

A History of Bethany Children's Home

Although today Bethany is a regional ministry serving hundreds of children, youth, and families across Eastern Pennsylvania, it began on a Civil War battlefield as the dream of one man, The Rev. Emmanuel Boehringer.

During the summer of 1862, Rev. Boehringer was making his way north from Norfolk, Virginia through Confederate Army lines. On his way to Philadelphia, he arrived at Sharpsburg, Maryland in mid-September. He was confronted with the Battle of Antietam's horrifying aftermath. 25,000 dead and wounded lay scattered across the countryside.

Helping to dress wounds over the next few days, Boehringer heard the fears of the dying. Showing him photographs of sons and daughters, they asked, "What will become of them?" The dream of an orphan's home was born.

Arriving in Philadelphia, Boehringer began to show colleagues the tattered photos collected at Antietam. "Veterans' homes, veterans' hospitals, but what about the children?" he asked. Confident that help would come, he began taking orphans into his Philadelphia home at 702 Morris Street. On September 21, 1863, Bethany's first resident, six year-old Caroline Engel, arrived at the Boehringer home.

The home's original name was "The Orphans Home of the Shepherd of the Lambs."

Growing pains

By 1864, the Boehringer home was too small for the growing orphan family. A large old house was found in the Bridesburg area of Philadelphia. The sale price was \$5,500. One hundred persons were found willing to donate \$50 each and the building was bought. On July 13, 1864, the move from Morris Street to Bridesburg was made.

Rev. Boehringer was still not satisfied. Instead of one building housing fifty to a hundred children, he envisioned smaller houses, with about a dozen boys or girls.

In September, construction began on what seemed to be the first of many buildings supervised by Boehringer. But on September 21st, his wife, Christiana died of jaundice. Just five weeks later, Boehringer himself was dead at age forty-one of "nervous fever."

The Move to Womelsdorf

By 1867, the Bridesburg site was proving too expensive. The buildings were not well suited to the children's needs and both children and staff suffered from chills and fever a larger part of the year. The Board of Managers decided to look for another location.

The Board learned that Manderbach Springs, a summer resort at the foot of South Mountain near Womelsdorf, was going to be sold. On June 27, 1867, the Board of Managers arrived at Womelsdorf to inspect the property. It was exactly what they wanted.

The price was \$34,000, but the Home's treasury had less than \$50. The hotel owner agreed to lower the price to \$33,000. Each Board member pledged to contribute \$1,000. With that, the decision was made. They would purchase the property. On October 1, 1867, the Home moved from Philadelphia to Womelsdorf.

A New Name

By 1871, the "Orphans' Home of the Shepherd of the Lambs" was settled in Womelsdorf, and the debt had been retired. It was also becoming clear the name was just too long to be practical.

One day when Dr. Benjamin Bausman, President of the Board of Managers, was visiting the home, he was overheard to say, "When I come here, I feel a holy atmosphere hovering over this place."

Surely the Lord must love to dwell here.”

A place where the Lord loved to be? Where could that be except the home of Mary and Martha in the town of Bethany? The idea was given to the Board for consideration, and on October 21, 1873, the name was officially changed. The home has been known as Bethany ever since.

HISTORY TIMELINE

The Home was started by REV. EMMANUEL BOEHRINGER, first superintendent

September 21, 1863 to October 25, 1864

Date of Founding – September 21, 1863

First contribution of \$1.50 was received from J. Pflantz of Buffalo, N.Y.

REV. JOHN GANTENBEIN, second superintendent – November 1864 to August 30, 1866

Home moved from Philadelphia to Bridesburg, Pa. on July 13, 1864. Incorporated by Legislature of Pennsylvania on February 17, 1865

REV. D. Y. HEISLER, third superintendent – August 30, 1866 to October 1868

Property in Womelsdorf bought in 1867 for \$33,000 - house and 20 acres 65 perches of land. Home removed to Womelsdorf, Pennsylvania on October 1

REV. D. B. ALBRIGHT, fourth superintendent – November 12, 1868 to April 1, 1886

1873 Name changed from “Orphans Home of Shepherd of the Lambs” to “Bethany Orphans Home”; 60 acres and 65 perches of land (and farmer’s house) purchased for \$10,600

1881 Main building destroyed by fire on November 11th

1882 Main building rebuilt and refurbished at cost of approximately \$30,000

1885 Barn erected at cost of \$2,313.15

REV. THOMAS M. YUNDT, fifth superintendent – March 25, 1886 to April 1904

1886 The Ladies Visiting and Advisory Committee organized October 6, 1886

1887 Laundry building erected, costing \$1,300.00

1889 Connected with Long Distance telephone

1891 Santee Hall built and furnished at cost of \$18,000.00; 7 acres & 78 perches of woodland bought for \$524.12

1894 Large Bell – Gift of Sophie Gelbach installed on roof of Administration Building

1895 Boy’s workshop erected at cost of \$1,200.00

1896 Frick Memorial Cottage built by Mrs. H.M. Housekeeper for \$6,000.00

1897 New water works & reservoir built at a cost of \$1,400.00

1900 Spring-house & pavilion built and improvements about spring for \$795.61

1901 New school house built for \$9,485.13

REV. W.F. MORE, sixth superintendent – July 14, 1904 to April 7, 1927

1905 Bricker property bought for \$1,285; Steam heat plant in Santee Hall cost \$592.80; Farm house enlarged & improved.

1906 Silo built

1907 Leinbach Cottage built for \$12,587.87

1909 Electric lighting introduced

- 1910 Memorial Gateway erected \$1,599.75
- 1911 Applegate Lodge built by Mrs. W.F. More in memory of her parents \$4,678.00
- 1912 Infirmary built for \$7,349.30
- 1913 Bausman Memorial Church built & furnished for \$10,902.93
- 1914 Reservoir enlarged to 80,000 gallons
- 1915 Bausman Memorial Church destroyed by fire, December 19th
- 1916 Bausman Memorial Church rebuilt, \$5,992.94
- 1917 Tower Clock donated and installed by B.O. H. League, Hains Reformed Church
- 1918 Water softening plant installed \$2,348.24
- 1919 Dietrich Cottage built by D. Wellington Dietrich in memory of his parents, \$23,030.42
- 1920 Anniversary Pavilion built
- 1921 Pipe Organ placed in church by W.O. Lerch
- 1922 Catherine Moyer Cottage built by Walter W. Moyer in memory of his mother, \$23,000.00
- 1923 Machinery Hall built; Light pedestal and flag pole donated and erected B.O.H. Circle, Allentown, Pa.
- 1925 REV. WALTER R. CLARK, first assistant superintendent – April 9, 1925 to November 1, 1926
- 1926 REV. C. HARRY KEHM, second assistant superintendent – April 16, 1926 to April 7, 1927 – Spring covered and spring bubblers erected \$400.00; Private telephone installed; D. Frank Knerr Cottage built \$40,000.00; Heating plant installed, cost \$10,375.00

REV. C. HARRY KEHM, seventh superintendent, April 7, 1927 to December 17, 1929

- 1927 Memorial pump house built by Albert R. Laubach and children
- 1929 Death of Superintendent, Rev. C. Harry Kehm, December 17, 1929

REV. HENRY E. GEBHARD, eighth superintendent, May 2, 1930 to November 1, 1943

- 1930 Death of Rev. W. F. More, D.D. Superintendent Emeritus, September 4th; Recreational department organized; Refrigerator built \$5,000.00
- 1931 Spiess building erected \$5,000.00; Ira S. Reed Cottage erected and furnished
- 1932 Lebo farm (6 acres) purchased \$5,500.00; Fire lane cut around property
- 1933 Special education for retarded children introduced
- 1934 Emergency lighting system and fire alarm installed
- 1935 Centralized store room built
- 1936 Centralized heating system installed. Automatic stoker in Church and Applegate Lodge
- 1937 Front campus tiled for drainage
- 1938 Bausman Memorial Church and Administration Chapel renovated
- 1939 New barn built; Modern water softener installed in pump house
- 1940 Farm land bought from Dr. Horne (4 ¾ acres); Three acres woodland donated by Dr. Horne
- 1941 Tennis & volleyball courts built on front campus

REV. R. S. VANDEVERE, ninth superintendent – elected November 5, 1943, assumed duties February 1, 1944 to May 30, 1954

- 1944 Full-time social worker initiated; Retaining wall and new lawn built on campus

- 1945 Main entrance road rebuilt and macadamized
- 1946 Philadelphia Ladies Auxiliary renovated Santee Hall dining room; Back road macadamized
- 1947 Chimes and Public Address system installed by Ladies Committee
- 1948 New reinforced concrete Anniversary stage built; New laundry installed
- 1949 Sewage disposal plant installed, cost \$40,000.00; New flag pole donated by Carpenter Steel Co., Reading, Pa.
- 1950 More Memorial Park completed and dedicated
- 1951 Spring shrubbery planted by Ladies Committee as a memorial to Mrs. R. S. Vandevere
- 1952 Complete renovation of Superintendent's office
- 1953 Complete renovation of Infirmary
- 1954 New refrigerator plant installed in Spiese building; Complete renovation of main kitchen

REV. GARNET O. ADAMS, tenth superintendent, elected March 18, 1954; assumed duties June 1, 1954 to July, 1985

- 1954 Enlargement of Board of Managers to include Synodical Representatives
- 1955 Complete renovation of Frick Cottage; New Boiler House & Heating plant completed
- 1956 New electrical service installed throughout campus; Baseball field built; Adel Naomi Brobst Cottage built by Mrs. Francis Brobst in memory of her daughter, \$108,000.00; Knerr Cottage renovated; Living room established in Santee Hall; Social worker added to staff
- 1957 Moyer Cottage renovated and redecorated; Pasteurization of milk started;
- 1958 Name changed to Bethany Children's Home
- 1959 Eck & Knorr Cottages completed and occupied at cost of \$240,000; Administration building no longer used as residence hall; Peters and Zartman Lodges, new farm houses built and old farm houses demolished; Dietrich Cottage renovated; Leinbach Cottage renovated
- 1960 New swimming pool constructed; Central library established in Administration building; Administration building renovated; Temporary Emergency Care Program established
- 1961 Recreation room added to Frick Cottage; Heating plant converted to oil
- 1962 Ceramics Program added to Home Life Program; Charter changed to provide for conference representatives
- 1963 Centennial observance; Bausman Memorial Church renovated; Recreation center completed in church basement
- 1964 Use of school house for school purposes discontinued; Front road named Vandevere Drive
- 1965 Infirmary renovated – dental clinic located in infirmary; Skating rink completed on campus; Hess Cottage constructed at cost of \$137,000.00
- 1966 Largest class in Bethany history (17) graduated from high school
- 1967 Ski run on campus built by boys; Dubbs Cottage for Boys completed at cost of \$140,000
- 1968 Smith Lodge for superintendent's family completed; Dietrich Cottage renovated; Junior Advisory Board organized for Bethany; On-campus school program started; Barn destroyed by fire
- 1969 New barn completed; Knerr Cottage renovated as educational-activity center
- 1970 Second on-campus school class started; First Bethany conference for ministers held

- 1971 Bethany helps to organize Pennsylvania Association of Children's Institutions; Plans approved for replacement of Administration & Santee buildings; Cub Scout programs started at Bethany; Putting green built on front campus
- 1972 Addition of regular psychiatric consultation services; Conversion of heating system to individual cottage units
- 1973 Administration building and Santee Hall demolished; Work started on new Administration – Social Service – Food Service building
- 1974 Leinbach Cottage renovated; Tent camping added to program
- 1975 Butkofsky-Wagner-Santee Hall completed at cost of \$740,000.00; Consumer education program started
- 1976 Tony Ross, Bethany senior, wins state championship in hurdling; Victor Ramos, Bethany senior, named to All-State Soccer team
- 1977 Two new all-weather surface tennis courts constructed on the front campus; Dubbs Cottage renovated after fire damaged the building
- 1978 Bethany takes over operation of Tubman Center for Girls in Philadelphia as a group home; New cottage planned to replace Frick Cottage; Campus schoolhouse torn down to make way for new cottage
- 1979 Frick Cottage closed as cottage residence
- 1980 Keck Cottage constructed
- 1981 Bethany Counseling Ministry started in Pennsylvania Southeast, Penn Northeast, and Penn Central Conferences of the United Church of Christ
- 1982 Individual Service Plans program started at Bethany Children's Home
- 1983 Reed Cottage renovated
- 1984 Frick Cottage renovated – changed to activity center

REV. HAROLD A. HENNING, eleventh superintendent – elected September 5, 1985, assumed duties December 23, 1985 to September 2000

- 1985 Berks I.U. leases Knerr Building for Special Education classes
- 1986 Council for Health & Human Service Ministries of the U.C.C. names Eugene & Patti Havlik "Employees of the Year" for 1986; Council for Health & Human Service Ministries of the U.C.C. names the Rev. LeRoy Brumbaugh, President of the Board of Managers as "Trustee of the Year" for 1986; Plans initiated for reorganization of Bethany Children's Home structure
- 1987 Ground breaking service for new gymnasium activity building – May 20, 1987; Alternative education program developed with the cooperation of Conrad Weiser Area School District
- 1988 Mark Groff earns 6th place in State AA Wrestling championship; Additional silo erected on the farm; New Bethany logo adopted in commemoration of 125th Anniversary; Dedication of Adams Brumbaugh Center, May 22, 1988; Storage building constructed; Dubbs and Knorr Cottages renovated
- 1989 Bethany Planned Giving Ministry implemented; Reed Shelter Care Ministry implemented; Life Skills program for all ages implemented
- 1990 Leinbach Cottage renovated
- 1991 Short Term Intensive Treatment programs started
- 1992 Knorr Cottage becomes a cottage for girls in the Short Term program; Knorr and Eck Cottages renovated; P. Buckley Moss, internationally known artist, visits Bethany; Japanese professors visit Bethany to study Bethany's programs

renovated; More Memorial Park upgraded; Organization restructuring begins; loss of resident Mary Bell; Gil Boehringer descendant of Rev. Emmanuel Boehringer spends a month at Bethany researching its history.

- NEW ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE PUT IN PLACE. Three top administrators include a Chief Executive Officer, Chief Program Officer and Chief Operating Officer;
- 2006 Campus flag pole illuminated with spotlight; Mr. Ron Light receives the Children's Award; Jamie Walczak receives the Lee and Karol Armbuster Award for Outstanding Life Achievement; Construction of the manure pit at the farm; ABC Child Care celebrated its 10th Anniversary; Music Therapy celebrated its 10th Anniversary of the Internship Program; Renovations of siding and installation of new carpet in Eck and Knorr Cottage; Conversion of oil tanks to gas at Leinbach, Brobst, Knorr and Eck Cottages; The Bethany Counseling Ministry offices were consolidated for administrative purposes; Spiritual Life Campaign: Spirit Seekers kicked off with a goal of \$40,000 to enhance the spiritual life offerings on the campus and to upgrade the existing church paraments; Front road macadamized
- 2007 "Love Others to a Greater Degree" campaign launched to install air conditioning in all campus residences and therapeutic/activity buildings, with a goal of \$500,000.
- 2008 Bethany is invited by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare to participate in the inaugural training of the Sanctuary Model of Care for Children®, beginning an intensive program toward certification.
- 2010 Development and implementation of the Independent Living Program, geared toward youth, ages 16 to 20, who have demonstrated the ability to function appropriately with a minimal level of supervision, and the Foster Care Program. August 4, 2010, Bethany Children's Home becomes the first Sanctuary® certified Residential Agency in the state of Pennsylvania.