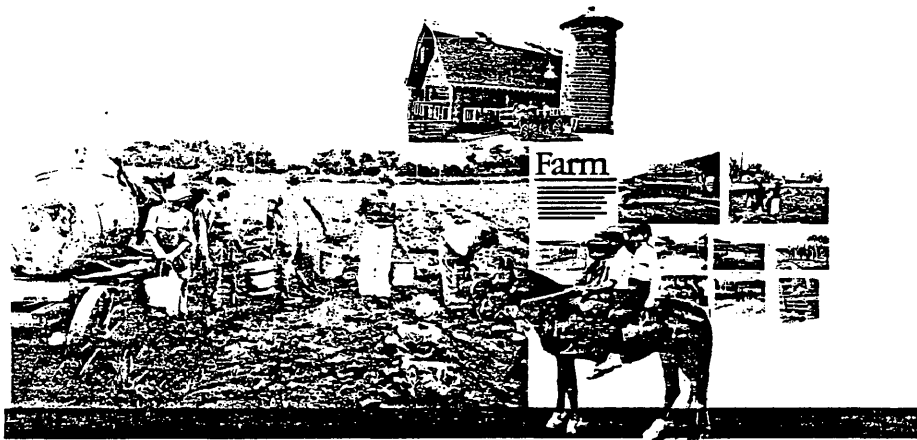
**The Mecca of their dreams:
the move to Overlook Farm**

**The Mecca of Their Dreams:
The Move to Overlook Farm**

This exhibit displays the culmination of Father Flanagan's dream to move to a permanent home for his boys, away from the harmful influence of city life.

Artifacts

- 1920's map of Overlook Farm
- 2-wheel metal barrow
- Trunk
- Check used to purchase farm
- Articles of Incorporation

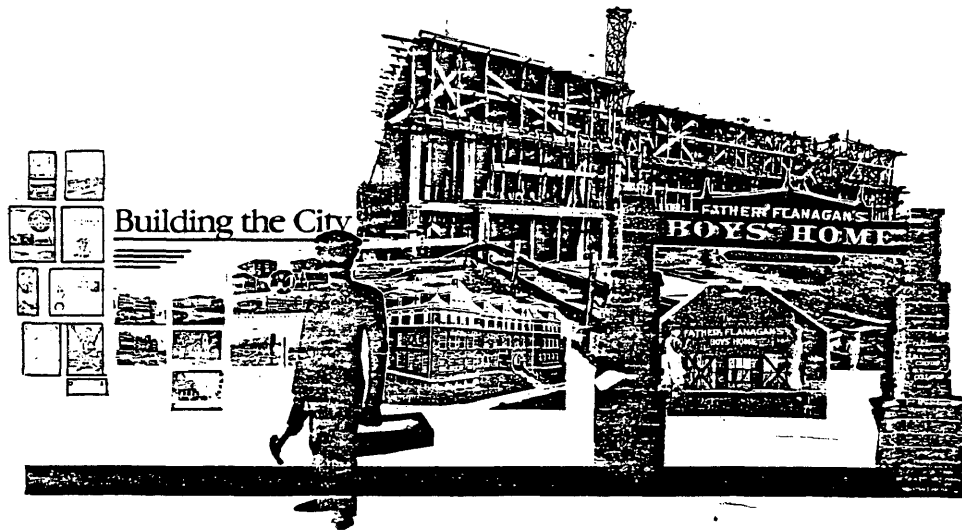


The Farm

Here visitors see how the boys, under Father Flanagan's guidance, developed Overlook Farm into a thriving community, Boys Town, which provided them with much of their food as well as valuable learning experience.

Artifacts

Windmill
Sickles
Wagon wheel
Gas pump
Barrow
Milk buckets
Scythe
Harness tree
Fire hose cart

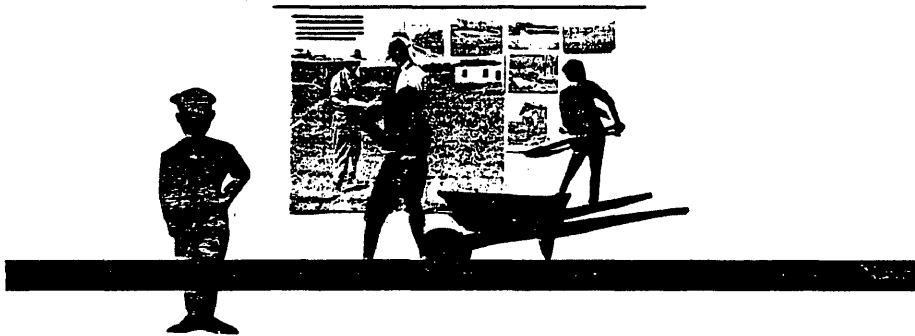


Building the City

This section details the completion of the various permanent buildings at Father Flanagan's Boys Town.

Artifacts

Trowel
Facade of Post Office
Casts of architectural details

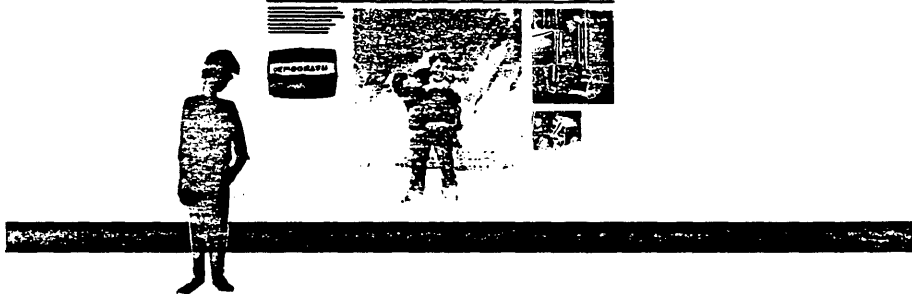


Temporary Buildings

This area shows the crude shelters and primitive conditions the boys endured while permanent facilities were under construction.



Coming to Boys Town

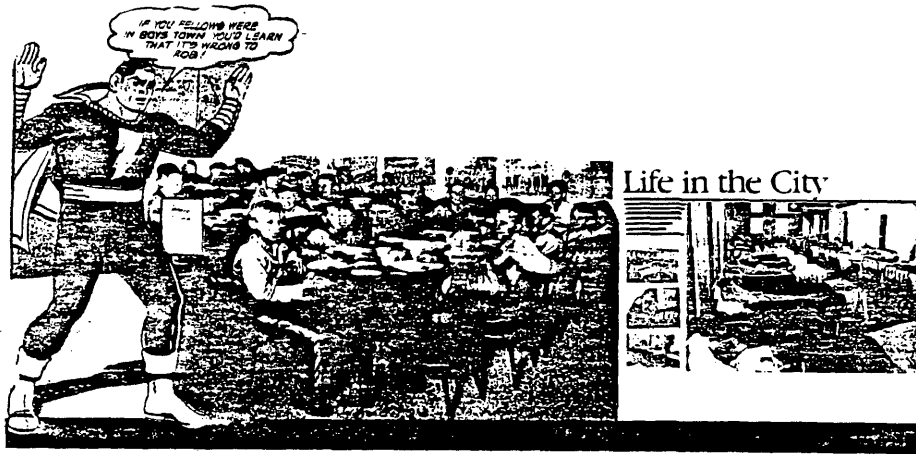


Coming to Boys Town

Here we will show examples of the conditions that brought children to Boys Town and how those children were accepted into the unique community.

Artifacts

Sign



Life in the City

The daily activities of Boys Town's residents will be introduced. A case history highlighting one of the first mayors can be included.

Artifacts

"Student Council" binder

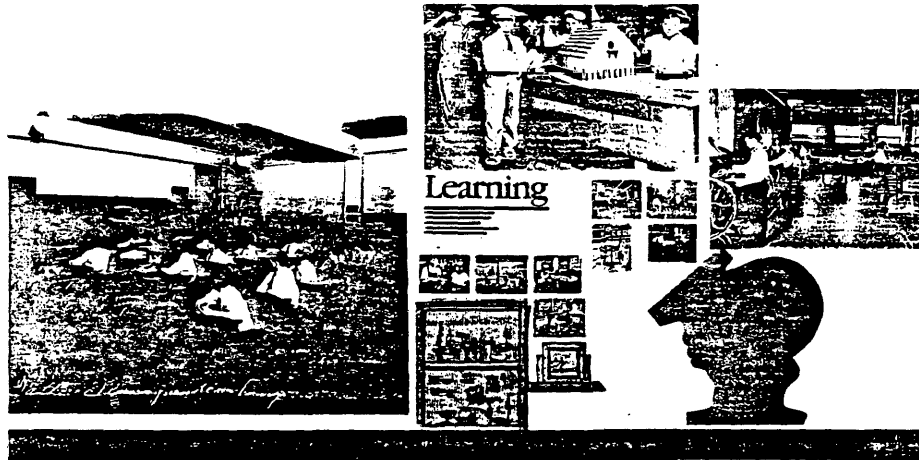


Guiding the Spirit

Here is shown the importance placed on religious instruction in a Boys Town resident's life.

Artifacts

- Catechism books*
- Choir robe*
- Hymnal*
- Objects from chapel*

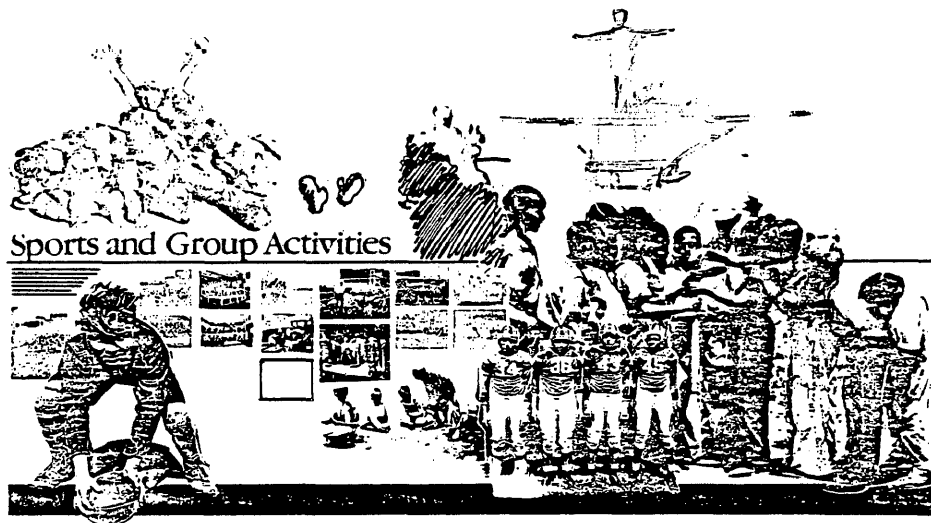


Learning

This section shows the variety of learning situations at Boys Town, in and out of the classroom. Through the years more grades were added, as well as education in useful trades, which would help the boys find jobs once they left Boys Town.

Artifacts

Brooms made by boys*
 Philco radio*
 Report cards
 Marking wheel
 Sewing machine
 Commencement program
 Printing press
 Woodworking projects*
 School books*
 Flip charts*
 Blackboard*
 World map*
 Globe*
 Silk kites made by boys*

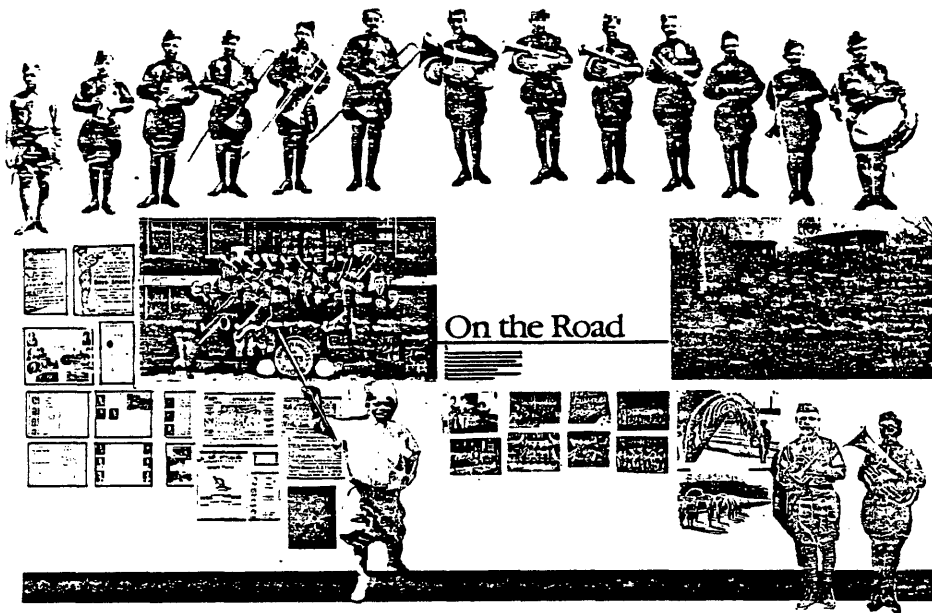


Sports and Group Activities

Teamwork and cooperation were important values instilled in Boys Towners, and here they are evidenced through participation in sports, clubs and other group activities.

Artifacts

Book on "T" formation
 Poster "Cub Bowl"
 Poster "Little Quakers"
 Mascots: goats and pigs*
 Flanagan's fishing pole*
 Boxing gloves*
 Marbles*
 Football*
 Uniform*



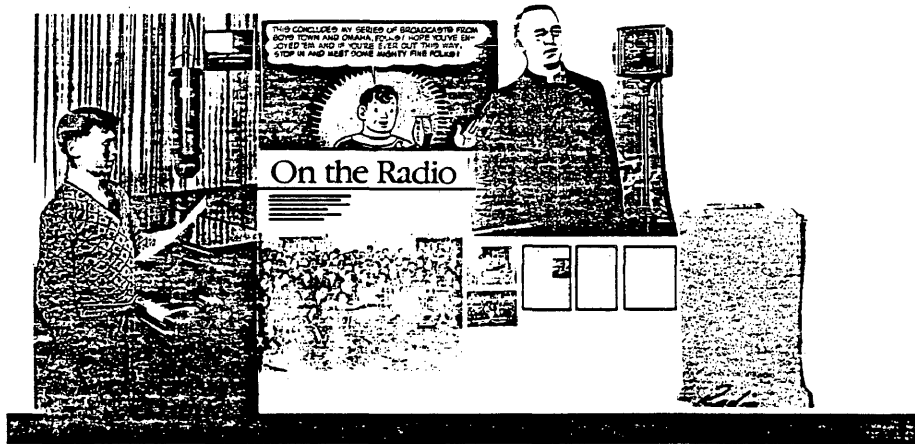
On the Road

On the Road

Father Flanagan's success in fundraising was aided by the travels of the famous Boys Town Choir as well as the creation of a troupe of "Juvenile Entertainers." Here we will depict the warmth and appreciation which greeted the musical groups on nationwide tours.

Artifacts

- Choir uniform
- Violin and case
- Music stand
- Band wagon
- Choir advertisements
- Tickets
- Drum*
- Newspaper advertisements*



On the Radio

Father Flanagan reached millions of radio-listeners with the message of Boys Town. This exhibit shows how he used the medium for speeches and popular student personalities such as "Johnnie the Gloom-Killer."

Artifacts

Draft of radio speech by Father Flanagan
 Microphone
 Choir concert
 Radio script
 Gloom Killer cards*
 Gloom Killer poster*
 Gloom Killer scripts*
 List of stations that played Gloom Killer*
 Re-enacted script*



On the Silver Screen

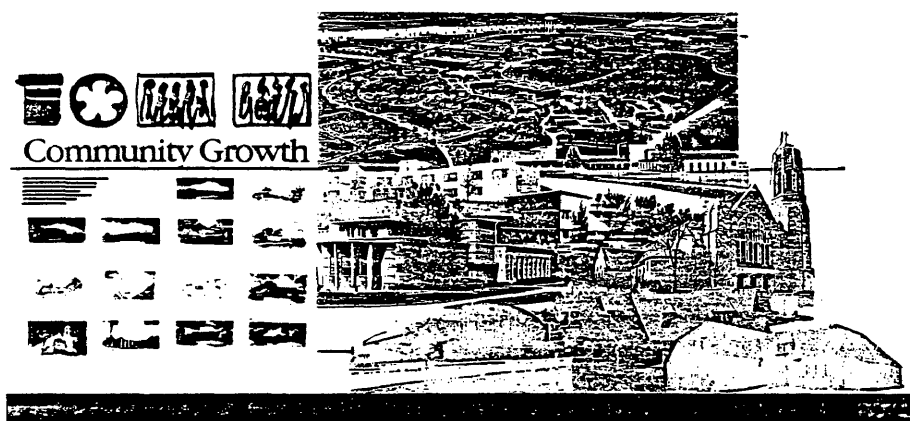
When Hollywood showed the story of Father Flanagan and Boys Town to millions of movie-goers, the community attained immediate international fame. Here we exhibit the filming of Mickey Rooney and Spencer Tracy in the lead roles of "Boys Town," the popularity of the film—and its successor, "Men of Boys Town"—and the awarding of Tracy's Oscar for his portrayal as Father Flanagan.

Artifacts

Oscar
 Films "Boys Town" and "Men of Boys Town"
 Scrapbook on premier of "Boys Town"
 Posters
 Scripts
 Box Office reports
 Correspondence
 Father Flanagan's press pass

THE BROTHERHOOD OF BOYS TOWN 1949-73

This section will depict the growing sense of "brotherhood" at Boys Town during the administration of Father Nicholas Wegner. It was evidenced in the camaraderie and community pride shared through group activities in music, athletics, agriculture and a new alumni organization. These years also saw dramatic growth on the campus, with the addition of many new facilities.



Community Growth

Boys Town experienced tremendous growth and change in the years after Father Flanagan's death. This section details the \$13 million expansion and the addition of family-styled cottages to house the boys.

Artifacts

Architectural drawings of expansion
 Dedication of High School
 Dedication of Field House
 Dedication of Flanagan statue
 Dedication of Philamatic Center

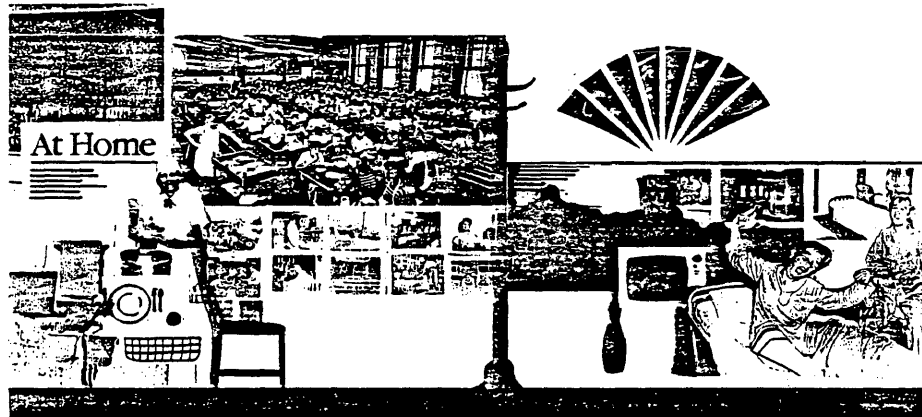


Village Services

As Boys Town grew, so did the support services which kept it running smoothly. Here we show the development of a professional fire department, army reserve, police department and other facilities.

Artifacts

Badges and patches
 Cadet firefighter jacket
 Book on diseases of skin
 Nurse's pants and skirt
 Sick pan
 Enema bag
 Clinic treatment slip pad
 Clinic memo pad
 Clinic envelopes
 K-pad for use with oxygen tent
 Pamphlet for volunteer firemen's association
 Cadet overalls
 Cadet badges
 Helmet and glove
 Medal from fire dept. competition
 Helmets
 Gas mask
 Fire extinguishers
 Hose and nozzle
 Ladder
 Spanner wrenches
 Axe



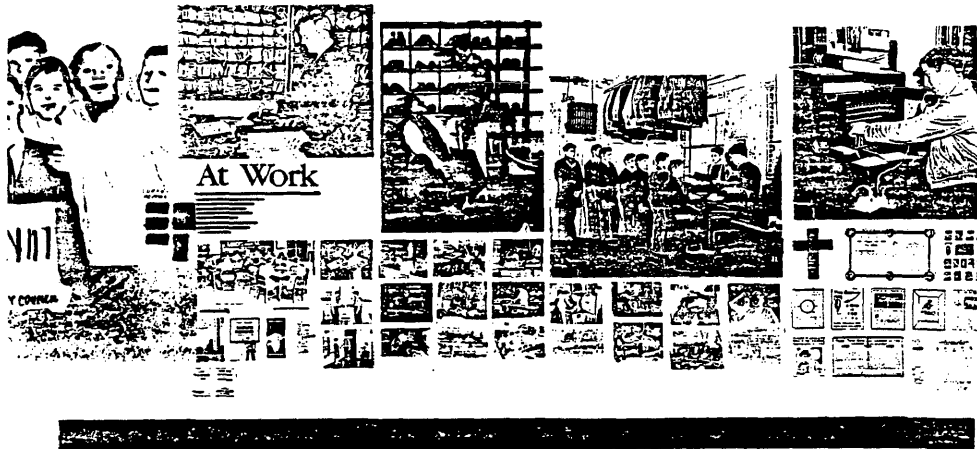
At Home

Here the visitor will get a detailed glimpse of life in a Boys Town cottage and dormitory. Everyday activities such as eating, sleeping, chores, homework and play will be highlighted.

Artifacts

"Boys Town Needs for One Year"
 Honorary citizenship card
 Boys Town certificates
 Lawn mower
 Coat rack
 Dining hall uniforms
 Aprons
 Wire dish racks
 Soup warmer
 Tableware
 Egg boiler
 Flatware
 Menus
 Personnel records, dining hall employees
 Movies

TYPICAL BREAKFAST

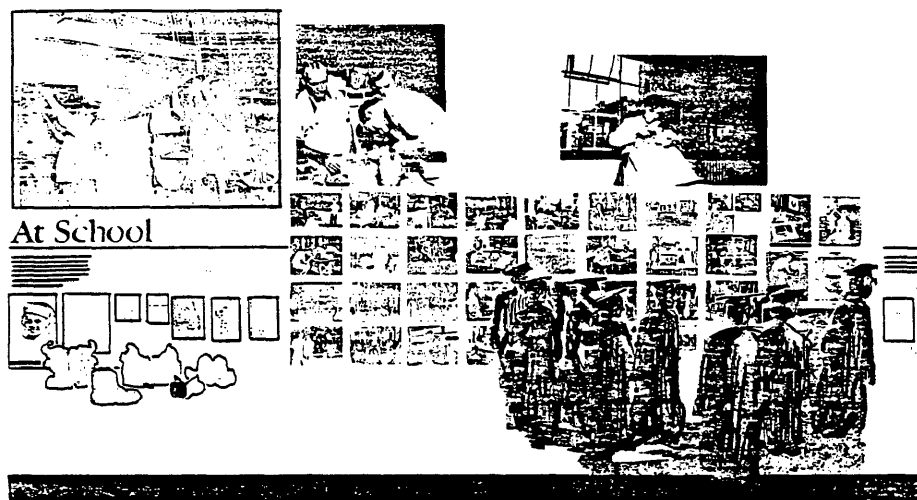


At Work

Students at Boys Town supplemented their classroom education with part-time work in one of the many departments available. Learning to use and save money, as well as gaining valuable employment skills would help Boys Towners function in the "real world" after graduation.

Artifacts

Adding machines
 Safe
 Fiscal dept. window
 D.O. Barret safe & papers
 Switchboard
 BT coins, bank forms, currency
 Teller counter and gate
 Portable bank file
 Multilith duplicator
 Print rollers
 Galleys and racks
 Boys Town Times
 Boys Town Daily Bulletin
 Tools and finished products for various trades*

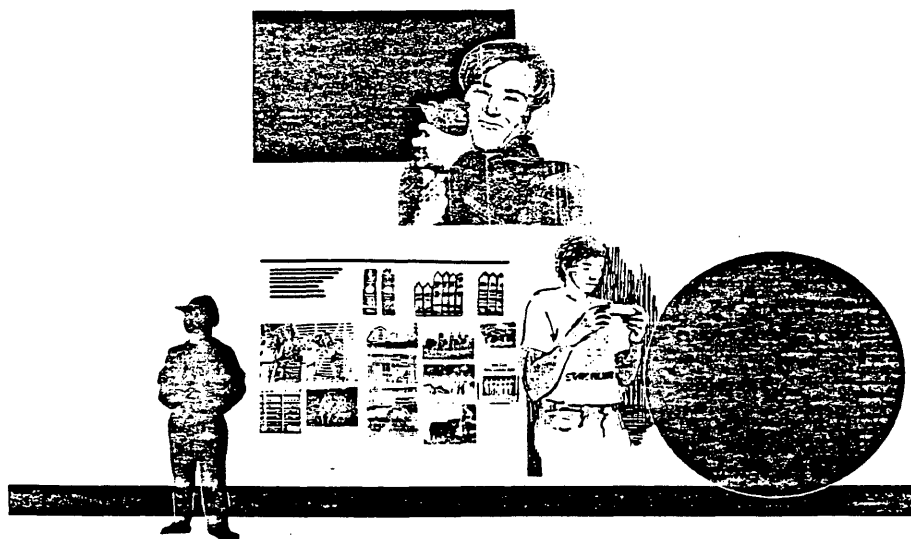


At School

Boys Town offered a complete array of grade school and high school subjects for trade and college preparatory students alike. This section will show the Boys Town residents in the classroom as well as the trade program. The story of an outstanding student in a trade or other subject can be highlighted.

Artifacts

School desk w/side arm
 School desk, table style
 Box flight training film
 Potter's wheel
 Woodwork made at BT
 Desk made by J. Thomas
 Lamp made at BT
 Audio-visual machines
 '57 Chevy*
 Theatrical sets & costumes*
 "Yearning Boy" mold
 Ephemera from proms, banquets
 Cereal boxes, games, comics

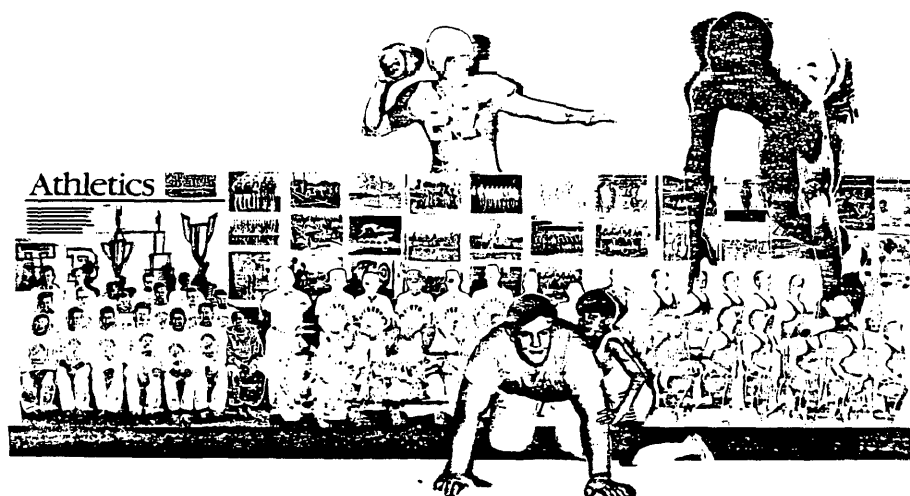


Community Pride: Agriculture

There were many opportunities for Boys Town students to take pride in their institution. This section focuses on one of these, agriculture, where the young farmers consistently raised prize-winning livestock and produce.

Artifacts

"Purebred Hampshires" sign
 Livestock ribbons
 Dairy award
 Beef hooks
 Tractor
 Corn planter
 Gardening book
 Exhaust box for canning*

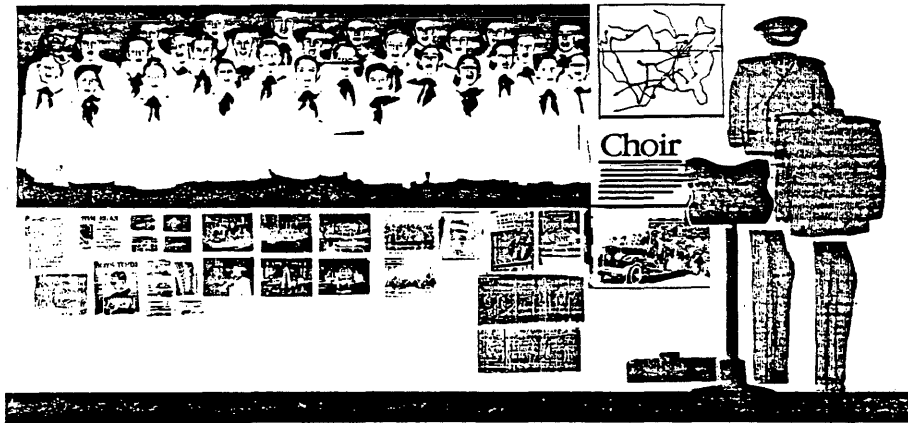


Community Pride: Athletics

During the 1950s-1970s, the athletic program was an important part of the Boys Town experience. Team competition in football, track, basketball, baseball, tennis, swimming and wrestling fostered cooperation and pride in mutual effort. The story of an outstanding Boys Town athlete can be highlighted.

Artifacts

Bronze bust of Lou Gehrig
 Palrang memorial
 Trophies
 Book by Palrang
 Football films
 Football posters
 Proclamation of Skip Palrang Day
 "The Flex"
 Deacon Jones' Olympic medal*
 Athletic letters*
 Letter jacket



Community Pride: Choir

People across the country shared in Boys Town's pride when they heard the famous Boys Town choir or the band perform. This section will show how these students served as Boys Town "ambassadors" in this and other countries.

Artifacts

Instruments and cases
 Music stand
 Band uniform
 Sheet music*

FAMILIES OF BOYS TOWN 1974-85

This section will explore the changes at Boys Town during the administration of Father Robert P. Hupp, focusing on the development of the family-teaching model environment, worldwide recognition of Boys Town's achievements and the growing outreach programs developed to help even greater numbers of troubled young people. Primary to this section will be a look at the daily life of a typical youth and how he/she is monitored, corrected, taught and encouraged.

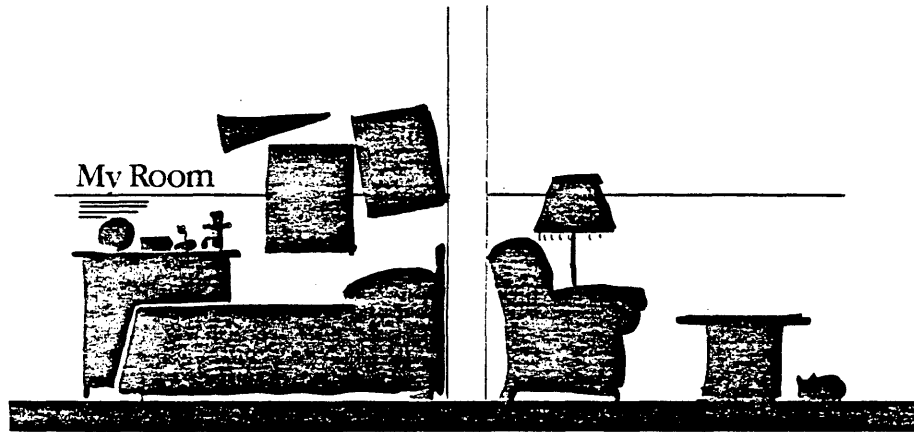


Families of Boys Town

This section exhibits the progress at Boys Town under the leadership of Father Robert P. Hupp. Emphasis will be placed on the family-teaching model and how it works to develop the social skills children need to function in the wider community.

Artifacts

Point log*
Task schedule*
Family budget*

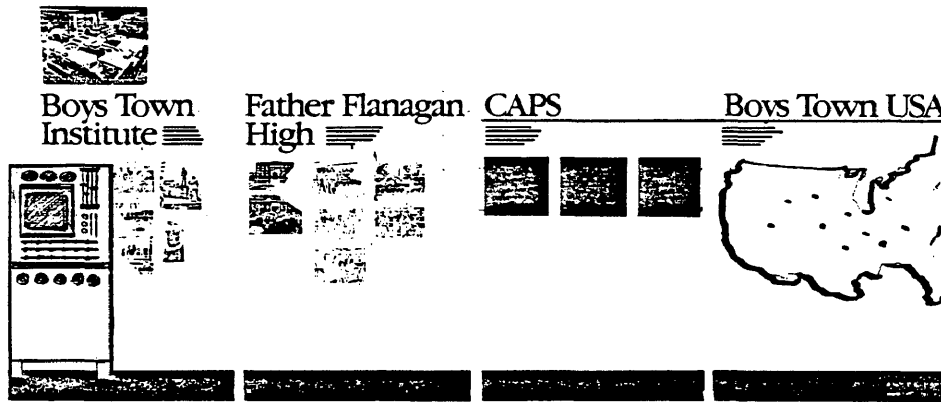


My Room

Here we show the visitor the bedroom of a typical Boys Town resident. This will include a discussion of how the child's daily life is monitored to produce optimum behavior.

Artifacts

Bed*
 Dresser*
 Posters*
 Personal effects*
 Bedspread*
 Arm Chair



Boys Town Institute
 Father Flanagan High
 CAPS
 Boys Town USA

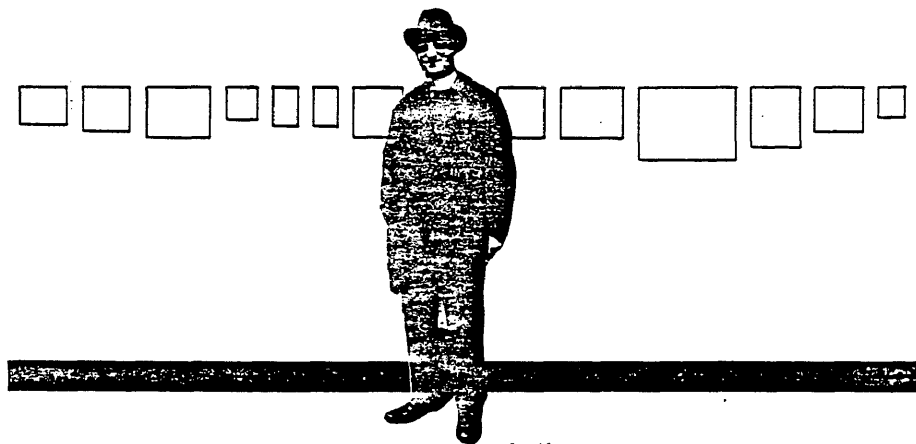
These panels will show the various outreach programs Boys Town has developed to reach hundreds of troubled, gifted, deaf, inner-city or speech-impaired children and offer them the medical help, counseling and support they need and could not otherwise obtain. Publications from Boys Town on a variety of topics reach parents, children and teachers.

Artifacts

Hearing and speech testing equipment and implements*
 Publications

DIRECTORS

This exhibit will pay tribute to the three men who formed and guided Boys Town's existence to the present day: Father Edward J. Flanagan, Father Nicholas Wegner and Father Robert P. Hupp.

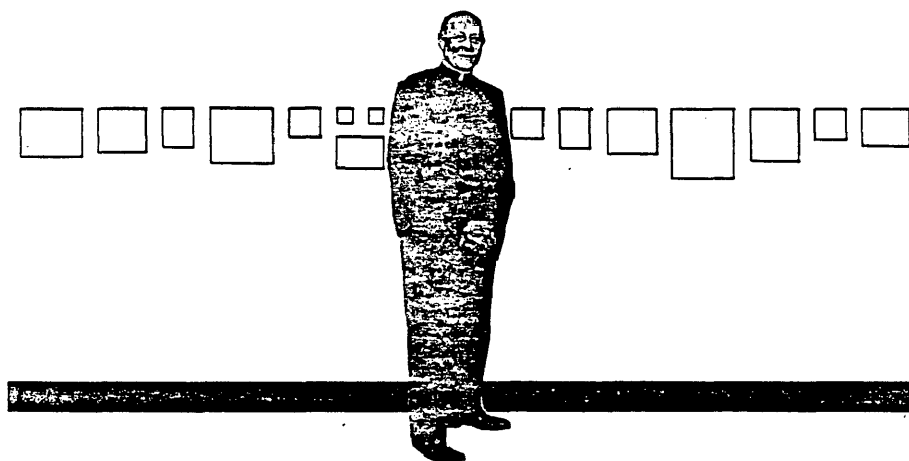


Father Edward J. Flanagan

This section honors Father Flanagan, telling something of his early life and detailing his hard work on behalf of Boys Town.

Artifacts

Doll given by B'nai B'rith
Flanagan's coffee mill, kerosene lamp,
paperweight
Scrapbook, Flanagan's funeral
Photos from Japan and Korea trips
Photos from other trips

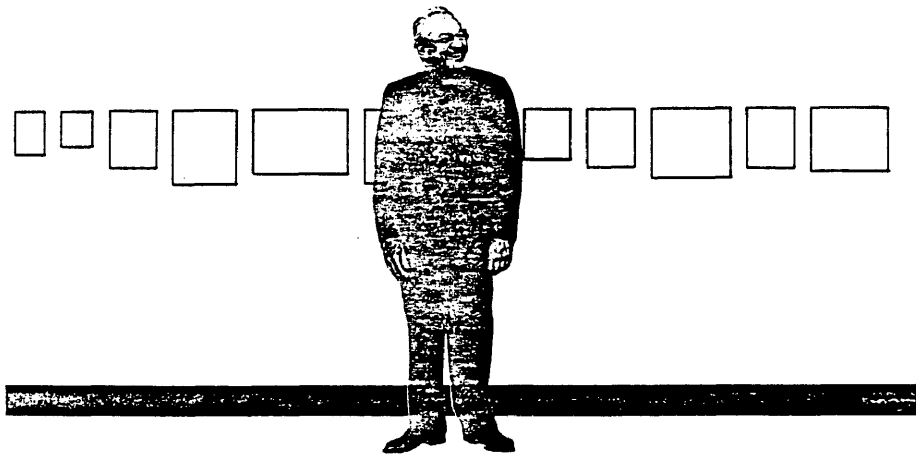


Father Nicholas Wegner

Here we honor Father Wegner and his dedication to expanding Boys Town.

Artifacts

Canes
 Documents
 Camera
 Ecumenical bell
 Letter from Nixon
 Travel diary
 Personal diary
 Radio
 Speeches
 Menu
 Elephant carving and case—good service award
 Silver Japanese snuff box
 Cuff links from Sparta
 Brass plate
 Foreign trip photos
 Scrapbook



Father Robert P. Hupp

Artifacts

Here the visitor can learn more about the current director, Father Robert P. Hupp, and how he has led Boys Town into the 1980s.

Recognition & Fame



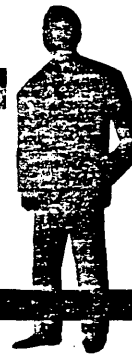
Recognition and Fame

This montage highlights all the many famous religious, entertainment, political and sports personalities who have visited and/or paid tribute to Boys Town. It also shows the worldwide recognition the institution has gained over the years.

Newspaper articles
 Far East Photo Review
 Christmas card signed by Flanagan
 Response card from Robert and Ethel Kennedy on death of JFK
 Letters from Eisenhower, Johnson, Nixon, Carter
 Joint resolution authorizing memorial in D.C.
 Franklin Mint ingot
 Ribbon from New Zealand Boys Town Police and Citizens Club
 Costa Rican stamp of Flanagan
 Irish medal to BT mayor
 Dedication booklets
 Cather bust
 Pershing bust
 Campaign letters
 BT seals
 BT greeting cards
 Sculpture of Flanagan and children
 Whittier School scrapbook
 Sat. Eve. Post articles
 Magic wand from Howard, class of '63



Alumni

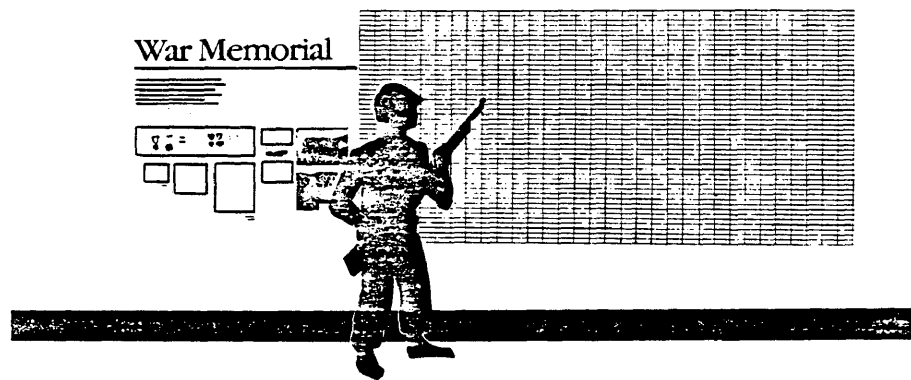


Community Spirit: Alumni

This section exhibits the dedication to Boys Town's spirit and ideals felt by students even after they left the institution. We will focus on the alumni organization which developed during this period.

Artifacts

Alumni Assoc. convention brochures



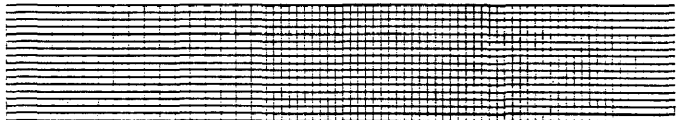
War Memorial

The Boys Town spirit translated into national spirit for those boys who entered military service when they left Boys Town. This section will honor "Father Flanagan's Fighters" and those who fought in Korea and Vietnam. The story of one young man who served his country can be highlighted.

Artifacts

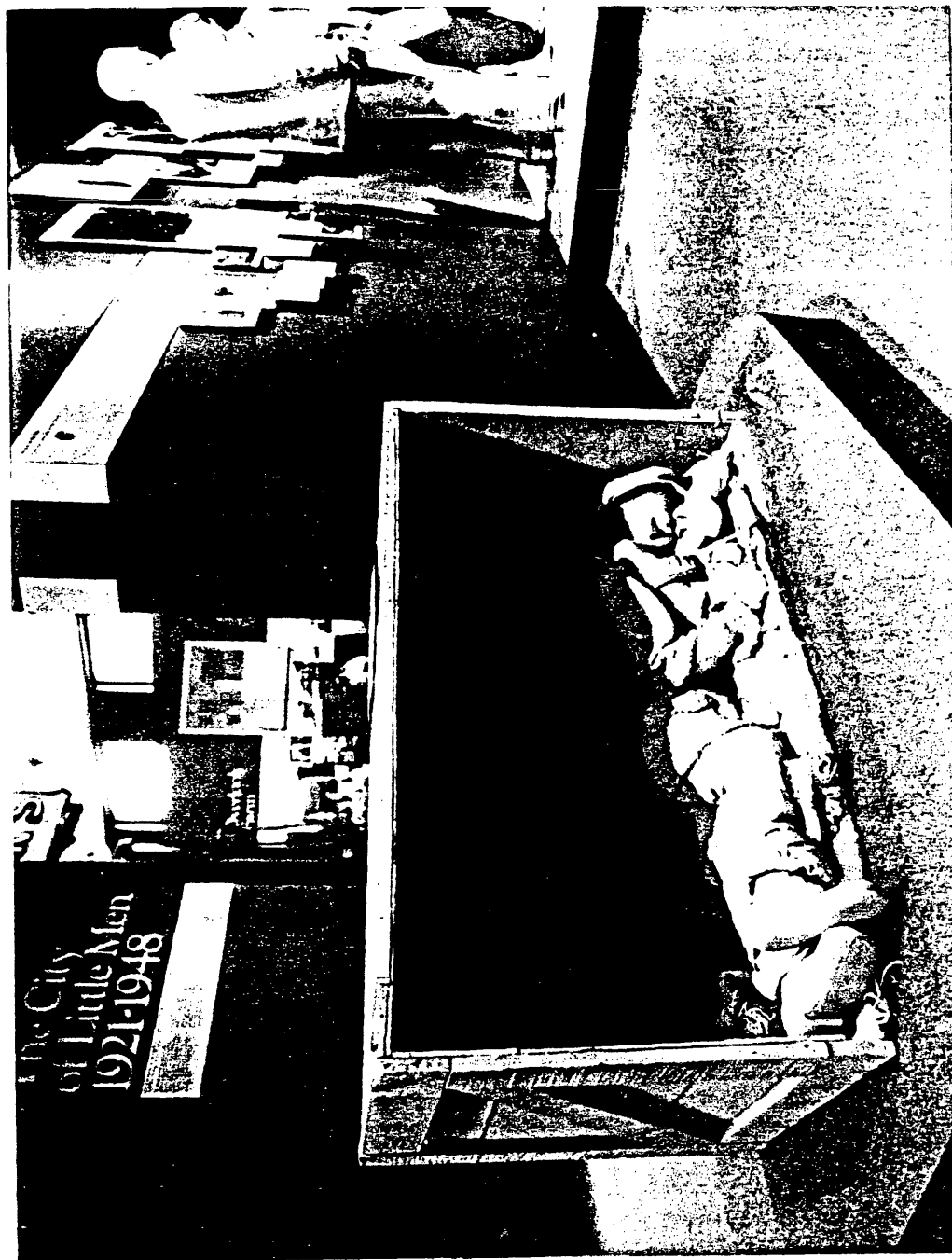
Newsweek article "Flanagan's Fighters"
 POW postcard to Flanagan
 TIME autographed by Bucher
 Bucher's patch, book, ashtray
 Record sent to Flanagan
 Bronze Star*
 Purple Heart*
 Silver Star*
 Congressional Medal of Honor*
 Personal effects sent back to Flanagan
 from boy*

Donors



Donors

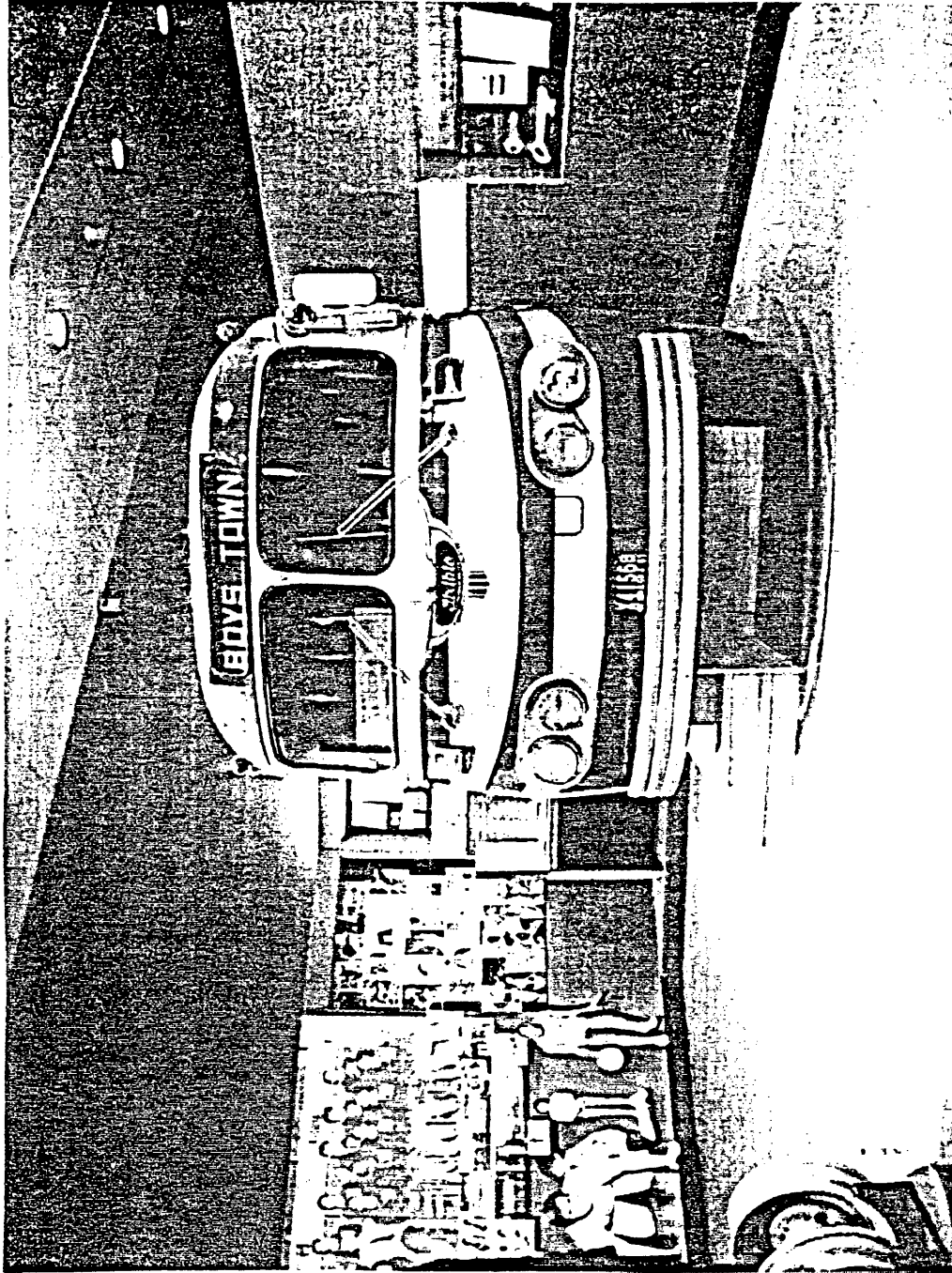
This exhibit section honors the thousands of donors who have made the accomplishments of Boys Town possible.



H. "The Boy in the Box" Mannequin, Boys Town Hall of History, March 1986



I. Juvenile Entertainers Show Wagon, Boys Town Hall of History, March 1986



3. The "Flxible [sic] Flyer" Athletic Touring Bus, Boys Town Hall of History, March 1986

K. "A" Label entitled, "The City of Little Men, 1921-1948,"

Boys Town Hall of History, March 1986

City of Little Men, 1921-1948

"There are no iron bars, no steel windows here, we win over a boy through a planned program of activities to develop his mind and broaden his interests."

—Father Edward J. Flanagan, Director, 1917-1948

The Home's growing reputation as a haven for homeless youngsters soon brought hundreds of boys — wards of the courts, victims of broken homes, orphans, and runaways — to its doorstep. Crowded quarters forced Father Flanagan to accept only those boys whose situations were most desperate. Once again, he began to look for a larger, permanent home.

Father Flanagan envisioned a rural community, self-sufficient and removed from the disrupting influences of urban life. He wanted the space and opportunity to build an educational, spiritual, and recreational program that would give his boys a new chance in life. Ten miles west of Omaha he found Overlook Farm, 160 acres of rolling farmland and plenty of room on which to build his "City of Little Men."

L. "B" Label entitled, "The Importance of Play,"

Boys Town Hall of History, March 1986

The Importance of Play

"Some of the finest people in the world go through life under a handicap because they never learned how to play when they were children."

—Father Edward J. Flanagan, Director, 1917-1948

The boys were expected to study hard and work hard, but play and organized sports were also daily activities at the Home. Father Flanagan believed athletics demanded discipline and built character. In the early years when there was little money for sports equipment, he encouraged the boys to hold marble tournaments and boxing matches, fly kites, or go swimming and fishing. Later, sports attention focused on the high school's basketball, baseball, and football teams. The football team, using the "T" formation and a fine passing attack, played in stadiums across the country. Called the "Blues," the team compiled a record of 37-0-1 between 1935 and 1940.

Original warranty deed, agreement and checks for the sale of Overlook Farm
from Mrs. Anne Baum and her daughter, Margaret Baum,
to Father Edward J. Flanagan, 1921.

M. "C" Label, untitled, Boys Town Hall of History, March 1986

Chapter Three

Exhibiting History Through the Written Word

The need for the perspective and skills of a historian does not end with the completion of an exhibition. As the author of a storyline, the historian acquires historical data and information difficult to display. Many historians write an expanded version of the storyline called an "exhibition catalog." An exhibition catalog fills many of the informational gaps that arise from "doing history" through exhibitions. As its primary goal, an exhibition catalog develops, "footnotes," and expands the complex historical ideas and themes displayed in an exhibition. In addition, the catalog presents to the public a more detailed historical account of the subject of an exhibition. Finally, it serves as a reference and "memory" tool that allows visitors to "carry home" not only written but visual and sensory information of an exhibition.

Though both are products of scholarship, the format of an exhibition catalog differs from that of a traditional thesis or historical monograph. When writing a catalog, exhibition historians must keep their readership in mind and appeal to popular interests in a historical subject. An exhibition catalog challenges a historian to write for a public audience without compromising the scholastic integrity of the work. Within its pages, a catalog reinforces the fundamental goals of a historical exhibition: the translation of complex social and cultural

themes and ideas in a visual form. As with an exhibition, a catalog displays photographs, graphics, and illustrations to communicate historical information. The written word, however, does not necessarily require the same graphics as the exhibition and often benefits from additional images and illustrations. For an example, an exhibition on the 1848 California gold rush may contain a recreation of a miners camp. A photograph of the display may not serve as the best visual accompaniment for a catalog description of the living conditions of the gold miners. Possibly, a photographic depiction of the miners at work near their camp would better serve the informational needs of the catalog. As the case with an exhibit section, a historian must research, gather, organize, and coordinate material culture images to complement the written words. The contribution of a historian to the written and visual content of a catalog determines its value as an "informational scrapbook" for visitors. In addition to historical information, the catalog should enable visitors to "relive" their exhibition experience at a later date.

As I researched the Boys Town Hall of History storyline, I gathered historical information "unexhibitable" either in length or format. Some of the information, if presented, would have provided additional historical information to the public. I realized the need for an expanded historical document to enhance public understanding of the Boys Town Hall of History exhibition. Despite many attempts, I could not secure committee support for the compilation and publication of an exhibition catalog. This chapter presents such a catalog without illustrations and graphics. The catalog will flesh out the storyline

of the exhibition with information obtained from many sources, including primary materials from the Boys Town Hall of History archives. The Boys Town Hall of History archives at this time is uncatalogued and disorganized, making it difficult to provide detailed footnote references.

I have attempted to outline, in as much detail as possible however, the sources and location of information obtained from within the archives. The catalog does not exhaust the history of Boys Town as a subject. It does, however, describe exhibition themes and ideas in sufficient detail to merit academic worth. In addition to a traditional conclusion as presented in most exhibition catalogs, I will provide my own interpretation based on the sources and my own experience there. As a public historian, I probably would not have been able to include a critical or controversial conclusion within the pages of a catalog. Public and private organizations grow nervous when presented with historical endings that are not "happy." Institutions seem unable or, more likely, unwilling to bare their historical psyches to the public. Unfortunately, institutions have not realized the benefits for future growth obtained through an awareness of past actions and thought. In an attempt to make a meaningful "omelet" out of the history of Boys Town, I offer the final pages of this chapter to break a few "institutional eggs."

The Formation of Boys Town's Mission:
Juvenile Delinquency in America, 1700-1930

As in the case of many human service organizations, the "mission" or purpose of Boys Town grew out of a willingness to alleviate a problem within society. As its founder, Father Edward J. Flanagan believed that the greatest tragedy of American society was the treatment and education of its youth. In 1917, armed with courage, vision and very little money, Father Flanagan established a home for "wayward" boys in his attempt to "right" a social "wrong." In order to understand why Father Flanagan thought that children from unfortunate backgrounds, in particular boys, would learn more from living in his "home" than the homes of their parents or relatives requires a brief historical overview of the social problem known as "juvenile delinquency."

Throughout its history, America has required different behavior from its children at different times. Many elements such as economic health, urban development, and political ideology shape the views of a society as to how its children should act. Traditionally, a society relies on parents to serve as the primary imprinters of its values and expectations onto children. To insure acceptable behavior in its children, American society developed institutions such as schools to supplement parental lessons. Children without parental guidance, however, posed special problems. Over the centuries, Americans have adopted many means and methods to feed, clothe, house, and educate homeless children.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the size of American society allowed for the individual disposition and care of

homeless children. If colonial children outlived their parents during the New World trials of disease, famine, inclement weather, and hostile Indian attack, responsibility rested with adult survivors to provide for their well-being. Community elders placed orphaned and abandoned children with willing families and relatives to stem any social problems of vagrancy or neglect. As small rural towns, many colonial communities managed to keep up with the needs of its unfortunate children.¹

The urbanization and industrialization of American cities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries stimulated a rise in juvenile, as well as, adult pauperism. Increasing numbers of neglected children plagued the cities' streets and the public consciousness. In an effort to live outside of adult reach, homeless children acquired characteristics and displayed behavior contrary to the standards of "civilized" society. Many believed that juvenile participation in adult criminal and immoral acts constituted "delinquent" behavior best treated in institutions separate from "normal" children. Inundated and overwhelmed, communities delivered their unwanted wards into the unprepared hands of state and local governments.²

In an attempt to "rescue from indolence, vice and danger, the hundreds of vagrant children and youth, who day and night infest our

¹Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), introductory chapter.

²Robert H. Bremner, The Discovery of Poverty in the United States (New York: New York University Press, 1967), 3-17.

streets,"³ government officials warehoused children in orphan asylums, poor houses, and prisons. "Misbehaved" children suffered mental and physical cruelties at the hands of institutional employees. Many officials, clergy, and private citizens strove to improve conditions for institutionalized children. In 1823, New York reformers established a "house of refuge" to care for "vagrant youth." Despite education and trades classes, the New York House of Refuge resembled a juvenile penitentiary in which children slept in cells and ate meals of brown bread, molasses, and coffee.⁴

In the 1830s and 1840s, many cities and states instituted "farm schools" to care for neglected children. Modeled after European child reform communities, farm schools simulated "family living" in a rural setting. Guided by a belief in the "virtuous influences of a private family," governmental juvenile caretakers acted as "parents" to as many as forty children in one farm school "cottage." The farm school emphasized trades training to correct the educational deficiencies of its youthful population. Whether incarcerated in a farm school, house of refuge, penitentiary, or orphan asylum, children remained as wards of a city or state until reaching an adult age.⁵

The inability of state and local officials to respond quickly to the needs of neglected children generated public criticism and

³Joseph M. Hawes, Children in Urban Society: Juvenile Delinquency in Nineteenth Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 33.

⁴Ibid., 49.

⁵Ibid., 41.

frustration. Private citizens banded together to form societies for the aid and protection of homeless and delinquent children. In 1849, several ministers, law enforcement officials, and social reformers organized the New York Children's Aid Society "to raise up the outcast and the homeless." Under the secretaryship of Charles Loring Brace, the Children's Aid Society financed neighborhood industrial schools, lodging houses and sponsored meetings to educate, feed and shelter "wild and untutored young Arabs" of the streets.⁶

A trained minister, Charles Loring Brace's child care philosophy dominated youth reform activities in the early and mid-nineteenth century. In addition to a formal education, Brace believed that children required the "moral lessons" handed down through generational family living. Brace felt by "placing out" children into farm homes in the West, children would receive parental guidance in a health-filled environment. "Placed-out" children did not always fare as well as Brace hoped. Separated from family and friends, many children experienced loneliness and depression. Some farm families treated their urban wards as chattel imposing tasks of heavy labor and providing poor living conditions. As a result, many children ran away, forced to fend for themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. Despite the drawbacks of his methods, Charles Loring Brace placed out over 60,000 urban children into rural communities by 1884.⁷

⁶Ibid., 87-111.

⁷See Donald Dale Jackson, "It Took Trains to Put Street Kids on the Right Track Out of the Slums," Smithsonian Magazine 17 (August, 1986), 94-102.

In 1860, only twenty facilities for the care and treatment of juvenile delinquents existed in the United States. Located primarily in Northeastern industrial cities, the institutions operated as overcrowded detention houses, inadequate to handle the complex problems of "children gone wrong."⁸ Juvenile vagrancy and crime escalated as cities tried to solve the dilemmas posed by urban growth.

In the late nineteenth century, the national canvas of rural values and traditions collapsed under the weight of urban expansion. Many Americans struggled to maintain a "sense of order" within their altering cities. Increased foreign immigration, industrial advancement, and technological innovation triggered rapid and unsettling changes within American society. City residents floundered under the heavy burdens of inadequate housing, abuses in the workplace, and ethnic and racial intolerance. Strained as a result of long working hours, low wages, and poor living conditions, families deteriorated as a unit and drifted apart.⁹

Children of the urban poor left school in the sixth grade to join their parents in the workplace. Lacking parental supervision, children took to the streets carving out an existence of their own highlighted by vagrancy and petty theft. Alleyways, saloons, houses of prostitution,

⁸Hawes, Children in Urban Society, 86.

⁹Robert Wiebe, The Search for Order, 1877-1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), and Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrants that Made the American People (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951), 144-69, 285.

waterfronts, and tenement slums served as the amusement parks and playgrounds of children on the streets.¹⁰

In the early twentieth century, a public cry arose for planning and control within urban society. Private individuals and organizations operated within the vacuum created by governmental inactivity, restructuring urban life to their liking. "Progressive" reformers held assimilation as the highest goal. In an effort to establish conformity within communities, the "Progressives" employed complex reasoning and diverse methods. In the absence of established practice, many Progressives relied on trial and error in their reform experiments. As social "guinea pigs," many immigrants experienced a loss of cultural identity and alienation among family members at the hands of the reformers.¹¹

A growing national concern for "wayward" children prompted a flood of "progressive" ideas for child rearing and reform. Many Americans viewed juvenile delinquency as a social by-product of the "breakdown" of the traditional values of "home" and "family." In the late nineteenth century, child savers believed misbehaved children to be innocent of guilt and not responsible for "incorrigible" actions. Reformers pointed to the "corrupting" influences of urban living, parental neglect, and unstable home environments as the primary causes for juvenile delinquency.¹²

¹⁰David Nasaw, The Children of the City at Work and at Play (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1985), page two of preface.

¹¹Wiebe, The Search for Order.

¹²Hannah Kent Schoff, The Wayward Child: A Study of the Causes of Crime (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs Merrill Corporation, 1915), 11,

In the early twentieth century, the benevolence of reformers toward the plight of "wayward" children dramatically increased. Progressives searched for new methods to treat neglected and abandoned children. In 1904, Clark University psychologist, Dr. G. Stanley Hall revolutionized reform ideals with his views on child rearing and parenting. Dr. Hall theorized that children experienced a separate stage of childhood called "adolescence" that formed future adult behavior. In the belief that children were "more or less morally blind," Dr. Hall encouraged parents and reformers to act as positive role models during the delicate stage of adolescent development.¹³

As a result of reformist views and academic findings, American children became the recipients of increased public attention and affection. Toys, clothing and literature encouraged children to develop their sense of youthful imagination and playfulness. An incorrigible child required parental love and understanding, not scoldings and whippings to break their youthful spirit.

As the "spearheads of reform," women mounted a defense against child abuse in the workplace and established institutions for the care of wayward children. Settlement house founders, Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, and Lillian Wald joined with the forerunner of the PTA, the National Congress of Mothers, to lobby for the passage of a national

and Jane Addams, The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1909), 25-47.

¹³Ellen Key, The Century of the Child (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), title and introductory chapter, and Hawes, Children in Urban Society, 207.

child labor law. In 1899, the Chicago Woman's Club successfully lobbied for the creation of a separate juvenile court. By 1925, juvenile court systems operated in all but two states across the nation.¹⁴

Judges such as Denver's "Boys' Judge," Ben Lindsey, rose to the challenge of the establishment of juvenile courts and created a body of case law that acted on behalf of the children or "in parens patrie." As parental replacements, judges could determine the disposition of juvenile cases without regard for the wishes of the children and/or their natural parents. Many juvenile judges counseled children before the bench and "sentenced" them into the custody of reform groups, state agencies and institutions, and into the homes of relatives.¹⁵

Despite indications that delinquency occurred as frequently in adolescent females as males, reformers seemed primarily concerned with finding a solution to the "boy problem." Many believed that male juvenile incorrigibility stemmed from antisocial factors such as illiteracy, "gangs" association, and petty crime. In response, "boy savers" created clubs and organizations to correct "bad boy" behavior. Reformers such as William "Big Daddy" George and Judge Ben Lindsey believed that, once exposed to the values and actions of responsible adult males, delinquent boys would emulate socially acceptable behavior. Some "boy savers"

¹⁴Allen F. Davis, Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 219-45.

¹⁵Anthony Platt, "The Triumph of Benevolence: The Origins of the Juvenile Justice System in the United States," Criminal Justice in America: A Critical Understanding (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 354-89.

founded farms or "towns" in order to remove their boys from the corrupting influences of the city and expose them to the "up-lifting" experience of hard work, thrift, and communal living. The boy reformers envisioned juvenile male "utopias" built, governed, and sustained by the fruits of youthful labor.¹⁶

Not all Americans agreed with the reformists' prescription of "a good man to rub up against"¹⁷ as the cure for the ills of male juvenile delinquency. Many believed that "bad boys" belonged with "bad men" in federal penitentiaries and city jails. Participation in World War I diverted national attention from the boys "over here" to boys fighting "over there." Responsibility for the care and treatment of juvenile delinquents shifted to city and state governments. In order to maximize efforts, many governments chose to develop agencies staffed by "professional" social workers and child care experts. Coupled with the activities of the juvenile courts, governmental agencies served as the primary custodians of neglected and delinquent children by the 1920s. Social workers and psychologists developed "scientific" methods such as behavior clinics and intelligence testing to aid governmental agencies in their diagnosis and treatment of juvenile abuse and delinquency. The professionalization of child care removed juvenile delinquents from

¹⁶William Byron Forbush, The Boy Problem (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1901), title, and Jack M. Holl, Juvenile Reform in the Progressive Era: William R. George and the Junior Republic Movement (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), introductory chapter.

¹⁷Father Edward J. Flanagan, The Romance of the Homeless Boy (Boys Town: Father Flanagan's Boys Home Print Shop, 1934), 6.

the well-intentioned hands of reformers into the clinical offices of trained experts.¹⁸

The goal of all child care activists, whether reformers or experts, has been to develop socially-disfunctional children into individuals fit for assimilation into American society. The Progressive Era "child savers," in particular, held citizenship and industry as their highest aspiration for the reform of American youth. Some historians have viewed the work of child savers as an attempt to provide a controlled, responsible labor force for urban businesses and industry. Other scholars have argued that reformers battled juvenile delinquency in order to preserve social order and eliminate "lawlessness." Yet another group of academics maintained that reformers toiled for humanitarian reasons, such as the mental and physical "salvation" of street children.¹⁹ Some of the "child savers" established agencies, organizations, or "homes" for the accomplishment of their individual reform goals. Many of the organizations lasted only as long as the public's interest in its founder and cause. Some agencies survived by altering their "social goals" to reflect the popular opinion and thought. A few institutions, such as Father Flanagan's Boys Home, accommodated for social change without a loss in public support and substantial amendment to the tenets of its original "mission."

¹⁸George S. Stevenson, M.D. and Geddes Smith, Child Guidance Clinics: A Quarter Century of Development (New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1934), 11-20.

¹⁹Hawes and Hiner, American Childhood, introductory chapter.

Saving the Wayward Boy, 1913-1921

As a reformer, Father Edward J. Flanagan adopted many of the Progressive Era ideals of salvation, good citizenship, social control, and labor organization into his child saving philosophy. Armed with the belief "that there is no such thing as a bad boy," Father Flanagan began caring for "boys whom nobody else wanted" in 1917 in Omaha, Nebraska. During his thirty-year career, Father Flanagan demonstrated amazing resilience as a social reformer. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Father Flanagan willingly "realigned" his reform beliefs to accommodate public sentiments. Father Flanagan courted popular support for his child care institution through newspapers, radio, and film. As a result, he emerged as an international media personality in the 1930s and 1940s. The sum of Father Flanagan's work, Boys Town, continues to operate within the tenets of his original mission: to save wayward children from a life of crime and neglect.

Curiously, Father Flanagan's work with homeless boys stemmed, not only from an intense personal vision, but from a sense of duty to the wishes of his ecclesiastical superior. In the late nineteenth century, many American Catholic bishops established welfare agencies and parochial schools "steeped in the true faith" to combat the "conspiracy" posed by Protestant charities and organizations. Contrary to established urban centers in the East, developing Midwestern cities readily accepted parochial institutions as a means to educate and care for immigrants and their families. Archdiocesan bishops relied on young priests and nuns to carry out their wishes. As urban missionaries, prelates and novices

homesteaded parishes and schools in ethnic neighborhoods populated by many Catholics. In their church assignments, young religious struggled with the problems of language barriers, inadequate funding, and public suspicion of their actions.²⁰

In the early twentieth century, Archbishop Jeremiah Harty followed the example of his ecclesiastical contemporaries and established parishes, schools, orphanages, and social service agencies for the uplifting of the Catholic poor in Omaha. In 1910, Archbishop Harty persuaded the Czechoslovakian order of the Sisters of Notre Dame to leave Hessoun, Missouri, and establish an orphanage and boarding school for girls in Florence, Nebraska. Archbishop Harty assigned the Sisters to other diocesan duties including teaching English to immigrant children in Omaha's Czech parishes.²¹ The organization of several ethnic parishes by Archbishop Harty survived diminishing parish rolls as immigrants moved from the inner core of the city out to the suburbs. Remaining inner-city residents, often poor and transient, exhibited an increasing need for economic and social relief.

In 1912, Archbishop Harty decided to transfer to Omaha a newly ordained priest unhappy in his first parish assignment in rural Nebraska. Unchallenged among the steadily faithful Irish farmers of O'Neill, Nebraska, Father Edward J. Flanagan believed that his mission was to

²⁰John O'Grady, Catholic Charities in the United States (New York: Ransdell, Inc., 1930), 147-62.

²¹Sister Marilyn Graskowiak, "Parochial Education in a Czech Community: The Sisters of Notre Dame in Elementary Education in Omaha, 1920-1960" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1977), 11-17.

help the poor. Prior to entering the priesthood, Edward Flanagan had exhibited an interest in working with the urban poor. Upon his arrival from Ireland in 1904, Flanagan aided residents living in New York's notorious slum, Hell's Kitchen.²²

As a result of his labors with the poor of New York, Edward Flanagan contracted tuberculosis. In 1907, he traveled to Omaha to stay with his brother, Father Patrick A. Flanagan, in the hopes of effecting a cure. As the pastor of Holy Angels parish in Omaha, Father "P. A." Flanagan introduced his brother, "Eddie," to Archbishop Harty. Impressed by Edward Flanagan's desire to become a priest, Archbishop Harty encouraged him to complete his seminarian training begun in Ireland and New York.²³

After working as an accountant for the Cudahy Meat Packing Plant in South Omaha, Edward Flanagan left Omaha in 1908 to enter a seminary in Rome, Italy, under the sponsorship of Archbishop Harty. While working with the poor in the slums of Rome, Flanagan suffered a relapse of his tubercular condition and returned to Omaha. In 1909, Archbishop Harty sent Edward Flanagan to Innsbruck, Austria, to recover his health and study for the priesthood.²⁴

Ordained a priest on July 26, 1912, Father Edward J. Flanagan returned to America to assume his duties as assistant pastor at O'Neill,

²²Important Dates in the History of Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, Boys Town, Nebraska (Unpublished manuscript), 1.

²³Important Dates, 1, and Larry Flanagan, interview with author, Boys Town, Nebraska, 6 May, 1985.

²⁴Important Dates, 1, and Larry Flanagan interview.

Nebraska. After granting his request for transfer, Archbishop Harty assigned Father Flanagan as an assistant pastor in South Omaha's Saint Patrick's parish on March 16, 1913. At Saint Patrick's, Father Flanagan read mass, heard confessions, and visited members of the parish who were sick or dying. As he made his calls, Father Flanagan observed the growing numbers of transient packinghouse laborers camped in alleyways, near the railroad yards, and along the river bottoms in South Omaha. Restless and frustrated with his duties as a parish priest, Father Flanagan approached Archbishop Harty with his desire to start a "hotel for homeless men."²⁵

Archbishop Harty cautiously approved Father Flanagan's plan to provide food and shelter for transient workers. He was pleased that Father Flanagan was interested in reform work but could not spare archdiocesan funds for the development of the mission. As Archbishop of Omaha, his first duty remained the establishment and maintenance of neighborhood parishes. As a result, Archbishop Harty required that Father Flanagan continue to perform his pastoral duties at Saint Patrick's parish.²⁶

Father Flanagan turned to prominent Omaha Catholics such as mortician Leo Hoffman and attorney William Lynch to raise funds for the mission. After securing financing, Father Flanagan rented the abandoned Burlington Building in South Omaha and established his first "Workingmen's Hotel" in November, 1913. Father Flanagan employed the residents

²⁵Flanagan, Romance of the Homeless Boy, 2-13.

²⁶Ibid., and Important Dates, 1-4.

of the mission as laborers to restore the interior of the building into sleeping wards, a soup kitchen, and a small chapel. Word traveled fast in Omaha's tough Third Ward that a young priest ran a "hotel" near the packing yards offering meals, warm clothing, and a bed for 25¢ a night. In addition to shelter, "men down in their luck" received "spiritual nourishment" from Father Flanagan and peers "reformed from a life of drink, vagrancy and crime." Unlike reformers in other large cities, Father Flanagan received little, if any, interference from Omaha's political machine. Many Omaha businessmen "sympathetic" to the activities of Boss Tom Dennison's machine aided Father Flanagan in the funding and development of his homes for wayward boys.²⁷

In its first year of operation, the Workingmen's Hotel lodged over 20,000 homeless men and served 11,000 meals. In addition to food and shelter, Father Flanagan dispensed clothing and, in some cases, secured employment for his residents. When possible, Father Flanagan attended to sick residents or transported them to St. Joseph's Hospital for extended medical care.²⁸

In order to ease overcrowded conditions, Father Flanagan moved his mission to the vacant Livesay Flats building near South 13th Street in July 1914. As the case with his first hotel, Father Flanagan recruited the residents to remodel and repair the interior of the Second Workingmen's Hotel. Despite its success among "down and outers" in

²⁷ Flanagan, Romance of the Homeless Boy, 2-13. In addition see individuals cited in Orville Menard, "The Dennison Machine: Boss Rule in Omaha, 1900-1933" (unpublished manuscript, 1986).

²⁸ Flanagan, Romance of the Homeless Boy, 2-13.

South Omaha, the Workingmen's Hotel received little public financial support. The charitable sympathies of Omahans did not lie with adult men they perceived as drunks and thieves. Father Flanagan voiced his frustrations in working with the men: "I soon realized that these men sought an idle life. I found that many of them had been homeless in their youth. It was then that I realized that I should work with boys, homeless, neglected boys."²⁹

Encouraged by Omaha parole officer and friend, Moge Bernstein, Father Flanagan visited the municipal courts to watch delinquency and vagrancy trials of homeless and neglected children. Established in 1905 by Judge George A. Day, Omaha's juvenile court met "regularly on Saturday mornings . . . the room . . . crowded with parents, welfare workers and spectators . . ." and appeared "almost as any other gathering than that of a courtroom." Omaha's juvenile judges conducted court sessions similar to their colleagues in Denver and Chicago:

. . . win(ning) the confidence of the child as they sit up close to the judge, the latter in his kind, fatherly way is enabled to draw from the lad or lassie the facts he is seeking

Omaha juvenile judges "sentenced" children before their court to indefinite stays at the boys' reformatory in Kearney, Nebraska or the girls' facility at Geneva, Nebraska. Judge Day and his predecessor, Judge A. C. Troup, remanded children into the custody of social workers and the settlement house, Riverview Home. In 1915, Father Flanagan joined

²⁹Ibid., and speech by Father Edward J. Flanagan, "Boys Town Times" radio broadcast (Cincinnati, Ohio: October 1939).

other social workers and reformers and requested that several of the "wayward" boys be paroled into his care.³⁰

Father Flanagan's first wards lived with their families and relatives. Father Flanagan met his boys after school each day to discuss values of good citizenship, religious devotion, and proper behavior as they played sandlot baseball and marbles together. Acting as a parole officer, Father Flanagan delivered the boys home for dinner often witnessing "exasperating instances . . . in the relations between husband and wife." Convinced that parents "seemed to have slight regard for their connubial vows," Father Flanagan blamed "the lack of a proper guiding hand" for the delinquency of his wards. His visits to the homes of his wards confirmed his growing belief that "the right kind of environment" would make delinquents "tractable and worthy children in any community." In the fall of 1917, Father Flanagan decided to open a home in order to create a "proper setting" for the care and salvation of wayward boys.³¹

The First Home, 1917-1918

Archbishop Harty approved of Father Flanagan's plans for a boys' home. After viewing his success with homeless men, Archbishop Harty relieved Father Flanagan of his duties as assistant pastor at St. Philomena's parish in the Spring of 1916. Impressed with the

³⁰"The Omaha Juvenile Court and its Functions," Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal 2 (April 1919), 5. [Hereinafter cited as Boys' Home Journal.]

³¹Ibid., 9.

energy and enthusiasm of his young prelate for social work, Archbishop Harty recruited Father Flanagan to organize an Omaha chapter of the St. Vincent De Paul Society. Father Flanagan formed his chapter with the aid of wealthy Catholics from St. Cecilia's and St. Margaret Mary's parishes. In addition to raising money, the Vincentians collected clothing and furnishings for the Catholic poor of Omaha. By 1918, Archbishop Harty, Father Flanagan and the Vincentians administrated a network of Catholic charities and social welfare agencies that cared for 26,000 Omahans and their families annually.³²

As the case with the Workingmen's Hotel, Father Flanagan's Boys' Home received the approbation of Archbishop Harty but no archdiocesan funds. After contacting several realtors, Father Flanagan secured the help of Omaha real estate magnate, Byron Reed, to find a rental property for his first boys' home. Selecting a two-story Victorian-styled house at 25th and Dodge Streets in Omaha, Father Flanagan

. . . borrowed the money to pay my first month's rent, I explained my plan to a number of prominent women who enthusiastically banded together into an informal organization to help me Mrs. E. W. Nash, one of the most splendid women philanthropists in the Middle West, gave me \$2,000, which was my first donation of any size Several other women gave lesser amounts, and I started on my way to make my dream come true.³³

Women continued to play an extremely important role in the early financing and administration of Father Flanagan's Boys' Home. As the "Mothers'

³²"What the Home Accomplished in 1917," Boys' Home Journal 1 (February 1918), 4.

³³"Mothers' Guild," Boys' Home Journal 4 (June 1921), 3.

Guild and Sewing Club," the "patronesses" held charity balls, auctions, and bake sales, sewed quilts, and mended clothing for Father Flanagan's wards.

On December 12, 1917, Father Flanagan moved into the house with his "first five boys"; three boys from the juvenile court . . . [and] two more boys who sold newspapers and slept in my men's hotel." Upon the request of Archbishop Harty, three Notre Dame Sisters aided Father Flanagan in the care of his boys. As recent immigrants from Czechoslovakia, Sisters Rose Slevin and Martha Djobek spoke little English and struggled to understand the conversations of the boys for whom they acted as cooks, laundresses, housekeepers, and seamstresses. When the Home's census rose to twenty-five boys within two months, Sister Ludmila Kucera, a young Notre Dame novice, joined her sisters and acted as the household interpreter and administrator.³⁴

As the Home grew, so did the child reform philosophy of Father Flanagan. In February, 1918, Father Flanagan penned his thoughts on the character and abilities of his boys:

They have minds that can be taught things that will be of service when they take their place among the world of men. They have characters that can be formed and moulded into a noble type of manhood, that would grace any Community, and fit in with the highest class of citizenship. They have souls, just as any other human mortals, that are starving, . . ., to teach them something of the supernatural and the Divine³⁵

³⁴Graskowiak, "Parochial Education," 11-17.

³⁵"Our Boys at the Home," Boys' Home Journal 1 (February 1918), 1.

As residents of the Home, boys ate, slept, played, and "enjoy(ed) God's air just the same as other boys." In addition to providing for their physical needs, Father Flanagan and the Notre Dame Sisters operated a small grade school and religion classes for the educational and spiritual instruction of the boys. Older boys received their education at nearby parochial and public schools.³⁶

Discipline practices reflected the philosophy of Father Flanagan that benevolent understanding was the key to exemplary juvenile behavior. In 1918, Father Flanagan scorned corporal punishment as a method of juvenile discipline:

. . . One would imagine that twenty-five rather strong and healthy boys would be difficult to discipline, and I admit they would, if attempted with a cat-o-nine tails continually hanging over their heads, but our home does not follow such a policy. The first thing we do is to place the boy on his honor, and win his confidence. We forget his past . . . and help him to forget them, by teaching him things that will help him efface them from his mind We have at the Home a most contented and appreciative class of boys who try to liquidate their debt of gratitude in the coin of . . . their splendid conduct.

Leisure activities for the boys centered around evening musicales, trips to nickelodeon theatres in downtown Omaha, and intramural sports of baseball, marble playing, football, and boxing. Father Flanagan relied on the generosity of local donors for holiday gifts and festivities. Donated clothing, a miniature croquet game, a "structo set," sports

³⁶Ibid.

equipment, and a toy airplane provided "a cornucopia of plenty" for the Home's first Christmas.³⁷

In the spring of 1918, prominent Omaha Catholics Leo A. Hoffman and William P. Lynch began to solicit community funding and support for Father Flanagan's Boys' Home. With Mothers' Guild and Sewing Circle representatives, Misses Cassie Riley and Alice O'Brien, Hoffman and Lynch organized a charity ball held at the Omaha City Auditorium on April 11, 1918. Four thousand people attended the benefit for Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, dancing to the music of a twenty-five piece orchestra, having their fortunes read, buying raffle tickets, and cheering as the boys "marched around the hall . . . to the tune of 'Home Sweet Home.'" In addition to raising \$1,250 dollars for the Home, the charity ball served, "as an interlude in the cares and anxieties of these over-full, bitter days of war-time."³⁸

As the case with Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, many Omaha charities suffered a loss in donations during World War I. In order to "do their part," Omahans donated money, time, and goods to keep their streets free from "the Huns" instead of the urban poor. Reformers faced the challenge of drawing public and economic support for their individual causes.

Father Flanagan proved a master at soliciting public attention and funds. In February 1918, he published the first issue of the

³⁷"Christmas at the Home," Boys' Home Journal (September 1918), 9.

³⁸"Second Annual Entertainment," Boys' Home Journal (March 1918), 1.

Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal to gain revenues from advertising and donations. Father Flanagan recruited his boys to sell the monthly newspaper on Omaha street corners for ten cents a copy. As "newsies," Father Flanagan's "little gentlemen, cleanly, polite, and graceful" rivaled the public image of urban newspaper boys "with their . . . street manners, voices shrill and loud, with language unfit for any decent person, with faces unwashed, . . . with clothes they (should) be ashamed to wear." Maintaining an image as a "Father Flanagan newsie" proved profitable for the boys. Monthly top salesboy received a new suit of clothes or a trip to the cinema for his efforts.³⁹

Subscribers to the Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal paid one dollar annually to read columns on Home news, patriotic poems, words of spiritual guidance, household recipes, and national articles addressing juvenile delinquency and child care issues. Often racist or sexist jokes accompanied columns entitled, "Rearing a Son" or "The Blot of Child Labor." In December, 1919, a quip reprinted from Life magazine "entertained" readers with a slangy racist exchange called, "Wah You Fool Niggah Goin?":

'No, sah, Ah doan't neber ride on dem things,' said an old colored lady, looking in on the merry-go-round. 'Why, de other day I seen dat Rastus Johnson git on a ride as much as a dallah's worth an' git off at de very same place he got on at, an' I sez to him, 'Rastus,' I sez, 'yo' spent yo' money, but whar yo' been?'⁴⁰

³⁹"The First Number of the 'Boys' Home Journal,'" Boys' Home Journal (March 1918), 11.

⁴⁰"Wah You Fool Niggah Goin?", Boys' Home Journal (December 1919), 12.

Despite Journal amusements which promoted a racist image of blacks, the admission policy of the Home stated its acceptance of boys "regardless of their race, color or creed."

The Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal carried advertising for many Omaha businesses. An analysis of the May 1919 issue of the Journal revealed fifty-five ads located on sixteen pages. Office advertisements for doctors, lawyers and dentists dominated the promotional pages of the Journal. Many Journal advertisers' displays touted "progressive ideas." In the May 1919 issue, The First National Bank of Omaha ran an ad entitled, "The Woman Banker" and invited women to visit the "women's department" and meet "Our Miss Stern . . . to consult with you, to advise you, and to furnish to women the same service the bank renders to its men customers."⁴¹

The Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal served as a favorite platform for campaign promises by Omaha's "machine," "reform" and labor candidates. Office-seekers declared themselves as "The Boy's Friend" and encouraged voters to select "the right man" on election day. In 1918, Journal ads documented reform candidate Ed P. Smith's attempt to thwart the reelection of "machine" mayor, James C. Dahlman. As a member of the "Allied Slate," Ed P. Smith and his "commissioners" established themselves as "Clean and Capable, Reliable and Reputable" and challenged voters to recapture "city control of . . . city hall." In his ads, Mayor Dahlman believed he should be reelected "because rich and poor alike have found [me] THE RIGHT MAN IN THE RIGHT PLACE."

⁴¹Boys' Home Journal (May 1919), 9.

Seemingly apolitical, Father Flanagan never endorsed candidates in Journal editorials. Father Flanagan, however, maintained close ties to the Boss Tom Dennison/Major Dahlman machine. Father Flanagan often appeared as the guest of Mayor Dahlman at many city charity and political functions. In addition, Father Flanagan recruited many pro-machine businessmen to aid him in fund-raising. Unlike many Progressive Era reformers, Father Flanagan remained a pragmatist and tolerated machine activities in order to secure "public" support for the Home.⁴²

Father Flanagan filled the pages of the Journal with pleas for public donations of items ranging from shoes to livestock. In an effort to establish an endowment fund for the Home, Father Flanagan initiated "The Boys' Life Saver Society" in 1918. Society members contributed twenty-six cents a month or three dollars a year to rescue a "waif from the cruel fate of the streets." In his request for donations, Father Flanagan described his Home as a "constructive charity" and stated that "[I] have endeavored to be of some assistance to our grand and Progressive City, of which we are proud to be citizens, ever alive to the complex problem of charity which a Progressive City [must] . . . face."⁴³ Despite steady donations, Father Flanagan could not maintain both his boys' home and the Workingmen's Hotel. In Spring 1918, Father Flanagan chose to close down the men's mission and devote his energies to the home for wayward boys.

⁴²Boys' Home Journal (April 1918), 2.

⁴³"Workingmen's Hotel," Boys' Home Journal (February 1918), 2.

Public interest in Father Flanagan and his work rose as he cared for an increasing number of boys at the Home. Juvenile Judge A. C. Troup "sentenced" juveniles "offering a fair speed for immediate reform" into Father Flanagan's Home. The population of the Home climbed to one hundred as Father Flanagan accepted walk-ins, court appointees, orphans and boys abandoned by their parents. In a Boys' Home Journal article in March 1919, entitled, "Addressed to Mothers and Fathers," Father Flanagan described his boys' conditions upon arrival:

The boys that are received at the Home from day to day and week to week, are in varying degrees. Some are dirty, ragged, uncouth street boys who receive their first real cleansing and suitable clothing when . . . at the Home

The Boys' Home Journal illustrated the transformation of "boys as they come" dressed in ill-fitting, torn coats and hats into "boys as they leave" attired as "captains of industry" in knicker suits and ties clutching an American Flag in upraised hands.⁴⁴

Omahans demonstrated their support for the Home in many ways. Local businesses donated food, clothing, cinema tickets, and haircuts for Father Flanagan's boys. W. O. Torrey penned a flowery poem entitled, "Father Flanagan's Home" which appeared in local newspapers and the Boys' Home Journal:

The boys whom no one else wanted,
Who were out in the world all alone:
Because of the love of one Father
Are now in the "Homeless Boys' Home."
The souls that were there bound in prison,
And dwarfed through some other's sin,

⁴⁴"Addressed to Mothers and Fathers," Boys' Home Journal (September 1919), 3.

With a friend now to guide and direct them,
Will their God-given mission yet win.

The most of our boys in the making,
Have hearts that beat loving and true,
But all need the hand of a sculptor,
That will fashion and shape them anew.
Father Flanagan's Home is a workshop,
That seeks out and rescues again,
The little wronged waifs of the city,
and makes of them God-fearing men.⁴⁵

Aware of his need for a larger facility, Omaha mortician Leo Hoffman convinced fellow members of the German-American Society to lease its headquarters to Father Flanagan for its use as his second home for boys.⁴⁶

The German-American Home, 1918-1921

Abandoned as a result of World War I anti-German sentiment, the German-American Home, located at 4206 South Thirteenth Street in Omaha, offered three large floors for the activities of the Home. The first floor of the building contained the kitchen, dining room, offices, and a "visitors parlour" for evening musicales and theatricals. Father Flanagan converted second and third-floor rooms into classrooms and dormitory-styled sleeping quarters for his wards. In the basement, the billiards tables and bowling alley of the German-American Society provided indoor leisure activities for the boys.⁴⁷

⁴⁵"Father Flanagan's Home," Boys' Home Journal (June 1921), 1.

⁴⁶Virginia Times, interviews with author, 12-13 August, 1985.

⁴⁷Ibid.

Education, sports, music, and hard work formed the essential elements of Father Flanagan's early youth care system. At the German-American Home, he received the opportunity to expand and refine his fledgling philosophy for the proper environment for boys. The willingness of the boys to perform daily tasks maintained order in the Home. In addition to their studies, the boys aided the Notre Dame Sisters in household duties, meal preparation, gardening, and tending to chickens and dairy cows. Older students employed carpentry skills taught by Father Flanagan to construct furniture and complete household repairs. The Home's first organized sports team, "The Home Team," practiced baseball and football in nearby fields and played against parochial school teams in the afternoons and weekends. Evening "family concerts" showcased the talents of the boys as they sang, danced, and played musical instruments for invited guests. In an effort to settle internal disputes and instill lessons of "good citizenship," Father Flanagan installed a "boys' government" in 1918. Many activities initiated at the German-American Home provided the foundation for the later child care programs of Boys Town.⁴⁸

In the early years of the development of the Home, Father Flanagan employed methods used by other "waif servers" to care for neglected children. The absence of local juvenile placement or adoption agencies made it very difficult for Father Flanagan to find "good homes" for his boys in Omaha. Adopting the child saving methods of Charles Loring Brace, Father Flanagan "placed out" many of his boys "with

⁴⁸Compiled from Boys' Home Journal (February-December 1919).

farmers in the country." The Boys' Home Journal published letters from former boys "making good" in their new rural environment:

North Bend, Nebraska April 26, 1919

Dear Father Flanagan:

. . . I am getting to be a dandy little farmer and I sure like my work I have been busy today. We sowed seven acres of barley. I have quite a job; every time it rains I take the teacher to school and go after her in the evening Well it is time for me to go to bed.

As ever, your boy,

Ray Lawless⁴⁹

Often, Father Flanagan did not have the ability to conduct follow-up reports on the boys he had placed out. As a result, he relied on letters from the boys to learn about their lives with their new families. The letters served as a fragile link as to the fate of the "placed out" boys.

As a result of the entry of America into World War I, the Home adopted a strong patriotic and militaristic public image. Captioned photographs revealed "boys . . . being put through drill," standing in long lines, wearing paper hats and saluting Father Flanagan in front of newly-named "Liberty Hall." Father Flanagan dressed his boys as pilgrims, soldiers, and "Uncle Sams" to participate in local parades and marches. He believed his drills differed from reformatory practices

⁴⁹"A Letter from One of 'Our Boys,'" Boys' Home Journal (May 1919), 7.

as his exercises "uplifted" instead of broke the youthful spirit of his wards.⁵⁰

The extent to which other "child savers" programs influenced Father Flanagan and his work remains unknown. In March 1919, a Journal article cited national boys' homes such as "Fr. Drumgoode's 'Mission of the Immaculate Virgin" located in New York City with "several branches . . . in different boroughs . . . housing several thousand homeless boys" and "Fr. C. J. Quille's 'Working Boys' Home of Chicago . . . the home of 250 boys training for various vocations and trades" as "worthy experiments." It can be assumed that the knowledge that Father Flanagan possessed of other youth care homes and methods influenced certain programs installed at his Home. In April, 1919, Father Flanagan launched a fundraising drive to establish "a farm home" for his boys:

A farm home . . . is the ultimate hope of the reverend director. It is conceded that the most logical method yet devised to develop the best that is in these young dependents is that of the environment of a healthy country life, free from city influences, temptations, and arrogances.⁵¹

The desire of Father Flanagan to relocate the Home demonstrated a knowledge of "progressive ideas" in favor of rural institutions for the care of delinquent and neglected children.

⁵⁰Photograph illustration for "A Letter from One of 'Our Boys,'" Boys' Home Journal (May 1919), 7.

⁵¹"Our Boys' Home--It's Purpose," Boys' Home Journal (March 1919), 2, and "Farm Home for the Boys," Boys' Home Journal (April 1919), 1.

The Move to Overlook Farm

To make Father Flanagan's dream for a farm home a reality, the ladies of the Mothers' Guild and Sewing Club raised two thousand dollars at its annual "Ball and Card" party held at the City Auditorium in February 1919. In addition to proceeds from private contributors and the "Boys' Life Savers Society," Father Flanagan instituted "The Boys' Stocking Fund" to solicit donations for purchase of a farm. With the help of their teachers, parochial school children organized into "Little Samaritan Clubs" and carried "mite boxes" and "Buy a Brick" cards for contributions to the farm fund.⁵²

On September 10, 1919, Father Flanagan acquired farm property in Florence, Nebraska, "only five blocks from the streetcar service, and consequently near the city." First Home benefactor, Mrs. E. W. Nash, contributed ten thousand dollars for the purchase of the 40-acre "Seven Oaks" farm. Facing expiration of his lease on the German-American Home, Father Flanagan planned to move to the farm "very early spring, we have visions of living in tents . . . and (will) try to care for some eighty or ninety boys in that manner." North Omaha residents voiced opposition to the possibility of "Flanagan's delinquents" living near their homes. The protests of the homeowners forced Father Flanagan to sell "Seven Oaks Farm." On July 3, 1920, the Notre Dame Sisters bought the farm from Father Flanagan to construct a motherhouse and girls boarding school.⁵³

⁵²Boys' Home Journal (February 1919), 3.

⁵³"Our New Home," Boys' Home Journal (October 1919), 2, and "Father Flanagan's Home is not a Reformatory," Omaha World-Herald, 14 March, 1921, 1.

Throughout the spring of 1921, Father Flanagan searched for a suitable site for his boys' home. He dreamed of building a self-sufficient "city of little men," removed from the "corrupting influences" of urban life. Father Flanagan rejected several properties until viewing a farm ten miles west of Omaha in May 1921. As "one of the finest farms in Nebraska," the annual harvest of Overlook Farm exceeded "1,200 bushels of corn, 100 tons of hay, 300 bushels of oats and barley and 800 pounds of grass seed" on one hundred and sixty acres. In addition to its fields, Overlook Farm harbored "89 varieties of fruit trees, grape vineyards, a large livestock breeding program and thirteen buildings all provided with concrete floors, running water and electric lights."⁵⁴

On May 21, 1921, Father Flanagan purchased Overlook Farm for one hundred thousand dollars from Mrs. Anne Baum and her daughter Margaret Baum. With "plenty of room to romp," Father Flanagan believed that Overlook Farm would become "the Mecca of the boys' dreams." Throughout the summer and fall of 1921, Father Flanagan and his boys travelled from the German-American Home to visit Overlook Farm as workmen readied it for their occupation.⁵⁵

On October 22, 1921, Father Flanagan, nephew Patrick Norton, the Notre Dame Sisters and one hundred boys ventured out, in trucks and on foot, from downtown Omaha to their new home at Overlook Farm. Father

⁵⁴"Overlook Farm," Boys' Home Journal (June 1921), 1.

⁵⁵"We Move to Overlook Farm," Boys' Home Journal (November 1921), 1.

Flanagan informed readers in a November 1921 issue of the Boys' Home Journal that:

Roads have been laid, railways constructed, cities have been built and moved by the labor of men; but we doubt if ever more willing hands were put to labor than those of our hundred boys in moving their old home to Overlook Farm, the Mecca of their dreams.⁵⁶

⁵⁶Ibid.

The City of Little Men, 1921-1948

The "mecca" at the end of the boys' pilgrimage consisted of wooden styled barracks, muddy roads, and unattended pastures. Overlook Farm would require many hours of labor to transform it into a "boys city." The boys ate, slept, played, and attended classes in the barracks heated by pot belly stoves during the winter of 1921. In an article for the Milwaukee Catholic Journal, Father Flanagan reported in December 1921, that "the boys experienced little difficulty in keeping the buildings heated and would have spent many uncomfortable days, but the Lord tempered the winds to His shorn lambs."⁵⁷

Building the City

In need of permanent buildings at Overlook Farm, Father Flanagan tried to organize several funding drives during the spring and summer of 1921. In November 1921, Nebraska Power Company President, J. E. Davidson, revived efforts to raise funds for a dormitory for Father Flanagan's boys. As chairman of the drive, J. E. Davidson established a "campaign headquarters at 401 Paxton Block" and divided Omaha into twenty-four collection zones. Over seven hundred volunteers formed "bucket brigades" on Omaha's street corners soliciting donations for the fund. Mrs. Arthur Mullen organized the "special 1000 women" group which held teas, canvassed neighborhoods and spoke at luncheons for

⁵⁷"Record of Father Flanagan's Boys' Home," The Catholic Journal, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2 December, 1921.

Father Flanagan's cause. The boys participated in the fund drive, giving speeches at luncheons, club meetings, and in movie theatres.

A street rally on November 13, 1921:

. . . looked and sounded like an old-time political rally . . . there were torches of red fire . . . and . . . speeches were made by Mayor Dahlman The home band was along to entertain and Charles Kenworthy, the boy orator, also made a plea

Many civic leaders joined Mayor Dahlman's endorsement of the fund drive. Community Chest president and attorney, Henry Monsky, informed Omahans that "when you buy the love of a homeless waif, you invest in good citizenship." Local newspapers endorsed the funding drive, printing sympathetic editorials and "eyewitness" reports:

. . . They are manly little fellows. They take a possessive pride in the plain and rough wooden barracks which constitute their temporary barracks. They . . . drag (me) breathlessly about to see 'our' pigs, 'our' coal supply, 'our' chickens, 'our' asbestos-lined smoke house--gosh but they are proud of that asbestos! . . . You go away from Overlook Farm with a lump of gratitude in your throat for the fine and true service that is given . . . to those who need it most

During its two week duration, the Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Fund Drive raised \$300,000 for the construction of the first permanent building at Overlook Farm.⁵⁸

In March 1922, the "Omaha Building" replaced the temporary wooden shelters as the living quarters for the boys. Designed by Omaha architect, J. M. Nachtigall, the five-story structure housed reception rooms,

⁵⁸"Davidson Chairman of Flanagan Home Drive," Omaha World-Herald, 28 October, 1921; "Street Corner Rallies for Boys' Home Drive," ibid., 13 November, 1921; "11 Theatres Will Have 64 Speeches," ibid., 10 November, 1921; "Father Flanagan's Boys," ibid., 14 November, 1921.

offices, a chapel, an infirmary, recreation room, classrooms, and dormitories. Within one month after completion, one hundred and fifty boys filled the newly constructed building to its capacity.⁵⁹

Learning To Live

After the erection of the first permanent building, Father Flanagan turned his attention to the agricultural needs of his Home. A successful spring planting insured the community's ability to feed itself. To achieve agricultural self-sufficiency for the Home, the boys cultivated fields, planted crops, and tended livestock. By April 1922, boys working in the dairy produced 201 pounds of butter and 176 pounds of cottage cheese. The young farmers milked nine cows to provide 120 quarts of milk necessary for daily meals. Eighth-graders learned to butcher and smoke meat. Monthly, they slaughtered three calves, two hogs, and twenty-two chickens to feed the Home. Local farmers and business owners supplemented the food needs of the Home with donated milk, sides of beef, and canned goods. Many boys created "gangs" named after their work tasks and competed against one another in marble tournaments and softball games. The "Kitchen Gang," arch rivals of the "Garden Gang," wrote a cheer descriptive of their daily duties:

What's the matter with the Kitchen Gang?
 They're all right!
 Who's all right?
 The Kitchen Gang!
 Biff! Bang! Don't they like to show off? They're

⁵⁹Important Dates, 3.

just as swift in the kitchen as they are on
the ball field only their record is better because
they can't break any dishes there!

The Kitchen Gang prepared and served daily meals for the community.
In addition, the boys canned fruits and vegetables picked by the
"Garden Gang."⁶⁰

In an attempt to equip his boys for "the battle of life,"
Father Flanagan instituted a trades program to supplement their aca-
demic education. The renovation of the temporary barracks yielded
classroom space to teach the boys "a useful occupation." In 1923, the
Home introduced carpentry, broommaking, and shoe "cobbling" among its
first trades. Nationally, trades training had gained favor among
"child savers" as the ideal method for juvenile reform. Ads in the
Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal illustrated the popular belief
that "the trade made the man." One ad entitled, "The Boy of Today,"
depicted a young boy, barefoot and dressed in rags, posed on top of
an overturned pail in the fashion of Rodin's sculpture, "The Thinker."
Large arrows led away from the boy toward two photographs. The top
photograph of an adult male, dressed in torn overalls and smoking a
cigarette in a junk yard, carried the caption, "Homeless, Neglected,
Misguided Becomes The Tramp, Thief, Degenerate--Tomorrow." A second
arrow, pointed at the bottom photograph, exhibited a clean-cut,
athletic man handling a rivet gun in a factory. Its caption proclaimed,

⁶⁰"Notes from Our Home, Written by Our Boys," Boys' Home Journal
(June 1922), 9.

"Given A Home--Watched Over--Guided--Becomes The Honest Producing Citizen--Tomorrow."⁶¹

By 1928, printing, electrical and mechanical repair, tailoring, and business classes joined the trades curriculum. Father Flanagan expanded the trades program as an alternative to "placing out" his wards. Father Flanagan believed his boys fared better by staying at the Home and learning a trade:

The policy of our home in the past has been to harmonize with the more modern methods of child welfare, and our efforts have been directed more along the lines of child placement in foster homes than with a view towards vocational training Our dissatisfaction arises from an element of selfishness in the foster home. I find that a boy past ten years of age ceases to be an object of love in a foster home, and in most cases has been received as an object of service This is particularly true in the farming communities where most of our boys are placed All they learn is work - work - work . . . when they grow up they are forced to drift away As a consequence there is nothing left for them to do but to drift into the turbulent sea of our social life as unskilled laborers.

The trades program prepared the boys to enter the urban workforce as "productive citizens."⁶²

In addition to its educational merits, the trades program employed the labors of the boys to provide essential services for the community. Completion of carpentry, farming, household, and maintenance tasks by the boys saved money otherwise paid for adult labor. Products

⁶¹Edwin Novotny, Principal, Boys Town Vocational Career Center, interview with author, May 1985 and Boys' Home Journal (August 1921), 12.

⁶²Annual Report of Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, 1928, 5.

built in the trade school classes provided income for the Home as the public bought Father Flanagan's Boys' Home brooms, bird houses, and sleds.

The absence of funding seriously limited the ability of the Home to hire lay teachers and administrators in the 1920s. Isolated from the convenience of inner-city schools, the academic education of the boys suffered until the arrival of seven Sisters of Mercy in January 1923. The Home offered classroom instruction to the eighth grade at which time a student either left Overlook Farm or entered the trades school program.⁶³

On The Road

Rural isolation hampered public exposure to the activities of the Home. Fundraising became increasingly difficult for the struggling community. During the 1921 building drive, campaigns that featured the boys as singers, "orators," and dancers readily captured audience attention. In 1921, Father Flanagan organized eight boys into an entertainment troupe under the direction of Omaha black musician Dan Desdunes in an attempt to put the Home back in the public eye.

To showcase the talents of his boys, Father Flanagan purchased three red circus wagons from Ak-Sar-Ben float builder, Gus Renze. Once outfitted, the "World's Greatest Juvenile Entertainers" toured cities in Nebraska, Kansas, and Iowa in the circus wagons during the summer of 1921 and 1922. In addition to Dan Desdunes, a cook, groom, and

⁶³Important Dates, 3.

"advance man" traveled with the troupe at a rate of twenty miles per day. As the troupe neared a town, the advance man ventured ahead to book a performance hall or tent, distribute posters, sell tickets, and seek lodgings for the night. Often food and shelter for the troupe and its horses exceeded twenty dollars per day. With admission costs at twenty-five cents per person, the troupe relied upon local generosity in order to profit from a performance. In most cases, communities welcomed the troupe with favor and turned out for performances in high numbers. On occasion, the racially-mixed troupe received threats from rural Ku Klux Klan chapters resulting in cancelled shows and hurried departures.⁶⁴

Dressed in surplus World War I uniforms and clown costumes, the boys performed minstrel skits and jokes, and played musical instruments during their shows. After inspirational remarks delivered by a "boy orator," the troupe sang, "How Do You Do, Old Friends and New?" to the tune of George M. Cohen's "Yankey Doodle Dandy":

How do you do, old friends and new?
 Take it from us we're glad
 We'll do our best, to please you, our guest,
 for you're the best we've had.
 We are singing for our Father.
 He's the bestest friend we know.
 He's kind and very good to us, his boys
 We'll help him give this show.
 He's the kind of man the Lord loves,
 He does his work with all his heart
 His name is Father Flanagan
 And He's a friend to everyone,
 from him we never want to part.
 We are minstrels, having lots of fun, you see

⁶⁴"Juvenile Entertainers Scrapbook," Boys Town Hall of History, 1-30.

Singing, dancing, filled with happiness and glee.
 Someday we'll be a lot of big men in this land,
 We'll be here to help other boys --
 boys who need a helping hand!

As part of the minstrel show, the troupe performed racial and ethnic jokes and skits. Troupe members appeared in acts billed as "Oscar (Snow) Flakes as 'Jassbo in Search of Wealth'" or "William Tenninty as 'Tony the Wop.'" Troupe performance photographs revealed a small black entertainer crouched "in fear of" larger white boys as they played bass saxaphones in a circle around him. As an "organ grinder's monkey," black troupe members wore a leather collar led by a leash at the hands of older white entertainers. Ironically, black jazz band leader, Dan Desdunes, helped organize material and write musical accompaniments for many of the sketches.⁶⁵

In 1923, the troupe expanded to include a twenty-piece "boys band" and traveled in a private Union Pacific railway car dubbed, "The Overlook." In its eight-year career, the troupe received many opportunities to perform for local and national dignitaries. In 1927, the Juvenile Entertainers journeyed to Spearfish Canyon, South Dakota, to play for President Calvin Coolidge at his "summer Whitehouse." Visibly amused during the performance, President Coolidge requested "little Willie Harris, the colored drummer boy" to "rattle them bones, boy, rattle them bones." Willie and the troupe obliged President Coolidge and performed several patriotic selections of his choice. As the

⁶⁵"Juvenile Entertainers Scrapbook," Boys Town Hall of History, 1-30, and "Charles Kenworthy correspondence file," Boys Town Hall of History.

traveling expenses for the troupe and band increased, Father Flanagan limited their performances to marching and performing in local parades and festivities.⁶⁶

On the Radio

Father Flanagan employed "progressive" forms of communication to relay his message to the public. In 1919, Father Flanagan commissioned a two-reel film entitled, "The Rose Among the Thorns," which detailed the transformation of a "street waif" into a "good boy." Until its retirement in 1923, the film played in Omaha movie theatres and opened performances for the Juvenile Entertainers.⁶⁷

The advent of radio, however, brought Father Flanagan and his boys into thousands of living rooms every Sunday afternoon through their radio program, "Links of Love." Early enthusiasts had heralded radio as a means to bring education and "culture" to the "masses." In an effort to develop radio as a source of public entertainment, broadcasting stations experimented extensively with program format and content. In the 1920s, Omaha's WOAW radio station invited Father Flanagan to deliver weekly inspirational speeches. Father Flanagan supplemented his radio talks entitled "Dare to Be a Dreamer" and "Little Talks to Children" with music played by the Home band and choir.⁶⁸

⁶⁶"Father Flanagan's Boys' Band Visits President Coolidge," Boys' Home Journal (September 1927), 8-9.

⁶⁷Father Henry Sutti, interviews with author, 2-10 August, 1984.

⁶⁸"Father Flanagan's Radio Speeches," Boys Town Hall of History Documents Files.

In 1927, WOAW broadcasted an installment of "Links of Love" that featured "Young Johnny Rushing." Johnny told his listeners to dispel their gloom and look toward brighter days. The speeches of "Johnny the Gloom Killer" proved immensely popular with radio audiences during the Great Depression. Fans formed "Gloom-Killer" clubs and touted actor/comedian, Will Rogers, as their honorary national club president.⁶⁹

Many broadcast listeners sent contributions and letters in support of the Home:

We sure enjoyed the boys' programs and we will sure tune in every week. Keep up the good work. Only sorry I can't give more. Enclosed find \$2.00.
-- A. C. Pelster, Petersburg, Nebraska

We invited all the children in the neighborhood to hear your program last week. They enjoyed it so much. -- Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Robinson and son John, Hutchinson, Kansas

Your talk on boys held me spellbound. I am 71 years old and have been shut in for three years. May our good Lord give you many more years to continue in your good work. I am sending you \$1.00.
-- Mrs. J. K. Walsh, Sioux City, Iowa

The Home's radio broadcasts heightened national awareness of its work with "bad boys" and established Father Flanagan as a media celebrity.⁷⁰

⁶⁹"Johnny Rushing Profile Case," On the Radio exhibit section, Boys Town Hall of History.

⁷⁰Boys' Home Journal (June 1926), 12.

The Importance of Play

In the 1920s, the Home could not afford to purchase expensive sports equipment for the boys. Marble tournaments and intramural games kept the boys occupied after school. In the winter, the boys coasted down the snow-covered hills of Overlook Farm on sleds made in the trade school classes. The first organized sports team of the Home, a football squad led by former boy and coach, George Butcher, played one season before folding in 1923.⁷¹

The donation of baseball equipment and uniforms in 1927 transformed nine of the boys into "the best oiled machine that has yet been produced at the institution." In an effort to "develop their bodies as well as their minds," Father Flanagan installed daily classes in "the manly art of boxing." With only two sets of boxing gloves and one burlap sack filled with rags, two hundred boys awaited their turn to learn the "science of . . . how to defend [themselves]." Father Flanagan outlined the goal of the Home's sports program in a 1928 interview as to "teach our boys not to be unruly or pick a fight and stress the importance of play." When distance and funding permitted, the boys' sports teams competed against local parochial and public school teams. The primary source of play in the 1930s, however, remained intramural sports activities.⁷²

⁷¹Important Dates, 3.

⁷²"Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Organizes Fast Ball Team," Omaha Bee-News, 21 May, 1928; "Boys Study Boxing," Omaha World-Herald, 14 October, 1928; "Taught Manly Art at Fr. Flanagan's Home," Breda News, Breda, Iowa, 29 October, 1928.

Life in the City

By mid-1920s, two hundred and fifty boys filled the Omaha Building to its residential capacity. Lay teachers, trades instructors, maintenance and housekeeping personnel required expanded office, shop, and classroom facilities to perform their work duties. At the end of its first decade at Overlook Farm, the Home had developed into a "city of little men" in desperate need of urban services and enlarged facilities.

In order to finance new buildings, Father Flanagan faced the challenge of retiring the \$103,200 debt of the Omaha Building. Aided by the Omaha public relations firm, Bozell and Jacobs, Father Flanagan launched a campaign to sell "Bonds of Happiness" which paid contributors "Dividends of Smiles." Omaha Mayor James Dahlman and Nebraska Governor Adam McMullen lent their support to Father Flanagan in his cause to "burn" the Omaha Building's mortgage. With the building debt cleared in May 1928, Father Flanagan commissioned the Omaha architectural firm of Lahr and Stangel to design five new office and education buildings. Constructed in the spring and summer of 1928, the buildings included "an administration and recreation facility with two wings, . . . [to] house the general offices, printing and building trades, band room, auditorium, gymnasium and natatorium." The proposed trade school building which "will make the boys skilled men, who can stand on their own two feet" replaced the wooden barracks that had served as classrooms since 1921. Additional facilities such as a dry cleaning plant,

faculty residence, laundry, boiler house, and waterworks plant provided new city services for the community.⁷³

Prior to 1929, new arrivals to the Home, "bearing signs of neglect, not only in body, but also in mind," went to local hospitals for medical and dental treatment. Increased office space in the Administration Building allowed local doctors and dentists to examine and treat their youthful patients at the Home. Many Creighton and Nebraska University medical and dental students received their pediatrics training in the small infirmary. In 1929, visiting physicians and interns performed "over 160 circumcisions . . . right at the Home."⁷⁴ Boys who required surgical operations stayed in Omaha hospitals.

At the dedication ceremonies for the new buildings on October 19, 1930, state and local dignitaries praised Father Flanagan for turning his "romance with the homeless boy" into an institution worthy of public attention and support. With assets amounting to \$750,000, permanent buildings, and a thirteen-year record of caring for three thousand boys from thirty-three states, Father Flanagan's Boys' Home seemed assured of a bright and stable future.⁷⁵

⁷³"Omaha Boys' Home Opens Money Raising Campaign," Grand River, Iowa Local, 10 March, 1927, front page, and "New Buildings at Overlook," Omaha World-Herald, 25 May, 1930.

⁷⁴Annual Report of the Welfare Department, Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, Boys Town, Nebraska, 1930, 5.

⁷⁵"Dignitaries Dedicate Four New Buildings and Honor Father Flanagan's Boys' Home," Omaha World-Herald, 19 October, 1930.

Drought

In the early 1930s, Father Flanagan and his boys experienced with the nation the devastating effects of the Great Depression. Donations to the Home plummeted as millions of Americans struggled to feed and clothe their families. In increasing numbers, "homeless boys throughout the nation, whether they be wanderers on the hiways, riders on freight trains, or ragged, hungry waifs . . . are to be found in every city and every town, . . . their plight brought about . . . by present economic conditions." In an effort to stem the tide of homeless boys, the Home accepted 304 boys in 1930 "from poverty, broken homes, and from neglect." Falling revenues, however, forced the Home to refuse "361 applications in dire need and several hundred inquiries."⁷⁶

In 1931, several incidents underscored the deepened economic distress of the Home. The loss of the laundry, boiler plant, workmen's residence, and dairy barn to fire necessitated a public appeal for building restoration. As a result of his diligent fund-raising activities, Father Flanagan suffered "a complete breakdown in health." At the advice of his physician, Father Flanagan departed the Home for a six-month stay in a Denver sanatorium. In the absence of confirmed medical reports, it can only be assumed that Father Flanagan experienced a relapse of his earlier tubercular condition. Father P. A. Flanagan replaced his brother as director of the Home in August 1931. In a newspaper interview, Father P. A. proclaimed that "Father Edward Flanagan [had] sacrificed his health for the Home It is no secret that

⁷⁶Annual Report, 1933, 1.

financial conditions . . . caused his breakdown." Despite his best efforts, Father P. A. Flanagan lacked his brother's charismatic style. As a result, the public withdrew its support of the Home. The loss of donations forced Father P. A. Flanagan to "place out" over half of the population of the Home. The Home plunged into bankruptcy despite well-publicized sickbed pleas from Father Flanagan.⁷⁷

In the early 1930s, a severe drought in the Midwest jeopardized the agricultural self-sufficiency of the Home. The growing community struggled to feed its new residents as crops and gardens failed. In 1928, the young farmers harvested bumper crops which included "600 bushels of potatoes . . . the tubers . . . used as a part of the daily menu at the Home." Agricultural production peaked in 1931 yielding, "three acres of sweet potatoes . . . two acres of sweet corn . . . lettuce, spinach, beets, radishes, rhubarb, peas, and beans." Throughout the summer, the boys canned "tomatoes, . . . sauerkraut, . . . apples, grapes and 200 quarts of cherries" for winter meals.⁷⁸

Drought conditions in 1933 reversed the agricultural good fortune of the Home. Without a municipal water system, "15 acres of garden, 19 acres of potatoes . . . 110 acres of small grain and 100 acres of corn" failed for lack of adequate irrigation. In an effort to save the withering crops, large garden trucks delivered thousands of gallons

⁷⁷"Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Needs Assistance," North Omaha Booster, 28 August, 1931, and "Letters Ask Home Funds," Omaha Bee-News, 11 September, 1931.

⁷⁸"Flagan [sic] Boys' Home Has Big Potato Crop," Omaha Bee-News, 17 October, 1928, and Boys' Home Journal (July 1931), 1.

of water to the fields. The boys formed "bucket brigades" to water the fields by hand. The Home appealed to the public to relieve their food shortage. The Boys' Home Journal ran ads that proclaimed, "Our Cupboard is Nearly Empty! . . . pastures burnt up . . . milk production greatly reduced . . . Conditions look bad! Your help is needed!" Despite a cash crop loss of over \$10,000 in 1934, the Home prepared for spring planting. Experiencing "the worst spring drought ever in the history of Nebraska," the young farmers witnessed another year of total crop failure.⁷⁹

Governing the City

In spite of its agricultural concerns, the financial crisis of the Home eased in 1934 as the New Deal programs of President Franklin D. Roosevelt alleviated America's "hard times." Several of the boys received jobs as "buglers" and workers in federal Civilian Conservation Corps camps. Renewed in health, Father Flanagan returned to the Home and pursued donations through radio talks and mass mail appeals. The successful 1934 "Romance of the Homeless Boy" mailing campaign highlighted the need for a post office at the Home to process incoming letters and donations.⁸⁰

⁷⁹"Our Food Supply is Ruined by Drought," Boys' Home Journal (July 1933), 7; "Our Cupboard is Nearly Empty!", ibid. (November 1933), 7; "Crops Suffering From Drought and Heat," ibid. (July 1934), 4; "Fr. Flanagan's Boys Work to Save Garden," Omaha Bee-News, 26 June, 1933, 80. Al Witcowski, Boys Town Mail Clerk, interview with author, 23 June, 1984.

⁸⁰"A Letter From One of 'Our Boys,'" Boys' Home Journal (May 1934), 8.

The final step in the transformation of Overlook Farm into an urban community occurred on December 10, 1934. The opening of a post office legally established the farm as a "second-class village" of the State of Nebraska. Father Flanagan's Boys' Home residents decided to name their village, "Boys Town."⁸¹

As the "newest town in Nebraska," Boys Town instituted a "city government" in 1935. Distinguished by "boy officeholders," the Boys Town government consisted of a mayor and police, building, park, public safety, health, and hygiene commissioners. Student court justices "held court" to handle infractions of village laws. In order to elect their officials, Boys Town residents adopted many elements of the American political system.

Organized into two parties, "Build Boys Town" (BBT) and "Help Our Town" (HOT), the boys drafted party platforms, distributed campaign literature, "gave plenty of stump speeches," and held "two or three torchlight parades reflecting all of the ballyhoo so familiar to American politics." On January 15, 1935, the boy voters filed into the Boys Town barbershop to cast their ballots for the choice of their party. BBT candidate, Tony Villone, captured victory with a narrow six-vote margin and won election as the "first" mayor of Boys Town. As he departed for the "victory feed," Mayor Villone promised his citizens, "More movies, more basketball games and more swimming--We'll try and get 'em boys!" Despite the fanfare and festivities, this was not

⁸¹"Boys Town Gets Official Rating As Postoffice," The Leavenworth Times, Leavenworth, Kansas, 25 January, 1935.

the Home's first attempt to install a boys government. Efforts in 1918, 1919, 1926, 1930, and 1933 failed to attract the interest of the boys. Increased adult supervision of the educational and leisure activities of the boys aided in the successful implementation of the 1935 boys government.⁸²

As elected officials, the boys instituted many of the city's "beautification, sanitation, and protection services which included weed control, street layout and marking, fire prevention, and trash removal. A youthful sanitation crew pushed a large wooden cart called the "Boys Town Ricksha" or guided a mule-driven "trash wagon" to collect the daily refuse accumulated by the Home. The Boys Town Fire Patrol, dressed in blue uniforms with a white safety sash, conducted weekly fire drills and inspections while riding in the Home's La France fire engine. To keep order within "the only town in the country without a jail," student justices sentenced "offenders" to increased work tasks or "standing in the rear of the auditorium with their backs to the screen" on movie night. The participation and cooperation of the boys in governmental activities distinguished the 1935 election from previous experiments.⁸³

In the late 1930s and 1940s, Boys Town mayors gained national attention as they accepted invitations from "big city" mayors to discuss

⁸²"Boys Town, Neb. to Have Mayor," Omaha Bee-News, 13 December, 1935; "Boys Town, Nebraska Celebrates," Omaha Republican, 24 January, 1935; "Tony Villone is Mayor in Boys Town Election," Omaha World-Herald, 16 January, 1935.

⁸³Boys' Home Journal (March 1937), 4.

"official business." In 1936, Boys Town Mayor Dan Kampen met with New York City Mayor Fiorella La Guardia and rode in a ticker tape parade in his honor. Touted as "a hero out of an Horatio Alger book," the "world's youngest mayor" escorted starlets to elegant New York restaurants and drank milk as his companions sipped champagne. Symbolic of Boys Town's "Everyboy," Mayor Kampen and his successors exhibited poise and exemplary behavior in and out of the public's view.⁸⁴

Learning to Live

Building "character" served as the underlying goal of many of Boys Town's programs. At Boys Town, a boy learned "who he is, why he is here and what is expected of him in the future." The Home relied on lessons taught in the classroom to mold and shape the boys' character. In the 1930s, Home administrators emphasized trades training as the cornerstone of its educational system. The erection of the Trades Building in 1930 "cut down on the first four grades of school as to have boys of suitable age for trade classes." The alteration of the admission policies of the Home to accept older students increased the need for an accredited four-year high school.⁸⁵

Upon passage of a state certification test, eighth-grade graduates matriculated into the trades and "commercial" classes or departed for "homes where they can obtain a high school and later a college

⁸⁴"17-Year-Old 'Mayor' to Be LaGuardia's Guest in New York," Omaha World-Herald, 20 November, 1936; "Milk Vs. Champagne," New York Mirror, 23 November, 1936.

⁸⁵"Tests Passed; Seek Homes," Omaha Bee-News, 28 May, 1931.

education." Students in the two-year commercial courses learned "type-writing, shorthand, business English, business spelling, arithmetic and general office training" in an effort to secure later employment as office secretaries and clerks. The Home's trades program reflected national trends toward individualized learning as it catered to boys that "are manual-minded and therefore cannot learn beyond a certain stage." In 1931, Father Flanagan instituted "a class for the mentally-retarded . . . [to give] the larger and less progressive boy a chance and not suffer the embarrassment . . . [of] being placed in a class with smaller and younger boys." Deprived of an education due to delinquency or neglect, many of the Home's boys attended remedial learning or classes for the "mentally-retarded."⁸⁶

In 1934, the Boys Town educational system expanded to include a high school curriculum. In an annual report to his Board of Directors, Father Flanagan reported that:

For the first time in the history of the Home we are able to offer high school work
Thirteen boys began their ninth grade studies . . . and our class is already approved by the state department of education. A well-trained man, holding a master's degree, teaches this class.

The first class of graduating seniors in 1937 composed a poem in tribute of their "Alma Mater" and vowed to keep the lessons of Boys Town "forever in [their] hearts."⁸⁷

⁸⁶Annual Report, 1931, 5.

⁸⁷Annual Report, 1934, 7, and "Graduation Days Case," Learning to Live exhibit section, Boys Town Hall of History.

Administering the City

In the 1930s and 1940s, scientific and professional methods replaced the good intentions of reformers in the juvenile care field. Increasing numbers of "problem" children passed from the hands of reformers into the offices of psychologists and sociologists. Many institutions adopted psychological and "intelligence" tests developed by experts in clinics dedicated to the problems of children.

In 1930, the Home instituted a "welfare department" to analyze admission applications, maintain case files, and to monitor the mental and physical health of its residents. The Welfare Department prepared annual reports which documented the number, condition, treatment, and placement of the Home's boys. In 1932, the Home cared for:

109 boys homeless through the death of one parent, 51 whom one parent, in most cases the father, deserted the family, 46 problem boys where both parents were living . . . and needed only firm discipline to show them the folly of their disobedience, 40 full orphans, 22 from the group which one parent had died and the remaining parent deserted the family, 19 boys of divorced parents, 9 from foster parents and 8 boys taken by the court from undesirable parents.

Labeling the boys as "incorrigibles" and "truants," the welfare reports revealed that many of them had entered the Home, not as "full orphans," but as the products of broken homes and parental neglect.⁸⁸

In 1933, the Welfare Department determined a set of admission standards for the Home. In addition to articles of clothing and personal hygiene, the Welfare Department required social services agencies to

⁸⁸ Annual Report, 1933, 5.

provide "a satisfactory health certificate," inoculation, and dental records upon admittance of referred boys. In order to update testing and evaluation procedures, the Welfare Department in 1937 hired a "trained social worker" and "the temporary services of a Child Psychologist . . . from Washington, D.C." After administration of the "revised Stanford-Binet Test (Form L) and the Otis Group Intelligence Scale," the psychologist revealed that Father Flanagan's boys tested "considerably above" the national average for institutionalized children. The arrival of Dr. Franz Plewa as Director of the Welfare Department in 1940 further developed professional child care standards for the Home. An Austrian emigree and student of Adler, Dr. Plewa expanded the Welfare Department to meet the growing bureaucratic demands of state and local child care agencies and juvenile courts.⁸⁹

Boys Town

Despite the growing administrative core of the Home, the daily lives of the boys remained unchanged. Their average day consisted of bed making and breakfast, school, leisure activities before dinner, and homework before bedtime. Since 1921, Sundays held the promise of movie night and the chance for the boys to gather together in the school auditorium. Only the boy projectionists experienced great change when the Home switched from silent films to "talkies" in 1931. Holiday traditions included a Fourth of July picnic, Thanksgiving feasts in

⁸⁹Ibid., 1938, 8.

the dining hall, and presents delivered by Father Flanagan on Christmas morning.⁹⁰

Some of the boys pursued hobbies such as stamp collecting and model airplane building in their leisure hours. Music flourished at the Home as two boys bands and an a capella choir performed at Midwestern festivals and concerts. In 1936, Omaha radio station KFAB offered to record the "Links of Love" radio programs and eliminated the need for the boys' homemade radio transcriptions engineered on borrowed equipment. Despite the loss of two barns to fire in 1937, the Home's agricultural program expanded and employed "new scientific methods" in its crop and livestock production.⁹¹

In his 1937 Boys' Home Journal Christmas message, Father Flanagan spoke of "peace and contentment, and the whole-hearted happiness" at the Home. As his home passed its twenty-year mark as a child saving institution, it seemed as if Father Flanagan had achieved the full sum of his words. In 1938, however, an event triggered unforeseen changes that transformed Boys Town from a quiet Midwestern town into a city of international renown.⁹²

On the Silver Screen

In February 1938, a secretary at M-G-M studios in Hollywood, California, read an article about a young priest in Nebraska and his

⁹⁰Compiled from Boys' Home Journals (January-December 1930-1937).

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²"Father Flanagan's Page," Boys' Home Journal (December 1937), 1.

home for wayward boys. She showed it to her boss, film producer Robert S. Considine, and convinced him of its merit as a screenplay. Joined by other M-G-M executives and film director, Norman Taurog, Robert Considine visited Boys Town in March 1938. After gaining Father Flanagan's approval, the M-G-M executives decided to shoot the film, "Boys Town," on location.⁹³

After casting Mickey Rooney and Spencer Tracy as the film's leads, M-G-M sent a sixty-one member crew to Boys Town on June 1, 1938, to transform the campus into a giant film studio. Technicians planted trees, positioned booster lamps, and draped the exterior of the "Omaha Building" to simulate shade, sun and night. Hot and windy June days hampered production, created glare on windows, melted wax sound recordings, and blew hats off the heads of the stars in outdoor scenes. Unaware local motorists delayed filming as they attempted to pick up a young "hitchhiker," played by Mickey Rooney. Resplendent in an African pith helmet, Director Norman Taurog guided his stars and hundreds of Boys Town extras with a steady hand, finishing the film in ten days. After shooting exterior shots in downtown Omaha and interior scenes at M-G-M, the film "Boys Town" stood edited and ready for release in August 1938.⁹⁴

⁹³"M-G-M Officials Arrive," Boys' Home Journal (March 1938), 2.

⁹⁴"Movie Makers Come to Nebraska," The Nebraska Farmer, 16 July, 1938; "Boys Town a Village of Actors as Film Shooting Starts," Omaha World-Herald, 27 June, 1938; "Movie Troupe Arrives for Filming 'Boys Town,'" Omaha Sunday World-Herald, 26 June, 1938; "Tenement Boy in Iowa Makes Stars his Pals," Des Moines Register, 3 July, 1938.

After M-G-M President Louis B. Mayer viewed "Boys Town," he shelved it declaring, "It will never sell, there's no sex." At the insistence of the film's cast and crew, Mayer reluctantly changed his mind and scheduled the world premiere of "Boys Town" for September 7, 1938, in Omaha, Nebraska.⁹⁵

On September 6, thousands of excited fans crammed Omaha's Union Station to greet Hollywood stars, Spencer Tracy, Mickey Rooney, and Maureen O'Sullivan as they arrived from Hollywood. Outside the Omaha Theatre, M-G-M crews raised a platform, positioned giant searchlights, and hung colorful banners for the premiere's pageantry. On September 7, 30,000 spectators lined Omaha's downtown streets to catch a glimpse of the celebrities. Over 100 police and firemen struggled to hold back huge crowds and remove over-enthusiastic fans from rooftops and telephone poles. When interviewed in front of the Omaha Theatre, film star Spencer Tracy proclaimed to the dazzled crowd, "This makes a Hollywood premiere look like a dime novel!"⁹⁶

"Boys Town" went on to be a box office smash across the nation. Theatre owners reported that patrons stood in mile-long lines, sobbed openly during performances, and, in some cases, refused to leave the theatre in order to watch the film again.⁹⁷

⁹⁵Patrick Norton, oral history transcripts, Spring 1977.

⁹⁶"World Premiere of 'Boys Town' Held in Omaha, 15,000 Jam Union Station to Welcome Stars," Union Pacific Bulletin, September 1938; "30,000 Lined Streets Here for Premiere," Omaha World-Herald, 8 September, 1938; KFAB radio interview with Spencer Tracy, 7 September, 1938.

⁹⁷"All-Time Records Topple as 'Boys Town' Turns Away 5000 Persons," Washington Daily News, Washington, D.C., 17 September, 1938;

Rave reviews won the film several Academy Awards in 1938 which included Best Screenplay honors for writer Dore Schary and Spencer Tracy's second Oscar as Best Actor. Upon acceptance of the award, Spencer Tracy attributed his performance to, "the man who inspired this picture, Father Flanagan himself." Unaware that Spencer Tracy had donated his Oscar to Father Flanagan, the packaged statuette sat unattended at Omaha's Eppley Airfield for two days until its delivery to the Home.⁹⁸

The increase in public interest as a result of the film "Boys Town" garnered problems, as well as benefits, for the Home. Donations plummeted as film viewers watched "Father Flanagan," alias Spencer Tracy, raise funds without visible public support. In an effort to ease the funding crisis of the Home, M-G-M President Louis B. Mayer offered to pay Father Flanagan one million dollars to relocate Boys Town to Hollywood. Father Flanagan rejected Mayer's proposal but requested aid in the organization of a national tour for the band and choir. The Boys Town Road Show Revue capitalized on the success of the film as it performed for large crowds in cities across the United States.⁹⁹

"Capitol Audience Weeps at 'Boys Town,'" Richmond Hill Daily News, New York, 9 September, 1938.

⁹⁸1938 Academy of Motion Pictures' Award Ceremonies, Hearst Movietone News, University of Southern California Radio, Television and Film Archives; "Tracy Sends Award To Flanagan," Omaha World-Herald, 1 March, 1939.

⁹⁹"'Boys Town' Box Office Hit, A Flop to Orphanage Head," Washington D.C. Evening Star, 27 October, 1938; "M-G-M to Aid Boys Town," Chicago Tribune, 17 November, 1938; "Organizing the Road Show Revue," Boys' Home Journal (December 1938), 2.

In 1939, M-G-M, Spencer Tracy, and Mickey Rooney returned to Boys Town to shoot the sequel, "Men from Boys Town" in the hopes of another box office smash. Critics and audiences viewed the film with only moderate interest. Boys Town, however, continued to reap the benefits of the film. After inquiring as to Boys Town's greatest need, Miss Mary Dowd of New York City contributed \$200,000 for the erection of a chapel, "in the memory of her deceased brother, James." Completed in 1940, The Dowd Memorial Chapel highlighted a building expansion drive which included four dormitories, a dining hall, convent and infirmary.¹⁰⁰

Public notoriety altered many Boys Town activities. In September 1938, M-G-M executives arranged a promotional football match between Boys Town's team, the Blues and Los Angeles' posh Black Foxe [sic] military academy. A stunned crowd of movie stars and moguls watched as Coach Ken Corcoran led his scrappy, lightweight squad to a 20-12 victory. Soon big city schools such as Gonzaga in Washington, D.C., Detroit Catholic Central, and Aquinas Institute of Rochester, New York, wanted a crack at the "cinderella team." In 1946, the Boys Town gridgers thrilled over 96,000 fans as they captured their first undefeated season in intersectional play. Father Flanagan traveled with the team and watched from the sidelines as they racked up 373 points to their opponents' 50 in five states. Proudly he exclaimed to the press, "We didn't

¹⁰⁰"'Boys Town' Film to have Sequel," Omaha World-Herald, 13 March, 1939, and Important Dates, 6.

come all of the way from Nebraska to lose a ball game. We sure love to play in front of big crowds!"¹⁰¹

The newly named "Boys Town Eleven" continued to dazzle fans and the press as they rolled across opponents across the country in the late 1940s. Interracially mixed, the Boys Town team faced several discriminatory incidents in its travels. Sports writers referred to Boys Town's black quarterback, Tom Carodine, as the "Negro Southpaw." Hotels refused to admit Boys Town's black players as guests. In November 1946, the Blackstone Hotel in Miami, Florida, stated its reason for the non-admittance of the black members of the Boys Town Eleven:

Conditions which the management . . . cannot control We do not subscribe to the narrowmindedness but after exploring potential reaction find that the boys would probably be subject to embarrassment. We do not care about prejudice aimed at the hotel. Our first reaction was that Negroes who in the eyes of God are welcome at the gate of Heaven should be welcome in a resort hotel

Some establishments accepted the black athletes but did not allow their white teammates to room with them.¹⁰²

The Men From Boys Town

In support of the United States military effort during World War II, Boys Town encouraged its boys to enlist in the armed services. Commencement day visitors watched as Boys Town seniors received their

¹⁰¹"Boys Town Dope Sheets, 1946-1948," Boys Town Hall of History Documents Files.

¹⁰²"Athletics Correspondence, 1945-1948," Boys Town Hall of History Documents Files.

diplomas with one hand and enlisted in the service with the other. The Selective Service Act of 1943, "virtually eliminated all boys older than 18 from the program at Boys Town." Students faced with enlistment before graduation, entered an accelerated learning program and earned diplomas before their 18th birthdays. As graduating seniors joined "the many hundreds of former Boys Town citizens fighting on battle fronts throughout the world," Father Flanagan toured the country selling war bonds for the war effort. At the request of the United States Treasury Department, Father Flanagan traveled to five states and raised over seven million dollars during the War Bond Drive. In appreciation for his war service contributions, the American War Dads honored Father Flanagan as their national chaplain and as "the country's number one War Dad."¹⁰³

In October 1943, Newsweek magazine dubbed Boys Town graduates as "Father Flanagan's Fighters" and reported on their acts of heroism overseas. Countless Boys Town soldiers won medals of commendation including the Purple Heart, Silver and Bronze Stars, Distinguished Service Cross, and the Congressional Medal of Honor. Many Boys Town soldiers listed the Home or Father Flanagan as their only next of kin. As a result, the Home received photographs, letters, P.O.W. correspondence, phonograph recordings, and the personal effects of former boys who fought and died during World War II.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³Important Dates, 10.

¹⁰⁴"Father Flanagan's Fighters," Newsweek Magazine, 12 October, 1943, 104.

In September 1944, the War Department approved Boys Town as a national defense post. Under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel George Morrow, the student military unit donned gas masks and "rifles" to drill "in case of a national emergency." In the spirit of military order, "AWOL" students "who left the premises without our knowledge or consent" received extra "KP" duty in the Home's dining halls.¹⁰⁵

After World War II, many government officials invited Father Flanagan to serve as a national youth care advisor. In February 1946, U.S. Attorney General Tom Clark appointed Father Flanagan to a national panel for the study of juvenile delinquency. As part of his work, Father Flanagan joined Attorney General Clark on the radio program, "America's Town Meeting of the Air," to discuss the question, "Are Parents or Society to Blame for Juvenile Crime?" After his appointment by U.S. Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, to the Naval Civilian Committee, Father Flanagan returned to Boys Town in April 1946 to prepare for an overseas trip to Ireland. Upon his return to the United States, Attorney General Clark asked Father Flanagan to participate on the Juvenile Delinquency Panel during the National Conference on the Control of Juvenile Delinquency in October 1946.¹⁰⁶

After the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japanese and American officials struggled to restore order and provide services for survivors. Thousands of Japanese children lived in temporary orphanages and shelters in desperate need of nourishment and medical

¹⁰⁵Important Dates, 10.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 14.

attention. In January 1947, General Douglas MacArthur and Secretary of War Robert Patterson invited Father Flanagan to travel to Japan to confer with Japanese youth care officials.¹⁰⁷ During his three-month tour of Asia, Father Flanagan advised over 5,000 juvenile welfare workers and educators in twenty-three cities. The Japanese press translated many of his speeches over Radio Tokyo and in national newspapers. In June 1947, Father Flanagan journeyed back to the United States aboard the U.S.S. Fall River to prepare a report on his Asian findings.¹⁰⁸

Impressed with his work, U.S. President Harry S. Truman invited Father Flanagan to join British General Geoffrey Keyes in Europe to establish child welfare programs under the Marshall Plan. Upon his arrival in Frankfurt in February 1948, Father Flanagan received a request from U.S. General Lucius Clay to aid German child care organizations. In Vienna and Rome, Father Flanagan attended meetings with youth care official representatives from the United Nations, Austrian, Russian, Italian, and British governments. In May 1948, Father Flanagan journeyed back to Berlin to assist General Clay and to attend war crimes trials held in Nuremberg. During his stay, Monsignor Edward J. Flanagan suffered a heart attack and died at the 279th Military Hospital on May 15, 1948.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 18-24.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

The Brotherhood of Boys Town, 1948-1973

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, life at Boys Town paralleled the national experience. Americans left behind the struggles and self-sacrifice demanded during the Great Depression and World War II and looked forward to a decade of prosperity and peace. Boys Town also passed over its "hard times" to become a financially secure, internationally known child care institution. As with America's loss of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Boys Town citizens faced the difficult task of replacing its charismatic leader, Father Edward J. Flanagan.

Boys Town operated without a permanent director until the appointment of Monsignor Nicholas H. Wegner on September 1, 1948. A former archdiocesan chancellor, Monsignor Wegner built his religious career, not as a child care expert, but as a sound financial and program administrator. Many Boys Town supporters questioned the wisdom of Archbishop Gerald Bergan's selection. Many believed that Boys Town interim director and long-time Father Flanagan aide, Father Edmund Walsh possessed the abilities and talents required of the position. In June 1948, Father Walsh demonstrated statesman-like bearing and personal charisma during a visit from President Harry S. Truman. Described by friends and relatives as "a tough German," Monsignor Nicholas Wegner's "big stick" philosophy stood in sharp contrast to the gregarious personality of Father Walsh.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Edwin Novotny and Clarence "Mitt" Stoffel, interview with author, November 1985.

The succession of Harry S. Truman as President of the United States and Monsignor Wegner as Boys Town's Executive Director posed interesting historical comparisons. Both men entered office after the death of long-term charismatic public leaders. As a result, the new officeholders had to "win over" a grief-stricken citizenry. They established administrations and maintained stability during an era of social and economic readjustment. In addition, each built a public image of determination and strength while in office. With the exclusion of a brief tenure as Director of Omaha's Saint James Orphanage in 1936, Monsignor Wegner arrived at Boys Town without previous child care experience. As executive director, Monsignor Wegner concentrated his energies on Boys Town's financial stability and community growth. As the harvester of the fruits of the Flanagan Era, Monsignor Wegner worked to preserve, not change, the existing programs of Boys Town.

At the time of his death, Father Flanagan was in the process of changing the youth care practices of Boys Town. In 1946, Father Flanagan had investigated the use of "cottage-styled" facilities as a humane housing alternative for juvenile offenders. Father Flanagan believed that simulated family living eased the problems of children from broken homes. In 1947, Father Flanagan approved an ambitious architectural plan to expand the facilities of Boys Town to care for 1,000 boys through dormitory and cottage-styled living. In addition to twenty-five residential units, the building program featured a 1,200 seat Music Hall, Trade School and Welfare Department buildings,

and a Field House "patterned after facilities at Purdue University and Michigan State College."¹¹¹

When Monsignor Wegner assumed his duties in Fall 1948, he directed the completion of several buildings and vetoed the construction of a proposed boathouse and launch near the Boys Town Lake. As executive director, he faced the challenge of retiring the thirteen million dollar building debt. Home employee, Ted Miller aided Monsignor Wegner and engineered a series of fund raising tours and mass mailings to eradicate the debt. In the 1950s and 1960s, national mass mailing appeals replaced local fund raising drives as the primary source of donations for Boys Town. Boys Town withdrew from its previously close relationship with the Omaha business community. As an entity, Boys Town seemed aloof and distant from its once-close Omaha neighbors.¹¹²

The institutional isolation of Boys Town stemmed, in part, from the administrative style of Monsignor Wegner. As executive director, he enjoyed staying at "Home" to concentrate on the internal needs of the Boys Town community. Monsignor Wegner ventured out on infrequent public speaking tours to raise funds for the Home or to visit seminary classmates in Rome, Italy. His sister, Sister Henry Joseph Wegner, commented in 1985, that "Boys Town was his heart's desire."¹¹³

¹¹¹Boys Town Times Newspaper, 11 February, 1949.

¹¹²Edwin Novotny and Clarence "Mitt" Stoffel interviews, November 1985.

¹¹³Sister Henry Joseph Wegner, interview with Edwin Novotny and Clarence "Mitt" Stoffel for Boys Town Hall of History, Denver, Colorado, 12 December, 1985.

In order to fill the new buildings, Boys Town increased its campus enrollment to 825 students in September 1950. The population boom within the community spurred an expansion of village services and solidified its image as an urban center. Residents developed a deep sense of pride in their community. Student activities complemented the emerging urban sophistication of the village. As Boys Town citizens, the students supported and participated in community events and programs. Their experiences forged a special unity among Boys Town classmates. As described by one alumnus, "It was like a brotherhood here at Boys Town."¹¹⁴

Village Services

To meet the needs of its residents, Boys Town expanded its urban services in the 1950s and 1960s. Until 1946, Boys Town relied on local pumping stations to supply water to its residents. The erection of a 140 foot, 4000 gallon water tank insured adequate water supply for household, school, agricultural, and fire safety needs. In 1955, Boys Town purchased a La France "750 gallon per minute pumping" fire engine and organized a thirty-member volunteer fire department composed of faculty and staff. Trained by the Omaha Fire Department, volunteers on the Boys Town Fire department conducted drills and fought fires at Boys Town and in nearby rural communities. In 1972, the installation of a

¹¹⁴Robert Maddux, interview with Boys Town's External Affairs Department, May 1984.

fire cadet program allowed students to learn life saving, and fire fighting and prevention as a career.¹¹⁵

In 1956, one hundred and fifty students formed a military police force, the "353rd Boys Town's Own," in order to protect residents and their property. As a branch of the U.S. Army Reserve, "Boys Town's Own" operated as the security personnel for the village until the organization of a professional police force in 1967. In 1973, the Boys Town Police Force, composed of trained adult female and male officers, gained accreditation as a recognized law enforcement agency for the State of Nebraska.¹¹⁶

The health services for the village underwent substantial change and expansion in the 1940s and 1950s. In order to care for its 900 residents, Boys Town built a campus infirmary which contained six wards, x-ray facilities, nurses quarters, a pharmacy, and medical and dental examination and treatment rooms. Staffed by full-time nurses and visiting dentists and physicians, the Boys Town Infirmary provided prompt treatment for medical emergencies. The expanded facilities of the infirmary allowed Omaha doctors to diagnose, test, and treat non-surgical illnesses, set fractures, and perform minor surgical operations.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Important Dates, 21, and Boys Town Times, 11 February, 1955, 1.

¹¹⁶ Boys Town Times, 13 January, 1956, 3, and Chief Robert Allbritton, Boys Town Police Department, interview with author, May 1984.

¹¹⁷ Annual Report, 1949, 11, and ibid., 1950, 12.

After initial care, the infirmary staff transported seriously ill or wounded students to Omaha hospitals. In 1949, 325 Boys Town students spent 958 days in local hospitals for an average of 2.95 days per patient. Of the reported hospital cases in 1949, 160 patients underwent minor or major surgery, 146 required x-ray exams, and 63 remained hospitalized for tests and treatment. Medical emergencies sustained by the students included 29 compound fractures, 15 appendectomies, and 30 "miscellaneous" cases requiring minor surgical attention.¹¹⁸

Omaha physicians performed minor surgical acts such as tonsillectomies, adenoidectomies, and circumcisions in the Boys Town infirmary. Non-surgical illnesses contracted by students in 1949 included rheumatic fever, osteomyelitis, polio, and "mental disorders." The majority of the residents' illnesses centered around childhood diseases which included chicken pox, mumps, and rubella measles.¹¹⁹

In 1950, Boys Town implemented a school nurse program to treat minor illness and reduce the frequency of student visits to the infirmary. The school nurse administered "routine inoculations, eye tests, . . . and treatments for colds" as a part of her duties.¹²⁰

Five local dentists rotated shifts and provided Boys Town students with dental treatment and care. In an effort "to safeguard the oral health of our citizens," Boys Town dentists performed an average

¹¹⁸Ibid., 1949, 11.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Boys Town Times, 8 December, 1950, 4.

of 200 extractions, 100 cleaning and fluoride treatments, and constructed 100 mouth braces and bridges on an annual basis. In addition, the dentists performed minor dental surgery such as wisdom tooth removal and root canals in the dental clinic.¹²¹

In the 1950s and 1960s, Boys Town doctors and dentists initiated public health programs in order to care for the boys. The dental staff required students to brush with chlorophyll toothpastes to determine its effects "on tooth decay and gingival condition." Nurses and doctors administered Sabin polio vaccinations to Boys Town and surrounding community residents "to help stamp out polio." In many cases, infirmary facilities at Boys Town matched and exceeded health care provided by local rural medical centers.¹²²

At Home

Dormitories and the family-styled "cottages" served as "home" for the Boys Town residents from 1950-1972. Each cottage housed twenty boys and a male counselor and consisted of a living room, kitchen, study and recreation rooms, and bedrooms. Each bedroom slept four boys and contained study desks, chairs, and built-in wardrobes for clothes and personal belongings. Unlike dormitory life, cottage living provided an environment for small group projects and activities. Guided by an adult male counselor, cottage residents staged skits, hosted holiday dances, and organized "theme" parties in their home. In 1960, residents renamed

¹²¹Ibid., 14 October, 1949, 4.

¹²²Ibid., 14 September, 1951, 1, and 8 June, 1962, 1.

the cottages to reflect each group's "spirit" and interests. In the cluster of homes known as "Little America," each cottage adopted the name of a U.S. President such as "Lincoln Place," "Roosevelt House," and "Washington Cottage." Choir members who lived in the "Caecilian Court," renamed their cottages "in honor of St. Caecilian, patroness of all musicians." In an effort to "beautify" their homes, cottage dwellers competed in "Lawn and Yard" contests and planted "shrubbery and flowers" to gain distinction as "top winner." Cottage living enabled counselors and educators to extend learning beyond the confines of the classroom. In 1965, one cottage undertook

. . . an ambitious project . . . to trace man's history . . . starting with the creation of the world . . . progressing through the prehistoric, Egyptian, Greek and Roman era, the Nativity, Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Christ, the Middle Ages, the American Revolution, the Alamo, the Winning of the American West, the Civil War, World War I, World War II, a Modern City of the Year 2,500, and the End of the World.

Inspired "by the writing of Jules Verne," the residents built "a series of tableaus" complete with "special lighting and sound effects" in the basement of the cottage. Despite its skewed vision of history, the project exemplified the leisure activities of cottage residents.¹²³

The dormitory residents lived a more structured existence than the cottage dwellers. Twenty-five boys received a bed and an iron footstool as their dormitory room belongings. Organized into units, residents and their counselors held large meetings to discuss daily

¹²³ Ibid., 14 October, 1960, 2; 11 November, 1960, 1; 10 February, 1965, 2.

activities and duties. Each dormitory conducted weekly "cleaning contests" in which dorm dwellers mopped and shined floors, polished and dusted fixtures and furniture, and sanitized bathrooms. After inspection by a team of male counselors, the "winning dormitory" displayed a victory banner in its entryway. Each morning, dormitory and cottage residents made their beds and cleaned their rooms before breakfast. Student Council members checked the bedrooms and reported their findings to the male counselors. Though regimented, the cleaning duties reduced the need at Boys Town for expensive janitorial crews and instilled discipline in the boys.¹²⁴

Students at Boys Town ate three daily meals in the high school and grade school dining halls. At an average breakfast, students consumed "1,000 eggs, 500 sweet rolls and 48 loaves of bread." Employed as cooks and kitchen staff, the boys aided in the preparation, serving, and clean-up of daily meals. Work tasks often complemented programs taught in the Boys Town Trade School. In addition to student wages, residents earned academic credit in baking and culinary arts courses for working in the dining halls. In 1950, Boys Town received "a swedish ice cream freezer . . . to furnish ice cream for the snack bar in the bowling ally, special parties . . . building stores and in the dining halls." As "one of the trades they will learn," seventeen student cooks prepared thirty gallons of "delicious topping for cherry pie ala mode" during its first day of operation. In between meals, Boys Town students bought snacks

¹²⁴Edwin Novotny, Clarence "Mitt" Stoffel, and George Pfeiffer, interview with author, November 1984.

or pizza at the snack counter of the bowling alley located in the basement of the high school dining hall.¹²⁵

At School

Over seven hundred students attended classes daily in Boys Town's high school, grade school and trade school buildings. High school students pursued a college preparatory or vocational training course of studies. With college beyond their reach, Boys Town prepared its students for the realities of the American job market in the 1950s and 1960s. By 1969, over 60% of Boys Town students opted for the trade school curriculum. The teaching emphasis in the Trade School shifted from traditional classes such as woodworking and printing to up-to-date courses in auto mechanics, electrical engineering, metal working, and electronics repair. In the early 1950s, consumer service trades such as barbering, tailoring, baking, and shoe repair became popular curriculum choices for the students.¹²⁶

In the course of their studies, Boys Town residents received the opportunity to learn trades from prospective employers and join national and local trade organizations and associations. In 1950, the "American Association of Nurserymen, the National Arborists Association, the National Shade Tree Conference and the Midwest Turf Conference" endorsed

¹²⁵"Boys Town's Needs for One Day," undated advertising flyer, Boys Town Hall of History Documents Files, and Boys Town Times, 12 October, 1950, 2.

¹²⁶"Boys Town Career Center Statistics, 1960-1970," Boys Town Hall of History Documents Files.

Boys Town's installation of arborculture as a trade school program. Students taking the four-year course in "horticulture . . . nursery, arborculture and turf" received "training in the field" and the promise of a job for "boys able to go out . . . and do a good job for their employers."¹²⁷

Students enrolled in the Trade school registered their curriculum choices with counselors in the "vocational guidance office." Program director, Father Roman C. Ulrich and his assistants administered "various tests . . . to determine the student's interests and aptitudes" in order to plan "his training . . . accordingly, thus saving any lost effort and possible disappointment later on." In the 1970s, Boys Town vocational counselors organized off-campus employment opportunities in "lumber yards, hospitals, garages and service stations, restaurants, clubs and hotels, tailors and bakeries" to enable students "to profit from the experience in the world of work." Comprehensive exposure to a trade afforded Boys Town students the opportunity to evaluate and adjust career choices before graduation. In the 1970s, Trade School instructor, Dr. Grant Magnuson mailed out questionnaires to graduates in order to determine "the effectiveness of the vocational programs at Boys Town." An analysis of the responses sent in by alumni revealed that over 21% of the graduates remained employed in their chosen fields as compared to a national average of 9% for graduates of similar trade school programs. The questionnaires prompted varied graduate responses:

¹²⁷Boys Town Times, 10 March, 1950, 1.

I believe that the on-the-job training program was instrumental in establishing a base of work and reference once I had graduated from Boys Town.

The Trade School was an integral part of my shaping Even today, being a supervisor with some sixty men under me I still employ some of [the instructors'] methods in dealing with discipline and productivity.

I felt the discipline was unnecessary while at the Home, but it turned out to be one of the greatest assets and lessons to prepare me for the rough business and technical world.

Several alumni criticized Boys Town's "underemphasis" of college as an option after graduation:

I did not "follow-up" my training because I was not interested in any trade. I wanted to go to college, however B. T. (the principal) said I was not smart enough. I now hold four degrees, work in an administrative position, and teach graduate courses on a part-time basis at our state university

Teachers were too easy when I was there. Subjects taught were of little help later in college.

I received excellent trade school training but found that I lacked the necessary academic courses to attend college. Career counseling and possibly financial aide should be made available to graduating Boys Town students who wish to pursue their education.

On the whole, respondees felt that the trades program had "opened many doors" and, in some cases, "carried more weight than [a] college education" in employment after graduation.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Ibid., 9 December, 1949, and Grant Magnuson, A Follow-Up Study of Graduates of the Vocational Programs at Father Flanagan's Boys' Home's Vocational Career Center (unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1975), 83-95.

The Boys Town Educational Department required all students to study core classes in math, English, and the social sciences. In 1949, instructors adopted "departmental teaching" in order to "alleviate the psychological and emotional reaction commonly found in older boys under the former system of one teacher to a group through a full day." Sensitive to the educational deficiencies of his students, Boys Town instructor, Father Aloysius McMahon instituted remedial reading classes and a "book program" in 1953. Enrollees in the program kept a file card which indicated the titles and dates of books checked out from the school library. Upon completion of a selected book, students wrote a "100-word summary of the book and a listing of the dictionary definitions of 10 new words learned." Prizes awarded for "best book reports and most books read" stimulated students to read an average of twenty books a year and demonstrated a "marked change in the reading habits of Boys Town citizens."¹²⁹

In the 1950s and 1960s, students who attended Boys Town obtained educational experiences similar to that of a public school. As a supplement to their classroom instruction, Boys Town teachers encouraged students to participate in a wide range of extracurricular events. Students interested in government and public speaking ran for positions on the Student Council, joined debate societies, and served as representatives to the Boys Town Model United Nations. Drama enthusiasts tried out for the "Boys Town Players," produced skits for all-school rallies,

¹²⁹Boys Town Times, 28 January, 1949, 1; 11 December, 1970, 4; 10 October, 1958, 1.

and staged plays in the Music Hall. In an effort to prepare students for "dating," instructors held after school classes in "etiquette, table manners and social graces." Hired "professional dance instructors" taught Boys Town students "the foxtrot, Cha Cha and the waltz" in weekly dance classes. Students steeped in social instruction attended dances in the Boys Town Field House and became the "invited guests of young ladies at dancing parties held at Mount Loretta Academy." Graduating seniors looked forward to special events including Junior-Senior Prom, "sneak day," athletic banquets, commencement exercises, and the publication of the Boys Town annual, The Pylon. At the "Last Will and Testament Banquet," seniors bequeathed their "worldly goods" to junior classmates. Private nicknames and jokes highlighted many of the "legacies" left by the seniors:

Don Lagoni wills his ability to wash the dishes to Floyd "The Nose" Brouillard.

Myron "Polka King" Mason wills his cool, sophisticated dancing ability to Cecil Schirtzinger and Danny Zarecor who threaten to shove Arthur Murray out of the spotlight.

Upon graduation, students carried away lessons of hard work and money management learned through the Boys Town student employment program.¹³⁰

At Work

Many students gained knowledge of their prospective careers through Boys Town's student employment positions. Counselors assigned

¹³⁰Ibid., 8 February, 1957, 1; 12 December, 1958, 2; 13 May, 1949, 3.

students campus jobs in the Home's tailor shop, laundry, kitchens, maintenance department, and administrative offices. Vocational agriculture students ground feed, raised livestock, and cleaned barns at the Boys Town farm. In the fields, students planted crops, operated farm machinery, and detassled corn as "farm hands." Students deposited income earned from campus jobs into a Boys Town Bank account. Instituted in 1945, the student bank held student earnings in a "going-away" fund for withdrawal upon graduation.¹³¹

Students who wished to withdraw funds prior to graduation received "Boys Town Currency" in the form of paper or metal tokens. The boys spent the tokens in the bowling alley, snack bar, and "store" at Boys Town. Opened in 1950, the Boys Town Store stocked candy, gum, toilet articles, clothing, shoes, and linens for student purchase. The Boys Town programs in student employment, banking, and merchandising operated in order to instill values of "good citizenship," "social responsibility," and "wage investment" in its youthful residents.¹³²

At Play

Hobbies captured the attention of many Boys Town residents. In a 1949 survey by the Boys Town Times newspaper, stamp collecting received highest marks as "the most popular of all hobbies, various sports . . . a close second [with] model airplanes, music and

¹³¹Important Dates, 23-26.

¹³²Ibid.

woodworking . . . having a great number of devotees." In the 1960s, students held "hobby shows" to display collections on

Art, aviation, birds, boats, bracelets, braiding, chemistry, dogs, electricity and radio, foreign currency, Indian lore, matchbook covers, medals, model ships, post cards, reading, rocks and stones and western life.

Limited allowances required the boys to form clubs and "swap" to acquire new items for their collections.¹³³

Scouting offered students the opportunity to venture out beyond the city limits of Boys Town to go on camping and boating trips. The Boys Town scout programs "built the boys' character" as they completed merit badges, performed community services, and aided fellow scouts in group activities. In the 1950s and 1960s, the boys choose membership in either Boys Town's Boy Scouts or Sea Scouts troupes. As members of "Sea Scout Ship Father Flanagan No. 37," sea scouts and their adult "captains" sailed on the Missouri River, held flotilla cruises down the Mississippi River, and raced in sailboat regattas on Iowa's Carter Lake. The adult sponsors donated rivercraft such as "a 20 foot cabin cruiser belonging to Skipper Lathrop, a 16-foot X Class sailboat and . . . a motorboat" for the sea scouts trips. On expeditions, the sea scouts sailed during the day, slept in tents on the riverbank at night, and "took all meals aboard."¹³⁴

Holidays and summer vacations posed special problems for Boys Town students and staff. Unlike most children, Boys Town students did

¹³³Boys Town Times, 25 February, 1949, 1.

¹³⁴Ibid., 11 August, 1970, 1.

not have "homes" to visit during school breaks. Counselors and teachers worked to make holidays and summer vacations happy, fun-filled times for the boys. At Christmas, each cottage and dormitory decorated a tree and awaited the arrival of Monsignor Wegner. As "Santa Claus," Monsignor, Wegner distributed donated and purchased gifts to the boys. After a "traditional feast with all of the trimmings," the boys played with their gifts, listened to phonograph records, and watched the choir perform from Dowd Chapel on television. "Twelfth Night" activities such as intramural sports, drama and musical presentations, scavenger hunts, dances, parties, and a New Year's Eve costume contest called "The Fool's Parade," kept the boys busy before the start of the spring school term.¹³⁵

Omaha supporters supplied food and gifts and established holiday traditions at Boys Town. From 1932 until his death in 1962, restaurateur Robert Nalibow sponsored an annual Fourth of July picnic which featured "hot dogs, ham, buns, pop, and ice cream" for the boys. In the 1920s, Omaha realtor Byron Reed donated turkeys for Thanksgiving dinners at Boys Town. After his death in 1956, Reed's company continued his Thanksgiving tradition and supplied the Home with over 100 turkeys. Boys Town held monthly birthday celebrations in the campus' dining halls in which students gathered for birthday cake and a special dinner.¹³⁶

Summer school at Boys Town afforded instructors nine weeks in which to correct some of the educational deficiencies of their students.

¹³⁵Ibid., 13 January, 1962, 2.

¹³⁶Ibid., 9 February, 1972, 1, and 12 December, 1956, 1.

At the end of the school term, students caddied at local golf courses, attended square dances on the Home's tennis courts, and spent short vacations at Boys Town's resort at Lake Okoboji, Iowa. Once operated as a "lavish casino" and a "missionary retreat," "Our Lady of the Lake" summer resort consisted of a main hall, canteen, cottages, garage and storeroom. The purchase of the resort in 1953 established a summer vacation tradition for Boys Town students.¹³⁷

Choir

Leisure activities served as a source of community spirit and pride for the residents of Boys Town. Three programs in particular captivated the public attention and the interests of the boys. In the 1950s and 1960s, the choir, sports teams, and 4-H club of Boys Town earned a national reputation for high school excellence. Many Boys Town students felt a deep sense of responsibility to continue program traditions established in Father Flanagan's era.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the performances of the Boys Town band and choir centered around fundraising and public relations events. Upon his installation as the Home's music director in 1946, Monsignor Francis Schmitt stressed excellence instead of showmanship as the central purpose of his music program. Monsignor Schmitt reorganized the choir and booked it into small concert halls and chorale recitals across the United States. On tour, the choir gained a reputation for its "soft harmony, sustained toward excellence and the lilting soprano voices."

¹³⁷Ibid., 14 August, 1964, 1, and 9 August, 1957, 2.

In 1950 and 1951, the choir received invitations to perform at Carnegie Hall in New York City, Constitution Hall in Philadelphia, and Symphony Hall in Los Angeles. During the New York City tour in 1950, the choir sang on Ed Sullivan's "Toast of the Town" television program. Favorable public reaction prompted television programs such as "Wide, Wide, World" and "You Asked For It" to film choir performances at Boys Town. Local and national radio stations such as NBC and ABC, delivered the "voices of Boys Town" into thousands of homes on Christmas Eve and Easter.¹³⁸

From 1946-1971, the Boys Town Choir traveled over 200,000 miles and performed over one thousand concerts in the United States, Canada, Cuba, Japan, and the Philippines. As recording artists, the Boys Town Choir sang on several labels which included Warner Brothers and Columbia Records. In the 1960s, the Everly Brothers and Gordon MacRae collaborated with the choir to produce Christmas and religious hymn albums.¹³⁹

Athletics

Three men stood behind the guts and glory play of the Boys Town sports teams. Coaches Clarence "Mitt" Stoffel, William Ojile, and Maurice "Skip" Palrang continued the winning tradition at Boys Town in football and basketball and expanded it to include tennis, swimming, and wrestling. A football coaching legend, Head Coach "Skip" Palrang guided Boys Town's football teams to 199 victories, 11 ties, and 66

¹³⁸ Ibid., 14 January, 1949, 1; 9 January, 1953, 1; 18 December, 1961, 1.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 9 August, 1968, 2, and "Boys Town Choir," Boys Town Hall of History Documents Files.

defeats in 28 years. Named Pop Warner Foundation "Coach of the Year" in 1949 and 1957, Skip Palrang pioneered the use of the "T" formation in high school football play.¹⁴⁰

Many Boys Town athletes won local and national recognition for their sports prowess. In addition to Nebraska's "All-State" teams, several students received recognition from "All-American," United Press International, and Associated Press' national football and basketball polls. Despite its powerhouse reputation, the football team could not play in the Omaha public high school sports league because of Boys Town's status as a private school. In order to play sports, Boys Town students traveled to distant cities in their team bus, nicknamed "the Flex." In 1966, one year after inclusion into Omaha's Metropolitan League, the Boys Town athletes captured local and state championships in football and basketball.¹⁴¹

Agriculture

In the 1950s, the agricultural program for Boys Town students concentrated more on vocational training and relied less on subsistence farming. As a nationally recognized vocational training program, Boys Town "Aggies" bred blue ribbon beef cattle, hogs, and sheep for livestock show exhibitions. The Boys Town 4-H club showed Shorthorn, Angus, and Hereford steers to capture Grand Champion car load lot honors at

¹⁴⁰"Boys Town Dope Sheets, 1949-1972," Athletics File, Boys Town Hall of History Documents Files.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

Denver's National Western, Omaha's Ak-Sar-Ben, Louisville, Kentucky's Bourbon Beef, and Los Angeles' Grand Western cattle exhibitions. In 1949, Boys Town students hosted the "First Annual Boys Town Royal Livestock Show" and invited "4-H boys and girls in Douglas, and neighboring counties in Nebraska, . . . Southwestern Iowa, and cattle breeders from Eastern Nebraska and Southwestern Iowa" to compete in "dairy, beef and swine judging." After the awards ceremonies, 4-H'ers "gathered for a dance in the high school library." In addition to livestock, many students raised pets and tended to gardens at the Boys Town farm.¹⁴²

A Need for Change

In 1967, Boys Town celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding as a home for wayward and neglected boys. To mark the occasion, Boys Town invited U.S. Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey and his wife Muriel as its special guests. At commencement exercises, Vice President Humphrey told the 1967 graduates that "Harvard almost equals Boys Town." Muriel Humphrey aided Monsignor Wegner to break the ground for the future site of the "Boys Town Division for Exceptional Children." In a speech entitled, "A Half Century of Service," Executive Director of the Nebraska Children's Home Society, Randall C. Brait, praised Monsignor Wegner for his youth care accomplishments:

When Father Flanagan passed to his reward he
left . . . a flaming torch that could be held
only in the grasp of powerful hands . . .
capable hands now grasp the torch and hold it

¹⁴²Boys Town Times, 12 September, 1964, 2; and 9 August, 1949, 1.

high The hands are those of a
most capable successor, Monsignor
Nicholas Wegner.

The willingness of Boys Town to create a care facility for mentally retarded children projected the external image of a vital institution ready "to take risks" in its mission to save youth. Internally, however, Boys Town experienced an administrative stagnation which threatened its continued operation as a youth care institution.¹⁴³

¹⁴³Ibid., 9 June, 1967, 4.

The Families of Boys Town, 1973-1985

The 1967 "Boys Town Division for Exceptional Children" proposal postponed public criticism of Boys Town youth care programs. In the case of a similar plan in 1956, Boys Town Executive Director Monsignor Nicholas Wegner did not develop the proposed care facility for mentally retarded youth. The inability of the Wegner administration to initiate change rendered many of the child care programs of Boys Town obsolete. Concerned local and national youth care officials probed deeper into the internal practices and organization of Boys Town.

Many youth care institutions shared Boys Town's struggle to adapt to the changing needs of children. The tumultuous decade of the 1960s tested many values and traditions within American society. Voices of previously unheard Americans, focused national attention on women and minority rights, urban blight, poverty, and the Vietnam War. As a result, public concern shifted away from the status of the American family.

A vow by President Lyndon B. Johnson to "heal and build" America through his "Great Society" seemed to exclude youth beyond school lunch, Head Start, and remedial learning programs. Youthful experimentation with new "freedoms" in sexuality, drug use, and social authority escalated the problems of teen-age drug abuse, unwanted pregnancies, and juvenile delinquency. Juvenile courts and social welfare agencies turned to child care institutions such as Boys Town to handle the problems of the society's latest "wayward child."

As one of the few recipients of the nation's troubled and unwanted youth in the 1960s and 1970s, Boys Town cared for over eight hundred boys on an annual basis. Concerns for youth maintenance preoccupied Boys Town officials. Without trained staff to develop new programs, Boys Town continued to "warehouse" its wards. Despite its antiquated methods, Boys Town's administration worked to protect its "status quo." Described as a "crackerjack administrator," Monsignor Wegner received criticism that his "managerial policy seem[ed] to dominate over educational and professional considerations for the staff and boys." Father Flanagan's nephew and long-time Boys Town administrator, Patrick Norton, defended Monsignor Wegner and declared that he had "done a tremendous job of getting money, investing it and bringing the home security." Despite his good intentions, administrative malaise of Monsignor Wegner threatened the security of Boys Town as a youth care facility. Elderly and failing in health, Monsignor Nicholas Wegner stubbornly clung to tenets established during Father Flanagan's era.¹⁴⁴

In December 1970, the Los Angeles Times newspaper reported that Boys Town "had been forced to operate without a state child care license since June 30." Nebraska State Welfare Administrator Richard Rosenthal cited "deficiencies" such as "an inadequate number of women staff members to care for younger boys and the absence of a guard in a dormitory at night" as reasons for the licensure denial. Monsignor Wegner attacked the findings of the state and maintained that, "Conditions at Boys Town

¹⁴⁴"Biographer Says Father Flanagan's Wishes Ignored," Sunday World-Herald, 7 May, 1972, 10-B.

[are] definitely better than conditions at some of the rabbit huts operated by the state." For the first time in its history, Boys Town forfeited its status as one of the premiere youth care facilities in America.¹⁴⁵

The licensure battle proved a minor skirmish in the face of attacks launched by the Omaha Sun Newspapers during the spring of 1972. In a copyrighted story dated March 30, 1972, the Sun reported Boys Town's estimated worth in excess of \$209 million dollars which made it "the richest city in the United States." Attacking its mass mailing department as a "money making machine," the Sun editorialized that "Boys Town has continued to plead as if it had the sheriff at the door and an empty coal bin." The Sun's description of the mailing operation "involving more than 100 women, who work in an [unmarked] . . . building . . . downtown" prompted one Boys Town official to exclaim, "It's so easy for the public to get the wrong idea We want people to think the boys send out the mail." In an editorial entitled, "A Tale of Two Cities," the Sun condemned Boys Town's funding appeals as "border[ing] on institutional arrogance." The editorial maintained that the mailing campaigns corrupted Father Flanagan's vision for his City of Little Men:

This is a tale of two cities one
that the revered late Father E. J. Flanagan
dreamed of . . . the other . . . one that was
created out of Father Flanagan's success
While . . . Boys Town buil[t] that bulging
portfolio . . . [it] was providing relatively
less service . . . [to] fewer and fewer boys

¹⁴⁵"License for Boys Town Held Back," Los Angeles Times,
2 December, 1970.

while the administration is drawing deeper into its shell of yesterday's memories.¹⁴⁶

In response to the articles featured in the Sun, Boys Town cancelled its spring mailing campaign. Despite the insistence of Monsignor Wegner that "the decision . . . had nothing to do with the report," Boys Town did not resume its mailing operation until November 1973.¹⁴⁷

Across the country, hundreds of newspapers printed the Sun articles under headlines that proclaimed, "Bogus Charity Appeals Net Millions," "Boys Haven Debunked as Big Biz Operation," and "Boys Town Said Rolling in Dough." Many religious charities experienced a drop in donations as a result of Boys Town's financial scandal. Many charitable organizations described Boys Town's mailing campaigns as "sleazy" and warned the public to "watch your wallet . . . and think before you give Does Boys Town need your dollar?" The newspaper accounts triggered a loss of public prestige for Boys Town. In order to survive in a sea of public controversy, Boys Town investigated new avenues for change.¹⁴⁸

In a series of emergency meetings, Boys Town Board of Directors and its chairman, Archbishop Daniel E. Sheehan, recommended several policy changes on April 7, 1972. In addition to a center for mentally

¹⁴⁶"A Tale of Two Cities," Omaha Sun Newspapers, 30 March, 1972.

¹⁴⁷"Rich Boys Town Drops Fund Plea," Boston Advertiser, 23 April, 1972.

¹⁴⁸"Bogus Charity Appeals Net Millions," Ambler Pennsylvania Gazette, 23 August, 1972; "Boys Haven Debunked as Big Biz Operation," Berks County Record, Reading, Pennsylvania, 11 May, 1972; "Boys Town Said Rolling in Dough," San Francisco Argus, 31 March, 1972; "Watch Your Wallet!," Eternity Magazine, September 1973.

retarded children, the Board suggested that Boys Town establish a research facility, fund research chairs at "outstanding universities," commission studies on "similar problem[s] among girls," and lengthen educational services to include junior college courses. The Wegner Administration splintered into factions as it attempted to implement the proposals of the Board. One highly critical group threatened "a class action suit led by donors" to halt expenditures "not directly used for the care of homeless boys."¹⁴⁹

In December 1972, state welfare officials found "continued deficiencies" at Boys Town and denied renewal of its child care license for the second time. When interviewed by the Sun newspaper, employees, "in fear of losing their jobs," refused to give details on the state's report. Former staff members who spoke to the Sun on December 14, 1972, revealed that "a series of promotions and staff juggling . . . hinder[ed] any new programs New appointees [are] 'old line' Boys Town alumni or long-time employees." The Boys Town Board of Directors realized that the Home needed new leadership to implement change, mend professional integrity, and restore public support.¹⁵⁰

On October 12, 1973, Monsignor Wegner resigned as executive director "mark[ing] the end of a distinguished priestly career, more than half of which was devoted to . . . homeless and neglected boys."

¹⁴⁹"Enrollment at 22-Year Low," Omaha Sun Newspapers, 14 December, 1972, 3.

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

Archbishop Daniel Sheehan approached Father Robert P. Hupp as his choice for Boys Town's new administrative leader.¹⁵¹

In his thirty-year career, Father Hupp had demonstrated flexibility, innovation, and foresight as a church administrator. In the 1940s and 1950s, Father Hupp aided in the establishment of Catholic Youth Organization in Omaha and the Newman Society at Wayne State College, and served as a chaplain to the Good Shepherd girls' home in Omaha. As the founding pastor of Omaha's Christ the King parish, Father Hupp held Sunday masses in the ballroom of an amusement park as the congregation awaited construction of its new church. In the 1960s, Father Hupp joined local physicians and social welfare workers to form the youth drug counseling agency, Operation Bridge.¹⁵²

Despite assurances of a "definite contract," the fifty-eight-year-old Father Hupp remained reluctant to spend his retirement as director of a controversial institution such as Boys Town. Upon his acceptance of the position, Father Hupp declared, "I look at myself as an interim man, like Pope John was. But then, what's he do but upset the whole applecart? He meant a great deal of change to the church." Local newspapers looked on Father Hupp's appointment with favor and described him as "a straight-talking, down to earth clergyman. People instinctively like him and trust him." Hoping to stay only "two or three

¹⁵¹Boys Town Times, 12 October, 1973, 1.

¹⁵²Father Robert Hupp, interviews with author, May 1984.

years," Father Hupp remained at Boys Town for twelve years during the course of which he, like Pope John XXIII, effected great change.¹⁵³

The Family Home Program

Upon his arrival in October 1973, Father Hupp commissioned an annual report to outline the status of the youth care programs at Boys Town. The report revealed that "referrals for placement at Boys Town [were] increasingly from public social agencies and courts, and less and less frequently from private social agencies and individuals." Boys who demanded "care and education only" received help through hometown agencies and organizations. Applicants to Boys Town characterized a "far more serious 'problem boy'" from "lower class environments," "out of control" due to parental apathy and rejection.¹⁵⁴

Unequipped to deal with the new "problem boys," educators and staff members reported that "two thirds of the boys dismissed had run away at least once" from Boys Town. Citing "negative attitude[s] toward authority figure[s]," many students left Boys Town after "refusing to cooperate with the staff." The report suggested that "applications [would] continue to decline" because "those applications which are received are in behalf of boys who have precisely those problems which

¹⁵³"Boys Town Head Director Did Not Want Job," Omaha Sun Newspapers, 11 October, 1973, 1-2.

¹⁵⁴Annual Report of Welfare Department, Father Flanagan's Boys' Home, 1972, 1-10.

we have been least successful--low tolerance for frustration and problems with self-control."¹⁵⁵

In an attempt to seek new direction for Boys Town's youth care programs, Father Hupp hired several trained child care professionals. Despite "massive training sessions" and "heroic efforts" on the part of teachers and staff the youth care situation at Boys Town did not improve. Citing the new practices as "not enough to prevent strains and serious problems from developing in the cottage life and child care systems" Boys Town staff members searched for answers to their problems. In 1973, Boys Town officials decided that the student population of Boys Town were "social orphans," "who have living parents . . . who have no contact with their children." Boys Town administrators concluded that the reason the old programs no longer worked was because their students had "special problems" as a result of their past family life which required new methods of care. In order to reverse the boys' "special problems," Boys Town administrators informed Father Hupp that "significant changes must occur in the design of our programs, the skills and education of our staff, and in our physical facilities."¹⁵⁶

In his first year at Boys Town, Father Hupp fought to change "the almost monastic regime" of the boys' life at Boys Town. He halted censorship of their mail, permitted long hair, and encouraged dating for his youthful residents. Convinced that boys at Boys Town "have more deep-seated problems than needing a place to sleep and something to

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Annual Report, 1973, 5-9.

eat," Father Hupp investigated successful youth care programs across the country to find an answer to the difficulties of his boys.¹⁵⁷

Despite high expectations, Father Hupp dismissed four youth care directors within two years. Newspaper and magazine publications questioned Boys Town's progress and declared, "Boys Town is dead." Father Hupp refused to admit defeat and continued to restructure Boys Town's youth programs to reflect "normal family living." He believed that his boys should experience that same kind of life "I had with my folks on the farm in Clearwater, Nebraska." In 1975, Father Hupp found a team of youth care professionals to institute the changes he envisioned.¹⁵⁸

Prior to their arrival at Boys Town, behavioral psychologists Dean I. Fixsen and Ellery L. Phillips had developed a "behavioral technology for child care" defined as "the teaching-family model." Aided by fellow child psychologist Dr. David L. Coughlin, Dean Fixsen and Ellery Phillips "transformed dormitor[ies] into liveable homes created 41 family-style homes, each for eight to 10 boys run by a married couple who live here with their own children." Within four years, the new youth care team eliminated the "sterile, uninviting, and uniform" aspects of the life of the boys which included cafeteria dining, centralized laundry and housekeeping services, and infirmary medical care.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷"Rebuilding Boys Town," Time Magazine, 5 August, 1974, 78.

¹⁵⁸Father Robert Hupp interviews, May 1984.

¹⁵⁹"Father Flanagan, You Should See Boys Town Now," Chicago Tribune, 19 November, 1978.

The selection and training of "family teachers" remained central to the success of the Boys Town Family Home program. The Boys Town psychologists sought couples secure in their personal and married lives as "house parent" candidates. Upon selection, married couples received extensive training to prepare them for home life with their Boys Town children. Couples attended seminars and engaged in role playing sessions to learn the "philosophy and execution" of the Boys Town Family-Teaching Model.¹⁶⁰

The Boys Town Family-Teaching Model consisted of four basic components which incorporated behavior-skills curriculum, a motivation system, self-government, and "good teaching." In an effort to instill "skills necessary for successful family and community living," family-teachers encouraged and guided their boys' social development:

. . . to learn everything from how to use a telephone to how to keep a job. They learn to listen, to treat pets properly, to study, to fix tools, to arrive on time. They learn how to work and how to behave appropriately at work. They learn how to bathe and dress.

After the establishment of a household routine, family-teachers monitored their daily progress of the children through "point systems" and group conferences. As a means for "teaching interaction," family-teachers held daily review sessions with their children and "negotiated" positive rewards and privileges for "good behavior." One Boys Town youth care

¹⁶⁰ Ellery Phillips, Elaine Phillips, Dean Fixsen, and Montrose M. Wolf, The Teaching-Family Handbook: Group Living Environments Administered by Professional Teaching-Parents for Youths in Trouble (Lawrence, Kansas: The Bureau of Child Research, University of Kansas, 1972), 1-10.

official described the system of awarding or subtracting "points" as "a method to insure that our family-teachers are doing their job, not as a means to penalize our youth."¹⁶¹

Many of the students arrived at Boys Town as the victims of mental and/or physical child abuse. In response, the Boys Town Family-Teaching Model emphasized positive praise and non-violent discipline as a deterrent to anti-social behavior. In order to achieve consistency in care, the child care experts required all Boys Town staff, regardless of their work duties, to attend training workshops.¹⁶²

The Family Home Program effected change in the educational and extracurricular activities programs at Boys Town. Father Hupp and his administrators implemented psychological, drug, and alcohol counseling services and updated the teaching staff and school curriculums. The Family Home Program deemphasized the use of student activities as a promotion of a public image for Boys Town. In an effort to establish "normal family living," Boys Town administrators eliminated national touring schedules and required students to concentrate on their "home life" and studies.¹⁶³

Many traditional activities such as the 4-H and choir programs failed to capture the interest of students of an inner-city, urban

¹⁶¹"Father Flanagan, You Should See," Chicago Tribune, 19 November, 1978.

¹⁶²All Boys Town personnel are required to attend training sessions upon hire. Author attended training session April-May 1984.

¹⁶³Exhibit research conducted by author with Boys Town Youth Care Department for "Families of Boys Town, 1973-1985" exhibit section, Boys Town Hall of History, March 1984-November 1985.

background. As a result, the agricultural training program shifted its emphasis in 1975 from farm management to "agri-business" courses. Students involved in the newly named "Overlook Farm" program received training to equip them for agricultural-based jobs conducted in an urban setting. The music department reintroduced band and musical instrument instruction and restructured the choir to include all interested students. In 1975, Father Hupp reduced the student census of Boys Town from 700 to 510 boys in order to implement the family-teaching model. As a result, the census decline "forced . . . [Boys Town] athletic teams to compete in small-school class." Despite criticism from former residents and staff, Father Hupp believed that athletics should complement not dominate student life. The concern at Boys Town for the emotional and educational development of its students took precedent over "past traditions."¹⁶⁴

During the 1972 financial scandal, Boys Town received criticism for the "lack of girls" within its student population. As past chaplain for Omaha's "girl's town" at the Good Shepherd Home, Father Hupp realized that girls experienced many of the same social behavior problems as boys. In an effort to integrate the all-male residential population of Boys Town, Father Hupp introduced girls into the educational and treatment programs. In 1975, he fought for and won approval to install "a family of girls" on campus. To mark the historic change, the Sun Newspaper ran a cartoon captioned, "At last, a sign of the times," in September 1975 which depicted boys scowling from inside a play clubhouse

¹⁶⁴Time Magazine, 5 August, 1974, 78.

named "Boys Town" as Father Hupp painted an "X" over the word, "No" in its doorway warning, "No Girls Allowed!" In May 1979, the "first five girls" graduated with their male classmates and became members of the "Boys Town Alumni Association."¹⁶⁵

Throughout the 1970s, Father Hupp extended the youth care mission of Boys Town to children other than "wayward boys." In 1973, The Boys Town National Institute gave care to underprivileged and disadvantaged children who suffered from speech and hearing defects. In addition to evaluation and treatment, the Boys Town National Institute implemented many rehabilitation programs which included parent awareness classes, gifted students summer programs, and pre-schools for speech and hearing impaired children.¹⁶⁶

At Father Flanagan High School, inner-city youth received the opportunity to return to school to earn a degree. Developed by Father James Gilg, the programs at Father Flanagan High School were designed to ease the ill-effects of "poverty culture" such as drug abuse, unwanted pregnancies, illiteracy, apathy, and economic distress. The nursery, financial aid, and counseling programs, enabled former high school drop-outs to stay in school and complete coursework and degrees for Father Flanagan High School. In 1984, the U.S. Department of Education honored

¹⁶⁵"At Last, A Sign of the Times," Omaha Sun Newspapers, September 1975.

¹⁶⁶Press brochures for Boys Town National Institute, Boys Town Public Relations Department, 1985.

Father Flanagan High School as one of the outstanding private schools in the United States.¹⁶⁷

In 1985, Boys Town implemented its latest program, "Boys Town USA," in the hope of bringing "our town to your town." After a nationwide search, Boys Town chose Tallahassee, Florida as the site of its first two Boys Town USA homes. Funding donations and the cooperation of Florida state welfare made it possible for Boys Town to extend its family home concept to needy children unable to relocate to Nebraska.¹⁶⁸ At present, the Boys Town USA program continues to search for cities and states interested in the establishment of extended care homes.

With many of his administrative goals realized, Father Hupp approached Archbishop Daniel Sheehan in the fall of 1984 on the subject of his retirement. In his twelfth year as the executive director of Boys Town, Father Hupp had served Boys Town considerably longer than the "two or three years" he had envisioned. Archbishop Sheehan and Father Hupp agreed that the next executive director must bring to Boys Town academic and administrative vision and youthful enthusiasm and energy. In 1986, Archbishop Sheehan named a 46-year-old Omaha priest, Father Val Peter, as the new executive director of Boys Town. A tenured theology professor at Creighton University and long-time church social

¹⁶⁷Press brochures for Father Flanagan High School, Boys Town Public Relations Department, 1985.

¹⁶⁸Press brochures for Boys Town USA, Boys Town Public Relations Department, 1985.

services advocate,¹⁶⁹ Father Peter accepted the challenge to guide Boys Town and shape its future child-care programs. It is under his leadership that Boys Town faces its future.

¹⁶⁹Father Robert P. Hupp, interview with author, May 1986 and "Biography of Father Valentine J. Peter," Boys Town Public Relations Department, Boys Town, Nebraska, 1986.

Summary: "The Work Will Continue"

Boys Town of 1986 is clearly different from the Boys Town of 1926 or 1946 or for what it will be in 1996. As an institution, Boys Town has experienced great change from its beginnings in 1917 with a young priest and five boys living in a two-story house to an urban-based, non-profit corporation that provides services to more than 7,000 children annually. As this account has shown, Boys Town did not attain its respected position as a child care organization without periods of financial concern, public criticism, and internal administrative crisis. What has separated Boys Town from many Progressive Era social reform agencies is the fact that it has met the challenges of hardship and adversity and survived without substantial alteration of its original "mission." When Father Flanagan penned the tenet of Boys Town's mission "to care for homeless, needy and wayward boys," he established a standard or rule by which Boys Town has measured its administrative and child care performance since 1917.

Unlike other organizations, Boys Town has been fortunate to draw strength and support from its own community during hard times. Throughout its history, Boys Town weathered the storms of economic deprivation aided by the increased labors and efforts of its residents. In the 1920s and 1930s, boys and adults at Overlook Farm forged a unique sense of community as they worked to feed, shelter, and clothe one another. In 1935, the community adopted a new name for its growing urban identity, Boys Town. In the 1950s and 1960s, Boys Town residents concentrated on urban and cultural improvements as a reflection of their

community pride. As "a nice place to raise kids," Boys Town's urban image appealed, not only to its residents, but to the general public. The financial stability of Boys Town increased in direct relationship to its civic improvement.

Urban and financial concerns, however, have not been the only motivations for change at Boys Town. Often, the youthful residents of Boys Town need help beyond a good education and a comfortable environment. Fortunately, Father Flanagan's "mission statement" provided Boys Town with the flexibility to explore new avenues for future programs of child development and care. Similar to the Supreme Court's judicial review of the United States Constitution, the board of directors at Boys Town has periodically been called on to interpret the original intent of the mission statement. In the 1970s, the board of directors recognized the need to expand the levels of care at Boys Town to girls, underprivileged inner-city and handicapped youth within and outside of the community. As a result, they broadly extended the meaning of the mission statement to care for, not only boys, but all disadvantaged children regardless of their sex, geographical location, and mental or physical disability. With an expanded sense of mission and wide-based public support, Boys Town seems assured to fulfill for many years ahead Father Flanagan's prophecy, "You see, the work will continue because it is God's work, not mine."

Epilogue

In the span of an academic career, most historians hope to uncover at least one overlooked topic of historical interest. The opportunity to "work without a net" of previously published source material allows a historian to pioneer some thoughts on the historical importance of a topic. Many of my conclusions on the history of Boys Town are easily verified through cited archival sources. Some of my historical impressions of Boys Town are not. They are based on my experience of working within an institution whose history I had been hired to portray. With that in mind, I offer my two-year immersion in the cultural and corporate structure of Boys Town as a primary source of historical information. My opportunity to view firsthand the embodiment and alteration of Boys Town's past in present action added a unique dimension to my studies. To paraphrase a thesis offered by ethnohistorian James Axtell, I only hope that I have approached my summary of Boys Town as a historian studying the "downstream" flow of history, from the past to the present, and not as an anthropologist "upstreaming" knowledge, from present to the unknown past.¹⁷⁰

As I reviewed the history of Boys Town, I often puzzled over the fact that no one had realized its potential for historical study. Only after I had completed two years of research and thought on Boys Town's past did I discover my answer. Unlike Mount Everest, no one ever

¹⁷⁰ James Axtell, The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 9-10.

attempted it, because no one knew that the records were there. That a scholarly appraisal of Boys Town's past had not appeared serves as an illustration of its most prominent historical characteristic, isolationism. Through voluntary separation from outside influences, Boys Town has achieved, over time, cultural hegemony, financial independence, communal self-sufficiency, and urban growth. And yet, it cannot be categorized as a utopian society in the traditional historical sense. Boys Town's past, present, and future existence depends upon its open and positive relationship with the donating public. As an institution, it has welcomed public attention but shunned public interaction. Within this paradox lies the key to understanding Boys Town. It has not one but two institutional histories, one bred in myth and one forged in reality.

The mythical history of Boys Town is one of convenience, shaped by countless public relations campaigns, to appeal to the contributory nature of faithful and potential donors. In their attempts to "sell" Boys Town to the public, Father Flanagan and his colleagues reshaped and engineered historical events to suit the image they wished to present. As with most products, the manufactured myths of Boys Town sold only as long as the public was buying. To understand why a mythical history arose, one must look to Boys Town's past as shaped by everyday events. Life at Boys Town consisted of the activities and experiences shared by the boys within a given day. The daily agenda of eating, sleeping, playing, and learning did not greatly alter over time. External forces such as technological, medical, educational, architectural and leisure advances improved conditions in each era of the history of Boys Town but

did little to change the rhythm of everyday life. Since product marketing relies on ingenuity and innovation, the officials of Boys Town rejected the seemingly "static" history of everyday life for a "dynamic" history highlighted by manufactured change and growth.

Each era of the history of Boys Town has had a "personality" sculpted through the administrative practices of its executive directors. As its founder, Father Flanagan set the pace for the formation of Boys Town's dual past. Indeed, a study of his life presents the same paradoxical history as the institution he created. Like Boys Town, Father Flanagan's life has been shrouded in myth and isolated from inquiry, only to emerge as an institutional public icon. Even family and friends keep the myth alive and refuse to present anything less than an elevated portraiture of the Father Flanagan. In pursuit of some insight into his character, a close family friend offered the comment, "He [Father Flanagan] was not the man he appeared to be."¹⁷¹ Like many "larger-than-life" or cult figures, Father Flanagan lived the myth of his public image and made very few people privy to his private character and life. In fact, none of his personal papers or memorabilia other than administrative files exist today. Whether Father Flanagan intended that his past be defined only by the myth that he created is not known. If so, he failed in his task. A study of the Boys Town administrative records revealed, not the engineered myth of an unselfish, unworldly priest "who had dedicated his life to the care and saving of wayward boys," but a man determined to accomplish his agenda for the nation,

¹⁷¹Virginia Times, interviews with author, 12-13 August, 1985.

fueled by personal ambition, political savvy, and an elevated awareness of public sentiment and opinion.

In his early career, Father Flanagan funneled his ambitions into serving the priesthood as best he could. As with any organization, the Catholic Church maintained power among its religious and parishes through a system of political order. As the representative head of the Pope in America, a bishop or archbishop guides his group of religious, parishes, and agencies or dioceses much in the manner of a benevolent despot. The bishop seeks counsel from his appointed "chancellor" and "directors" but ultimately determines all diocesan policy and practice. For a young prelate to advance in the religious hierarchy of the diocese, he must garner the favor of his ecclesiastical superiors, in particular, his bishop. Not unlike a young knight errant, a prelate must distinguish himself through exemplary acts of ministerial courage and bravery to receive rapid elevations in rank. Prior to the nineteenth century, the parish served as the primary battleground on which a priest could achieve ecclesiastical fame and good fortune. The establishment of a financially secure parish insured a priest of a comfortable existence and praise from his superiors. The formation and maintenance of a successful parish, however, often took many years. Consequently, parish life held little glamour for ambitious priests anxious to rise in the hierarchy of the diocese.¹⁷² In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some priests saw the desire of the Catholic Church

¹⁷²For general information on the formation of Catholic charities and church organization, see: John O'Grady, Catholic Charities in the United States (New York: Ransdell, Inc., 1930).

to establish "true faith" alternatives to Protestant-based social service organizations as a release from the confines of parish life. In 1917, Father Flanagan seized upon the new opportunity for religious ministry. He combined a genuine interest in social reform with personal ambition to form his life's work, the care and treatment of unfortunate and neglected boys.

From its inception, Father Flanagan worked hard to distance Boys Town from association with other social service agencies. In part, his desire for institutional isolation stemmed from a need to procure funds during the World War I era. With the attention of the nation averted away from troubles at home to troubles overseas, many organizations such as Father Flanagan's Boys' Home found it difficult to raise money and support for their cause. Father Flanagan chose not to stand in line with other social service agencies in the hopes of a financial handout from the public or business community. He actively pursued the first-hand participation of local "powers-that-were" such as Omaha Mayor James Dahlman, attorney Henry Monsky, and business executive J. E. Davidson, in the financial growth and development of his Home. Unlike many of his Progressive Era colleagues, Father Flanagan did not shy away from associating with people with big money and political power. As a result, Father Flanagan's Boys' Home survived the skirmish of the Progressive Era as reform groups fought to secure financial and public support. By supporting a non-threatening social group such as delinquent boys, political and financial power brokers could claim an "interest" in "progressive" social and civic reform. Certainly, Father Flanagan's Boys' Home raised an amazing amount of funds from public, private, and corporate

donors during an era in which "reform" was not always a welcomed course of political and civic action.¹⁷³

¹⁷³Unfortunately, a comprehensive study of the formation and operation of Progressive Era social reform organizations in Omaha, Nebraska has not been compiled. The Boys Town Hall of History has several files and scrapbooks compiled by Miss Catherine Dannehy, personal secretary to Father Flanagan from 1917-1948, which contain numerous newspaper clippings and documents regarding local social reform movements and agencies. The existence of the files indicate that Father Flanagan was very interested in the activities of his "competition." In addition, a survey of the files reveals a sharp contrast in the fund raising style and techniques between other social service organizations and Father Flanagan. Many social service organizations relied on funds received on an annual basis from the Community Chest in Omaha, Nebraska. Started by long-time Flanagan friend and Boys Town board member, Omaha attorney Henry Monsky, the Community Chest was an organization headed by Omaha businesses and businessmen to raise funds for local charities. Information on how and to which groups funds were dispersed is unavailable through the Boys Town Archives. In spite of his connection with Monsky, Father Flanagan did not participate in many of the Community Chest fund drives. He chose, instead, to conduct separate funding campaigns for his Boys' Home such as the 1921, 1926, and 1929 building drives. Whether other Omaha social service agencies campaigned for funding on the same level of Father Flanagan is unknown. Certainly, Father Flanagan distanced his organization from others on creative "marketing and selling" of his mission to the public. His extensive use of mass mailing and radio speeches reached thousands of rural and urban homes across the country from 1921-1948. In an interview with Al Witcofski, Boys Town mail clerk from 1921-1975, it was revealed to the author that two trucks a day were dispatched in the 1930s and 1940s to travel to downtown Omaha to pick up incoming mail responses from the public contacted through mail, radio, or the Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal. As a postscript to this discussion, in 1985, the Numismatic Society of America awarded Boys Town the distinction as one of the "pioneer" American organizations to use mass mailings as an effective fund raising tool. See "Davidson Chairman of Flanagan Home Drive," Omaha World-Herald, 28 October, 1921; "Street Corner Rallies for Boys' Home Drive," ibid., 13 November, 1921; "11 Theatres Will Have 64 Speeches," ibid., 10 November, 1921; "Father Flanagan's Boys," ibid., 14 November, 1921; see also "Father Flanagan's Radio Speeches," Boys Town Hall of History Documents Files; see also "Johnny Rushing Profile Case," On the Radio exhibit section, Boys Town Hall of History; see also Boys' Home Journal (June 1926), 12; see also "Boys Town Gets Official Rating As Postoffice," The Leavenworth Times, Leavenworth, Kansas, 25 January, 1935.

Father Flanagan further protected the Home by broadening its base of public support. Through mass media and advertising campaigns, he procured national fame and recognition for the Home. Only through the creation and promotion of an image for himself and the Home separate from other social service organizations could Father Flanagan achieve financial security and national recognition for his project. Over the course of thirty years, he established in the public's mind the idea that the Home was unique with a mission and methods unlike any other social reform agency. Public relations and fund raising materials from 1917-1948 document the subtle image progression of the Home from local obscurity to national fame but it is difficult to determine at what point it was decided to install a "grand vision" of the Home. A survey of the Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal from its first publication year in 1918 through the early 1920s reveals little passion on the part of Father Flanagan for national exposure. His articles and editorials reflected standard Progressive Era reformist practice and thought. Throughout his career, Father Flanagan pioneered few, if any, improvements in the field of delinquent child care and development. He always maintained a high, progressive level of care at his Home but lacked the academic vision to implement real change. He remained a master, however, at placing the cause of delinquent children before the eye of the public. Unlike other Progressive Era reform groups, Father Flanagan's Boys' Home did not vanish in the 1920s and 1930s wave to professionalize social work and health care fields. Instead, Father Flanagan launched a crusade before the public and the press on the plight of delinquent children. His attack on the ineptitude and inadequacy of state and

federal child care institutions deflected any public focus on the practices of his own institution.¹⁷⁴ Through his press attacks, Father Flanagan gave the impression that he intended to save and care for all neglected boys, regardless of their race, creed, religion, or geographical location. In fact, he could only care for a maximum of 500 boys per year at his Home at Overlook Farm. Father Flanagan's media campaigns stimulated hundreds of applications for admission to his Home. Despite financial gains over the years, Boys Town has never cared, on campus, for over 600 boys in any given period of time.¹⁷⁵

The media campaigns widened the base of public support and built a national image for Father Flanagan and the Home. He utilized the power of other media tools such as radio and mass mailing appeals to reach into American living rooms and pocketbooks. Not unlike the 1980s "Praise to the Lord" (PTL's) and "700" clubs, Father Flanagan established a loyal grassroots support base that allowed his institution to operate without close public scrutiny.¹⁷⁶ In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Father Flanagan and his officials experimented on the public's charitable psyche with dozens of public relations campaigns. By 1935, they had successfully established a national awareness of Father

¹⁷⁴ See above discussion and "Father Flanagan's Radio Speeches," Boys Town Hall of History Archives.

¹⁷⁵ Census history compiled by author from a survey of Boys Town Board of Directors Annual Reports, 1925-1986.

¹⁷⁶ Father Flanagan distanced his organization from others on creative "marketing and selling" of his mission to the public. His extensive use of mass mailing and radio speeches reached thousands of rural and urban homes across the country from 1921-1948. See Father Flanagan's Radio Speeches.

Flanagan and his Home for "bad boys." Through his media campaigns, Father Flanagan, however, accomplished more. He installed in the national memory an image of his Home that transcended ordinary public recognition. Father Flanagan cast Boys Town as a national symbol in the likeness of "Mom," "apple pie," and the "American Flag." Father Flanagan established the image of Boys Town as a national symbol through public relations tactics geared, not only to fund raising, but to the readjustment of public thought. Father Flanagan and his colleagues implemented a plan of advertising action based on a reinvention or, more fittingly, an "invention" of history. They first drafted an image and then restructured the Home's history to meet its specifications. The presenters maintained that the Home had always resembled a "mini-America," organized in the spirit of democratic ideals such as patriotism and hard work.¹⁷⁷ All allusions that the Home had ever operated as an agency for social reform were dropped. The imagemakers adopted an urban setting in which to house the new historical image of the Home. Father Flanagan and his administration accelerated the final stages of urbanization at Overlook Farm and acquired village status for the Home in 1936. Within the newly named "Boys Town," efforts were increased to install a stable "boys" government and provide improved health,

¹⁷⁷ See Chapter III, "The City of Little Men, 1921-1935," of the thesis; see also "Boys Town, Neb. to Have Mayor," Omaha Bee-News, 13 December, 1935; "Boys Town, Nebraska Celebrates," Omaha Republican, 24 January, 1935; "Tony Villone is Mayor in Boys Town Election," Omaha World-Herald, 16 January, 1935; see also Boys' Home Journal (March 1937), 4; see also "17-Year-Old 'Mayor' to Be LaGuardia's Guest In New York," Omaha World-Herald, 20 November, 1936; "Milk Vs. Champagne," New York Mirror, 23 November, 1936.

sanitation and safety services for its residents. Under the guidance of Father Flanagan, Boys Town became the "perfect" American city, run by fully employed, hard working "men," uncorrupted by the wages of sin, and fueled by spirit of brotherly love.¹⁷⁸

After 1936, the media campaigns at Boys Town stressed the image of a male utopia, a "City of Little Men," dedicated to the advancement and preservation of democratic ideals inside and out of its society. Father Flanagan and his colleagues aggressively pursued public avenues of exposure for their new image. As an export of Boys Town, the boys became illustrative tools in the hands of the image makers. The youthful "mayor," the football squad, and residents under the age of ten received special attention in media campaigns. Each stood as an embodiment of the "ideal" American youth forged in the "superior" metal of the democratic and educational processes at Boys Town. In 1938, random exposure of the boys gave way to full-scale exploitation as Father Flanagan and M-G-M studios agreed to capture Boys Town on film.

Upon review, "Boys Town" and its 1939 sequel, "Men of Boys Town" remain well-crafted propaganda which played on the national fears and social concerns of New Deal Americans. As the "perfect" community, the cinematic Boys Town struggled heroically to reverse its hard times of financial uncertainty and inadequate living conditions. Actor Spencer Tracy portrayed Father Flanagan as a "spiritual sheriff" who fought against gangsters, "yellow journalists," insensitive politicians and an "unenlightened" public to preserve and protect the "democratic" way of

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

life at Boys Town. Hundreds of Boys Town boys participated in many of the film's scenes which included vigilante pursuit of "gangsters" by "Father Flanagan and his boys" who held one of their "own" hostage. Known only to the public through radio or print, the depiction of the boys on film elicited tremendous popular response. In the late 1930s and 1940s, Boys Town's administrators presented the boys to the public in performance vehicles such as the Boys Town Road Show Revue, Choir, and football team.¹⁷⁹

Despite the popularity of the boys, Father Flanagan became the greatest exportable commodity at Boys Town. As a national figure, he had managed to distance himself from the temporary fame of evangelical cult figures such as Billy Sunday and Milwaukee's Father Coughlin and achieved a broader base of public appeal. During and after World War II, Father Flanagan vigorously pursued, through bond rallies and government service, his image as a dedicated defender of juvenile reform and American values and ideals. At the time of his death, he had become

¹⁷⁹ See Chapter III, "On the Road," "The Importance of Play," and "Choir" in the thesis. See also "Juvenile Entertainers Scrapbook," Boys Town Hall of History, 1-30, and "Charles Kenworthy correspondence file," Boys Town Hall of History; see also "Father Flanagan's Boys' Band Visits President Coolidge," Boys' Home Journal (September 1927), 8-9; see also "Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Organizes Fast Ball Team," Omaha Bee-News, 21 May, 1928; "Boys Study Boxing," Omaha World-Herald, 14 October, 1928; "Taught Manly Art at Fr. Flanagan's Home," Breda News, Breda, Iowa, 29 October, 1928; see also "17-Year-Old 'Mayor' to Be LaGuardia's Guest In New York," Omaha World-Herald, 20 November, 1936; "Milk Vs. Champagne," New York Mirror, 23 November, 1936; see also "'Boys Town' Box Office Hit, A Flop to Orphanage Head," Washington D.C. Evening Star, 27 October, 1938; "M-G-M to Aid Boys Town," Chicago Tribune, 17 November, 1938; "Organizing the Road Show Revue," Boys' Home Journal (December 1938), 2; see also Boys Town Times, 9 August, 1968, 2, and "Boys Town Choir," Boys Town Hall of History Documents Files.

a "favorite" of the Truman Administration and had attained an international reputation as a youth care authority.¹⁸⁰

Because of his vocation as a priest, historical analysis of Father Flanagan's motives and "grand plan" for Boys Town poses special problems for the historian. The elements of ruthless ambition, juvenile exploitation, and the pursuit of worldwide recognition run contrary to the popular perception of the proper role of a priest. It should be noted, however, that a careful study of Father Flanagan's life as a priest is necessary before any firm historical conclusions can be drawn. Though some could argue that the image of Father Flanagan evolved as an unpremeditated response to the national fame of his Home, I have maintained that his personal ambitions were systematically conceived and well-executed. In final defense of my position, I offer the cover of a 1926 Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal entitled, "Peeks Into the Future, Father Edward J. Flanagan in 1941" (Attachment O, page 270). Lodged under the masthead's disclaimer, "Published in the Interests of the Homeless Boy," the cover featured an illustration in the comic style of "Moon Mulligan" in which a seated Father Flanagan reads a newspaper in the lobby of an elegant, marble-adorned lobby of a luxury hotel. A boosterish businessman, dressed in a tuxedo coat and top hat, gestured toward Father Flanagan and announced to a bespectacled desk clerk:

I want to reserve the whole hotel for the
'Home Coming' day at Father Flanagan's home
and I want the place all dolled up! There'll

¹⁸⁰See Chapter III, "Men From Boys Town," in the thesis. See also "Father Flanagan's Fighters," Newsweek Magazine, 12 October, 1943, 104; see also Important Dates, 10, 14, 18-24.

0. Cover Illustration of Father Flanagan's Boys' Home Journal, May 1926
entitled, "Peeks Into the Future: Father Flanagan in 1941"

FATHER FLANAGAN'S BOYS' HOME JOURNAL

Vol. XI No. 2

In the Interests of the Homeless Boy

Omaha, Nebraska, May, 1926

"PEEKS INTO THE FUTURE"

FATHER EDWARD J. FLANAGAN IN 1941



be senators, governors, congressmen, cabinet members, bank presidents, bishops, and movie stars here and they'll expect class! He's turned more fellows to the right than a traffic cop!¹⁸¹

As early as 1926, Father Flanagan had determined his personal image in the future. The cover illustration leaves little room for doubt that it was an image not of a self-effacing cleric working quietly for religious and social reform, but a well-respected administrator of an institution that had achieved worldwide fame and recognition.

The death of Father Flanagan in 1948 plunged Boys Town into the midst of church politics and administrative uncertainty. As the president of Boys' Town's board of directors, Omaha Archbishop Gerald Bergan rejected long-time Flanagan aide, Father Edmund Walsh, in favor of his archdiocesan chancellor, Monsignor Nicholas Wegner. As executive director from 1948-1973, Monsignor Wegner ran Boys Town, not as a world-renowned institution, but as a parish, frugal in image as well as action. Uncomfortable in the public spotlight, Monsignor Wegner gradually reduced the exposure of Boys Town to the nation. The institutional isolation of Boys Town became complete. Not only had it been distanced from local community interaction, it also remained shrouded from national view. Despite its reclusive nature, the image of Boys Town as a uniquely American institution intensified in the 1950s and 1960s. Thousands of visitors travelled across the United States and from overseas to view the famed "City of Little Men." Boys Town became a living museum which displayed the mythical history installed in the era of

¹⁸¹Boys' Home Journal (May 1926), front cover.

Father Flanagan. Monsignor Wegner enjoyed his role as spiritual curator and remained content to watch over and, occasionally, redisplay the myths stored in the collections of Boys Town's history.¹⁸²

To the public, the exterior face of Boys Town projected contentment and the rosy glow of Father Flanagan's dream. In reality, it had become an institution, stagnant in its administrative policies and outdated in its youth care philosophy and practice. In 1973, Boys Town fell victim to one of the dangers inherent in isolationism: public inquiry. That no individual or group questioned the operations at Boys Town prior to 1973, is a tribute to the public relations genius of Father Flanagan. For more than twenty years after his death, the wheels of Father Flanagan's public relations machine operated without the aid of a skilled media mechanic. In the words of one of the administrators at Boys Town, "At the time of Father Flanagan's death, Boys Town was like a great ocean liner at sea whose engines had been stopped. It took

¹⁸²See "The Brotherhood of Boys Town, 1948-1973" of Chapter III; see also Sister Henry Joseph Wegner, interview with Edwin Novotny and Clarence "Mitt" Stoffel for Boys Town Hall of History, Denver, Colorado, 12 December, 1985; see also "Boys Town Dope Sheets, 1949-1972," Athletics File, Boys Town Hall of History Documents Files; see also Boys Town Times, 12 September, 1964, 2; 9 August, 1949, 1; 9 June, 1967, 4; see also "Biographer Says Father Flanagan's Wishes Ignored," Sunday World-Herald, 7 May, 1972, 10-B; see also "License for Boys Town Held Back," Los Angeles Times, 2 December, 1970; see also "A Tale of Two Cities," Omaha Sun Newspapers, 30 March, 1972; see also "Rich Boys Town Drops Fund Plea," Boston Advertiser, 23 April, 1972; see also "Bogus Charity Appeals Net Millions," Ambler Pennsylvania Gazette, 23 August, 1972; "Boys Haven Debunked as Big Biz Operation," Berks County Record, Reading, Pennsylvania, 11 May, 1972; "Boys Town Rolling in Dough," San Francisco Argus, 31 March, 1972; "Watch Your Wallet!", Eternity Magazine, September 1973; see also "Enrollment at 22-Year Low," Omaha Sun Newspapers, 14 December, 1972, 3; see also Boys Town Times, 12 October, 1973, 1.

a long time before the ship itself finally came to rest."¹⁸³ The disclosure of its vast wealth by the Omaha Sun Newspapers in the spring of 1973 shattered for a time public trust in Boys Town and its national image. Amazingly, the journalistic attack centered on the financial accumulations of Boys Town and did not extensively explore the equally explosive issues of the media exploitation of youthful residents, and substandard educational and living conditions.¹⁸⁴ Despite the best efforts of the press and concerned individuals, Boys Town survived the financial scandal. The Boys Town Board of Directors realized, however, that its future existence relied on its adaptation to social change. The stubborn resistance of Monsignor Wegner to modifications in the child care practices for the institution posed further public embarrassment for Boys Town. In order to achieve an agenda for change, the Boys Town Board of Directors pursued the only option at its disposal, the installation of a new executive director.¹⁸⁵

During his twelve year tenure from 1973 to 1985 as executive director, Father Robert Hupp proved to be the "saving grace" for Boys Town. In a pragmatic fashion, Father Hupp worked to eliminate the "Howard Hughes" image of monied eccentricity of Boys Town. He strove to expand his product, Boys Town, to fit its already present public market.

¹⁸³ Dr. David Coughlin, interview with author, Hall of History exhibits consultants, March 1984.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter III, "A Need for Change," of the thesis; see also Boys Town Times, 12 October, 1973, 1; see also Father Robert Hupp, interviews with author, May 1984; see also "Boys Town Director Did Not Want Job," Omaha Sun Newspapers, 11 October, 1973, 1-2.

Similar to Father Flanagan, Father Hupp enticed academic professionals to advise and update the child care programs of Boys Town. The adoption by Boys Town of the "family living" concept of juvenile care in 1975, worked to "debunk" several historical myths. First, the "family living" concept rejected the tradition-bound, spartan existence of dormitory housing. For more than fifty years, the public had been exposed to an "orphanage-style" portrait of Boys Town boys, happy and secure with a warm bed, three square meals a day, and the guarantee of an educational diploma. It became the job of Boys Town officials to convince the public that the boys now needed three-story modern homes occupied by no more than ten residents and a set of "teaching parents" to make them happy.¹⁸⁶

The administrators of Boys Town also had to impress upon the public the importance of female adult role models and adolescent peers for the healthy readjustment of its residents. Since its acceptance of girls as residents in 1979, Boys Town officials have had to struggle with the ethical and religious dilemmas posed by interracial dating, unwanted pregnancy, premarital sex, and contraception education and distribution. Despite its original "mission" as a "non-sectarian, non-proselytizing organization, Boys Town has maintained an overwhelmingly Catholic view on issues affecting its youth such as premarital sex, birth control, and abortion. Finally, the family-living concept repealed the mythical canon that Boys Town operated as a village of

¹⁸⁶Based on extensive survey by author of Boys Town public relations materials from 1917-1986.

social perfection. Boys Town began to openly state that the 1970s and 1980s "social orphans" demanded a dramatic measure of care to reverse the damage of drugs, alcohol, illiteracy, parental rejection, and mental, physical and sexual abuse.¹⁸⁷

In an effort to publicize its new image, Boys Town has relied upon many of the media lessons formulated in its past. As Boys Town cast off one set of American word symbols such as "patriotism" and "democracy," it borrowed another highlighted by the terms "family" and "home." The steadfast adherence of Boys Town to structure itself in line with traditional American values reestablished its institutional integrity and national fame. In 1986, Father Flanagan's vision for Boys Town was finally realized with congressional recognition of the institution as a national historic site. Boys Town had officially taken its place among American institutions such as Mount Rushmore, the Grand Canyon, and Yellowstone National Park.¹⁸⁸ Secure in its "mission," public image, and finances, Boys Town administrators actively work to maintain the status quo of the institution. It remains to be seen what new challenges to the fame and fortune of Boys Town will arise in the future.

¹⁸⁷Exhibit research for "The Families of Boys Town, 1973-1986" exhibit section, Boys Town Hall of History, May 1984-November 1985.

¹⁸⁸The National Park Service awarded Boys Town with its plaque naming it as a National Historic Site in August 1986. Plaque is currently housed in the Boys Town Hall of History.

Chapter Four

Conclusion: Public History Through Exhibitions

The subject of this thesis was born out of a sense of personal frustration. As a historian, I had been "doing" public history exhibitions since 1982. I found the conceptualization, writing, and organization of exhibitions to be an extremely rewarding experience. Through my work, I recognized the need for more academic historians to enter the field of material culture studies and public history exhibitions. In my efforts to encourage others to work on exhibitions, I found I could not readily relay my work methods to my colleagues. My inability to communicate what I do as a historian prompted extended thought on the matter.

I realized that, throughout my career as a public historian, I had operated without a written set of exhibit standards or practices. I remembered the difficulties involved in the combination of textbook knowledge with material culture for the completion of an exhibition. My frustration and anxiety stemmed from a lack of experience in the conceptualization and organization of three-dimensional displays. My search to find published guidelines for the organization and completion of public history exhibitions proved to be fruitless. I began to understand why more historians had not utilized the power of exhibitions to communicate historical information to the public. Exhibits historians

have not taken the time to inform their colleagues of what they do and how they do it. Other historians who employ "non-traditional" approaches such as quantitative methods and social statistics have attempted to provide a methodological framework for their work.¹ As a result, more historians have ventured into "new" fields of history such as quantitative, social, urban, and ethnohistory. It is my belief that historians have not extensively explored the professional possibilities of exhibitions work and material culture studies due to a lack of written descriptive and methodologically-based sources.

With that idea in mind, I set out to accomplish several objectives in this thesis. First, I examined the evolution and present state of social history. I did so to prove my belief that social history cannot attain its original goal, to present the "total" history of the public past, without the study of material culture. I maintained that material culture, as the concrete evidence left by ordinary people engaged in everyday life, will round out or provide "dimensionality" for current and future social history studies. I further stated, that while social historians discover important information, they do not communicate it well. As a result, the public turns elsewhere to satisfy its interest in the past. The academic isolation of historians allowed amateurs and charlatans to create historical images and information which shaped the perceptions of the public about its past.

¹As an example, see James Axtell, The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), introductory chapter, and Edward Shorter, The Historian and the Computer (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Co., 1975).

In this study, I have shown how exhibitions have served as a powerful tool for the dissemination of historical information. To date, historians have under-utilized exhibitions as a showcase for their information and ideas because of a lack of professional interest and experience in the field. As a remedy, I have suggested practices and methods to acquaint historians to the field of public history exhibitions. It remains my final task to speculate on the future of the history profession in material culture studies and historical exhibitions.

Historical exhibitions exist as a result of material culture. Material culture displayed for its own sake, however, lends little meaning to the subject of an exhibition. The purpose and scope of an exhibition is determined by historical analysis of the themes and material culture to be displayed. As this thesis has shown, many museums rely on curators to be the primary interpreters of material culture for exhibitions. Past and present museum curators such as Wilcomb Washburn and Edith P. Mayo have revealed that curatorial energies often concentrate on the expansion and not the interpretation of material culture collections. As a result, many material culture collections and history subjects do not receive adequate scholarly research and interpretation before they are displayed. Often, historical exhibitions are fashioned, not by the mind of historians, but by the hands of designers. Without interpretation, the displays reflect contemporary ideas of design, not historical scholarship. Ultimately, it is the public, not the material culture collections, that suffer from the informational malaise of exhibits. If visitors gain little historical insight from museum

displays, it reduces the power and effectiveness of exhibitions as public information tools.

Historians can help bridge the public exhibition information gap. In order to do so, they must be willing to venture out beyond the gates of the academy. For many historians, the move will signal not only a geographical relocation but an alteration in professional identity. Often, they are required to shed the mantle of academic intellectuals and adopt the pragmatic practices of public employment. As a result, public historians run the professional risk of academic disapproval. In her article, "Women's History and Public History: The Museum Connection," historian Edith P. Mayo described the nature of the initial split between academic and public historians:

Two factors led to the divergence between academic and public historians, particularly in historic preservation and the museum field. Academic historians increasingly stressed specialization in training, historical method, and interpretive content. In many instances amateurs interested in the preservation of our cultural past but largely untrained in historical method and interpretation worked in historic preservation, museums, and historical societies. Academics came to view those in historic site preservation and museums as anti-quarians, not scholars, and, hence, not historians.²

In addition to her analysis, Mayo offered the contention of historian Joan Hoff Wilson that "most non-public historians have 'conveniently forgotten' that scholarship traditionally thrived outside the university." In many respects, the academy continues to hold present-day, university-trained public historians accountable for the past

²Edith P. Mayo, "Women's History and Public History: The Museum Connection," Public Historian 5 (Spring 1983), 64-65.

professional sins of their predecessors. Articles by academic historians such as John Bodnar and Michael Wallace stress the scholastic inadequacies of public history exhibitions and institutions without a full definition of the cause.³ The fact of the matter is that academically-trained public historians have not had sufficient time, and in some cases opportunity to change two hundred years of badly-displayed American history.

In addition to objections within the academy, public historians often encounter outside hostility in their professional pursuits. Long-employed amateurs in public history, in particular on the state and local levels, have put up a valiant fight to retain their positions of power. Historian Ronald J. Grele, in his article, "Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of the Public Historian?", outlined the battle's central issue as:

. . . public history['s] attempt to co-opt for the academy the traditional base of and therefore the public of the state and local history movement. It is this aspect which has so attracted academic historians and which has generated such deep antagonisms toward public history among the leaders of the state and local history movement. . . . It has antagonized the local history movement by its [the academy's] early failure to recognize that such work was already being done and the landscape already occupied⁴

³See John Bodnar, "Symbols and Servants: Immigrant America and the Limits of Public History," Journal of American History 73 (June 1986), and Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," Radical History Review 25 (1981).

⁴Ronald J. Grele, "Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of the Public Historian?", Public Historian 3 (1981), 45.

In addition to administrative conflicts, many public historians have to defend their right to "do history" at all. In the past, corporations and institutions relied on non-qualified personnel "interested in history" to manage research projects and programs. Public historians have had to convince the private sector that they should perform its historical tasks. In an effort to establish long-term job stability, many public historians have given the impression that they "mean [only] to hold a job, earn a living, [and] to carve out a safe haven" without regard for professional and ethical standards.⁵

In his article, "Pitfalls Along the Path of Public History," Terence O'Donnell characterized the public historians' dilemma as the "heinous compromise" created out of "the marketplace [where] the pressures for ethical compromise are greater than in the academy"⁶ Many public historians have commented that history produced for the sake of a paycheck has "narrowed" the professional effectiveness and scope of the field. As this thesis has shown, academic historians such as Michael Frisch and John Bodnar present a much more critical appraisal of the performance of public history. They believe that economic concerns corrupted the 1960s movement to involve historians with communities and stimulate mutual reconstruction of the "history of the public." As previously stated, I believe that the academic "supply-side" assessment brings to light an important professional concern, but remains

⁵Ibid., 46.

⁶Terence O'Donnell, "Pitfalls Along the Path of Public History," Public Historian 4 (Winter 1982), 70.

naive alongside the realities of "doing" public history. I would offer that the malaise of public history stems, not from the "heinous compromise" but from the formation of its professional goals. In the 1970s, the limited job opportunities in universities prompted many historians to seek public and private employment. As the case with immigrants into a new land, the historians traveled into the public sector with cultural baggage attained in their old world, the academy. In public history, they discovered a land of employment and historical opportunity. Unfortunately, employers often demanded that historians "need not apply here" in the marketplace with their academic rules and standards of behavior. In the clash of cultures that ensued, the economic determinism of public employment sometimes won out over attempts by historians to maintain their professional standards. Historians learned to adapt their methods to serve the expectations and goals of their employers. That public historians have assimilated the pragmatic policies of the marketplace should not come as a big surprise to the academy. As history has shown, groups faced with economic survival often exchange past idealism for present realities.

My analysis of the professional dilemma within public history should not be dismissed as an apologist's view. On the contrary, I have stated in this thesis my belief that it is the professional responsibility of public historians to inject ethical standards into their workplace. Public historians must no longer be satisfied to serve the demands of uninformed masters. They must orient their employers to the actions necessary to produce "good history." Granted, attainment of this goal requires possession of a "missionary spirit" or attitude in regard

to one's profession. I offer that public historians must view their professional activities not only as a job, but in the words of historian Ronald J. Grele, as a "vocation--a calling."⁷ Only through personal commitment to professional ethics can the best interests of both the public and the academy be served.

Despite its importance, the ethical dilemma of public history is only the symptom of a greater problem within the history profession. Disunity among academic and public historians has allowed public relationists, amateurs, antiquarians, and "buffs" to slip in and engineer the public's perception of its past. In his article, "State and Local History: A Future from the Past," Larry Tise described the crisis as:

a growing chasm between academic historians on the one hand, and public and private sector historians on the other and between and among the numerous fields of specialization in both academic and public and applied history. If all of these characteristics are totalled we find ourselves caught in a whirling dervish that seems to fly in pieces a thousand directions all at the expense of history.⁸

Tise cited the lack of a "broad and viable definition of its [the history profession] role in American society" as the core of the crisis. In order to set a public agenda for history, all of its participants must achieve equal status at the negotiations table. Ironically, a compromise between academic and public historians will be necessary to achieve professional unity. If historians would combine academic idealism with

⁷Grele, "Whose Public?", 44-47.

⁸Larry E. Tise, "State and Local History: A Future from the Past," Public Historian, vol. 1, no. 4 (Summer 1979), 18.

pragmatic action, they would emerge as formidable contenders in the contest to control the public perception of the American past.

As this thesis has shown, material culture studies may serve as a common ground upon which academic and public historians settle their differences. Museums and historical societies have demonstrated an overwhelming need for academic analysis and utilization of material culture collections. Fortunately, historians engaged in material culture studies are not required to align themselves with one faction or another within the history profession. Academic research of social and cultural history topics will benefit from the "dimensionality" of material culture. Historians engaged in material culture studies serve public, as well as, academic informational interests.

Research efforts by academic and public historians in material culture studies can be used to enrich the informational content of public history displays. In fact, some historians would argue that it should be one of the duties of the profession to insure the quality of historical exhibitions. In his article, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," historian Michael Wallace concluded that many exhibitions present an elitist view of American history formed through biased amateur ideals and efforts and corporate and philanthropic funds.⁹ If present-day historians wish to alter the popular perception that the only "good history" is history "from the top down," then they must be willing to express themselves in public forms of communication. As demonstrated in the article by Michael Wallace and

⁹Wallace, "Visiting the Past," 63-96.

maintained by this thesis, academic historians must use the informational power and grass-roots appeal of history museums and exhibitions to shape the public perception of its past.

As previously mentioned, historians have not used museum displays for the dissemination of historical information because they are unfamiliar with exhibitions methods and techniques. As stated in Chapter Two, exhibition methods rarely change but each exhibition requires a purpose and scope uniquely its own. For that reason, historians, comfortable with the methods can bring a wealth of knowledge, insight, and skills of vital importance to the exhibitions and material culture fields. To achieve a successful public history exhibition, a historian must create a storyline flexible enough to serve the needs of history and design. As the author of an exhibition storyline, a historian directs the visual manner in which historical information and images will be released through material culture displays. Exhibits historians must not allow non-qualified persons such as designers, architects, and graphic artists to determine the historical images and statements made by an exhibition. It is the responsibility of the exhibits historian to become comfortable with the "third-dimensionality" of material culture and learn to plan for its effective use in public history displays. Ultimately, the goal of the exhibits historian should be the public presentation of the intellectual aspects and visual dynamics of a historical subject housed in cooperative elements of scholarship and design.

In conclusion, it is my hope that more academic historians will choose to work and consult in the fields of exhibitions and material

culture. Only through cooperation and mutual involvement can historians eliminate informational deficiencies in and plan for future public history exhibitions. Academic awareness of the informational possibilities and limitations inherent in material culture collections and exhibitions will foster greater identification and cooperation with public historians and their work. The combined efforts of academic and public historians in the field of material culture and exhibitions may contribute to professional unity, open new avenues for research and employment, and aid in the dissemination of historical information to the public.

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