

The Rotary Home for Boys, 1919 -1963

(Currently the site of Café Chuckles)

Any examination of the history of the social control and care of juveniles is in some measure contextually framed by the laws and statutes in place at the time. In 1901, Pennsylvania established its first Juvenile Act. This legislation established legal



definitions for dependent, neglected, and delinquent children, among other provisions, and marked the beginning of the modern juvenile justice system in Pennsylvania. This Act prohibited the confinement of juveniles under the age of fourteen in jails, further if a child over fourteen was to be confined to a jail they were required to be completely separated from contact with adult offenders. Apparently, the Lancaster County Courts at the time, lacking a separate institution for juveniles utilized the County jail for the confinement of delinquent youth. The Lancaster Rotary Club became aware of this local practice at least in part because of the public criticism previously mentioned by the Law and Order Society. The club's history also credits Judge Wagner of the Berks County Courts, addressing a club meeting in the spring of 1919, as a motivator for the establishment of a more suitable institution for delinquent boys.

The club developed a plan to operate a home for delinquent boys, and successfully presented it to the Lancaster County Court and County Commissioners, with the County agreeing to pay a per diem of thirty-eight cents per day, per boy. The club's history cites this per diem rate as the same charged for institutional care at the Huntington Reformatory for Young Offenders and Glen Mills. Five thousand dollars was the

estimated annual cost of operating the home, and with the exception of the County per diem, operations were completely subsidized by the Rotary Club until 1921. Beginning in 1921, Lancaster County allocated five thousand dollars per year to the home in addition to the per

diem, increasing the allocation to seven thousand dollars in 1922.

The Rotary Home for Boys officially opened on August 23, 1919, at the intersection of Fruitville Pike and Keller Avenue, as the first local institution devoted to the care of delinquent boys. On that date, Judge Landis committed two boys to the home for auto theft. There appears to be no surviving records of the operations of the home. Throughout its existence, the home was administered and staffed by live in house parents, with the husband serving as superintendent and his wife as matron. The Rotary provided oversight through a standing committee of the club with daily operations managed by the superintendent and matron. The superintendents of the Rotary Home are chronologically listed as follows: Harry Martzall (1919-1923), Harry D. Weller (1931-1954), David A. Strayer (1954-1958), James R. Neal (1958-1960), John K. Jenkins (1960-1962), Elmer R. Ritchey (1962-1963).

The Rotary Home for Boys closed in 1963 due to a combination of economics and mandated safety regulations by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry. The Rotary Club history indicates the organization was unable to fund required improvements to the structure.