

# HISTORY OF THE LOCATION OF ST. JOSEPH'S HOUSE OF HOSPITALITY

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**Roselia Foundling and Maternity Home 1891**

Source: *Pittsburgh Catholic*

3935 Forbes Avenue (Oakland), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213 – approximately on the site of the present Schenley Hall-William Pitt Student Union building on the campus of the University of Pittsburgh. The services the Foundling Asylum provided to unwed expectant mothers were much in demand. After a few months, the Sisters of Charity discovered that the small building they had rented in Oakland was inadequate. The Sisters began to search for a larger building in another neighborhood which would be large enough to meet the increased demand.

Mr. Charles Donnelly was a prominent businessman in the Pittsburgh community. Through his good offices, the former Ursuline Academy building at the corner of Cliff and Manila Streets (Hill District) was secured as a permanent home for Roselia.

**Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 1891:** The Sisters of Charity, who were in charge of Roselia Asylum, transferred the children to the former Academy. The Roselia Foundling Asylum and Maternity Hospital was incorporated in 1892. Roselia was purchased from Charles Donnelly for \$41 and the assumption of the existing mortgage of \$20,000 – nine lots and the former Ursuline Academy building on Cliff Street – on September 1, 1893.<sup>1</sup>

**October 28, 1908:** Roselia purchased from Daniel Nee all of lot #26 and a brick dwelling house known as 1617

Roselia Foundling Asylum and Maternity Hospital operated on this site – 1635 Bedford Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – and out of this building before the House of Hospitality moved to this location in 1974.

The work of Roselia Foundling Asylum and Maternity Hospital was begun on July 16, 1891 at

Cliff Street for \$6,600.00.<sup>2</sup>

There was a continuing demand for services that were offered by Roselia to pregnant women, and a further need to expand.

**May 11, 1920:** Two lots and a three-story brick building at 1608 Cliff Street were purchased from John Harper for \$10,700.<sup>3</sup>

Roselia enlarged the hospital buildings to twice their original size over several decades, so that the buildings extended from Cliff Street to Bedford Avenue. From the beginning, the Sisters of Charity and the staff at Roselia were concerned with foundlings. However, they soon began to provide for unmarried pregnant women and their children, and in subsequent years offered adoption services as well.

After sixty-three years of continuous service using the several buildings on the Cliff Street property, the authorities at Roselia made the decision to tear down the older buildings on that site and erect a modern four-story brick/steel/concrete building with an elevator, modern patient rooms, delivery rooms and the latest equipment.

Ground was broken for the “new” Roselia Hospital on July 16,



**Little Roselia Asylum Charges and their Caretakers**

Source: *Pittsburgh Daily Post* (July 15, 1912)

# A DAY IN THE LIFE... AT ROSELIA

Source: Courtesy of the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill Archives



Sister Mary Kieran and Child  
at Roselia 1940s



Playtime at Roselia 1950



Sr. Margaret Teresa McConaughy helps  
at St. Joseph House of Hospitality



Ray O'Neil, Sr. Elizabeth Ann Stock, and  
Sr. Marie Teresa Rishel playing shuffleboard at  
St. Joseph House of Hospitality, Summer 1982



Nursery at Roselia 1940s



**Roselia Foundling and Maternity Hospital 1950s**

Source: Courtesy of the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill Archives

1954. The Most Rev. John F. Dearden, bishop of Pittsburgh, officiated at the dedication and blessing service for the new Roselia Hospital on Sunday, September 8, 1956. The “old” Roselia buildings were demolished. These old buildings had faced Cliff Street on the brow of the hill overlooking Bigelow Boulevard and the Pennsylvania R.R. Yards. The “new” Roselia Hospital was designed to face Bedford Avenue. This design provided ample room for a large fenced-in yard at the back of the hospital that would assure privacy for the girls who came to Roselia.

For eighty years the Sisters of Charity faithfully staffed Roselia and provided for the unwed mothers and their children who came seeking help. Roselia was a model hospital and child caring agency with a fully trained skilled staff. Hundreds and hundreds of young women who were enrolled in various hospital-sponsored nurses training programs also received a part of their education and training at Roselia. Because of its excellent reputation in the wider community, many married women elected to come to Roselia and there give birth to their babies.<sup>4</sup>

With the change in mores in our society in recent decades there was less demand for institutions like Roselia. The Asylum and Hospital at 1635 Bedford Avenue was equipped to provide for sixty expectant mothers. Fewer and fewer women came to Roselia in the decade of the 1960s. The decision was made to close the hospital on Bedford Avenue and provide services on a smaller scale in Oakland.

**August 7, 1971:** Roselia Foundling Asylum and Maternity Hospital sold the land and the building at 1635 Bedford Avenue (Hill District), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15219, to the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, Greensburg, Pennsylvania, for \$1.<sup>5</sup>

In the years between 1971 and 1974 several tenants used part of

the Bedford Avenue building. Among these were the City of Pittsburgh Board of Public Education and the Sisters of Mercy. The Sisters of Mercy used part of the building to house their infirm sisters after a fire destroyed their infirmary (St. Xavier) in Latrobe, Pennsylvania.

St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality had occupied the former St. Paul Orphanage, 61 Tannehill Street (Hill District), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15219 since 1938. After some repairs were made to the Roselia Hospital building, St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality – a program operated at that time by the St. Vincent de Paul Society (Central Council) – leased the building. The House of Hospitality began to use the former Roselia Hospital on September 5, 1974 as a residence for fifty-eight men and twelve low-income women between 50 and 80 years of age. When the Diocese of Pittsburgh took over the St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality Program, on May 3, 1982, a new lease between the Catholic Institute of Pittsburgh and the Sisters of Charity was negotiated and signed.

Each low-income resident at the House of Hospitality is provided a private room and three meals a day. Applications are accepted from men and women 50 years of age and over. The residents are asked to pay a portion of the actual operating cost and each pays a service fee based on a sliding scale according to income. Each resident must be capable of independent living (i.e., keep his/her own room for meals, etc.). St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality is a residence; it is not a personal care home, nor is it a nursing home. The House of Hospitality does not provide therapy of any kind.

Today the House of Hospitality continues a long-standing tradition of providing charitable service – food, clothing, and shelter – to needy men and women that began when St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality was founded by Rev. Charles O. Rice and the Catholic Radical Alliance on July 20, 1937.

**Note:** The author prepared this article in 1992 in connection with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Roselia Foundling Asylum and Maternity Hospital. This is the first publication of his research, and now appears as a sequel to Father Joseph Scheib’s article on Roselia in the 2016 issue of *Gathered Fragments*.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Office of the Recorder of Deeds of Allegheny County [now Department of Real Estate of Allegheny County, hereinafter cited as DREAC], Deed Book Vol. 944, p. 511.

<sup>2</sup> DREAC, Deed Book Vol. 1582, p. 523.

<sup>3</sup> DREAC, Deed Book Vol. 2046, p. 282.

<sup>4</sup> Sister Mary Electa Boyle, S.C., *Mother Seton’s Sisters of Charity in Western Pennsylvania* (Greensburg, PA: Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, 1946), 136-141 *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> DREAC, Deed Book Vol. 5009, p. 744.