

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Brethren Service Center Celebrates 50th Anniversary"

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by Jay A. Graybeal

Fifty years ago the world was at war. By the fall of 1944, the tide had turned in favor of the Allies and, although great battles remained to be fought, the Axis defeat was only a matter of time. Far from the scene of battle, some members of the the Brethren Church looked toward the near future when huge quantities of relief supplies would be needed for the millions of persons displaced by the war. Mr. M. R. Zigler is credited with having the "courage and faith" to coordinate the purchase of the former Blue Ridge College property in New Windsor for use as a world relief center. The 26-acred property was purchased for \$31,300 on September 6, 1944.

Less than two years after the center opened, a Washington Star reporter described the activities at the former college campus.

At this headquarters, where you can look across a vast stretch of valley to the jagged haze of the Blue Ridge on the horizon, Christianity has become more than principle and precept. It has been translated into action.

These workers, young and old, men and women, boys and girls, are obeying the kindly mandate; "Bear ye one another's burdens." Nearly all of them are volunteers.

No Questions Asked

No one asks those who drop in to help exactly how they interpret the Book of Genesis or whether they believe in infant baptism or favor total immersion at a later age. They're asked only, "Can you help? How long can you stay?"

Selective service has assigned about 75 conscientious objectors to the center, and these youths are eager to serve here. Officials say they are invaluable.

The volunteers have included college professors, laborers, farmers, artisans of every type, ministers, lawyers, engineers.

Work Marked by Efficiency

One who had not inspected the center might think that a group of workers haphazardly would turn out that sort of work. The contrary is true. The project moves with quiet efficiency from start to finish. No wasted motion is apparent. The workers have been provided with the latest equipment, and they operate it so effectively that three to four carloads of clothing and a car of food move out every week. During one recent week, seven carloads left for the docks in Baltimore or New York, but that was a record week.

The clothing is sorted and baled in the school gymnasium. Under a torn basketball basket, a baling machine of the newest design pressed the garments into compact bundles, which are wrapped in paper and burlap automatically and sent down a chute to waiting trucks.

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Efforts are made to obtain gifts of clothing in good repair. Repair work except on shoes, no longer is done at the center. If torn clothing does arrive, however, it is not discarded, but sewing kits are enclosed when it is shipped, so that the recipients can mend it.

Shoes are in a different category. If they are salvageable, they are welcome. The center has as complete a repair shop as you'd find in any city. Shoes are soled, heeled and mended until they come out looking new. Hundreds of pairs are renovated and boxed every week.

Many of these shoes will be taken eagerly by the homeless, the displaced persons, as they are called, who have dragged themselves through northern winters with sacks wrapped about their feet or only papers, perhaps.

Canned Food Is Boxed

Canned food of all sorts is donated and this is boxed and consigned to places abroad where it is needed most.

On the day this reporter visited the center, 120 cases of seeds were ready to go out. These seeds are for vegetable gardens, to help those with a little land to grow their own food.

There were 32 varieties of seeds in the shipment. There are about 60 potential gardens in each case and each garden is designed for six persons.

The seeds are divided among the various countries needing relief, with due care taken to send to each only those varieties suited to its soil and preferred by the people.

Many churches and charitable organizations buy cloth and send it to New Windsor. Here it is cut into patterns, mostly for children's clothing. These are returned to the organizations that bought them. Women of church circles and other groups make the completed garments and return them to the center for final shipment.

More than 200 bales of clothing move out of the gymnasium every day. There are 400 to the carload. Each bale weights 100 pounds and costs \$5.90 to make up. This expense includes labor, materials, transportation, office overhead, telephone, telegraph and warehouse rental.

Hundreds of fine dairy cattle are being donated to the farm for shipment overseas. The center already has shipped 1,200 heifers to Poland, France, Greece, Belgium and Czechoslovakia. A new shipment of 350 head is about to go to France.

Herds Go to Neediest

B. G. Bushong, livestock representative of the project, explained that the dairy herds are going to places where the need is most urgent. Thus some have gone to orphanages in France and to tuberculosis sanitariums in Belgium. Others have gone to Polish families without any farm animals at all. Some blue-ribbon bulls have gone to Greece to help replace destroyed herds.

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Workers for the United Church Service Center go along with the cattle to feed them aboard ship and see that they reach their destinations.

This little capital of mercy even has a mimeographed newspaper, "the Weekly Processor." It is edited by Charles (Chuck) Webb, director of education and publicity. Mr. Webb's wife works in the pattern room. Mr. and Mrs. Webb are awaiting assignment to the European end of the project, which is the World Service Committee, an organization of the World Council of Churches.

The center has its own carpentry and repair shops, where crates are made for shipping food and other materials and machinery is repaired. An electric cutting machine is the feature of the clothe pattern room.

The town of New Windsor, which was a tranquil foothill community of 500, has almost doubled its population since the enterprise was expanded to nation-wide proportion, and the village stirs with activity unknown through its century-plus history.

The freight agent has become one of the busiest on his whole line. Postmaster William D. Lovell handles 250 incoming sacks of parcel post every week. He used to take in around 40. There's talk of raising the rank of his postoffice from third to second class.

Following World War II, the Service Center continued to assist refugees and disaster victims. General Secretary Donald E. Miller recently described the Center.

The heart and soul of the Brethren Service Center is a Christlike dedication to world peace, service and the alleviation of human suffering. The many activities occurring at New Windsor the past 50 years are testimony to God's love for humanity in the midst of the world's turmoil. May this year mark the beginning of another 50 years of sisters and brothers of all ages and cultures committed to a way of life in which service and self-giving are at the center.

Photo Caption: "Tying and marking bales of clothes for relief, Church World Service Center, (today known as Brethren Service Center) New Windsor, Md." c. 1945. Photograph courtesy of the Brethren Service Center.