

Mooseheart " The Child City "

James J. Davis - who later would serve as Secretary of Labor to three Presidents, then 14 years in the U.S. Senate - agreed late in 1906 to take on the job of recruiting members into the then - faltering Moose organization, on the basis of eventually using members' pooled resources to create a home and school where dependent widows of Moose members could take their children.

Within five years the organization had grown to membership of nearly 200,000, and Davis, now carrying the title "Director General," recommended that Moose leaders begin seeking the right parcel of real estate to set about establishing the so-called "Moose Institute." On Dec. 14, 1912, the leaders decided to purchase a 750 acre dairy operation known as Brookline Farm, 40 miles west of Chicago, plus adjacent acreage to the west and north, 1,023 acres in total. Final purchase took place in February 1913 totaling \$264,000. At a joint meeting of the Supreme Council and Institute Trustees unanimous approval was granted to Congressman John J. Lentz's proposal to name the new home and school "Mooseheart." "This," he said, "will always be the place where the Moose fraternity will collectively pour out its heart, its devotion and sustenance, to the children of its members in need."

Dedication of Mooseheart was set for Sunday, July 27, 1913. Thomas Marshall, then newly installed as Vice President of the United States, first balked at Supreme Governor Ralph Donges's invitation to speak at a ceremony for what he viewed as an "orphanage." Donges responded that "what we are planning will not be an orphanage at all. It will be a home and school for the children of our deceased members". Vice President Marshall, in his July 27 remarks, said: "Thank God, here in this Middle West, here on this most sacred day, humanity has again proved its right to be called the children of the Most High; has again reached out its hand in love and loyalty to the needy brother, and has disclosed not only the right, but the duty of this great Order to exist." On its dedication day Mooseheart featured a large farmhouse dubbed Aid Hall, a few other ramshackle buildings, and a huge circus tent rented from Ringling Bros. for the occasion, to shield the gathering from the summer sun. Several thousand Moose men and women, (for the Women of the Moose received formal recognition that year as the organization's official female component), gathered under the rented tent and placed the cornerstone for Mooseheart. Most importantly, there were 11 children present who would be the first to call Mooseheart home.

In August 1913, Supreme Secretary Rodney Brandon moved from Anderson, IN, where Moose headquarters had been located, to Mooseheart, to serve as the community's first Superintendent. Under Brandon's direction, the future design of Mooseheart began to take shape. James A. Young, city forester for nearby Aurora and owner of a nursery there, contributed landscape design services on a part-time basis. It was Young who also drew basic plans for a Mooseheart street layout, which he made roughly in the shape of a stylized heart. In 1918, on Mooseheart's fifth anniversary, Vice President Marshall returned to speak at a dedication of a new Auditorium named for former President Theodore Roosevelt, recalling five years before: "Let me tell you that when I spoke, there was a reservation in my mind . . . Thank God that today . . . the age of miracles has not passed. All that I hoped for, longed for and prayed for on that interesting occasion five years ago has come to pass at Mooseheart."

The Great Depression hit the Moose fraternity hard; membership plummeted from 600,000 to less than 250,000 in just seven years. Meanwhile, Mooseheart bore the responsibility for the largest population of children and teens it would ever have, flirting with the 1,400 mark throughout the 1930s.

Up through the early 1960s, the original admission policy to Mooseheart remained largely unchanged, permitting only children of male Moose members who had died. As society changed swiftly throughout the 1960s, '70s and '80s, Mooseheart adjusted in response, steadily accepting more and more children whose families were in disarray due to divorce, substance abuse, severe economic reversal, or other reasons. Until 1994, however, admission generally required that there be a Moose member in a child's extended family. But that year, the Moose fraternity's leaders voted unanimously to expand the admissions policy to consider applications from any family in need, regardless of whether a Moose member was a part of their extended family. Also in 1994, the Mooseheart campus took its first step away from full financial reliance upon the Moose fraternity, when Mooseheart Child City & School was incorporated as a separate entity, a registered 501[c]3 charity under the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

In 2003, Mooseheart gained its youngest Executive Director since its first one, Rodney Brandon, when 34-year-old Scott D. Hart assumed the post. Hart and his wife, Christie, had been career Mooseheart staffers since coming to the campus in 1991. The new Executive Director has served as a Family Teacher, Dean, and Assistant Executive Director.

In December 2012, the Moose fraternity's Supreme Council selected Hart to succeed the retiring William B. Airey as the tenth Director General/CEO of Moose International; Hart, in turn, selected Gary L. Urwiler to succeed him as Executive Director of Mooseheart—an appointment that was swiftly confirmed by the Mooseheart Board of Directors. Urwiler became the second Mooseheart alumnus to rise to lead the campus in adulthood (the first having been Robert Hanke from 1974-80). Urwiler, who had come to Mooseheart at age 12 in 1981, was graduated in 1987. He earned a bachelor's degree in education at Eureka College in 1992, and a master's degree in educational administration from Aurora University in 2001. From 1995-2000 he served Mooseheart as Dean of Students, Athletic Director head football coach; from 2003-12 he served as Superintendent of Education/Principal, and again as head football coach.