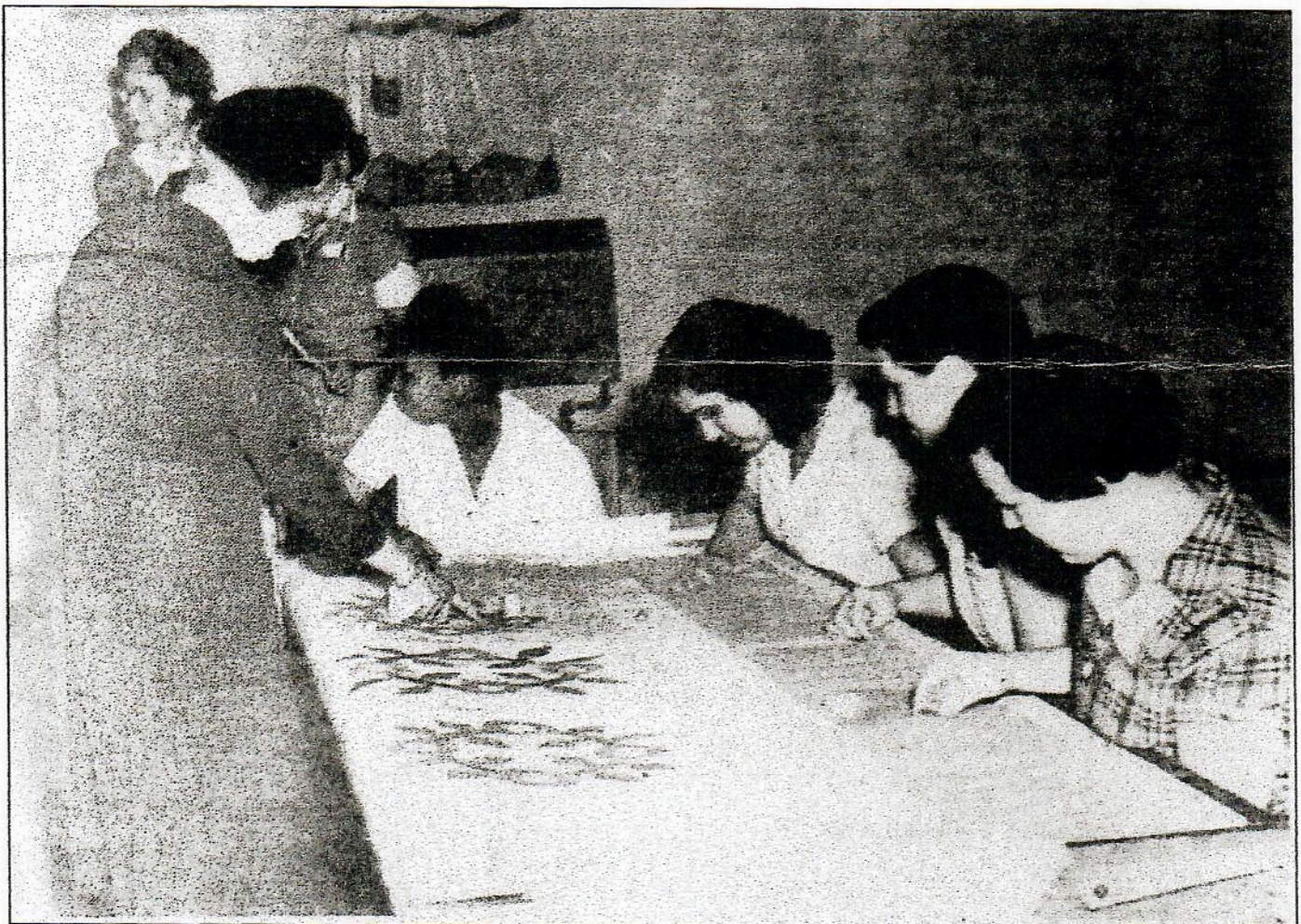

THE WEST END QUARTERLY

HISTORY AND FOLKLORE IN THE WEST END OF UNION COUNTY



A group of unidentified inmates in a high security cottage demonstrate their quilting abilities while state inspectors investigate conditions at the Laurelton State Village, 1955. *Photo courtesy of Tony Shively.*

The Village, Part II

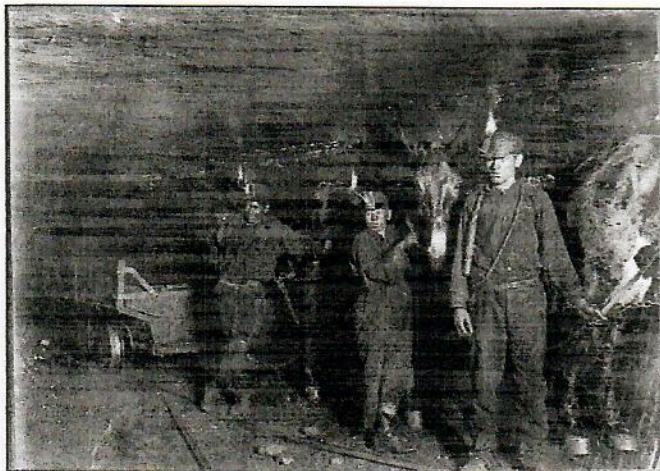
September, 2017

The Expansion and Demise of the Village

Micalee Sullivan

This issue of the WEQ covers the second-half of the history of the Laurelton State Village. An in-depth look of the founding and early history of the institution formerly known as the Laurelton State Village for Feeble-minded Women of Childbearing Age can be found in the March 2017 edition of the WEQ. As a historian, I have always attempted to connect our own local history here in the West End to the broader narrative of our country. As I began to research the Laurelton State Village, it was obvious that the founding of the institution was connected to a larger nation-wide movement at the time period. Although I did touch on this in the last edition of the WEQ, for this edition, I've also added some additional historical context that led to the opening of the Village. I hope the article sparks some good memories for some and helps to bring some new understanding to a place with a 70+ year legacy in this area. -Micalee

The opening of the Laurelton State Village in 1920 was just one example of the ways in which people tried to help a rapidly changing society in the early twentieth century. Politicians, civic leaders, and concerned citizens were outspoken about the need for social reform in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many reformers hoped to maintain social health by reaffirming appropriate social behavior and correcting inappropriate social behavior through religion, education, and institutionalization. The concern was a reflection of much larger social and economic changes happening around the United States at the time period. As the nation continued to invest in industrial expansion, not only men, but also women and children entered the workforce in larger numbers. The disruption to traditional ways of life and growing concern for the detrimental effects of women and children entering the workforce led some advocates to devise creative methods of addressing the problem. Lewis Hine, a member of the National Child Labor Committee, used photography as a way to advocate for an end to child labor. Often posing as a fire inspector or a salesman, Hine would enter factories to interview and photograph children, many of whom had to forgo schooling to help support their families with an income.



One of Lewis Hine's photographs of children working in the West Virginia coal mines, ca. 1908. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Working women were also a subject of controversy as they left their traditional roles in the home and entered the workforce in larger numbers. According to historian Allison Kessler-Harris, their numbers increased from 1.72 million to 8.28 million between 1870 and 1920. With access to their own income, divorce rates also began to rise, as did an increasing concern in their personal behavior. Again, social reformers worried about what these changes would do to the future the country, and new organizations began to appear to assist women's social behavior. Jane Addams opened Hull House in Chicago in 1889 to provide practical services for Chicago's rapidly changing population, which included an influx of people seeking work in cities, a growing and diverse immigrant population, and women in the

workforce. Hull-House offered child care services to working mothers, taught classes on cooking and sewing, and assisted in the transition towards citizenship with classes. The urgency to reform women over men was linked to the popular belief that women were the bearers of moral authority and were responsible for passing these values onto their families and communities. Immoral behavior, therefore, carried an even greater weight for women, as it also suggested the immorality of society.

Founders of the Laurelton State Village were inspired by these progressive measures of reform, and carried these ideas over into mental health facilities as well. With more women in the workforce, an increase in divorce rates, and growing number of women living on their own, some of the earliest candidates for institutionalization were often referred to as "wayward girls." Before the Laurelton State Village opened its doors, similar institutions like the Illinois State Training School for Delinquent Girls institutionalized girls and young women between the ages of 10-21 that were accused of crimes and/or immorality. These early institutions became models for Pennsylvania's own institutions, especially the Laurelton State Village, where training and industrial reform became important elements to changing women's behavior. To this day, locals remember the village as a place for "wayward girls," or a place where parents warned children that "bad girls" were sent to live.

By the middle of the century, the Laurelton State Village was no longer just a center for segregating, reforming, and rehabilitating women, it had also become a prominent research institution as well. Besides applying the latest research in the fields of mental health, the institution was a place where landscape and farming workers also applied a level of expertise to keep the Village campus both beautiful and fruitful. Farming success was measured in numbers. Essential crops like wheat, corn, oats, and potatoes were grown in large quantities. Workers and inmates also maintained a "truck patch" for growing smaller quantities of vegetables. Even dairy production at the Village had reached impressive quantities by the middle of the century. The farm often achieved Gold Seal Certificates for cows, one of which produced 16,839 pounds of milk and 5943.7 pounds of butter fat. In the 1950s, J. Frank Snyder managed the farming program at the Village, James Pollock oversaw the truck garden, and Bruce Folk was in charge of the dairy herd. The farm at the Village was able to nourish and sustain inmates and employees at low cost, and by the middle of the century, the Village farm was producing more than it could consume. Surplus goods were sent to other state hospitals. Annual reports detailed the growing success of the farming program.

After three decades, workers with years of experience also contributed to the aesthetic appeal of the campus grounds. As always, much of the labor involved in running the Village came from the women institutionalized here. Cora Bougner, described in a 1949 report as a "great-grandmother" served as supervisor over a group of inmates that maintained the grounds. Bougner used her experience and knowledge to care for plants that flourished, despite the poor nature of the shale soil that covered the property. Walking through the campus in the springtime, one could find a variety of spring bulb flowers, like crocuses and daffodils, flowering cherry, crab, and dogwood trees, ferns, rhododendrons, laurel phlox and evergreens all carefully laid out in the landscape design of the grounds.

The institution also continued to be one of the preeminent places in the country for the study and application of modern mental health treatments. By the 1950s, this included not only medicine and therapy, such as a electric shock to treat "mid-life depressions," but also included a three-tier training program emphasizing industrial, social, and academic development. This reflected an ongoing belief, even into the 1950s, that delinquent and immoral behavior was best corrected through institutional evaluation and reform whenever possible. Educational research and application continued to be an important part of the school as well. The school utilized a kodachrome projector

to apply a visual education program for inmates. The results allowed one employee, Mrs. Pollock, to complete a Master's Thesis based upon her findings from the application of visual education.

By the 1950s, education also emphasized the importance of place and identity. A "Pennsylvania Week" offered inmates the opportunity to learn and practice a variety of Pennsylvania traditions. Inmates played and listened to traditional Pennsylvania music, recited Pennsylvania history and folklore, showcased Pennsylvania antiques, and practiced traditional Pennsylvania handiwork. Inmates also helped to pen the alma mater of the school - with the opportunity for the best inmates to pen a verse of the song. Religion was also playing a prominent role in the education of inmates. The board reported in 1949, "The daily adherence to a spiritual habit of thought is wished for all girls. Grace is said before meals, prayers are said in the dayroom before the girls go to the dormitory. There must be quiet for individual reading and prayers. Sunday evening there are cottage services where hymns are sung and various girls read or take part in the service." Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic faiths were all practiced at the institution and religious leaders from the surrounding areas provided spiritual guidance for inmates.



An example of art and handiwork produced by inmates from Laurelton State Village, 1958.
Photo courtesy of Tony Shively.

From Segregation to Rehabilitation

When the Laurelton State

Village first opened, rehabilitative and educational training were secondary to the institution's goal of segregating and detaining inmates who could potentially reproduce. Mental illness was thought to be hereditary, and keeping women of reproductive age institutionalized was one of the main goals of the Village. But even in early studies conducted in the institution, there was little conclusive evidence to find heredity links to "feble-mindedness."

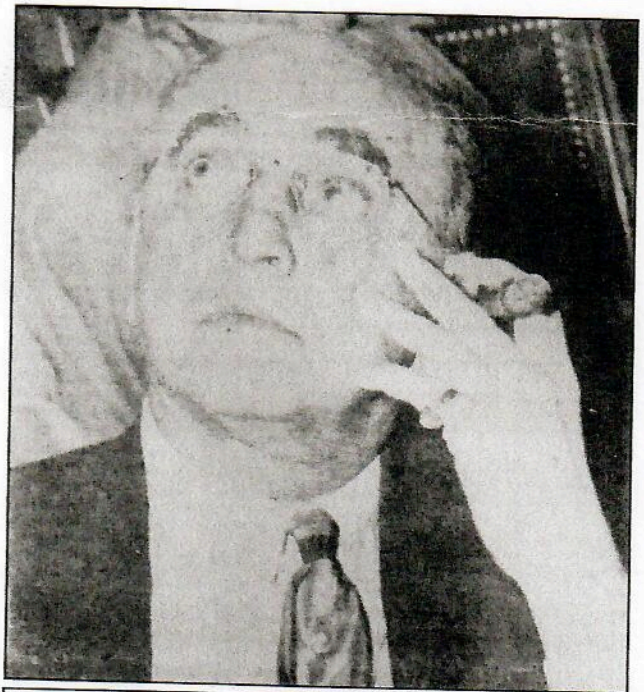
Findings like these eventually led to new objectives for the Laurelton State Village. Although doctors at the Laurelton State Village were not willing to entirely dismiss hereditary links in mental health, by

1951, Dr. Effie Ireland admitted that "feeble-mindedness" was a complicated trait. "There may be carriers of the affliction who are not themselves defectives, and therefore, cannot be readily identified. Because of this, feeble-minded women are no longer segregated for the entire child-bearing period." For Dr. Ireland and other experts in the field, it was becoming increasingly clear that environmental factors also contributed to delinquent behaviors. According to Dr. Ireland, "feeble-mindedness itself does not make a person delinquent. To this must be added poverty, alcoholism, home neglect, the broken home, bad community influences such as gang association and slum sections, and lack of training suited to their mental and manual abilities." Dr. Ireland concluded that, society, too, carried a share of blame for bad behavior for many of the inmates. By 1950, admissions numbers confirm that the vast majority of women institutionalized in Laurelton were there due to delinquent or criminal behavior. Between 1946-50, of 315 admissions to the Laurelton Center, only 11 were admitted for care and protection, with the majority of women described in the records as having engaged in delinquent behavior, including theft, assault, and truancy. Tied to nearly all of these descriptions was also sexual behavior. Dr. Ireland also admitted that, many of these women had already served time (in prison), and often came to Laurelton with "a great deal of resentment, having already served time for criminal acts." Her comments suggest that, after serving sentences in prison, many women were then institutionalized at the Laurelton Center (perhaps at the suggest of family or under court orders). While men might have committed similar crimes, there was an additional onus placed on women to always engage in good behavior and to make moral judgements. Anything less than this could result in, not only jail time, but also institutionalization to evaluate one's mental health.

The 1955 Investigation

While the memories of the Laurelton Center have begun to fade with passing generations, some West Enders still recall one of the most controversial time periods in the history of the institution. In 1955 Welfare Secretary Harry Shapiro began a campaign to clean up what he termed "miserable conditions" in the state's mental hospitals. Upon inspecting conditions at the Laurelton State Village, Shapiro centered his concern in particular, on Johnston Cottage - a secure cottage where inmates were kept in solitary confinement. The Secretary charged the institution with providing inmates in the cottage with a very limited diet, restraining them with bed straps, wrapping inmates in wet towels, and leaving them in the cottage for as long as six months in solitary confinement. Reports, backed by eyewitness accounts, also leveled abuse charges at the institution. The findings also caught the attention of then Governor George Leader who supported Secretary Shapiro's efforts to reform conditions at Laurelton.

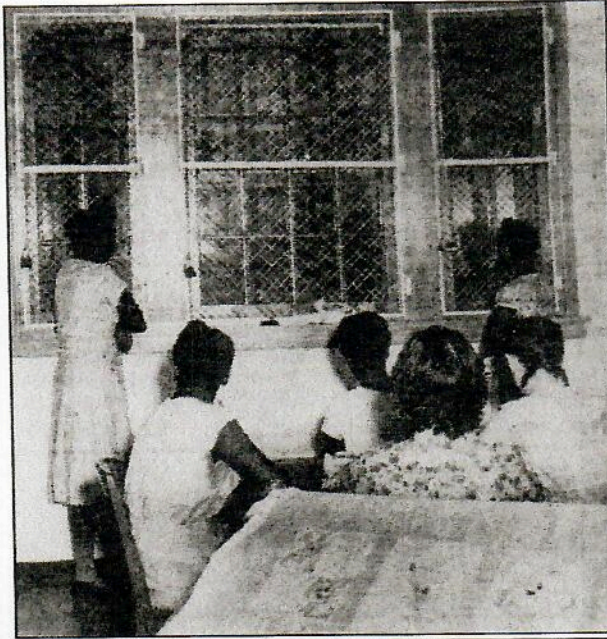
Lulu Hoffman worked at the Laurelton State Village at the time of the investigation and remembered occasions when inmates were placed in solitary confinement.



Pennsylvania Welfare Secretary Harry Shapiro is photographed during legislative hearings into "inhumane conditions" at Laurelton State Village. Photo courtesy of Tony Shively.

"Well, we'd have quarrels and fighting - they called it a raid, almost. (Inmates would) upset furniture, tables, and chairs. Those were the ones that weren't so good. They'd pick up a chair and throw it through a window - that kind of stuff. Those got locked into seclusion. We'd have to put them in until they simmered down and cooled off...they locked them in the room and they just had a bed in there. That's all they had - and left them in there for a day or two until they cooled down...And then we

were supposed to try to stop them if they were breaking windows and throwing furniture and breaking furniture and stuff like that...If we had girls that were breaking things to pieces, well, then we had to get in there and hold them and try to stop them. Once in a while we got hurt too!"



A journalist snaps a photo of a group of inmates assigned to Johnston Cottage. Their back are turned to protect their identity. Photo courtesy of Tony Shively.

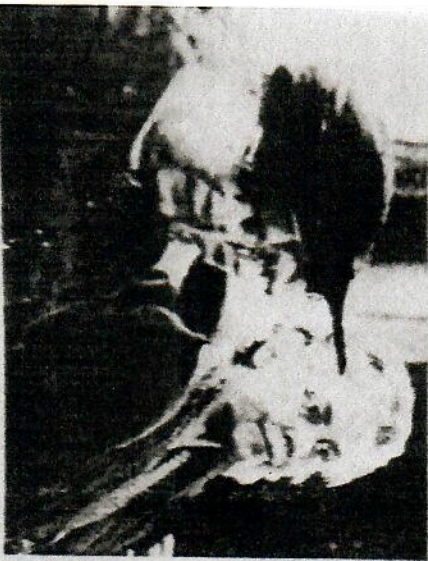
It is unclear how many of the inmates in the cottage were a threat to the attendants, but Secretary Shapiro used his authority to make immediate changes while simultaneously gathering evidence to support his claims of cruelty at Laurelton. Shapiro ordered all 40 inmates in Johnston Cottage to be removed at once. He also ordered immediate changes to the cottage, including the removal of solid doors in each confined room. To support his claims, Shapiro quickly recovered all records pertaining to Johnston Cottage (an employee working in the cottage had removed these records but Shapiro ordered their return). Shapiro sent four more state employees to investigate conditions at Laurelton and also obtained recorded statements from attendants and inmates that supported his claims against Laurelton.

When Dr. Ireland and Dr. Edgett learned that Secretary Shapiro ordered the closing of Johnston Cottage, their protests aligned with Lulu's own memory of inmates assigned to solitary confinement. The supervisors argued that Shapiro's order would threaten the safety of both employees and inmates, and that the order to shut down the cottage placed them in an "impossible situation." The institution's board members also backed Ireland and Edgett. Board member Fred Maue argued, "This is drastic action and I hate to contemplate the disturbance and chaos which might result from this action." In protest of Shapiro's order to shut down the cottage, both Ireland and Edgett submitted letters of resignation to the board (although the board refused to recognize their resignation).

Shapiro's claims of abuse and cruelty placed the Laurelton State Village at the center of state-wide scandal, and Shapiro collected enough evidence to support a story of disturbing charges against the institution. Working with an investigator and using the recovered records from the cottage, Shapiro was able to detail more specific incidents of cruelty. Upon reviewing the records, Dr. Edgett and Dr. Ireland stated that they "were shocked at some of the contents." Dr. Edgett further stated that she would take whole responsibility for not visiting the cottage or reviewing the books more often. Despite the evidence collected that supported Shapiro's claims, some believed that the charges were exaggerated. Dr. Mary Wolfe, the founder and first supervisor of the Laurelton State Village argued,

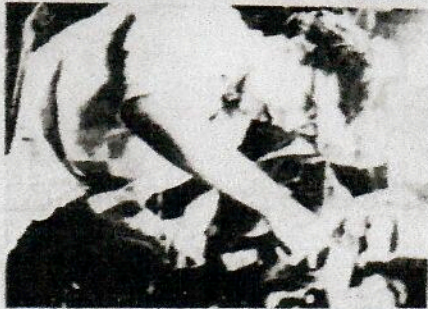
Headline and captions from the Laurelton State Village investigation. Images courtesy of Tony Shively

Parade Of Witnesses Continues In Investigation Of Laurelton State Village



NOTE-TAKING OCCURRED as Dr. D'Ette Edgett and Dr. Effie Ireland, both appearing tired and wane at LSV hearing.

Note-taking occupied both Dr. D'Ette Edgett and Dr. Effie Ireland, both appearing tired and wane at LSV hearing.



DESCRIBING ATTACK on village Mrs. Josephine Oberlin, during the hearing to explain.

Describing attack at Village, Mrs. Josephine Oberlin uses gestures to explain.



SEPARATION SORT-OUTS Mrs. Dorothy Hooker, during the hearing.

Separation was sometimes necessary, Mrs. Dorothy Hooker testifies.



RESTRAINTS WERE USED Mrs. Dorothy o'Dell, during the hearing.

Restraints were necessary, Mrs. Dorothy o'Dell told LSV probates



RESTRICING STRAP used at hearing between Sen. Albert Pechan, right, and Miss Grace Cox at Harrisburg hearings.

Restraining strap used at Laurelton intrigues Sen. Albert Pechan, right, and Miss Grace Cox at Harrisburg hearings.



A testimonial dinner honoring Dr. Ireland and Dr. Edgett before charges had been brought against the Village. From L to R: Founder of the Laurelton State Village and first Superintendent, Mary Wolfe, toastmaster Mrs. Charles Kalp, Dr. Ireland, Dr. Edgett, Mrs. Ralph Hitchcock, and State Senator Samuel B. Wolfe. *Photo courtesy of Tony Shively.*

"I think that Mr. Shapiro has shown by what he has said and done at Laurelton State Village that he is not fit to be Secretary of Welfare, and doesn't know the first thing about mental institutions...Dr. Ireland was one of my assistants. She is a fine Christian woman, and I have never known of Dr. Ireland doing anything wrong."

For Wolfe and others who refused to accept the claims, politics was the motivating factor in the allegedly false claims. One newspaper wrote, "the apparent groundlessness of the charges against the village, which has always enjoyed a high reputation, is seen by many persons as a political move, by which Democrats hoped to replace Republicans with members of their own party, while dodging the issue of patronage." Despite the claims, by the end of 1955, there was an overhaul in how the institution was run. A new supervisor - Dr. Bernard Newell vowed to "make a completely open institution," that would steer away from confinement and containment to one that focused on rehabilitation and a possible return to society. In 1966, an even bigger change came with new state legislation concerning mental health - the Mental Retardation Procedures Act. For the first time, the Laurelton Village began admitting men alongside women into the institution. These changes reflected some of the initial concerns of the Secretary of Welfare by emphasizing rehabilitation and a return to society. It also marked an end to the Village as a place to reform convicted women. After, the institution focused on caring for and educating Pennsylvania's citizens with special needs and intellectual disabilities.

The End of the Village

Although institution leaders at Laurelton had always emphasized rehabilitation and reintroduction into society, this new emphasis to reintroduce inmates into society came during a time when the leadership might have realized that the institution was no longer financially sustainable at the level it had once operated at in the past. In 1968, in an open letter to Pennsylvania Governor Shafer, one

cottage attendant alluded to mismanagement of another state institution that brought financial cuts to Laurelton. "When scandal and public pressure divert the vast majority of funds to one institution, how does another similar institution, which manages to care for its residents without so many attending horrors as the other, continue to function?"

The author was most likely referring to Pennhurst, located in Spring City, Pennsylvania. Pennhurst had also recently come under scrutiny for the treatment of its patients. In 1968, one local news station in the area ran an investigative piece on the institution, exposing the poor conditions of inmates, bringing new public scrutiny to mental health institutions across the state and country. In 1977, while some advocates called for continuing investigations into the conditions at Pennhurst, U.S. District Judge Raymond Broderick shocked many when he instead ordered the institution closed. 1,200 former inmates of the institution were removed and placed in smaller community homes across several counties in Pennsylvania. The dramatic decision completely changed the future of mental health institutions around the country, and Laurelton State Village was one of many institutions to enter into a phase of gradual reduction in size. Funding to the Village was severely cut in 1978, as the Mental Retardation Procedures Act now gained more legal prominence. The Act called for patients to be released into community living arrangements in an effort to have them more fully integrated into society. Although it would take another two decades to fully close Laurelton, the institution saw a gradual decline in funding throughout the 1980s and 90s. In an article from 1996, discussing the planned closing of the institution, it was clear that, despite the damaging history to come from the 1955 charges, there had been, and remained, many people who cared deeply for the Village and the people that lived there. Staff members expressed concern for ending relationships with patients, many of which had spanned decades at the time of the institution's closing. When the Laurelton State Village closed in 1998, 400 staff members were out of work.

Attempts to sell the Village after its closing led to a number of rumored purchases. Penn State University, Bucknell University, and Susquehanna University were all rumored to have been interested in the property. There was also a discussion of turning the institution into a Veterans' Home or a Hospital. One of the most dazzling proposals, that the Village was to be used as a "world class" golf course and resort got a great deal of local buzz before plans fell through. Another, less dazzling proposal was to use the Village as a rehabilitation center for convicted criminals. Buzz around this proposal came mostly in the form of public resistance to the idea. As years passed, many of the buildings fell into disrepair and prospects for repurposing the infrastructure seem unlikely, as both nature and man have taken and destroyed much of the original property.

Today the Village continues to hold a presence over a large piece of the West End landscape. With Do Not Enter signs and closed gates barring public entry, what the Village used to be continues to elude the memories of an increasing population of West Enders, much like the saw mill at Pardee Pond or the L&T train that once rolled through Paddy Mountain. The Village itself has been a constant marker for almost all West Enders for all of our lives, but with little prospects left for the future of the abandoned buildings, it seems almost certain that nature will once again reclaim its land.

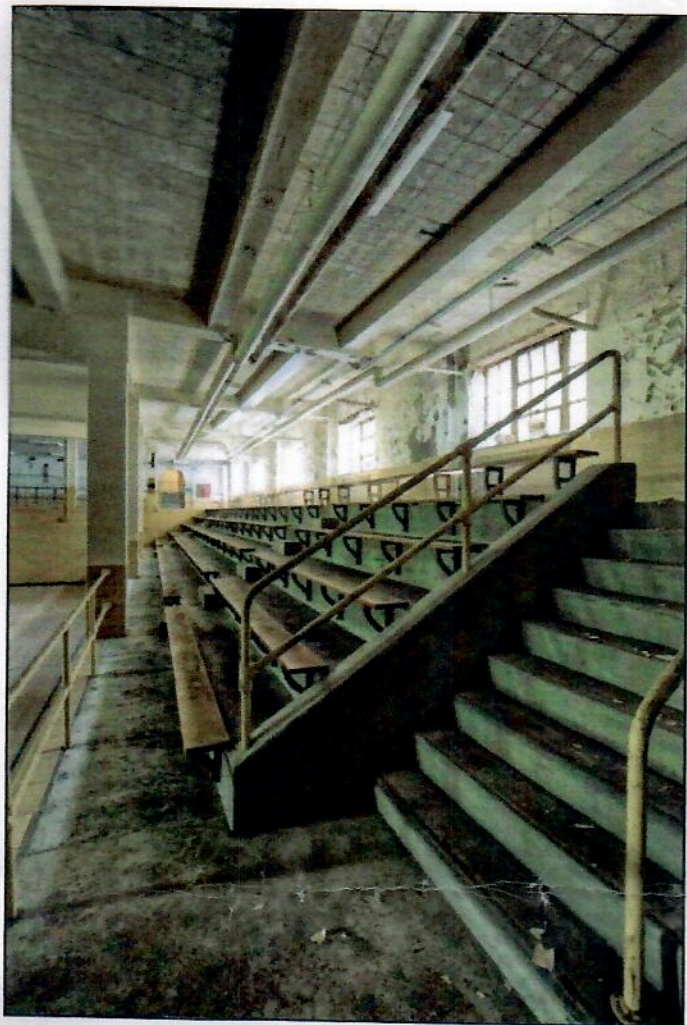


Photo by Ed Roppo



Photo by Ed Roppo