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INTRODUCTION

Twelve men met in 1920 to start the Nebraska Children’s Homefinding Association.

By the bylaws of the new organization, its lifetime was to be perpetual . . . never ending . . . “until time shall be no more”.

The founding fathers knew that Great Causes ought never to end, that even as one challenge is met, others lie ahead.

The Omaha Home for Boys, the result of that meeting, has met one challenge after another as its mission has changed through the years.

This book is a history of the Home’s first 75 years of working with and caring for people.

And a promise to continue to do so “until time shall be no more . . . ”.
PART I
THE EARLY YEARS
1920 - 1930

Tuesday, October 12, 1920 . . .

Omaha’s Columbus Day observance had been highlighted by the traditional parade through downtown streets.

As the afternoon sun faded from view, cooling what had been an unseasonably warm day, people set about their plans for the evening.

Thousands made their way to the Auditorium to cheer the voice of the great tenor Enrico Caruso.

Others took in a musical production at the Brandeis Theater, where local newcomers Fred and Adele Astaire were beginning to make a name for themselves.

Just a block from the Theater, 12 men - each representing a different Masonic organization from the Omaha area - were getting together as well.

They had been meeting for months, actually, following a request by Juvenile Court authorities for local Masonic bodies to start a home for orphaned or homeless youth.

The 7:45 P.M. meeting that evening - a climax to months of hopes, plans and dreams - resulted in approval of the articles of incorporation which had been drawn up for a new home to care for children.

The Nebraska Children’s Homefinding Association was born.

With incorporation a reality at last, several key issues had to be faced: creating a working organization, finding quarters for the new home, hiring staff, and funding to carry on the work to be done.

A prominent jeweler, Tinley L. Combs, was elected president of the new enterprise, a position to which he was re-elected every year until his death in 1941.

Tinley Combs represented the Tangier Shrine on the Board of Trustees. He had served as Potentate in 1919 and doubtless had

304 North 22nd Street, the Home’s location from 1921 to 1923.
influence as the Shrine made a $5,000 gift for 1920 and pledged a like amount for 1921.

Other Masonic organizations, which had been asked to make pledges of support throughout 1920, were now encouraged to honor the commitments they had made.

In its search for a building, the Board looked at - and bid on - a huge brick home at 14th and Martha, but the offer was rejected.

Less than a month later, in early December, a 14 room brick home on the northwest corner of 22nd and Davenport - 304 North 22nd Street - became available.

It seemed to be an ideal location - close to the downtown business district and several churches, and with Central High School and Central Grade School close at hand.

The house and a few 10 room flats to the north were purchased from Mrs. Paul Kuhns and Miss Carrie DeLora Clark for the purchase price of $25,000.

Each of these ladies immediately donated $1,000 to apply as a credit to the purchase price, freeing the new organization from immediate payments on the principal.

They were made honorary life members of the Board of Trustees, as a result.

Rev. Carl M. Worden was hired as the Home’s first Superintendent and authorized to hire additional staff.

Mrs. Ida Keister was hired as cook - at a monthly salary of $65 plus meals.

Possession of the 22nd Street property took place January 1, 1921, and work began immediately to reshingle, repair, furnish and equip the property for its new role.

There were delays in the shipments of new furniture for the Home and final repairs took longer than expected. As a result, boys who needed homes were boarded temporarily at various places in the city - awaiting the formal opening.

Shortly, they found, confusion arose as the corporate name - Nebraska Children’s Homefinding Association - too closely resembled another child care agency.

Tinley Combs then obtained Board approval to talk to the Grand Master of Nebraska Masons to see if the word “Masonic” could be included in a new name, to indicate the fraternal allegiances of the founding fathers.

Permission was granted, and in a special meeting on November 12, the Home became the “Masonic Home for Children”.

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Finally, the Board determined, March 21, 1921 was to be the big day . . . and on that day, 10 year old James A. King, who had been residing with relatives in the Florence section of North Omaha, became Boy No. 1.

Others quickly followed and on April 13 the OMAHA BEE was able to report that 19 boys were in residence . . .

“The Masonic Home for Children was opened to the public Tuesday afternoon. Members of all Masonic bodies were entertained at a reception, and the boys of the DeMolay orchestra furnished special music for the occasion.”

By the end of the first year, the First Annual Report could report that 67 boys from 5 to 15 years of age had been cared for.

On the first floor of the Home were the Superintendent’s office, next to the front door, a large living room, and the dining hall and kitchen to the rear.

The boys’ rooms, with 4-5 to a room on narrow, single beds, were on the second floor. The Superintendent, the only staff person present on a full time basis, had a room on the northeast corner.

Larger facilities soon were needed, as the Home was always full to its capacity of 36.

George W. Megeath approached the Board about the use of the Megeath family home at 2137 South 33rd Street.

The mansion was donated to the Home in the name of James G. Megeath, George Megeath’s father and a prominent business

We all sat at one long table for meals, which were prepared by a cook who came in 5 days a week. The weekend meals were pre-cooked for us and I especially remember Sunday evening’s meal . . . all the milk and bread or crackers you could eat, nothing more and nothing less.

Each boy had a daily job. My job was to get up at 4 A.M., using my own alarm clock, and go to the coal furnace to shake the clinkers out and put in some fresh coal every day. No one else wanted that job, but I did it because it was quick, it didn’t take a lot of time . . .”

STANFORD FADDEN, the 9th boy to enter, a resident from 1921 to 1922

The resignation of Carl Worden, the first Superintendent, was accepted in December, 1921; the Board then chose James A. Noble, who had a background in YMCA work and with the juvenile court, to head the staff.

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George W. Megeath approached the Board about the use of the Megeath family home at 2137 South 33rd Street.

The mansion was donated to the Home in the name of James G. Megeath, George Megeath’s father and a prominent business
man who at one time gave Omaha a portion of the land which is now Hanscom Park.

In April, 1923, the boys and Superintendent Noble and his family moved into the Megeath House.

(The home on North 22nd Street was utilized for many years as rental property for income, eventually to be razed. The site is now a highrise dormitory on the Creighton University campus.)

The Masonic Home’s new location on South 33rd Street had been described by the OMAHA BEE in 1922 as . . .

“one of the most beautifully situated in Omaha, directly across from Hanscom Park with entrances on 32nd and 33rd Streets. There are 18 rooms and a large steam heated garage over which there are 6 bedrooms. The grounds comprise 8 lots, and were bought in pioneer days when it was open prairie”.

In addition to the mansion and the garage, the spacious grounds also included a covered walkway to a fountain and a formal garden area, and a separate brick building which was used as “the hospital building” and later as living quarters for the Superintendent.
The Megeath carriage house, a block east, was made into a laundry for the Home.

The Superintendent’s office and a library were just inside the front door of the Megeath House, as was the dreaded bench in the hallway, a prominent place where time was spent following misbehavior.

Two large rooms on the first floor were converted into a dining room next to the kitchen.

The second floor held living quarters for the Superintendent and his family, four bedrooms where the boys slept in single beds one foot apart, and living quarters for the cook and a matron.

Later modifications were to see the use of bunk beds so there could be up to 12 boys in one room, a hospital room, and the development of the basement into a recreation room with wrestling mats, boxing bags, lockers and showers.

The older boys were housed in the rooms over the garage, supervised by students from the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

The ample backyard allowed for a playground for the younger boys, and - recognizing the needs of the older boys - the Megeath family generously donated 7 vacant lots nearby for the development of a play area.

“We had a central shower where we all bathed at once. It was also the place where we held the fights (they did break out once in a while). When we were watching a fight and the matron hollered ‘What’s going on?’, the fight would stop and someone would reply ‘I am undressed, don’t come in’. When she left the fight would start up again. Great fun, no one got hurt.

I tell people we were fed, clothed, housed, bandaged and punished when required, but no one kissed the sore finger . . .”

GEORGE BIGELOW, a resident from 1924-1929
The move to the new location meant many changes in the lives of the boys.

The school attended now became Windsor Grade School, half a block south and one block west of the Megeath House. It had been named after George Windsor Megeath.

And the relatively new Technical High School, 3 miles north of the Megeath House on 33rd Street, became the high school for the boys in the Masonic Home.

Three miles north in the morning, carrying lunchtime sandwiches wrapped in newspaper, and 3 miles south in the afternoon. Everyone went everywhere by foot.

The main artery to the outside world, whether to school, the YMCA for a swim or to a local movie house, was 33rd Street.

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A big day . . . cowboy star Tom Mix visited in 1928, and everyone gathered at the front gate.

And, although no one could know at the time, a walk up 33rd Street went past the birthplace of a future president . . .
Gerald R. Ford had been born just east of 33rd and Woolworth.

Westminster Presbyterian Church, also up 33rd Street, was the church attended by most of the boys.

Across the street, Hanscom Park, then the largest park in the city, held a world of fun for growing boys - fishing, hiking or games in warm weather months, sledding and ice skating in the winter.

And there were other exciting times to be had as well... streetcars to race, an occasional electric line to pull down when the car was stopped at the turnaround, skiing at Hummel Park, picnics hosted by Masonic groups, and oh! the thrill in 1928 when cowboy star Tom Mix visited the Megeath House.

The Home’s Model T truck took the boys to Waterloo, NE, where the J.C. Robinson Seed Company made rich farmland available for raising crops.

Valuable food was grown for the dining tables on 33rd Street, and lasting memories were made. Six decades later every recollection of life at the Home in the 1920’s would refer to the farming operation on the banks of the Elkhorn River.

Farming on the land donated by the Robinsons was, as a matter of fact, so beneficial that the Board felt the Masonic Home should secure its own land in that area to grow food - and to raise a few boys in an agricultural setting.

In early 1930, then, as the Home neared the end of its first decade, plans were made for a second campus.

The Early Years were over, and - having survived the challenges of infancy - the Masonic Home for Children was ready for more.

"Mr. Toastmaster and Gentlemen: I have been asked to talk on the subject of ‘How the Masonic Home helps boys to become better men.’ This is my first attempt as a speechmaker... In this modern age it has been proven time and time again that no boy can succeed in life, without some early training...

At the Masonic Home for Boys they are clothed, fed and housed as well as developed physically, mentally and morally...

...With all this experience mixed together with our own intelligence, we have surely been prepared for life and should succeed in this world, and I hope that when the last and final roll is called by God, that I may hear the welcome words: ‘Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joys of our Lord’.

LEON BIGELOW, a resident from 1924-29, in an address before a local men’s club"
PART II
THE MEGEATH HOUSE GANG
1930 - 1945

It is easy to romanticize the past . . . an era that is long gone can be whatever the memory allows.

Half a century later, most memories of growing up in the Megeath House are fond ones. Friendships of 65 years standing were made there.

They were like “one large family”, each boy being assigned a nickname to show “he belonged”.

There might have been fights, now and then, but only to determine where a boy belonged in the pecking order. The fight ended when one fellow said “That’s enough”.

On many a Wednesday, the boys were reminded the Board of Directors had met in the library the night before . . . for the smell of cigar smoke lingered a long while.

On one of those Board meetings in 1930 it was decided to purchase a farm 4 miles north of Elkhorn, NE. The large house could handle a number of boys, and there was plenty of space for vegetable gardens and raising crops and animals.

The Home’s superintendent, James Noble, added a farm couple to his small but growing child care staff.

“We stayed on the farm from Monday until Saturday in the summertime. Mr. Stanley was the farmer in charge of the boys, a very nice man but he sure believed in hard work . . . every Wednesday he took us swimming in the Elkhorn River, just downstream from a herd of cows.

It wasn’t all that much fun to hoe potatoes. The rows seemed to go on forever.

Mrs. Stanley really fed us well, with big silver pitchers of milk that were never empty. We could drink all the milk we wanted at every meal.

We could stay up until 10 o’clock, but everyone was in bed asleep by 8 or 9. That’s life on the farm.”

ERNIE THOMPSON, a resident from 1933-39

“The rows seemed to go on forever . . .”
Crippling arthritis was to force the early retirement of James Noble in 1934, and he and his wife and 3 boys moved to a home close to Carter Lake in northeast Omaha. The new superintendent was William Nielsen - who had been a member of the Home’s Board of Trustees - and Bill Nielsen and his wife Amelia were to guide the Home for 9 years. They ruled with love and strict discipline. Miss Havercamp, the matron, is surely remembered by all the boys who knew her... short and stocky, she could swing the paddle as hard as anyone, when necessary.

She read Bible passages after dinner, and each Saturday night, just before bedtime, every boy got in line in the medicine room for a spoonful of cod liver oil.

Then Miss Havercamp would pull slivers and doctor scratches and cuts with “the hottest iodine in the world”.

The Nielsens and Miss Havercamp ran the Home through the years of the Great Depression, and while the Home was not “wealthy” it was a point of pride with the local Masons that they kept running through the hard times.

To the annual fundraising campaign, held each fall among the Masonic Lodges, were added appeal letters at Easter and Christmas. And in 1938 the Home published a newsletter for the first time - BOYS AT HOME, a publication which would continue for nearly 3 decades.

The boys at the Home considered themselves lucky, as the Megeath House was sandwiched between 2 great places for youngsters to play... Hanscom Park to the east, and to the west a large play area donated by the Megeath family.

It was called, simply, “the lots”.

“The lots” were important to others as well - not just the boys of the Home. Sometimes there was a football field enclosed by a chain fence. I seem to recall that on each end there grew a huge cottonwood tree.

On a lazy hot summer day one could climb all the way up to one of the branches and stretch out with a ‘Horatio Alger’ book and, at the same time, catch a soft breeze that made the leaves dance...

You could take part in a ball game or down at the other end of the lot someone might be digging a cave, which was nothing more than a hole covered over with pieces of wood or cardboard, whatever could be scrounged up.”

HAROLD THOMPSON,
a resident from 1930-39
were scuffles between the Home’s boys and a team of players from a nearby church.

Boys from each side would pair off by size, and short lived battles held to see who would control the baseball diamond that day.

And a major leaguer developed his skills on the Home’s playground as well.

Rex Barney practiced almost nightly on the ballfield with his father during the 1930’s - his blazing fastball carried him to the big leagues after World War II.

Pitching for the Brooklyn Dodgers, he appeared in 4 World Series games in the late 1940’s. A career highlight came when he no-hit the New York Giants in 1948 . . . a long way from the diamond on “the lots” on South 35th Street.

(The site, on the east side of 35th Street 2 blocks west of the Megeath House, can still be identified - homes there now date from the 1940’s and are much newer than those that surround them.)

If the desire for exercise or competition was fulfilled on “the lots”, then another outlet opened up - with the creation of the Masonic Home Boys’ Band.

It all started on Christmas morning, 1935, when members of Omaha’s Square and Compass Club arrived at the Home with musical instruments.

Enthusiasm was great, and regular practices were held. Soon, flashy red, white and blue uniforms appeared - more instruments obtained - and there were appearances at Masonic functions, county and state fairs, and in parades nearby.

Many of our boys also played in the Tech High band, one of the outstanding school bands in the state, and there was a joint appearance of the 2 bands in 1938.

Once, the band gave a concert on local radio.

Many of our most experienced players left to serve in World War II . . . and then Glenn Scudder, our faithful band leader, was transferred from Omaha in 1942.

The golden days of the Masonic Home Band were over.
Attempts to revive the program met with little success.

But the memories linger . . . of Donald Retz who went on to play in the U.S. Navy Band, and Robert Moore who played with the Wayne King orchestra, of Boyd Cockerill, so skillful with the baton as he led the Tech High band . . . and of the many other young fellows who shared in this special part of our Home’s history.

The Megeath House was getting old. On top of almost 3 decades of housing the Megeath family, just think of what 60 young boys under one roof could do!

The Board first started to seriously consider a campaign to raise money for a new campus in 1936.
Three years later, in 1939, a visionary report by a special committee of the Board laid the groundwork for the future of the Home:

... the Home should become a “national” home

... the Megeath House should be abandoned in favor of a new home on an acreage, where the boys would live in cottages and not a dormitory setting

... the Elkhorn farm, while not as successful as had been hoped, should be maintained

... there should be more emphasis on publicity and fundraising, and increases in child care workers

The case had been made - now to implement the plan!

Many attractive parcels of land, both inside the City of Omaha and out, were examined.

One was particularly impressive - only a few years before, as a matter of fact, it had almost become the new campus for the University of Omaha.

The 59 acre Solomon farm was located on the southeast corner of 52nd Street and Ames Avenue, 2 narrow brick roads on the outskirts of the City.

Surrounded by a large dairy farm, and cornfields in all directions, the farm held a racetrack for horses, a huge orchard, a farmhouse with a few sheds, and most of all a beautiful view in all directions.

The land was on one of the highest hills around - one day to become known as Inspiration Hill.

In February, 1941, a great opportunity presented itself. For the sum of $2,000, plus the Elkhorn Farm, the property on 52nd Street was secured for the Masonic Home’s new campus.

Work began immediately on the first construction - a utility building with garages and an apartment which would serve as headquarters for growth of the new campus.

The decision was made that the new campus would consist of several cottages - and not large dormitories - built around a traffic circle along a winding road.

Efforts to raise funds were started, and in June, 1941 the Masonic Boys’ Home Band...
and city leaders led ceremonies to put up a flag at the hill’s highest point.

One of the dignitaries present was Past Grand Master Joseph Fredenburg, who, 21 years earlier, had approved the use of the word “Masonic” in the name of the independent home for children . . .

A word about the Elkhorn Farm - it had never quite lived up to the hopes of the Board, its remoteness and muddy country roads could cause problems.

In 1941, though, it fulfilled its greatest mission - by helping make possible the Home’s final location on 52nd Street.

The large farmhouse and most of the same buildings - north of Elkhorn at 20906 Rainwood Road - are there yet, and to this day brick pillars with their Masonic symbols stand guard at the entrance to the driveway.

Like the Megeath House, the Elkhorn Farm will forever hold a special place in the history of the Home.

By late 1941 it could be reported that 6,200 gifts for $96,000 had been pledged for the construction of new buildings.

Jesse Arnold, General Superintendent (our first “Executive Director”) from 1942 to 1949

Farm Manager Felix Carpenter, known to all as “Carp”, stood with a few boys in July, 1944 on what was soon to become the traffic circle around which cottages were to be built.
In early 1942, the Home officially became the “Omaha Masonic Home for Boys” . . . a farm manager was hired for the new property, and he took up residence in the utility building . . . and an architect was hired to draw a master plan for the new campus.

George Prinz designed a campus with residential cottages centered around a traffic circle on a winding road, and he selected the Georgia Southern style of architecture featuring brick construction with stone lintels over the windows and doors - a style faithfully followed through the years.

World War II intervened to slow building construction, as certain materials came in short supply, but it allowed good time to plan, as well.

For, if the Home was to expand from the Megeath House to a brand new campus with many cottages, this called for administrative changes as well.

Jesse Arnold was hired in 1942 to be the General Superintendent and to guide the business and fundraising functions.

It was recognized that the annual fundraising campaign among the Masonic Lodges, even though it still raised the bulk of the Home’s annual budget, could not continue to do so if the Home grew as planned.

To the Home’s mailing list of 7,500 names would now be added promotional names in an effort to gain more donors, and a more ambitious mailing schedule was organized.

Of all of those things the boys knew little. They knew about the War, and they saw many of the Home’s young men leave to serve their country in it.

Otherwise their world continued to center around 33rd Street and the many places its sidewalks could take you.
The first 3 cottages were sponsored by the Tangier Temple - to be known as the Shrine Cottage - and by Earl K. Buck and Henry B. Neef.

Cornerstone ceremonies for these 3 cottages were conducted on October 21, 1944, and because foundation work had been completed already the Home planned for a move to its new campus the next summer.

1945 came, the War was nearing an end thankfully, and the construction schedule was met.

The Board made plans to sell the 7 lots on 35th Street, the fabled playground, for housing construction - and Our Lady of Lourdes Church tendered an $11,000 offer for the Megeath House and its spacious grounds.

It was understood, however, that the playground equipment used by the smaller boys

Everyone had a job to do . . . the kitchen at the Megeath House was always busy in preparation for the next meal.
would accompany them to the new location.

The big day took place in July, 1945, when the boys boarded a bus, carrying with them their clothing and personal possessions, and left the Megeath House for the first 3 cottages on Inspiration Hill.

The Megeath House, home to countless boys for 22 years, was to be demolished. The location is now a paved school playground, with only the driveway entrance in the curb along the street to remind the visitor of what once was there.

But in the bargain, the Home had found “its home” . . . at last.

Spring, 1945 . . . the Shrine, Buck and Neef Cottages near completion, with 2 additional cottages being started.
PART III
A HILL BECOMES A HOME
1945 - 1955

What changes were in store, as the Home moved to its new location . . .

No longer was South 33rd Street, with its sidewalks to the outer world, important to the boys - except in memory; now North 52nd Street was their link with the community.

Windsor Grade School and Tech High were replaced by Monroe Grade School and Benson High School.

There were different churches to attend.

Dormitory life gave way to the brand new brick cottages, each containing 4 living units for 4 boys each - under the watchful eye of a housemother.

And the move “to the country” allowed for a permanent, daily change of lifestyle for the boys - with all the advantages and opportunities which went with it.

As the boys were taken to the 3 cottages atop the hill, they were assigned to their new living quarters on the spot - the youngest to the Buck Cottage, the middle boys to the Neef Cottage, and the oldest to the Shrine Cottage.

The Shrine Cottage . . . it deserves special mention in the history of the Home.

“Felix Carpenter taught me how to plow with the team of horses we had . . . I remember cutting hay and baling it, going out in the country to dig up small trees to transplant them here (many of them still standing), and we also milked our cows, fed our pigs and raised chickens in the old farm buildings.

When I left after graduation from Benson, I went to the University of Nebraska on an athletic scholarship . . . ”.

WES FULNER, a resident from 1945-1950

Due to its central location, it was the most public of our buildings.

Just to the right, inside the front entrance, is a very small room . . . which for several years held the Home’s switchboard, a small desk and chair for the secretary, a glass top desk and swivel chair for the Superintendent, a chair for a visitor and 2 file cabinets.
Just around the corner another small room served as the medical room, where an intern from Immanuel Hospital came 2 or 3 times a week to care for the boys’ minor ailments.

At the north end of the first floor was the Home’s library, and a place for the tutor who helped with the schoolwork.

The Board of Directors held its meetings in the lounge of the Shrine Cottage . . . and downstairs, in a room not much bigger than today’s foyer, was the dining hall. It is hard to imagine so many boys eating so many meals in such a small place.

In the early years, then, the Shrine Cottage did its part and more - a residential cottage - administrative offices - library - medical room - meeting place - and dining hall.

Another need was met in the Shrine - the Superintendent and his family lived there for a few years as well.

Then, the High Twelve Club of Sioux City, IA, an association of Masons dedicated to service to the fraternity, announced its desire to sponsor construction of private living quarters for the Superintendent.

“Our Scout group met in the basement of the Neef Cottage, and there were Friday and Saturday (?) night movies there as well.

I remember being called on often to carry the very heavy cans of film for the projectionist . . .

My foot froze on the accelerator as Mr. Reichart gave me my first driving lesson across the lower alfalfa field . . . but what great Sunday afternoon rides he took us on to brighten our days . . . ”.

MAX GREEN,
a resident from 1944-1952

Construction started in 1947, and the building was dedicated June, 1948.

There were changes on other fronts, as well. A Boy Scout troop involving 35 youngsters was organized, and late in 1947 the Earl Buck Athletic Field, a large concrete court for tennis, skating, hockey and basketball was completed.

The littlest boys had their playground of Megeath House carryovers . . . now expanded recreational opportunities for all were possible.

The Home was approached by a movie producer in 1948, with the idea of making a promotional film which could be shown to interested groups - and even mailed out over the country, a very novel idea for that time.

Harold F. Chenoweth had been making movies in Omaha since 1920, and his studio in the 1940’s was not far from the new campus.
“TAD”, a full color 27 minute production, was the result, and it proved to be a tremendous public relations asset for the Masonic Home in club meetings and offices far and near.

(Sadly, and for unknown reasons, no copies of “TAD” can still be found - and this look at life in our Home nearly half a century ago, may be lost forever.)

General Superintendent Jesse Arnold led the Home’s business and fundraising functions from offices in Downtown Omaha, for there was not yet room at the new site.

Jesse Arnold passed away in early 1949, and the man chosen to succeed him was William Harrison Bruner.

It was a choice well made, for Harry Bruner was to be the Home’s guiding force for 27 years.

The growing fundraising operation on site at the Home took place in the basement of the Buck Cottage, and then in a portion of the High Twelve Building.

Countless boys recall stuffing fundraising appeals for the Home. Over 40 years later, Ed Young - then Chairman of Home Real Estate, Omaha’s largest residential real estate company - chuckled about his “first job”, stuffing envelopes at a penny apiece.

“I was good at it, too” he recalled fondly.

Another boy got directly involved in fundraising, too, when the High Twelve Club of Clinton, IA, started a yearly tradition of filling large ceramic pig savings banks with coins and bills for the Masonic Home.

The first “Hammy” bank was presented in the dead of winter and Harry Bruner took young Mickey Davis with him, clear across Iowa on the train, to accept the gift for the boys.
On a visit to the campus 4 decades later, Mickey quoted his thank you speech to the Club in its entirety - “It’s better to give than to receive”.

A very important friend of the Home, indeed, was Mr. Bob Cooper. A prominent cattleman, on his first visit in 1948 he offered to help start a 4-H calf program.

Shortly after, several calves appeared - they were housed originally in some old rabbit hutches on the property.

A colorful start for a program of such lasting consequence to so many . . .

Gazing at the beauty of the view to the east from the lounge of the Shrine Cottage, 4 people came up with a name for a new 4-H Club - “Valley View” - a name still in use.

But rabbit hutches and other outbuildings weren’t enough for what Bob Cooper had in mind, and in 1950 he donated his 72 acre stock farm - 3 miles north - to the Home.

The newly acquired farm, about to enter a new phase in its history, already had a storied past.

It had been in 1846 part of the site for Cutler’s Park, an encampment of several thousand Mormon pioneers heading west. Wagon ruts were visible in the pasture a century later.

Frank Simpson, a mule trader in the days before mechanization, when mules were of great military value over rough terrain, ran the Simpson Mule Farm here.

Each year officers of the British Army would come to Omaha to select mules for shipment to India. Tea was held every afternoon on the screened porch, and the mules were branded in the corrals on top of the hill.

LIFE magazine was so impressed with this operation that it devoted a page of its December 13, 1937, issue to the Simpson Mule Farm.

Guards patrolled the farm during World War II, for the mules were still of military value - but the weapons of war changed during that monumental conflict.

The days of shipping mules to India were over.
Frank Simpson died in 1945, to be buried in the northwest corner of Forest Lawn Cemetery overlooking the land he loved so well.

The 1930’s farm north of Elkhorn had contained a picnic area for use by groups, and it was decided to continue this tradition in the new location.

In 1953 a picnic pavilion was built atop the hill, where mule corrals once stood.

The Cooper Farm, named after this generous friend of boys, was off and running . . .

Bob Cooper purchased the farm in 1948 . . . and shortly after his 1950 donation to the Home, plans began for the new use of this historic land.

An annual practice - a fall trip to the ranches of central and western Nebraska to pick up calves donated for the boys’ use - began in 1950.

The Denver stock show was attended in February, 1951.

Meanwhile the farm house was being converted into a residential cottage for boys and houseparents, and a farm manager’s residence was built with donated materials and labor in 1952.

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Memories indeed . . . Mr. McMullen, the tutor hired in 1950 . . . visits by Sky King and Penny, and on another occasion the Mills Brothers . . . silent filmstar Harold Lloyd, a Nebraska native, coming to the Home and being greeted by 4-H calves wearing large black glasses - his trademark . . . and actor Pat O’Brien who brightened St. Patrick’s Day in 1952 . . . the dinner bell . . . Dobby the quarter horse . . . dirt clod fights behind Mr. Reichart’s back . . . and the banquet where tainted Boston Creme pie sent 80 boys back to the Home violently ill, “giving new meaning to the term ‘bucket brigade’” in the words of Mickey Davis decades later.

“What memories . . . We had a buff colored Collie dog who was a friend to everyone. You could set your watch by Sandy - each afternoon at 3:15 he would walk down the path and wait for the boys to come home from school.

One housemother always wrapped a quarter and a dime in Saran Wrap and then put them between the layers of birthday cake - great fun to be the lucky one to find the money . . .

One of ‘my favorites’ fell through the ceiling when he was in the attic hiding feathers from a pillow fight - onto a boy who was sleeping in his room below. The housemother heard the commotion, and of course several boys were in trouble then . . .”.

MARGARET STASKA, employee from 1949-1984

Movies in the basement of the Neef Cottage . . . great times every weekend.
Thanks to a provision in the Will of Ida Gallagher Smith, who passed away in 1951, construction started on the Robert L. and Ida G. Smith Administration Building in 1952.

Administrative offices were finally moved from the Shrine Cottage, rented offices downtown and the High Twelve Building - a long sought goal.

And the basement of the new Smith Building contained recreation rooms for supervised play and a stage area for plays and movies.

Under the leadership of John Changstrom, a member of the Board of Trustees, the administrative functions of the Home were divided into departments and there were staffing and budgetary changes.

The Home was growing . . . and changing. More boys than ever . . . two large campuses . . . a growing 4-H program . . . many beautiful brick buildings to maintain, and plans for more to come.

No longer could the help of friends in Omaha, and particularly the Masons with their heartfelt and steadfast support, raise the funds necessary.

It was time to “nationalize” the Home, with an expanded mailing system - nationwide in scope.

“T\was Mr. Bruner’s Secretary. He and I first proposed putting ‘The’ in the new name for the Home as it was a way to make it more formal, and to distinguish it from other children’s homes . . .

John Changstrom was the one who came up with the wonderful name ‘Inspiration Hill’ . . .

I took the streetcar from my home to 52nd and Maple, the end of the line, and Cal Reichart would pick me up there and bring me to the Home . . .

I couldn’t have found a better ‘Boss’ to work for than Harry Bruner.”

- ANNE SWANSON, an employee from 1951-1967

Because funds cannot be solicited Masonically across state lines, the name of the Home was changed to “The Omaha Home for Boys” on June 24, 1952.

And later that year, using rented lists of names, 500,000 Christmas appeal letters were mailed nationwide for the first time.

In the memory of Edgar Franklin Howe, a crafts building was built in 1954 - also to include a small apartment for staff, the Home’s laundry and a garage.

That same year was to see the Home enter teams in citywide softball play, starting decades of ball games on the diamond behind the Administration Building . . . and
boys proudly entered a float in the City of Omaha's Centennial parade.

As Christmas approached in 1955, Harry Bruner announced that the Home would be mailing nearly a million letters for the first time - and maybe with something new, too.

It had been a memorable 10 years . . . a new location . . . cottage life . . . a second campus . . . a 4-H program . . . staff and procedure changes . . . more boys and greater recreational and educational opportunities for them . . . the Home got a new identity - and became a national organization . . .

Many milestones had been passed, and, indeed, “a Hill had become a Home”.

Byril Brown and his 4-H calf

The serial number on this Massey Ferguson tractor told us it was made in 1941, the year the 52nd Street location was obtained. In 1994 - 53 years later - it was a partial trade on a new tractor . . . used by the boys in their daily chores right up to the end!
PART IV
THE HOME GAINS PROMINENCE,
YEARS OF MATURITY AND GROWTH
1955 - 1985

The mid fifties could hold some great moments for a boy at the Home . . .
He could walk the short distance to the brick service station on the corner, and for a nickel in the Coke machine grab the ice cold bottle by the neck and slide it to the slot where it could be pulled out of the machine. Some boys took their Cokes to the orchard and watched planes landing or taking off in the distance, and, in season, apples and cherries were waiting.
For some a great treat was eating raw potatoes which were rubbed across a part of a salt block from the old barn - a Home boy potato chip.
And if Cal Reichart wasn’t around there was that great maple tree to climb - but watch out for him, because he meant business - “NO”!
Small pleasures perhaps, but big things were happening in 1955, too, though few would have guessed how big.
Harry Bruner decided to add something new to the annual Christmas appeal letter. His national mailings had started a few years ago and they were working alright, but maybe adding something else would produce even better results . . .
Something . . . like a Christmas Seal.
Mr. Bruner started cautiously, inserting a sheet of the new seals in only a portion of the mailing for Christmas, 1955 - and comparing the results they brought in with the results of mailings without seals. There was no comparison.
The seals were so effective they soon became a standard part of every major appeal. Within 2 years the net income from Christmas mailings doubled, so the size of the nationwide mailings was then doubled as well.
And so, to the friendship and support of the local Masons were added legions of new supporters.
Mr. Bruner’s letters had just the right touch to carry the Home’s message to people from all parts of the country, most of whom would never see Inspiration Hill or Cooper Farm except in pictures.
The nationwide success led, in 1957, to the creation of a fundraising subsidiary, known as the Inspiration Hill Department. The Administration Building had to be enlarged to add a mail room to better coordinate mailing activities.
Each summer, in several locations, boys and staff alike would insert letters, seals and return envelopes in thousands - eventually millions - of envelopes.
Each month for months the Board would hear a report on how many envelopes had been readied for mailing.
All those envelopes were bagged in Post Office bags and stored in several locations around campus, awaiting those busy days in November when all were delivered to the Post Office.

This system worked well, if not easily, for years - until the time a number of bags of Christmas appeals were discovered in their storage place - in April . . . they had been overlooked in the Christmas mailing in November!

The Home turned this gigantic process over to a professional mailing company for the first time in 1970.

The Home’s great benefactor, Bob Cooper, died in an automobile accident in 1957, and the farm he had so generously donated became known as “Cooper Memorial Farm”.

The 4-H program was well in place by this time, and each fall the Farm Manager - accompanied by Mr. Bruner or another member of the staff - made the rounds of Nebraska ranches to pick up calves which had been promised for the boys.

Felix Carpenter, known to all as “Carp”, was Farm Manager until 1956, but continued in these fall roundups for many years afterward.

It was decided to add a sheep program to the thriving calf program in 1963, and the Farm took on a new look.

By the end of that decade, in fact, the Cooper Farm animal population was recorded at: “60 herd cows, 50 herd calves, 20 donated calves, 1 bull, 8 hogs, 41 pigs, 38 ewes, 2 bucks and 2 horses”!

It took lots of hay to feed numbers like that, so cutting and baling - at many locations throughout the city . . . and for several cuttings a summer - became a major effort.

A new sleeping wing was added onto the original Farm cottage in 1960, and at that time the boy resident population at that facility reached 16.

The Farm was hooked up to the Metropolitan Utilities District in 1962, allowing for a fully adequate water supply for the first time - up to that time the Farm had relied on 2 huge concrete water holding tanks buried in the hill above the farmhouse.

The picnic grounds on the hill, where until 1940 hundreds of mules had been corralled and branded and readied for shipment to India, brought thousands of people to use one of the nicest picnic facilities around . . . and in June, 1967, a first - a wedding on the picnic grounds.

4-H could involve more than working
In the late 1960’s, 6 boys - including lead vocalist John Hlavka - started to make music. In 1995 Tony Westphalen, John Hlavka and Mike Westphalen entertained everyone at our Reunion ... and received the purple ribbons they were denied in 1968.

“...with animals - a lot more as related in John Hlavka’s account:

For decades the primary suppliers of care to the boys were women - and few would doubt that Miss Havercamp had been up to the task back at the Megeath House. Then, Mabel Stoft became the matron.

When the Home moved to 52nd Street, Mrs. Stoft took charge of the 16 boys in the Buck Cottage - and Maude Smith, all six feet plus of her, was in the Neef Cottage while Edna Perry handled the fellows in the Anderson Cottage.

In 1957, though, a married couple was hired for the Neef Cottage as an experiment. By 1959 the change was complete - couples replaced single housemothers in all cottages.

JOHN HLAVKA,
a resident from 1967-70
More and more activities were being offered all the time, wrestling and basketball teams were entered into competition in city leagues at the Benson Recreation Center, and a tumbling team was organized and made local appearances.

The Scout program flourished and the troop was active in local jamborees, and a Jr. Optimist Club was formed - here the influence of Harry Bruner, a leader in Optimist International, was felt again.

And leadership emerged . . . one of the boys, Rudy Elder, came close to securing an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy in 1956 and another, Merle Green, edited a boys’ paper “Home Happenings” the same year . . . Kenneth Hargis was a Captain in R.O.T.C. and Treasurer of his senior class . . . and in 1963 Duane Cook attended Boys’ State in Lincoln (had he been fortunate enough to be the Nebraska representative for Boys’ Nation he would have been at the White House when a young Bill Clinton from Arkansas shook the hand of President John Kennedy).

In April, 1959 - for the first time - the population of the Home reached capacity with 81 boys on Inspiration Hill and 11 at Cooper Farm.

A Long Range Planning and Building Committee was formed to assess future needs and to determine the ultimate size of the Home.

Enlargement of the kitchen and the heating plant came out of their recommendations, as did a new 250 capacity Dining Hall, which was dedicated on May 1, 1960.

A building for staff housing - the Forster Patton Building - was erected in 1962-63, and cornerstone ceremonies held September 21, 1963, with Governor Frank Morrison in attendance.

This building is named after Henry Forster, who provided a substantial amount of the construction cost, and Frank Patton - former Postmaster of Omaha and Deputy Grand Commander of Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction.

Construction of the Mary O. and John S. Herd Cottage began in 1964 and there was a Masonic cornerstone laying on May 1, 1965. A special speaker was U.S. Senator Roman Hruska.

The Herd Cottage was built to be an orientation cottage for each new boy at the Home, for them to receive intensive personal attention and care before being placed in a cottage with others of their age group.

This idea was to be discontinued in 1971, however, and the Herd Cottage became a cottage like all the others.

Included in its spacious construction, in addition to quarters for the boys and their houseparents, were a library - study hall, a recreation room, a hobby center and offices for an educational counselor and a librarian.

The library is a memorial to Richard
Evans Gilmore, a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Elliot E. Gilmore in memory of their son who died in World War II.

As the Home neared celebration of its 50th Anniversary, tremendous news was received - the Eugene C. Eppley Foundation had approved a $300,000 grant for a recreation center for the Home, provided the remaining funds could be raised.

No longer would the recreational needs of the Home’s growing boys have to be met in the facilities of others all around the city or in assorted rooms all over the campus.

Another feature of the 50th Anniversary celebration was publication of the first official history of the Home.

The 36 page gold covered booklet was largely the work of a member of the Board of Trustees, Wray M. Scott, and to the diligence of this man for his 50 year history all friends of the Home are indebted.

Ten thousand copies of the booklet were made available to the Home with the compliments of the Wray M. Scott Company.

The Home was saddened in 1970 with the death of Glen Shuey, a former resident, in Vietnam . . . and the Board of Directors was stunned into silence on August 10, 1971, when it was announced that one of our boys had died that very morning.

Douglas Teachout, a resident at the Cooper Farm, was killed when the tractor he was driving overturned on a steep embankment and ended up on top of him.

The Home had seen death before - diphtheria had taken Robert Barnes and Carl Gerling in 1924, Donald Minnick had drowned in Carter Lake in 1930, and Richard Bennett with a kidney ailment in 1948 - but here was death on our very doorstep.

It was a tragedy which would not be forgotten.

It was the 1970’s . . . by Board decree in 1971 “the boys will be permitted to wear their hair a little longer” - the days of the skinhead were over for sure - and even the Boys’ Council, the boys’ own governing unit, recommended that any boy who ran away got a crew cut on his return.

Harry Bruner indicated that his retirement date was nearing, and the Board in 1973 selected one of its own, Charles W. Amidon, to be the Assistant Executive Director effective July 1, 1973.

Mr. Bruner announced his retirement date - December 31, 1975 - and Mr. Amidon became Executive Director the next day.

Several hundred employees, Board members and friends saluted Harry Bruner with a
retirement dinner at the Scottish Rite Cathedral - his 26 years at the helm had surely seen the Home grow to great heights.

The Home received the largest bequest ever - over three million dollars - in the late 1970’s and it allowed for a longtime goal to be realized.

The Neef Cottage moved to the Forster Patton, the Shrine Cottage moved to the basement of the Recreation Center, and all the other cottages moved, in their turn, as it was time for their remodeling.

Residents of 1977 and 1978 have many interesting tales about their temporary quarters, too.

No quarrel could be found with the end result, however, as each cottage moved back to expanded living facilities, new carpeting and complete interior remodeling.

The front driveway was named “Bruner Drive” in 1977, and in the next year several acres to the south of the current campus were purchased, adding even more “green space” around the Inspiration Hill campus.

The Home’s nationwide fundraising had stood us in good stead through the years, and The Omaha Home for Boys was by this time one of the nation’s leading children’s home mailers.

But, as Harry Bruner had tested seals in 1955, the Director of Development felt it was again time to test something new.

Polly Thanis inserted a prayer card in her appeal mailings for the first time in 1978, and they were an immediate hit. Soon every

“The new Recreation Center switched everything around here. Movies switched from the Dining Hall on Friday evenings to the new building, and the wrestling program moved from the basement of the Administration Building.

Now we had our own gym for basketball and our own pool - no more trips to the YMCA. The game room brought pool tables, other games and boxing matches to us, and volunteers from colleges came out to coach.

I really remember the huge open house (it was May 2, 1971) when it was all finally finished and open for use - many, many people. We had waited a long time for this.”

DOUGLAS TUCKER,
a resident from 1970-72

The cottages had been designed in the 1940’s, after all. They had endured 3 decades of child care with few changes or improvements, and the houseparents’ quarters - designed for single housemothers - were not adequate for married couples, some of whom even had children of their own.

Getting, and keeping, good houseparents was a constant problem.

Plans to remodel each of the first 5 cottages were unveiled in 1976, and the moves were on.
major appeal would have a prayer card inserted along with the seals.

The Board determined that renovation of the Smith Administration Building was in order - the downstairs recreational program had moved to the Recreation Center, and so that could now be converted to offices for the growing staff of people working directly with the boys.

The mailing list became computerized in the late 1970’s, so the days of transporting trays and trays of thousands of tab cards across the city were a thing of the past.

In 1980 a new newsletter was born, THE TWIG. It was designed to launch the Home into a planned giving program, one emphasizing bequests to the Home and gift annuities.

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On October 12, 1980, the 60th Anniversary was celebrated with a special dinner in the Dining Hall, and each cottage made a poster or banner noting this event.

“I entered the Home in 1979, but since my older brother had already been there a few years, I knew what to expect and I actually looked forward to coming.

In my 6 years there were many firsts in my life. I had never played sports until I came to the Home, so basketball, wrestling and softball were all new to me.

The first thing I ever drove was the old red tractor, which we used to pick up laundry and trash at each cottage.

And the Home helped me get my first job, too, at a nearby shoe store.

What trips we took through the years! My favorite trips were the winter skiing trips to Colorado and a chance to see Yellowstone Park and visit a boys’ ranch in Montana.”

TIM MANGIAMELI, a resident from 1979-85

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Employees and Board members of at least 10 years of service received a special salute.

Good things were happening to the boys as well . . . Rod Neiman had been a page in the U.S. House of Representatives . . . the 3 York brothers - Ron, Ken and Jim - were recognized for 10 years of residency at the 1980 Dinner . . . another former resident, Kevin Orr, was Assistant to the Dean of Boys . . . Kevin Cowan received a leadership award from the Optimist Club . . . and David Schmidt achieved a “first” when he won both of the Home’s major awards for the boys, the Wayne E. Decker Friendship Award and the James Collins Athletic Award, in the same year.

A longtime goal was reached in 1983 with the purchase and removal of a house on Ames Avenue, the last remaining property on Inspiration Hill which did not belong to the Home.

The removal led to substantial changes, which included the placement of a 3 sided 20 foot tall sign at 52nd and Ames - to include the logo and the term “As the twig is bent, so grows the tree”.

Margaret Staska, administrative secretary to the Dean of Boys since 1949, attended a reunion of some alumni from the Megeath House days in 1983 - and it was to serve as a springboard to our first Nationwide Reunion in 1984.

On August 11, 1984, 102 former residents of the Home - representing 12 states - enjoyed the Reunion Picnic at Cooper Farm. And promptly, plans were made for the next reunion 2 years hence.

It was the decision of the Board that a new residential cottage should be built, and funds...
for that end were solicited in the August issue of THE TWIG. Several hundred friends responded in amounts large and small. There was an air of excitement, and anticipation, as 1985 approached - the 65th anniversary year!

The Home had come a long way in the 30 years since 1955.

But the Years of Maturity and Growth were only a forerunner of things to come.

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A new boy’s head and the tree were adopted as the logo in 1979
Jeff Curtis wasn’t too thrilled about it. He had been at the Home for about 5 years now, and here he was, on this warm spring morning, out on a part of the hilltop which to his memory had never been used, digging hundreds and hundreds of holes . . .

What was taking place was the start of the celebration of the 65th Anniversary of The Omaha Home for Boys.

Arbor Day was near, the time when we celebrate the growing of trees which cover and shade the earth, thanks to that great Nebraskan, J. Sterling Morton.

Jeff Curtis had to do his part.

He was one of the ten or so boys selected by Jim Anderson of the Maintenance Department for this particular task.

The holes had to be dug, in even, clear rows, so that many hundreds of trees could be planted . . . it was the start of a tree nursery that would fill Inspiration Hill and the Cooper Farm campus for years to come.

Television cameras came to record this event, thanks to Board Member Joe Baker, and the 65th Anniversary was off and running . . . Things were happening on many fronts.

The Board of Directors had approved 2 projects which were to start later in this anniversary year, the building of a new residential cottage and the conversion of the Herd Cottage to an Education Center.

And those charged with the Home’s weekend of activities in October were busy securing filmed messages of congratulations for the 65th anniversary - one of them from Vice President George Bush, thanks to help from U.S. Representative Hal Daub.

On the morning of Saturday, October 12, Charles Amidon - the Home’s Executive Director for 10 years - was installed as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Masons of Nebraska.

And later in the day, in a large banquet at Peony Park, hundreds gathered to celebrate this special day. They all received a new history book at their place setting - none had been undertaken since Wray Scott’s 1970 book.

The Home’s residents were on their best behavior that evening, and made quite an impression as they walked to their tables in the center of the room after buses brought them to Peony Park.

This is more like a celebration, Jeff Curtis must have thought.
Dick and Barb Mathiesen, Anderson Cottage houseparents, took their boys to the Ozarks in the 1980’s and posed in Old West attire . . . then they returned to Inspiration Hill and posed in the same order.

After a fine meal the audiovisual salute to the Home, including messages from Vice President Bush, Masonic officials and local business and governmental figures, was enjoyed by all.

The next day, following luncheon in the Dining Hall, the newly installed Officers of the Grand Lodge conducted cornerstone ceremonies for a new residential cottage, which was placed on Bruner Drive close to 52nd Street.

Open House activities and appearances by the Strategic Air Command Band and the University of Nebraska Scarlet and Cream Singers capped off the events of a very busy weekend.

There was another special event in October, 1985, as well. The workers in the Maintenance Campaign - who had been raising funds for the boys every fall since 1926 - were hoping to reach the goal set for the first time in many a year.

On the final Report Night, spirits soared as the roll call of Team Captains brought the goal in reach.

$144 short after the last report was in! . . . one of the leaders, without saying a word, went to his billfold, and others followed suit - the Maintenance Campaign had achieved goal at last, and this started a streak of many years.

Work began immediately on the new residential cottage, whose architectural style maintained the same features of earlier cottages, while there were differences.

There were to be 6 rooms for the boys, with 2 to a room, rather than 4 rooms with 3 to a room in the other cottages, and a full kitchen and dining facilities were included as well.

Most of the meals would be eaten in the cottage, and not in the Dining Hall.

In 1986 the Board chose to name the cottage after departed Executive Director Harry Bruner, as its funding had come from thousands of donors who responded to newsletter appeals and from endowed funds received by bequests.

The boys and houseparents from the Shrine Cottage eagerly awaited their move to the Bruner Cottage throughout 1986, and once posed in front of it with their dog, Reagan, as it neared completion.

One . . . sadly . . . would not make the move. A tumor was discovered in 16 year old James Conrad, and it proved inoperable.
He left the Home to spend his last months in his hometown.

A year later many from the Home - boys, former boys and staff alike - attended James Conrad’s funeral in Fremont, NE.

The move from the Shrine Cottage to the Bruner Cottage came in December, 1986, and this allowed the residents of the Herd Cottage to move to the Shrine - which signalled “full speed ahead” on conversion of the Herd to an Education Center.

Finally, there would be adequate space for the many tutoring and reading skills classes necessary, an expanded library, a computer center and an art room - a major improvement in the Home’s program for the boys.

For, while the Home would maintain its strong Masonic tradition of support and attendance at public schools, individual tutoring and expanded opportunities for the boys were needed.

A grant from the James and Winifred Watson Trust, earmarked for educational and recreational projects at the Home, made possible the new Educational Center.

Both the Bruner Cottage and the Watson Education Center were dedicated in special ceremonies in 1987.

Also made available in 1987 was the end product of several weeks of work - and fun - in late 1986.

The Home was approached by a video production firm about making a promotional film which could be shown in presentations to groups locally, and just as importantly could be easily sent to friends of the Home around the country.

It was 38 years after “TAD” and time to do it again!

More than 40 boys auditioned for the main speaking roles in the video - and all appeared in some part of the production.

The 5 oldest boys who tried out - Shrine Cottage residents - came to the auditions with newly adopted “stage names” for the occasion.

Chosen by the film director for the 3 chief roles were 15 year old Travis Barclay from the Cooper Farm, 13 year old Ceasar Reyes of the Neef Cottage and 9 year old Dominique Tisdale of the Buck Cottage.

Floyd Kalber, a former Omaha newscaster and a member of the Home’s Board of Trustees, provided the narration for the video from a studio at his Chicago television station.

Everyone had great fun as the camera (and microphone) went all over campus, to scenes which had been carefully planned and to some which just happened.

Our three “stars” prepare for the tree planting scene - the final scene in the video.

Many youth care workers and boys were interviewed on camera for possible use in the video . . . when Herd Cottage housefather
Tom Causey said “If a boy learns nothing else from me, he’s going to learn to care (about himself)”, the film had its title.

“**A TIME TO CARE**” had its “premiere” in the Dining Hall, and while all enjoyed the 23 minute video itself, great laughter rang out when the “out-takes” - film which didn’t make the final video - were shown.

There the audience saw that it took Joe Cuevas 5 or 6 times to start the Cooper Farm tractor before it didn’t die on him . . . and Roger Rounds being attacked by the chicken as he gathered eggs . . . and little Mike Reyes answering a tutor’s question “But that would be cheating!”.

A second video was made 3 years later, “**A TIME FOR PRIDE**”, which was the story of the Cooper Farm campus and the 4-H program.

Its narrator was Ed Young, who 4 decades earlier had earned a penny apiece for stuffing Christmas appeals in the basement of the Buck Cottage.

Together the two video productions became “The OHB Video Package” and they have been viewed in thousands of private homes, and before groups, in all corners of the United States.

Countless friendships were cemented, and new friendships made, as these video productions have travelled across the country . . . and one direct result was an article about the Home in the 600,000 circulation “New Age” magazine of the Scottish Rite.

The Watson Trust, which had funded the Education Center in 1987, was again utilized in 1988 when the Trust approved a new 4-H Training Facility for its next project.

The 60 foot by 180 foot building at the Cooper Farm includes an indoor arena, cattle stalls and a washing area - and it enables work with the animals all year round.

It has spurred an increase in 4-H activities and participation - from that Saturday each February when the boys select their calves, and weigh ins take place, all the way to local fairs and the State Fair in late summer.

“This building was dedicated September 18, 1988 - at which time Board Member John Furstenberg quipped that it was “the Hyatt Hotel for livestock in Douglas County”.

Each year it has been made available for

*In working with cattle, as in working with youth, every moment brings the potential of a lesson. Every boy becomes a learner, every person a teacher, and every place a schoolroom. It is important in showing cattle that it is not the animal which is important. The animal is simply a visual aid. It is what is happening to the youth that makes the difference.”*  

WILLIAM CALDWELL, Superintendent of Nebraska 4-H, in remarks at the dedication on September 18, 1988.
Douglas County 4-H activities, and for youth from other organizations, working in conjunction with the boys at the Home.

In an effort to improve the quality of life training skills for the boys, the Board adopted the National Family Home Program in 1988, a much more structured manner by which the houseparents - those closest to the boys in their cottages - would work with their boys.

Other changes were in process as well.

Executive Director Charles Amidon announced in 1989 that he would retire in 1990, and Board President John Furstenberg was selected to replace Mr. Amidon.

John Furstenberg became Associate Executive Director in early 1990, and Mr. Amidon announced his retirement date - July 1, 1990, 17 years after his date of employment with the Home.

The Home was nearing a crossroads in its existence . . .

- it was well established on two beautiful locations in North Omaha
- its quality of child care was second to none
- nationwide direct mail fundraising generated the direct expenses for care for the boys - and just as importantly led to bequests which bolstered the Home’s endowment fund.

Now, just as those visionary Board members of the late 1930’s had decided, in order to build on the past, it was time to change for the future.

A map to chart the Home’s course into the 21st century was necessary, so a Long Range Planning Task Force was created.

How big should the Home grow to be?
Should girls be admitted to the Home?
Should the Home remain in the same location?
What new programs should be tried?
Is there a better way to use facilities and resources?

All these, and other questions yet to be asked, were brought to the table in March, 1990, as this most significant process began.

Board members, staff and interested civic leaders with no tie to the Home were active in the process, and many Saturday morning sessions over the next several years were the result.

The work of the Home went on, but great plans were being made for the future . . .

Mr. Amidon’s retirement took place in July, and on the next weekend he and his wife fulfilled a long dream - a ride in a hot air balloon.

The ride, a gift from the boys, started with an early morning launch which barely cleared the wires in back of the Herd Building and ended some time later as the balloon descended in Bellevue, NE just north of Offutt Air Base (which had been called as a precaution).

A vanload of boys and 2 staff members had followed the balloon on the ground and were on hand to welcome the Amidons down from their lofty ride.

In October another special anniversary - the 70th - was celebrated with a banquet at the Mutual of Omaha Dome.

Among the crowd were 12 boys and their dates . . . ready to be taken to the Homecoming Dance on conclusion of the meal.

To put more emphasis on Planned Giving, special mailings about Wills and Gift Annuities were targeted to a portion of the mailing list for the first time, and THE TWIG newsletter - now in full color - was expanded to 3 mailings a year.

The Long Range Planning process continued under the leadership of Board President Charles Sederstrom . . . Saturday morning meetings, including discussion, the consideration of alternatives, . . . and challenges to Board and staff alike to reach out, to dream of the future, and to plan for better ways to do the job.

In 1992 a rather lengthy Mission Statement...
was replaced by a new one: “The mission of The Omaha Home for Boys is to support and strengthen youth and families”.

There it was, an open ended statement which allowed a diversity of programs, and people served, for the future.

Change started immediately.

Home officials began to meet with representatives of Uta Halee Girls Village to discuss ways that, between the 2 organizations, a home providing psychiatric residential care for boys could be realized.

Uta Halee had the expertise and accreditation for this type of care - The Omaha Home for Boys had the location and the ability to fund such a project.

Cooper Village was born, on the grounds of the Cooper Farm.

It was a milestone in youth care, a model for the nation . . . 2 separate organizations combining forces, rather than working independently, to meet a need in youth care.

The boys at the cottage at Cooper Farm were moved to the Inspiration Hill campus, and 4-H activities would continue - even in expanded form - as the boys would be taken to the Farm in vans.

Another need, for a Transitional Living program, for young people past high school who have no family support system on which to fall back, was realized.

Following the sudden death of Board Officer Warren L. “Pat” Jacobs in 1991, funds from his Estate were received, earmarked for a Transitional Living program . . . a cause which had been close to his heart.

A small apartment complex about 2 miles south of Inspiration Hill was obtained, and to this program were eventually to be added the first females in the Home’s history.

Eleven year old Jeff Dee waves greetings from his cottage, and three years later he received the Wayne Decker Award . . . 4 years later, the Naval Academy.

“My parents were divorced and I was living in South Omaha. I was kind of a delinquent in the 4th and 5th grades, I stayed out late and did drugs a little.

The I came to the Home about 8 years ago, and . . .”.

JEFF DEE, a resident of the Home from 1985-93, talking to a newspaper reporter one week after high school graduation.
The youth care staff continued to develop program ideas, submit them to the Board for consideration, and then to implement the plan following approval. A Wellness for Life program, adult parenting classes, a mentoring program, and more.

In 1992, the “Circle of Friends” donor recognition program was started, funded by friends who wanted the Home to start such a venture, and there was another Reunion of former boys and staff at the Cooper Farm picnic grounds. It was to be their last look at the old pavilion, which dated back 40 years - after the last picnic of the season, it was bulldozed down and a new cement block structure put up in the same location.

In May, 1993, a cornerstone setting at the new pavilion - a first in Masonic circles, a joint cornerstone laying by the Grand Lodge of Masons of Nebraska and the Prince Hall Masons of Nebraska.

There was another celebration that month as well - one of the most distinguished classes in the history of the Home graduated from Benson High School.

Distinguished indeed - 5 of the 7 were continuing on to college, 3 of them ranked in the top 15 of the graduating class, and the Class of ‘93 included a 4-H champion, a director and star of high school plays, honor roll members, and a commencement speaker.

One of the 7, Jeff Dee, reached his goal when he received a presidential appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD - and was the day his success was announced a “red letter” day on the Hill!

An interesting weekend took place in July, 1993.

It started on Thursday evening when a massive wind storm went through the area, devastating the stately old trees in Fontenelle Park only a few blocks east of the Home, but leaving the Home’s grounds totally without damage.

The next morning saw the first annual OHB Golf Tournament, at a course west of town, and the next day saw many Home staff people conduct a community garage sale at the Bruner Cottage to benefit a member of the community in need.

More than $3,600 was raised as hundreds of people in the North Omaha community, led by staff and boys from the Home, combined forces in an event few will forget.

At the State Fair that year, Joe Parrett made the best showing ever by a boy from the Home... invited back for Monday’s championship review by the governor of Nebraska!

Joe was in pretty good company, that day.

Indeed, 4-H was well on the way back to the highly successful program of earlier decades - girls from Uta Halee Girls Village and boys from Cooper Village now take part with us.

A western pleasure horseback riding program was started that year as well.

Cable television reached the Hill in 1993,
and while it did not have the impact of the Home’s first television 4 decades earlier, the addition of sports and educational programs was well received.

In early 1994, renovation of the cottage at Cooper Farm was complete, and Cooper Village took in its first boys. There was a ribbon cutting dedication ceremony, including Governor Ben Nelson, in February.

And almost immediately plans were underway to build 2 additional cottages at Cooper Village - when they were completed the next year the capacity of the new home for boys would grow to 36.

1995 loomed ahead . . . another anniversary year . . . this one the most important one yet.

In a nationwide contest of readers of THE TWIG newsletter, an entry was submitted from Texas, and it was decided to use it on everything throughout the 75th anniversary year.

On envelopes, on letterhead, on trinkets to pass out to visitors, and on many graceful banners which flew on power poles along 52nd Street and Ames Avenue.

The Board had authorized a special new building for 1995 as well - a Youth and Family Services Building where there would be adequate room for administrative offices, counseling rooms and for rooms for program expansion in the future.

The new building, fulfilling a long-time need on the campus, also contains a conference center and a Visitors’ Center where the rich heritage of the Home can adequately be shown.

![Steve Marecek and Gene Thompson, residents during the 1930's, review Visitors’ Center displays during the 1995 Reunion, along with Mrs. Marecek.](image)
The bylaws of The Omaha Home for Boys proclaim it to be perpetual . . . never ending . . . “until time shall be no more”.

That is because Great Causes ought never to end, and that even as one challenge is met, others lie ahead.

Leaders of the Home have decided to meet those other challenges . . . to reach out in new programs, cooperating with other organizations, to help even more people.

The residential program for boys will continue - and at the 52nd and Ames location.

The 1941 decision makers who obtained the farmland which was to become known as Inspiration Hill had selected the Home’s final location, to be sure.

“To leave this community we would be a part of its problems, not a part of its solutions!”

Dr. Bernard Gyger proclaimed at a Long Range Planning meeting.

A master plan for campus expansion in a very short time has been drawn up.

But the Home is more than bricks and mortar . . . it is PEOPLE. People helping people.

People are not easy to catalog, as buildings are, for each comes, and then leaves, in his time.

It is the Great Cause which remains.

People serve the Cause and it will ever be thus . . . “until time shall be no more”.
An OHB Gallery

A diamond jubilee is indeed a special event. Countless thousands of people have contributed to the ongoing story that is the 75 year history of The Omaha Home for Boys. Boys and members of the staff, who have written the story . . . and the volunteers who have made it all possible. An OHB Gallery has been assembled to recognize a few of those thousands of people.

The Gallery is not a “Hall of Fame”, rather it is an effort to recognize a small number of individuals who - each in his or her way - represent what we have been and what we have tried to do. Because “History” is better viewed from a distance, our Gallery does not include staff or boys with a tie to the Home in the 1990’s. The author of our Centennial History - in the year 2020 - can see to that, after all . . .

TINLEY COMBS

“He built better than he knew.”

Those words, on a metal plaque on display here, attest to Tinley Combs’ place in our Home’s history.

It took many people to start this Home in 1920 . . . many ideas . . . many contributions . . . many types of involvement.

But Tinley Combs was the leader of these people; he was selected as the first president of the new corporation.

Born the son of a Methodist minister in Fairfield, IA, in 1870, Tinley was orphaned at the age of 7. He was raised by a guardian and then moved to Omaha in 1889.

He began selling jewelry door to door, saving enough money to start his own jewelry store in downtown Omaha. The T.L. Combs Company was incorporated in 1898 and grew to become one of the finest jewelry stores of its day.

Mr. Combs was active in the Methodist Church and became very prominent in Masonic circles. He joined the St. Johns Masonic Lodge and later became a charter member of Mizpah Lodge. He obtained the 32 degrees of Scottish Rite Masonry, and was honored in 1915 with his 33rd degree.

Tinley Combs was potentate of the Tangier Temple Shrine in 1919, one fact which helps to explain the tremendous financial support the brand new Home was to receive from the Shrine starting in 1920.

It was Tinley Combs who obtained permission from the potentate in 1920 to use the word “Masonic” in the new Home’s name - to show the allegiance of the founding fathers.

Tinley Combs served as president for 22 years, until his death in 1941. Six of the older boys from the Masonic Home served as his pallbearers.

Our Home grew from the 1920 dreams of many caring friends.

Tinley Combs - truly - “built better than he knew.”
JAMES KING

History always pays special attention to who “came first”.
It was not James King’s desire to be the first boy in a new home for children, cer-
tainly - nor was he aware how well known his name would be 75 years later.
James Alfred King was born November 22, 1910, in Superior, NE. His mother died
when he was 4, and Jimmie was sent to Omaha to live with an aunt.
He was a 4th grader in Florence School until March 21, 1921, when he was the first
boy to enter the new home.
James did well at Central Grade School, almost all A’s and B’s, and later that year,
he returned to live with his aunt.
And there the story might have ended - but a chance look at a Superior phone book 64
years later took the search for our first boy back to that small town on the Kansas border.
We now know that in the 1929-30 school year, Jim King - a high school junior - lettered
in football and was a high scorer in basketball, and with exceptional abilities in music and
dramatics he was in many singing groups and had leads in school plays and operettas.
A world of promise and opportunity lay ahead.
Or so it seemed.
Newspaper accounts the next year told of a one night hospitalization for influenza.
He had a good night and seemed much improved, so all were shocked when his father
stepped into his room at 8:30 the next morning and found him dying.
Just 19 years old and only a high school senior, James King passed away on September 25, 1930.
This young man, whose life we recall fondly because he was OUR “first”, was laid to rest in the King plot, Ever-
green Cemetery, Superior, NE.

J.C. ROBINSON

The J.C. Robinson Seed Company of Waterloo, NE can be called - and rightly so - our oldest corporate friend.
The friendship began in the early 1920’s when the company offered some of its most productive ground to the
new Masonic Home for the boys to grow their own produce.
Wonderful movies still exist showing our boys working their way through the fields -
in the background is a milk processing plant, a building which still stands east of High-
way 275 north of Waterloo.
“I recall all the work was done with a hoe and a corn knife” George Bigelow would
later write, “I can’t recall any mechanical equipment at all. Weeding was the worst part,
the knees would get sore and dirty . . .”.
J.C. Robinson, born in New York State in 1861, had settled in Douglas County, NE
with his wife Mary in 1886.
He started the seed company in 1888 and by 1905 had prospered enough to build an
8,000 square foot, 3 story home next to the business. The elegant mansion still stands
on Lincoln Avenue - and now serves as a Bed and Breakfast.
J.C.’s friendship for the new Home came about as a result of his love for children - he had 2 sons who carried on the
business - and his love for Masonry. He was the 1919 Master of Waterloo Lodge, a Shriner and a 33rd Degree Mason.
Support of the Home continued after his 1928 death, as first his sons and then his grandsons took the reins.
Loaning land to grow crops on gave way to the donation of seed corn so even more lands could yield results.
Each year the Robinson Seed Corn Company renews the pledge made by J.C. so long ago . . . that it will do
whatever it can, whenever asked, to help children in need.
J.C. Robinson . . . a man, and a symbol of caring.
JAMES NOBLE

A special debt of gratitude is owed to James A. Noble. He took over leadership of the Home during its first year of infancy, at a time when an emergency situation called for an immediate rather than a gradual, planned takeover. He guided the Home for 13 years, from 1921 to 1934, and helped move it to the Megeath House on South 33rd.

And he filmed . . . Mr. Noble was among the earliest “home movie” buffs in the country . . . his roaming camera caught hours and hours of movies of the boys in the Home - a tremendous record of our early years.

Born in Omaha in 1890, Mr. Noble was the Physical Director of the YMCA in Grand Island, NE, before returning to Omaha to become a juvenile court officer. This position brought him in contact with the new Masonic Home, which he was hired to head in 1921.

Ironically, when the Nobles moved to the Home to live, they left a house on North 47th Avenue, just a short distance from farm land that would one day be called Inspiration Hill.

His 13 years with the Home were hectic ones; his own family was growing, and he always had close to 60 other “sons” of all ages and sizes to contend with. With a minimum of help, at least by modern day youth care standards, Superintendent Noble carried the load on his broad shoulders.

Crippling arthritis forced an early retirement in 1934, and he took his wife and three boys to a new home in far northeast Omaha. James Noble passed away in 1965.

His legacy lives on, however. Sixty years after the Nobles left the Home, Harold Noble, James’ youngest son, donated the family’s beautiful oak furniture from the Megeath House era to The Omaha Home for Boys for its new Visitors’ Center historical display.

GEORGE BIGELOW

It was not unusual for George W. Bigelow to pose for pictures and answer questions about the Home . . .

As the oldest returning alum at our Reunions he was always sought out, but each time he graciously gave up his own time and pleasure to help the Home. That was the way he was.

Orphaned at the age of 12, George Bigelow found his way to the Masonic Home for Boys in 1924 and was to stay until 1929. George’s written recollections are our best accounts of life in the Megeath House in the 1920’s.

“I tell people we were fed, clothed, housed, bandaged and punished when required”, he once wrote, “but no one kissed the sore finger”.

Nevertheless, the foundation George received was to stand him in good stead - he graduated from Tech High and then obtained a law degree from Omaha University in 1939.

Following a stint in the Army during World War II, George moved west and took up the real estate and insurance business in Cozad, NE. He was on the city council, president of the Chamber of Commerce, and active in the American Legion and the Presbyterian Church.

He became Judge Bigelow, a Dawson County Judge from 1964 until retirement in 1978.

Three children came from his 1941 marriage to Kay Johnson, and in 1982 he married Beth Bowman Wright, who always accompanied him to the Home’s Reunions.

When George Bigelow passed away in February, 1994, many Memorial Gifts were sent to The Omaha Home for Boys.

George Bigelow . . . orphan, resident of our Home, lawyer, businessman, community leader and judge. In the words of Beth Bigelow - “a very proud man, and much credit was given to the Masonic Home for Boys”.

65
THE MEGEATH FAMILY

America was moving West - but some stopped to lay roots. James G. Megeath, a Virginian aged 30, stopped in 1854. He opened a general store and this led into a very profitable business as a developer with the Union Pacific Railroad. He dabbled in local politics.

In 1895 he built an 18 room mansion, by one account “one of the most beautifully situated in Omaha”. Its address would be 2137 South 33rd Street at a later date. James Megeath died in 1906. By then George Windsor Megeath, one of his five children, was well established in the coal and mining business. Windsor School, in the Windsor Addition to Omaha, were named after George W. Megeath.

In 1923 the Masonic Home badly needed larger quarters, whereby George donated the family home in memory of his father, James. For a brief time even, by request, the Home was “The James G. Megeath Masonic Home for Children”.

At that time, James E. Megeath, George’s son, purchased land way west of town at 90th and Dodge. There he constructed on his Long View Farm the “last” Megeath House. Located at 617 North 90th, it was dubbed the “House of a Thousand Windows” when opened in 1924.

George W. Megeath lived there until his death in 1931.

James then moved to Wyoming to manage a coal business.

The Megeath House on 33rd was sold to a church in 1945 and is now a paved parking lot-playground. “The House of a Thousand Windows” is law offices - a designated Landmark.

Megeath Office Supply here still bears the family name, but all the Megeaths are long gone.

The most imposing family mausoleum in historic Prospect Cemetery also bears the Megeath name . . . in it are those who laid roots here, and decided to stay till the end.

WILLIAM NIELSEN

Our early Superintendents did it all - raised the boys, raised the funds, ran the business operations and supervised the facilities. William Nielsen was the last of this breed.

He was on the Board of Trustees from 1926 to 1933, while working at the Union Pacific Railroad. Then, in 1934, he became the third Superintendent in the Home’s history.

For 9 years, from 1934 until 1943, Bill Nielsen and his wife Amelia “did it all”, as they guided the lives of hundreds of boys and held the Home together through the worst days of the Great Depression, problems with the Elkhorn Farm, and the acquisition and development of the new property.

Even Father Flanagan had to disband operations briefly during the Depression, to send his boys elsewhere to live for a time . . . Bill Nielsen didn’t. His doors stayed open.

It is Bill Nielsen who is fondly recalled by many as the man who “rescued” them from Riverview Home - it was he and his wife who fostered the togetherness of “family” which rang so true in the Megeath House era.

The Nielsens lived in a small brick building (formerly the Home’s “hospital”) at the rear of the property.

As, one by one, their boys went off to war the Nielsens felt the pride of parents anywhere. The many letters and pictures sent back showed their closeness to the boys they raised. When one, Robert Barnbrook, did not return, the grief was beyond imagination.

But all things come to an end, and Bill Nielsen left the Home in 1943. He returned briefly in 1953, as Dean of Boys, but his health was failing. He passed away later that year.

Bill and Amelia Nielsen - they “did it all” and helped a young home grow to maturity.
EARL COLLINS

Earl Collins has always led by example.
“We had the leadership of fellows like Earl Collins” pens one of our 1940’s boys, in an essay on the Masonic Home . . . Earl was a pallbearer for our founder, Tinley Combs, in 1941 . . . four decades later our newly formed Alumni Association elected Earl its first president.

Breakdown of his family in 1934 resulted in 9 year old Earl Collins coming to the Masonic Home to live.
While with us, he did INDEED lead by example and his quiet, self assured manner held him in good stead until graduation from Tech High School in June, 1943.
The U.S. Navy followed - at war’s end Earl was in a V-6 program to become a Navy pilot. Returning to Omaha, he enrolled in Creighton University and graduated in 1950 with a degree in Marketing and Finance.
There was time for courtship and a 1948 marriage to wife Marjorie - four children and seven grandchildren (at last count) were to come after this marriage.
Earl’s life’s work at Guarantee Mutual Life Insurance Company began in early 1950 and continued until he retired in 1990 as an Assistant Vice President.
Along the way Earl and Marge found time to serve their church, to travel all around the country (often visiting other alumni) . . . and to spearhead our Alumni Association.
Earl was at first president by himself, then shared the office with another alum, and in 1994 stepped down from his position so “the next generation” could take over.
His are some of our best recollections of life at the Megeath House, and some of our best perceptions of the Home. He continues, whenever asked, to lead by the example that so impressed the others in the Home more than 50 years ago.

JESSE ARNOLD

For more than 2 decades, the entire operation of the Masonic Home had been under the leadership of the Superintendent - who was the head of direct care of the boys as well as all other administrative functions.

It was 1942, the Masonic Home was 22 years old and - finally, the Board decided - it needed a separate manager for its administrative and fundraising business.

The Home was, after all, in a $100,000 campaign to secure pledges for buildings on the new campus at 52nd and Ames, and $28,000 was desperately needed from the Fall Maintenance Campaign to support current operations.

Jesse Arnold was hired for 6 weeks to coordinate that 1942 Maintenance Campaign, and over $33,400 was raised, well above the original amount sought.

He was the right man at the right time. His hiring became permanent - our first “General Superintendent”, a position later to be known as “Executive Director”.

Mr. Arnold was not new to boy care. A 60 year old native of Kansas, he had long been associated with YMCA camps in Colorado and in fact had started his own Byers Peak Ranch west of Denver in 1932.

Jesse and May Arnold moved to Omaha in 1942 when his future with the Home was made permanent. He led the Home through the completion of its building campaign, the construction of cottages, and the 1945 move to 52nd Street.

“He can properly be called the father of the Home” said John Changstrom, after Jesse Arnold’s untimely death as a result of a 1949 stroke . . . “I don’t know what we’re going to do without him . . .”.

The Home managed, but Jesse HAD laid a solid foundation.

A brass plaque here proudly honors his memory.
DARWIN NELSON

Darwin Nelson’s big toothy grin won a lot of hearts.

As a boy in the Home from 1942 to 1947, his wide smile often found its way into the Home’s publicity pictures - plus Superintendent Jesse Arnold liked to take him home on Sundays to enjoy dinner with the Arnold family.

Things hadn’t always gone so well . . .

After the police had picked up 7 year old Darwin at a downtown movie theater, he was taken to the Riverview Home detention facility. Riverview, Omaha’s worst answer for homeless youth, was famous for its “strapping room”, where tape on the floor showed children who were to be punished where to lie.

Small wonder he felt “rescued” when the Masonic Home took him away from Riverview.

Darwin’s years at the Home were busy ones - there was nearby Hanscom Park to enjoy, the boys’ band, Boy Scouts, many close pals - and those Sunday dinners with the Arnolds.

He was in the Home when it moved from the Megeath House to the new cottages on 52nd Street in 1945 - over 40 years later when he visited the Scott Cottage he could still name the boys who had lived in each room back in 1947.

Darwin left to live on an uncle’s Iowa farm and he graduated from Clarion, IA High School in the early 1950’s.

A year at a Colorado college was enough for him.

He returned to Iowa, married a girl from Fort Dodge, and they had 6 children. In 1955 the Nelsons moved to Omaha, where he has run his house painting business ever since.

On a visit to the Home, Darwin was surprised and delighted to find so many of his boyhood pictures . . . he ordered copies so the boy with the big toothy grin could be enjoyed by new generations, his children and grandchildren.

MR. AND MRS. EARL K. BUCK

“Buck boys” - the term will always have a special meaning.

For almost 50 years, the Buck Cottage was the home of our youngest boys - 6 to 12 years old. Therefore, “Buck boys” were younger, littler, went to bed earlier, enjoyed fewer privileges . . . in short they were the “small fry” of the campus and were treated accordingly.

The term fell out of use in the 1990’s when we started to mix boys of all ages into all cottages.

Earl K. Buck owned and operated shoe stores in Omaha - stores which were called “Buck’s Booteries”.

He and his wife Louise lived in the fashionable Saint Regis Apartments at 621 South 37th Street, on the south edge of Omaha’s “Gold Coast” section.

Their Masonic affiliations, and their love for children, combined to make them natural friends and supporters of our Home - and during the 1941 campaign to raise funds for buildings on the new campus, Earl Buck was one of the first 3 sponsors to pledge at least $15,000.

His name is engraved in stone as a result, over the front door of the Buck Cottage. He also funded a paved play area.

Louise Buck’s frequent visits to “her boys” were marked by her thoughtfulness and caring - when she brought Christmas presents out for the 16 Buck boys, each gift was wrapped in a separate wrapping paper all its own. Each boy was different!


By the 1990’s there were still Buck Shoe Stores on Farnam Street and on South 24th Street, though the connection with the Buck family had long since ceased to exist.

But all over the country there are still “Buck boys”, testimony to the enduring memory of Earl and Louise Buck, two loving people who cared.
FELIX CARPENTER

The Megeath House was growing old, and the Masonic Home needed a new campus. One of the most desirable properties around Omaha was obtained in 1941 in a very fortunate real estate transaction.

The 60 acre Solomon Farm, out along narrow country roads northwest of town, was surrounded by a dairy farm and cornfields. There was a beautiful view in all directions, for the land was located on one of the highest hills around.

A flagpole was erected on the peak of the Hill in June, 1941 and the Home built a utility building which was to serve as headquarters for future growth at the new site.

Felix Carpenter - known to all as Carp - was hired in March, 1942, to guide the development of the new property.

For 3 years Carp and his wife were the lone residents of Inspiration Hill, living in the utility building, except for boys from the Megeath House who came out to help.

There were trees to plant, land to make ready, and crops to raise. The orchards were ripe with fruit.

It was a treat to visit and help Carp, who was a favorite at the Home. He had a special way with boys.

Carp was joined by the others in July, 1945 as the Home changed campuses. But history was to repeat, and five years later he moved to the Cooper Farm to help establish the Home’s presence on that new campus.

He retired in 1956, but continued for many years afterward the fall trips to Nebraska ranches to pick up calves donated for the growing 4-H program. Carp passed away in 1964.

“There should be a monument for Carp” more than one former boy has stated.

There is . . . in the warm memory of this caring man who helped carve our two campuses out of Nebraska farmland.

HENRY NEEF

Henry Neef was a man “of steel”.

He started his professional career as a draftsman, and later was the founder of the Gate City Steel Company.

His pride and joy was his home in the Minne Lusa section of North Omaha. Located at 2884 Iowa Street, it is a bit of a North Omaha landmark yet. Built at the junction where Iowa Street runs into Martin Avenue, it is a large, stately home with unusual steel trim ornaments.

Surrounding the pie shaped lot is a tall steel fence, and . . . true to his profession, Henry Neef’s home was made of steel as well - the steel is covered by a brick and stucco veneer which blends in with the older neighborhood.

Mr. Neef later built another home, again of steel, high on a hill on the River Road north of Omaha.

A member of John Mercer Lodge, Henry Neef became active with the Masonic Home. He served on the Board of Trustees from 1944 until his death in 1950.

Mr. Neef was Chairman of the Construction Committee for the new campus on 52nd Street - it was this committee’s proposal that the new Home start with 5 cottages for 16 boys each, the plan which was adopted by the Board.

The sponsors of the new Home’s first cottages each contributed $15,000 toward building construction; then the sponsor’s name was placed over the front door for all time.

The Henry B. Neef Cottage was one of the original three cottages built on Inspiration Hill.

Mr. Neef was President of the Board of Trustees at the time of his passing in October of 1950.

On Memorial Day, 1951, residents of the Neef Cottage held hands in a circle as Henry Neef was remembered with the planting of an oak tree - to honor the man “of steel”.

69
MABEL STOFT

“There are 4 corners on my bed, there are 4 angels overhead. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, please bless the bed that I lay on... Now I lay me down to sleep...”.

It was ritual in the Buck Cottage, as Mabel Stoft went from room to room to lead her boys in their nightly prayers.

Many people, boys and staff alike, have fond memories of this special lady who touched a lot of lives at our Home.

At 60 years of age, she lived in her comfortable home in the Minne Lusa section of North Omaha when she became an employee of the Masonic Home on August 1, 1943.

Mrs. Stoft used her experience raising children to good effect in the Megeath House, where there were almost 60 boys of all ages at any given time. She was the matron, but one of her additional duties was as breakfast cook as well.

One young fellow with special memories recalls being chosen quite often by Mrs. Stoft to make the toast for the day - by placing sliced bread on flat pans which were headed into the oven. No elaborate toaster for the Megeath House.

Then came the move to the new campus in July, 1945, and Mrs. Stoft was placed in charge of the Buck Cottage - all alone, the housemother for our 16 youngest boys!

She was up to the task.

Mrs. Stoft was made a relief housemother in 1955 and placed in charge of the clothing program. She continued to work for the Home until October, 1968 - an almost unheard of 25 years in direct child care. Retirement at age 85!

On her departure, the Board honored her with a written proclamation and by funding a trip to visit relatives.

Mabel Stoft - mother to hundreds, remembered by all who knew her. She was, indeed, up to the task.

OUR SEWING LADIES

Each year they keep coming.

Nowhere is the tradition which means so much to our Home more evident than in the actions of our Sewing Ladies.

Their story of support goes back to our very founding, when the “ladies’ touch” kept our young boys in the clothing they needed to appear in public.

Coveralls were “standard issue” for boys in the 1920’s and 1930’s, but each youngster always had his “Sunday Best” as well. There were always socks to mend, and rips or tears to repair... and patches went on patches in those days.

The gracious ladies of the Eastern Star Chapters and York Rite and Scottish Rite Women’s Clubs really got organized in 1923.

Each year, since then, they have met in an annual ritual which has become a tradition all its own.

A breakfast is held in February, hosted by the Executive Director and the Director of Campus Programs. At it the representatives of each organization “pass the hat” and draw out the month for which their group will be responsible.

One of our smallest boys salutes them all in a written proclamation which declares our gratitude for their service. And then... every Thursday morning... the ladies start coming, each group during its appointed month. Clothing to be mended has been left in the Dining Hall... the ladies come, do their work, eat lunch and leave for another week.

A very favorite Thursday is the one when the ladies bring birthday cakes so the evening meal can celebrate all the birthdays for the month together.

These wonderful ladies are a part of the tradition that makes us strong - with a sense of love and caring, and devotion to boys, which goes on from year to year to year.
RICHARD BENNETT

His was a life which ended too soon.
Richard Bennett was born in Omaha in 1932, the oldest of 7 children. Each of the Bennett children was eventually adopted out to a new family or - in Dick’s case - placed first in Riverview Home and then the Masonic Home for Boys.
He entered our Home July 23, 1943 - 10 years old.
The camera almost never caught Dick with a smile on his face - he appeared “older than his years” - but by most accounts he was a happy, outgoing child. And full of life.
Many recall his artistic ability - Japanese warplanes were a specialty - and the way he raced cars across the basement of the Scott Cottage. They tell of the time the boys strung a wire from a window to the slide in the playground, and lit model planes afire as they made their way down the wire.
Surely Mrs. Herrin, the housemother, never knew that.
Poor Mrs. Herrin, the victim of Dick Bennett’s most famous prank. One evening as she listened at the bottom of the stairs to see if the boys were quieting down in their rooms, Dick helped to lower a fishing line from the railing atop the stairway and snatched off Mrs. Herrin’s wig!
By the time she charged up the stairs and began a room to room search for the culprit, Dick had exited the window, re-entered another room by the fire escape, and was “sound asleep” when Mrs. Herrin finally got to his room.
A classic. Even Mrs. Herrin must have laughed - later.
Richard Eugene Bennett - 15 years old and with a future as bright as anyone’s - was hospitalized for a kidney ailment in February and he passed away April 15, 1948. His funeral was held in the lounge of the Shrine Cottage two days later.
A life which ended too soon, the promise of a brighter tomorrow never to be realized.
But also never to be forgotten. His grave in Forest Lawn Cemetery is visited faithfully by a few who remember, and during a recent trip to Omaha a brother and sister of Dick Bennett came to the Home . . . to look at pictures, to talk . . . and to visit the Scott and the Shrine Cottages.

CAL REICHART

“Come down out of that tree!” yelled Cal Reichart.
“You can’t make me!” came the response.
“That was all I needed to hear” Cal declared about 40 years later. “The only thing slowing me down going up that tree was taking off my belt at the same time . . .”.
Youth care - 1950’s style - was applied quickly, and the two were the best of friends ever after.
Cal Reichart started work at the Home in 1948, when he was hired as Assistant Superintendent. The 52nd Street campus was only a few years old, and a “new” Home was emerging.
He always carried a thermometer with him in those days - you never knew when that would come in handy - and at the end of his work day each evening he made his nightly rounds, stopping at each cottage to make sure everyone was alright.
A favorite visiting place was the stairway in the Buck Cottage, listening to our smallest boys say their prayers upstairs - Cal’s eyes would moisten decades later as he mentioned this special memory.
There was never a truer friend to the boys in our Home.
Cal and Leona left the Home for a few years and then returned, to become houseparents in the Herd Cottage and later at the Cooper Farm.
Retirement came in 1985, and the Reicharts left Inspiration Hill for an apartment in northwest Omaha.
But Cal visits often - how else could he make a squirrel feeder for the Buck Cottage, bring ice cream bars or watermelon for the lawn crew on the hottest days, or help in the 4-H gardening project?
He was honored in 1993 when an annual award was started in his name - the Cal Reichart Hard Worker Award.
Cal Reichart . . . one of a kind . . . an OHB Classic.
**BOB COOPER**

It was June, 1951, and hundreds of people had gathered for a barbecue and a chance to see the boys’ new living quarters at our new farm campus.

The speaker was too long-winded in his praise of the man who had made the whole event possible.

Bob Cooper heard enough.

“Pipe down, let’s eat” he bellowed, abruptly cutting short the formal part of the day’s program.

That was the way Bob Cooper was, a no-nonsense “let’s get it done” type of man. That was the way it had been 3 years earlier when his barber at the Livestock Exchange Building had first interested him in a home for boys on North 52nd Street.

Cooper then visited on a Sunday morning and he chuckled when Cal Reichart guessed we could handle as many as 7 calves in our rabbit hutch. Seven calves were donated to the Home shortly thereafter for the start of a 4-H program.

But a rabbit hutch wouldn’t do for what Bob Cooper had in mind - in 1950 he donated his 80 acre stock farm on Mormon Bridge Road to the Home for its second campus.

And beginning in 1951, hundreds and hundreds of boys came to enjoy the advantages of life on the farm, doing daily chores, working with animals, away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

Bob Cooper . . . cattleman, bank owner, and a friend of boys . . . died in an automobile crash in early 1957.

He is buried in the family plot in the cemetery in Pilger, NE.

The Cooper Memorial Farm - 4-H training ground, popular picnic location for thousands of visitors every year, and the home of Cooper Village - stands as his monument.

**ED YOUNG**

Ed Young is grateful, and he shows it.

His association with the Home goes back to 1950 when - with brothers Dennis and Ron - he came here to live.

The association continues today - when we wanted a narrator for our second video, “A TIME FOR PRIDE”, thoughts turned to Ed, who was delighted to help us out.

And each summer, as Omaha hosts the 8 teams competing for the championship of the College World Series, Ed is instrumental in getting one of the teams to come to the Home for a steak fry and for an evening of mixing with our boys.

It is one of the year’s highlights here, and no one has more fun in the crowd of college athletes, coaches and our boys than Ed Young.

Ed graduated from high school in 1958 and then attended the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where he received a B.S. degree in Business Administration.

After college he worked for the phone company for a few years, had a brief career in the radio business, and then, he says “I became intrigued with real estate business and decided to enter that field”.

It was a choice well made.

In real estate since 1971, Ed is Chairman of the Board of Home Real Estate, Omaha’s largest residential real estate company.

Wife Diane - they were married 30 years ago - and Ed recently moved to a new home in a Southwest Omaha subdivision developed by, of course, Home Real Estate. They have 3 children and are “proud grandparents”.

“I am forever grateful to the Home for the care and attention provided me . . .” says Ed Young - and he shows that gratitude in more ways than one.
MARGARET STASKA

In her own words . . . “a frightened widow walked up the cinder path through the pasture and made her way around the Circle and to the front door of the Shrine Cottage . . .”.

It was September, 1949, and Margaret Staska had walked to the Home to apply for a job. She was hired as a secretary by Superintendent John Glassey, and together they worked out of the Home’s “office”, a small room just inside that Shrine Cottage front door.

It must have been meant to be, for Margaret Staska was to spend the rest of her working days - 35 years - here.

One thing was for sure, the “frightened widow” who walked up the cinder path was to put her mark on the Home.

Margaret became an institution . . . to more than 1,400 boys she helped raise, to the many bosses she outlasted, and to others she encountered as she scurried about the Home’s business.

A fast pace was her trademark, for it was not her style to waste time. In one famous episode she entered one door of the Executive Director’s office, stated her opinion, and got an “OK” before she was out the other door - ready to tackle another pressing issue.

To most this lovely lady was known, simply, as “Staska”.


Margaret Staska retired in 1984, and a few hundred friends and associates hid in the basement at the Cooper Farm to honor her with a surprise “This Is Your Life” salute.

“I feel that the Good Lord blessed me when He sent me up that path in ‘49”, she was to write later.

How many people shared in that blessing!

JOHN CHANGSTROM

The Home needed a more businesslike approach.

We had become a big business, after all. It was 1952, and we had two flourishing campuses, a nationwide base of support, and the boy count was at an all time high.

It was time to put this new force, this new, growing “national” home for boys, on a sound, businesslike approach.

John Changstrom, a bank vice president and member of our Board of Directors since 1929, was appointed in an extraordinary move to become General Manager of the Home.

In this function, by Board Resolution he was given “full authority to manage and supervise all operations of and all personnel employed by this Corporation”.

John Changstrom went about his business by separating the Home’s functions into working departments, establishing an independent fund raising subsidiary - the Inspiration Hill Department - and by establishing budgetary and monetary controls over all phases of the business.

It was, truly, a businessman’s businesslike approach . . . just what was necessary as the Home was growing to maturity.

His two year stint as General Manager capped nearly 30 years of service to the Home: Board member 1929-57. . . Treasurer 1929-54 . . . a leader in acquiring the 52nd and Ames property in 1941, selling the Megeath property in 1945, starting the endowment fund in 1946, and founding the trademark name “Inspiration Hill” in 1953.

There was a “John Changstrom Day” celebration at the Home in 1954, and an appreciation dinner was held on May Day, 1960, to honor him for his many years of dedication.

John Changstrom, the author of our modern day procedures and organizational structure, moved to Englewood, FL where he passed away in 1984 at 100 years of age.
HARRY BRUNER

“Charlie, you can never thank people too much . . .”

That was Harry Bruner’s advice to Charles Amidon, his successor as Executive Director in 1976.

Mr. Bruner should have known, too, for he was the man who guided our Home from 1949 through 1975 - from an Omaha based children’s home with a few thousand Masonic supporters . . . to a “national” home with hundreds of thousands of supporters all over the nation. Many people to thank, and often.

William Harrison Bruner was, in the 1940’s, active as a Boy Scout leader, and a pillar of Kountze Memorial Lutheran Church, Optimist International, Florence Masonic Lodge and the Scottish Rite.

He was chosen in 1949 to be the Home’s Executive Director following the sudden death of Jesse Arnold.

The next 26 years were a storybook in child care . . . and in administration of a boys’ home. To the millions of people who responded to his appeal letters in that time, he was “W. Harry Bruner”, the man whose letters - often sprinkled with Biblical phrases - touched the nation’s heart.

To the boys here, he was “Mr. Bruner”, a friend they could count on. To the employees, “Mr. B”, and to the Board, well, “Harry Bruner” was their kind of man.

In his tenure, we grew to 2 sites, doubled the size of each campus, expanded the opportunities offered to our boys, and set our Home on a solid financial base.

Everyone loved Mr. Bruner . . . he retired in 1975, and our newest residential cottage bears his name.

His death, a tragedy during a blizzard in 1981, brought us all to tears. In his memory, we recall Matthew 25:21: “Well done thou good and faithful servant . . . Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord . . .”.

TIM STREITWIESER

When Tim Streitwieser takes on a job, he does it so well that others won’t let him quit . . . ever.

Several Alumni Reunions ago (we hold nationwide reunions every 3 years) Tim was a committee of one to make all the food arrangements for our hundreds of guests.

Now, every 3rd year . . . “That’s Tim’s job” is all that needs be said in our Reunion planning sessions. And Tim, as usual, did his job - and well - at our August, 1995 Reunion.

Putting a vote of confidence in Tim Streitwieser is nothing new.

He came to our Home in 1962 at the age of 10, with younger brother Kevin and older brother Jary - from a Nebraska town so small it eludes all road map listings. And that’s small.

Tim established a fine record at the Home, setting good times while running for the track team and posting high marks in school too - steady honor roll marks.

“Tim is one of the finest all around boys that we have had at the Home” reads a counselor’s report in his file - that vote of confidence from a longtime employee of our Home.

After finishing high school, Tim moved on to the University of Nebraska - Omaha with help from the Harrison Scholarship set up in the Home’s scholarship fund.

He found time to court future wife Bev during his college days - they were married in 1975 and a degree in Sociology came in late 1976. There are two sons, Tim and Jeff.

Since 1978 Tim has been employed by the Omaha Fire Department. And in, 1986, the Department’s vote of confidence resulted in his promotion to Fire Captain.

Very soft spoken, Tim is a quiet, effective worker at any task he takes on. It can truly be said he gets those votes of confidence the old fashioned way . . . he earns them!
FRED BROMLEY

Fred Bromley came from the East Coast, bringing with him a pronounced accent, and his never ending sense of humor. “This would be a great place to work if it weren’t for the kids and the telephones” . . . he was famous for that one. Or, taking a tape measure, “Let me see how long I’ve been here.”

Coming from a children’s home in Kansas, he was named our Assistant Dean of Boys in 1963. Six years later he was appointed Dean of Boys, a position he held for 12 years.

The years were not dull - hundreds and hundreds of boys went through the Home during Fred Bromley’s time, but he was a man whose path they dared not cross.

Of course, the Dining Hall was always alive with activity around dinner time. And there Fred Bromley sat, in his corner chair in the foyer, a half an hour before and a half an hour after mealtime . . . keeping the peace.

For minor infractions against the law, a boy stood under the clock in the Dining Hall. For something more serious, he was put “on campus” - no privileges and working without pay.

For the most serious problems, there were quiet rooms for the boys to be in, time to think about the behaviors which got them there - or unusual clean up jobs at Cooper Farm.

One can still see Fred Bromley - ringing the Dining Hall’s bell to get total silence, the proper atmosphere for prayer.

Fred lived with his wife and four daughters in the High Twelve residence - one of his proudest moments came as he walked daughter Emily across the campus to her wedding on the patio where our flagpole stands.

He left in 1981 and eventually returned to his home state of Connecticut, where his accent doesn’t stand out, there aren’t “those kids and the telephones” . . . and he doesn’t have to keep the peace anymore.

JOHN LIIKE

In late 1969 a gift of $2,000 was received to start an annual award at The Omaha Home for Boys.

The stated intent was to honor the Home’s outstanding 8th grade boy, selected each year by a vote of the staff.

Jack Liike had come to us in 1963, a 7 year old boy from Iowa. He compiled a fine record in his first 6 years here and was “a natural” to be, in 1970, the first boy to receive the very prestigious Wayne E. Decker Award.

He was “a natural” in other ways as well - he was a whiz in the beginning electronics classes in high school, he attained the rank of Eagle Scout, and he was our highest ranking senior in the Benson High Class of 1974.

Following high school, Jack joined the Navy. He attended several years of electronics schools before service on the submarine U.S.S. Lapon out of Norfolk, VA.

When his enlistment ended in 1981, Jack decided to stay in the field of electronics, and to remain in Virginia.

He obtained an Associates Degree in Electronics Technology and began a career with Bendix Electronics. After 14 years with the firm, Jack has been - since 1992 - a Maintenance and Production Supervisor.

He is currently working toward a longtime goal - a college degree in Business Administration/Computer Information.

Jack has remained single through it all and resides in Hampton, VA, with hobbies of music, animals (2 parrots, 2 cats and a dog), snow skiing and bicycling.

Jack Liike - our first “Outstanding Eighth Grader” winner a quarter of a century ago - had never been able to attend a Home Reunion before this year’s Special 75th Anniversary celebration in August.

And were we delighted to welcome him “Home” at last . . .
JOHN SAVAGE

Thank heavens he couldn’t stick a needle in people.

John Savage, born in Denver in 1905, moved to Omaha as a youngster. After
Omaha’s Tech High School he entered the University of Nebraska as a pre-med student.
While he wanted a medical career, he found he could not stick anyone with a needle - so a change of plans became necessary. He turned to the field of journalism.

A reporting job turned to a career in photography when it developed that no photographer could - or would - accompany him into the heat of battle to get the picture. “He thought nothing of risking his life for the picture” said one editor.

He became one of the premier news photographers in the country . . . a photographer of presidents, the winner of many awards. His pictures appeared in national magazines.

After 48 years in the newspaper business, mostly with the Omaha World Herald, 50,000 negatives from pictures he took were donated to the Western Heritage Museum.

It is one of the finest collections in the country.

John Savage’s Masonic ties - membership in Covert Lodge and active participation in the Shrine and the Scottish Rite - acquainted him with The Omaha Home for Boys, and he became one of its strongest supporters.

He served as a member of the Home’s Board of Trustees for an 8 year span, from 1977 to 1985.

And he was a leader in the annual Maintenance Fundraising Campaign for well over a quarter of a century. Senator Savage (he served 2 terms in the state legislature as well) was a familiar face at campaign dinners until his death in 1989.

How fortunate for so many that a dislike of needles altered the life’s path of this journalist, photographer, public servant and friend of the Home.

MIKE WESTPHALEN

The late 1960’s were troubled times around the country - assassinations, war protests, riots in the cities, youth rebellion . . . everyone seemed to be mad at everyone else.

Just the time, in 1968, when 13 year old Mike Westphalen and his older brother Tony entered The Omaha Home for Boys.

Mike and some other Cooper Farm fellows decided to make their mark - their statement of youth rebellion, however mild - in music. They entered their band in the local 4-H contest.

Only John Hlavka’s account of this contest elsewhere in the book - his vivid description of what took place, and the reactions that followed - do it justice.

There was Mike banging on the drums, shirtless due to the heat but with a necklace of chains draped around him - not the image 4-H officials, who anticipated patriotic or religious themes, wanted to portray.

No first place ribbon here, no matter how much the crowd had cheered the performance. A white ribbon, last place, was the boys’ reward for daring to step out of the mold.

But the music went on. The fellows continued to practice, and following high school graduation, their band played spots in Iowa and Nebraska until 1977.

They then went their separate ways . . . Mike got married and settled down in a comfortable house in the Florence section of Omaha - 2 miles due east of Cooper Farm.

The necklace of chains is gone, and Mike is now a welder, a solid asset to the community in which he lives.

Whether coaching his children’s athletic teams, carting players to games, serving spaghetti dinners in a church basement, starring in the annual Florence Melodrama, or serving on the OHB Alumni Committee, he’s always there.

A child of the 60’s grown to a leader of the 90’s.
JOHN OWENS

A most interesting character was Mr. John Owens. “Character” meant in the very best sense of the word.

John Owens was born in the Deep South, one of several children in a large family. He served in the uniform of his country - he was particularly proud of that - and he moved to Omaha where he became, ultimately, a chauffeur.

In 1973, John Owens took his last job - van driver for The Omaha Home for Boys. Here, his job was to pick up the morning mail, make runs to and from businesses the Home had dealings with . . . and of course to transport the boys around to medical and dental appointments, or to special meetings or obligations. He was always on the move - maybe at a pace he chose to set - but always on the move. Some of the outrageous caps he wore became OHB legends in their own right, and the high pitched “hee hee hee” that sounded when he chuckled to himself cannot be done justice to in written description.

But John Owens CARED, and when he had the undisputed attention of a boy in their trips across town somewhere, the youngster knew he had a friend. John always supported the Home, and he came to its special events “dressed to the nines”. The triple lot yard around his home, while not in the best neighborhood in Omaha, was as neat as a pin, as immaculate as any around. His yard and his old Thunderbird - and wife Becky - were his pride and joy.

John and Becky’s farewell gift from the boys at his 1985 retirement was - appropriately - a long limousine ride around town followed by dinner in the best restaurant around.

Six years later, when Becky called to say “our John’s not going to make it”, we paused in sorrow, remembering all this kind and quiet man had meant to everyone at our Home.

ALPHEUS MAPLE

“Good morning, Al Maple here . . .” the distinguished voice resounded over the phone.

It was to be our last direct conversation with Col. Alpheus Maple, a longtime friend of the Home.

By 1993, the Colonel had outlived everyone in his family, and he was calling to see if the Home would accept the memorabilia he had collected over a long, colorful life of 90 years plus. We could tell there was little time left to plan.

We were proud, of course, to agree to receive the entire Estate of Col. Maple which was to consist of furniture, jewelry, guns, books, artwork, china, foot lockers whose decals told of journeys around the world, articles he wrote, and his memoirs and pictures of a fascinating life.

Following college at the University of Chicago (we have his football season ticket for the 1923 season) Alpheus Maple led a life of many varied interests. He was a pilot, worked in New York City in public relations, he was a professional photographer, an artist, and a bridge builder for the U.S. Army in Africa in World War II.

Alpheus Maple was a Mason, and he was born in Nebraska - two good reasons, he thought, to support our Home. He funded scholarships for our boys in his late wife’s name in the 1980’s and he left funds for two $5,000 scholarships to be awarded annually from now on.

Mementoes from the Colonel grace many of our buildings, and the prized foot lockers have accompanied Maple scholarship winners on to their chosen colleges.

Not long after Col. Maple’s phone call, we received the fateful news from Virginia. This great friend of boys was buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery, August, 1993.
**QUYEN DAVID TU**

On October 12, 1965, the 45th birthday of The Omaha Home for Boys was celebrated happily in Omaha.

On that same day, half a world away, Quyen David Tu was born in Saigon into a world of war, family disruption and - at times - starvation. In the roughest of times, wild dogs and stray cats were eaten in order to survive.

South Vietnam fell in 1975, and 9 1/2 year old Quyen made it out just in time . . . he was brought to this country knowing 2 English words - “Omaha” - the city where he was to live, and “Conroy” - the family which would take him in.

But Quyen Conroy’s rocky times were not over - after problems within the family he was admitted to The Omaha Home for Boys in September, 1979.

On more than one occasion, Quyen “tested the system” at the Home. At one point he was near the end of his rope; only a handwritten note to the Dean of Boys, asking for one more chance to make good, kept him here.

He became a U.S. citizen in December, 1982, graduated from Benson High School in 1983, and immediately went to the University of Nebraska - Lincoln to study accounting.

Four years of hard work, with a B+ average even while working part-time, earned Quyen a degree in 1987. He then set his sights on California to be near a brother, but first there was an emotional farewell at the Home . . . his thank you for “a second chance, and even a third chance, to make something of myself”.

Quyen David Tu, who was pictured in the February, 1988 “Changing Times” magazine, now holds a fine accounting job in the Los Angeles area.

His life - from the streets of Saigon, at the Home, and in California - is the fulfillment of the American Dream.

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**MINNIE BEEDLE**

Someone should write a book about Minnie Beedle . . .

A more staunch supporter of the Home never lived.

Minnie Beedle was widowed at a relatively young age and left to raise her children alone. Her children . . . and countless numbers of the Juvenile Court’s children as well.

For years she was a waitress in one of Omaha’s larger downtown hotels and then went home to care for her own family and to take in wards of the Court to raise as well.

“Someone had to take them in - we’re all God’s children, you know” she would say in later years.

Her reward, in addition to the small stipend county government gave for such care, was calls, visits and loving “thank you” notes and letters for decades afterwards.

It was our Home’s good fortune - and the boys who lived here from 1973 to 1989 - that Minnie Beedle came our way.

She was the evening phone receptionist, she coordinated the volunteer sewing ladies who come in each Thursday, and she spent the better part of every August “fitting boys to clothes” for the new school year. Each boy was allotted only a certain amount of clothing for the new year . . . and woe be unto him if, as occasionally happened, he tried to put one over on Minnie Beedle. No way.

Schoolgirls called during Minnie’s watch to talk to our boys - a no-no, which Minnie took delight in quashing. “They’re up to no good, those varmints” she’d laugh.

Minnie’s fudge, jellies and pumpkin bread were famous - her gifts going to boys who needed a lift after a hard time.

Boys cried on her shoulder, and she cried back with them.

Minnie Beedle retired her singsong “Omaha Home for Boys” phone greeting in 1989; she passed away in 1993, and when she did a colorful part of our history left us forever.
FUNDRAISERS - OUR CAMPAIGN WORKERS

The Masonic Home needed additional help . . .

It had been financed from its start by pledges of support from many local Masonic organizations. But only a few years later, some groups could no longer meet their pledges.

The minutes of the Board of Directors show that it was decided in 1926 to start solicitation each fall of INDIVIDUAL members as well. It was to become a fall ritual at the Home - the annual Maintenance Campaign.

The Maintenance Campaign is misnamed - it has nothing to do with maintaining buildings and grounds.

Rather, it has EVERYTHING to do with raising boys.

Its name aside, this yearly fundraising event - carried on by workers representing the various Lodges who “hit the streets” to secure gifts from individuals and business concerns - was the lifeblood of the Home for decades.

In the earliest years, the campaign provided the bulk of the funding for the Home’s program . . . and well into the 1950’s it still provided at least half the annual budget.

The nationwide direct mail program changed all that . . . but the Maintenance Campaign exists to this day.

Its workers are our best local goodwill ambassadors.

And each fall, as a new campaign begins by setting goals and distributing prospect cards, the commitment and dedication of this army of volunteers is charged anew.

And the names of some of the storied leaders of the past - Claude Clifton, Chet Winslow, Wes Lindahl, Rudy Larsen, and Frank and Marie Dinges - are linked with current leaders - Harold Irvin, Ed McLaughlin, Lyle Ward, Bob Ihnen, Roy Ehlers, and Ted Phelps - in a common bond . . . helping children in need.

And that is what, in its purest sense, The Omaha Home for Boys is all about . . . people helping people.

TRUMAN ARMELL

“When I grow up”, Truman said in a serious tone, “I’m going to tell my kids I grew up the hard way”.

“How’s that, Truman” the Stanleys asked.

“At The Omaha Home for Boys!”

“Oh, Truman” Carol Stanley, his former housemother at the Home, said as she put her arms around him.

It was August, 1992, and 14 year old Truman Armell had returned to visit - the occasion was the Home’s 4th nationwide Reunion. As our youngest returning alum he was among those interviewed and pictured in the local newspaper.

Well, one young man’s memory of “growing up the hard way” was recalled a bit differently by others - who remember the very quiet and very shy Native American youth who came to the Home in 1986.

Maybe it was the security of a more structured life in the Buck Cottage, 3 hot meals a day . . . and the nightly hug from his houseparents that Truman always looked forward to.

Maybe it was the fun he had appearing in the Home’s video, “A TIME TO CARE”, and jumping on the trampoline.

Maybe it was the daily swims at the Recreation Center . . . or the hours he spent playing outside, down by the lilac bushes, entertaining himself . . . or the fact that Truman actually began to like school.

Whatever it was “growing up the hard way” stood Truman in good stead - and in 1989 he left the Home to live with his mother and little sister in Winnebago, NE.

When he returned for the 1992 Reunion, he told of improvement at school - and as this is written plans are underway for learning a trade in the Job Corps.

* * *

Truman Armell, at 17 years of age, is fitting for the conclusion of “An OHB Gallery”, for his story is as typical as any of our thousands of boys . . . young people who came to the Home . . . made the most of what it had to offer them . . . and then left, in their time, with the prayers and best wishes of friends from all over the country.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This history book was undertaken as a “labor of love”, to chronicle the first 75 years of The Omaha Home for Boys . . . its people, its events large and small, and its moments happy and sad.

A special debt of gratitude is owed to those who were here earlier, for they cared enough to provide for - and then carefully preserve - photographs, mementoes and printed materials from the Home’s earliest decades.

A treasure chest of historical information was just waiting to be used.

The minutes of the Board of Directors starting with October 12, 1920, and the 1970 booklet by Wray M. Scott were invaluable sources of information.

If this book has any particular merit, however, it is due to the many individuals who directly aided in its writing. The Home IS people.

Many thanks to all - they are far too numerous to mention or to single out - who shared their memories whether by telephone or by faxed messages, by mail - all the way from hastily scribbled notes to 15 page letters, by taped messages, or in personal visits, from fleeting comments to 3 and 4 hours visits.

All contributed to the spirit of this book, and all were truly appreciated.

John E. Carter