



An American Tour: 85



Nebraska's *Boys Town*

In 1917, a young Irish priest named Father Edward J. Flanagan grew discouraged in his work with homeless men in Omaha, Nebraska. He shifted his attention and in December of that year, borrowed \$90 to pay the rent on a boarding house that became Father Flanagan's Home for Boys. Flanagan welcomed all boys, regardless of their race or religion. By the spring, 100 boys were living at the Home.

In 1921, Father Flanagan purchased Overlook Farm on the outskirts of Omaha and moved his Boys' Home there. In time, the Home became known as the Village of Boys Town. By the 1930s, hundreds of boys lived at the Village which grew to include a school, dormitories and administration buildings. The boys elected their own government which included a mayor, council and commissioners. In 1936, the community became an official village in the state of Nebraska.

News of Father Flanagan's work spread worldwide with the success of the 1938 movie, "Boys Town". Spencer Tracy won an Academy Award for his portrayal of Father Flanagan, which he later donated to the priest. After World War II, President Truman asked Flanagan to take his message to the world. He traveled the globe visiting war orphans and advising government leaders on how to care for displaced children.

Although Father Flanagan died in 1948, his work at Boys Town, which Flanagan called "God's work" continued. Monsignor Nicholas H. Wegner became the new Executive Director of Boys Town and under his watchful eye, Boys Town doubled in population, gained solid financial footing and expanded educational, vocational, athletic and arts opportunities for its residents. Monsignor Wegner retired in 1973 and was succeeded by Monsignor Robert P. Hupp.

Father Valentine J. Peter led Boys Town from 1985 - 2005. During his tenure Boys Town expanded its programs and services to more than 12 sites across America. The number of children and families served by Boys Town skyrocketed, and the quality of care improved as new research-based services were developed. Boys Town opened its National Hotline in 1989.

Father Flanagan's simple dream to make the world a better place for children thrives today because people still believe that every child deserves to be valued and loved, and to live a healthy, positive life. [<http://www.boystown.org/about/our-history>]

