

History of the Port Arthur Community Home

In early 1944 a group of concerned citizens from the Methodist Temple Church realized that the elderly people of South Jefferson County were in need of adequate housing. The churches belonging to the Federated Missionary Society were asked to make a survey through their church membership to further investigate the need. At a meeting of the Executive Board of the Federation on April 3, 1944, a report of the survey was presented. It showed there was a definite need for such a home. Elderly people were found to be living in all types of unsuitable places. Mrs. Hunter Smith made a motion to the Board that such a home be established, seconded by Mrs. H.H. Brown. The General Board of the Federation met on April 20, 1944, and with a motion by Mrs. J.C. Reynolds seconded by Mrs. S.G. Wall the plans were set in motion.

On May 1, 1944 Federation President, Mrs. R.E. Coulassi appointed a committee to meet with and seek to secure the approval of the Ministerial Alliance. After giving approval and offers of help from the Alliance a planning board was appointed. This board met for the first time on June 27, 1944 to search for suitable property to purchase, secure a charter, and formulate by laws. All of this information was to be submitted to a permanent Board of Trustees to be chosen later. Mr. Baker moved that Mrs. Cowan secure one member from each of the 13 churches belonging to the Federation as board members. Dr. Goodrich suggested \$25,000 as a tentative figure to be raised in contributions from groups and individuals. Mr. Banker mentioned the possibility of securing the Model Apt. Building at 3141 Procter Street as a suitable location. Dr. Goodrich also suggested that the name imply that the home was a Christian Institution.

At the August 7, 1944 meeting the name "Community Home" was unanimously chosen. Mr. Banker and A.E. Scott reported on the contract they had entered into with Mr.R.C. Forster, owners of the property. On July 31, 1944 the sale price was \$32,500.00. Mr. Banker and A. C Scott put up \$1,000.00 of their own money to secure the sale of the property. The property will come with furniture that is in excellent condition.

The charter for the Community Home had been received shortly before the October 1944 meeting. Between contributions and rent for each apartment at \$37.50 there was enough money to make a down payment on the house and pay 1/6 of the 1944 taxes for \$98.589. There was delay in money raising due to solicitations from the United War Chest and another six war drives being conducted at this time.

It was decided at the October meeting that an entrance fee of \$250.00 be charged; there would be a six month probation period with refundable deposit if the person moved before the six month period was up. A letter of recommendation by three reputable persons is submitted along with a Health Certification from each applicant. The minimum age is 58 years and the applicant is a resident of Port Arthur. Exceptional cases would be given consideration. Residents could have guest twice a month with a charge of 50 cents each per meal. Mrs. Rose Fortuna, a nurse, agreed to check on the general health conditions of the residents once a week. Texas Optical and St. Mary's Hospital offered courtesy prices to the residents.

Mrs. Sarah Baxter was the first resident guest of the Community Home. After the death of her husband, a Church of Christ Minister, she moved to the Community Home on February 1, 1945. She was the grandmother of Gordon Baxter. After the death of her husband, Mrs. A Greg was the first matron and resident on the second floor. Mrs. Prickle was the second matron to reside at the home after the resignation of Mrs. Greg. This occurred in April 1946. There were 17 guests in the home as of January 1947 with room for two more. There are church services on a regular basis. By June 1947 the home had 23 residents, 6 men and 17 women. The home was fortunate at that time to have the good people Port Arthur contribute not only money, but other necessities needed to make the Home as comfortable place to live.

Later History of the Community Home

State and Federal Regulations deemed the Home unsuitable for elderly people who must climb stairs, and to remove wooden structures. It was then that in 1963 Dormitory "A" (the Wall Building) was built. It had 14 double bedrooms and a large reception room. The second dormitory (the Brown Building) with 12 double bedrooms, 1 single bedroom, and a reception room was built in 1966. The Administration Building was added later with a kitchen, dining room, 2 offices, a chapel, and administrators living quarters (which are now residents rooms). The two buildings are now connected with a beauty and barber shop.

The latest addition was December 30, 1988 when Dr. John White Jr. donated his former office building that was located next to the Community Home. The Banker Cottage, a structure between Dr. White's office and the Home, was dismantled and a glassed-in-walkway was constructed to connect the White Clinic to the main building. Renovations were completed, and this building was opened in February of 1990. It is now known as the John M. White Cottage. It contains 7 single bedrooms with private baths, a small kitchenette, a financial office, and the board room.