

UP FRONT



THOMAS & KATHERINE DETRE

LIBRARY & ARCHIVES TREASURES

By Carly Lough, Archivist

“Making Good”

By December of 1913, an inmate discharged from the Allegheny County Workhouse could be given a business card printed with an address: 32 Lacock Street, North Side. There, a four-story building containing bedrooms, lounge areas, and a kitchen offered what might have been the only shelter available to those without family connections or employment prospects. Opened officially in January 1914, the Pittsburgh Parting of the Ways Home served thousands of recent ex-offenders in its 33 years of operation, providing meals, a bed, and a clean suit until their first paycheck could bring independence.

Rollo H. McBride, the home’s founder and superintendent, welcomed residents as they arrived. He counseled and assisted them in locating work, occasionally putting them on trains to their native cities or families. His vision for the home included providing former inmates with a fresh start, believing that an environment of opportunity, dignity, and self-reliance could drastically minimize the cycle of crime and repeated arrests. An average of four days in the home gave a resident the time needed to pivot to gainful employment, leave the home with means, and reimburse his meals and bed if he chose.

Loose-leaf pages tucked within one of several scrapbooks in the Parting of the Ways Home Records at the Detre Library & Archives

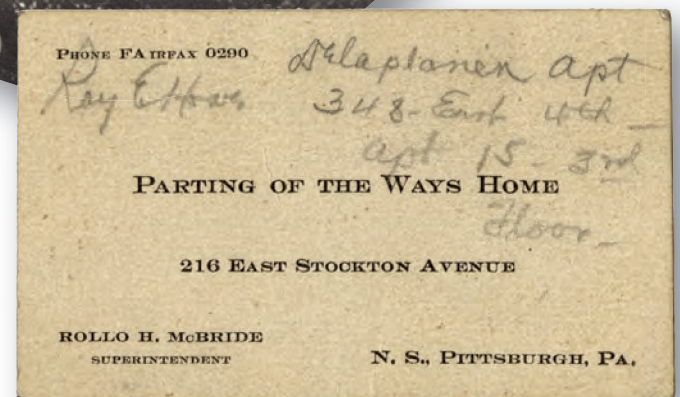
A Parting of the Ways Home business card could be distributed to inmates of the County Jail or Workhouse upon their release. This card dates from c. 1920, when the home relocated from Lacock Street to East Stockton Avenue, also in the North Side.

HHC Detre L&A, Parting of the Ways Home Records, MSS1186.B01.F06.1

record the names of men who visited the home and notes on their altered circumstances. One, a small scrap about the size of an index card, is labeled with the words “Making good.” It goes on: “Wm Haller, Auto Repair Shop. Ike Olbum, Furniture Stores. Mr. Everson, Paying Teller....” Throughout his tenure, McBride made a point of tracking the men who passed through, compiling dozens of notes and newspaper clippings that tell the stories of

men who made good.

Pieced among them are numerous articles that trace McBride’s own tale of transition. After a successful turn in the Ohio railroad industry, McBride grew dependent on alcohol and lost his job. Making his way to Chicago around 1890, he spent several years battling his addiction. One article characterizes his eventual recovery as accidental: wandering one evening into the well-lit Life Boat Mission





PARTING OF THE WAYS HOME

32 E. LACOCK STREET
PITTSBURGA, PA. N. S.

BELL 'PHONE, CEDAR 290

Parting of the Ways Home letterhead.

HHC Detre L&A, Parting of the Ways Home Records, MSS1186.B01.F09.I01.

in Chicago under the impression it was a saloon, he was persuaded to stay for an evening service. The experience inspired a will to change. Set on his feet by the evangelical mission, McBride felt moved to help others. He began visiting prisoners in Chicago's Harrison Street Jail as a volunteer and later worked for the Y.M.C.A. of Chicago. With Judge McKenzie Cleland, father of Chicago's parole program, he developed plans for a re-entry program for recently released inmates, called the Parting of the Ways Home, which opened in 1909.

As calls for a Parting of the Ways Home in Pittsburgh advanced in 1913, McBride traveled to open the home with the intention of remaining just six months, until a replacement could arrive. He stayed for nearly two decades. McBride gained popularity as a public speaker at local civic clubs and with the Chautauqua lecture circuit. He seized the opportunity as a public relations vehicle for the home (which relied on public funding) and pressed for a similar home for women, the New Future Association. His advocacy led to

Making good.

Wm Haller, Auto Repair Shop
Ike Olbum, Furniture Stores.
Mr Everson, Paying Teller,
Prezewerzikouski, Drug Store
Wm Gavin, Supt. Elec Duquesne
Harry G Eber, Auto, Sale Bank
Dave Rosenfeld, Biz Man
Wertzman, Supt Insurance
Ben Resneck, State Furnace M
C.A. Hudson, Halifax, N.S.
Ben Shaprio, \$5,000. Forbes
Nick Katsaros, Biz, Creighton
C.L. Glass, Big Biz, C of C
wife
Ben England, supervisor,
Wm.H. Sabins, U.S. Hosp.

ABOVE: Parting of the Ways Home superintendent Rollo H. McBride maintained informal lists of the home's previous residents, including their current occupation or whereabouts.

HHC Detre L&A, Parting of the Ways Home Records, MSS1186.B01.F04.I04.

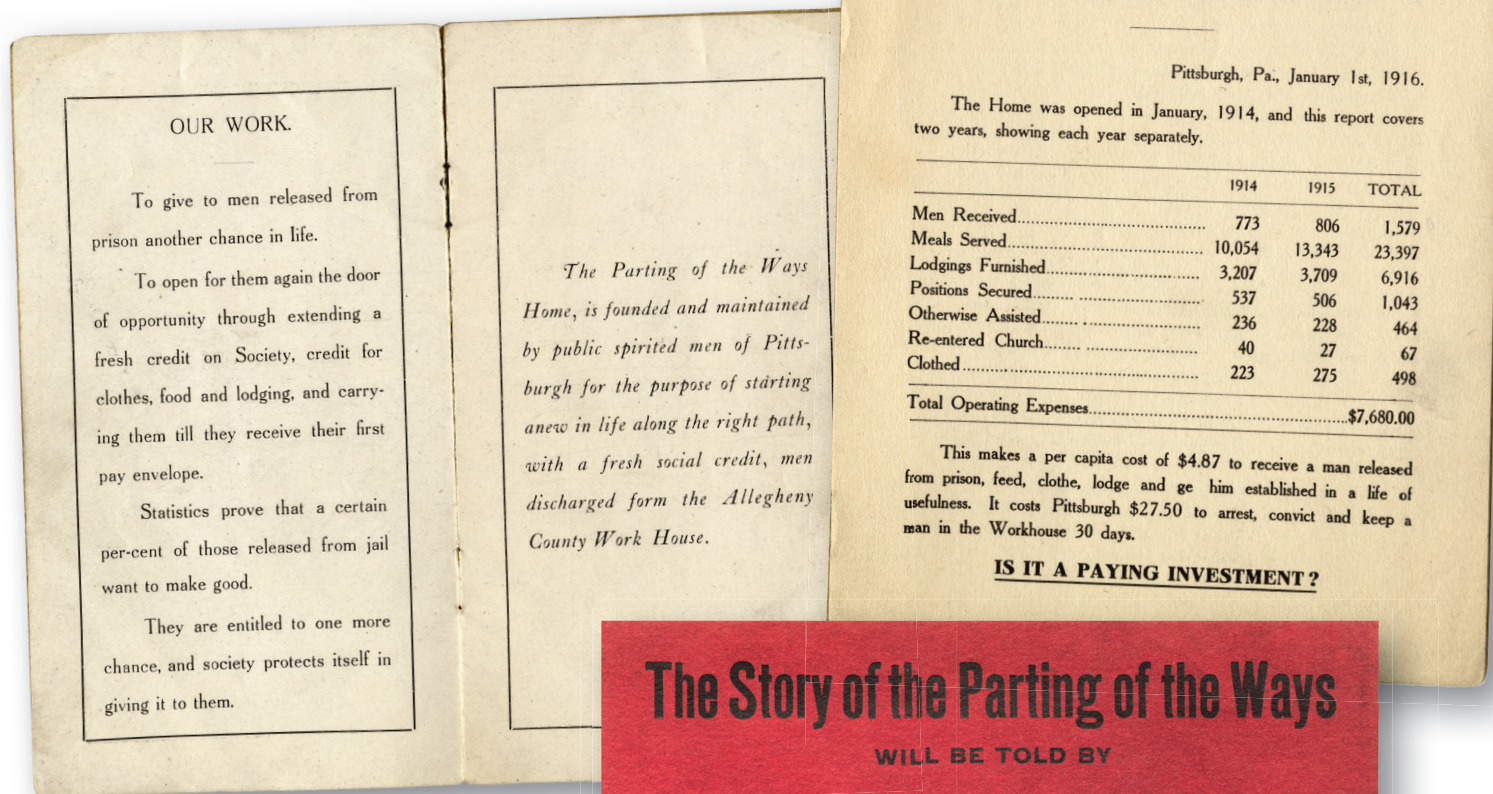
BELOW: An early annual report for the home depicts its first building on 32 E. Lacock Avenue.

HHC Detre L&A, Parting of the Ways Home Records, MSS1186.B01.F06.I02.



RIGHT: The home's second annual report provides statistic on its first two years of operation.

HHC Detre L&A, Parting of the Ways Home Records, MSS1186.B01.F06.I04.



ABOVE: This brief mission statement appears in the home's second annual report, printed in 1916.

HHC Detre L&A, Parting of the Ways Home Records, MSS1186.B01.F06.I03.

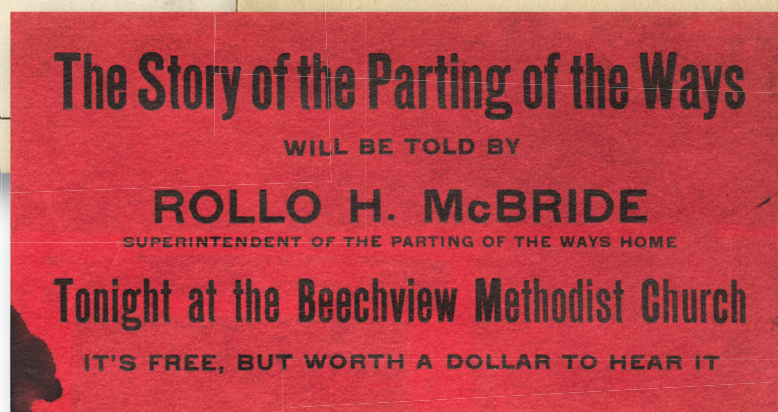
an appointment as a City of Pittsburgh public defender by Mayor Joseph G. Armstrong. The post allowed him to represent—without salary or legal training—defendants unable to afford legal representation and ferry them into the home upon their release. By the end of its first decade, the home had provided temporary housing for nearly 15,000 men, found work for nearly 11,000, and relocated to a larger building several blocks away at 216 E. Stockton Avenue.

McBride remained in Pittsburgh until his death in 1931 at age 72. His widow, Lottie King McBride, assumed his role as superintendent. She held the position until shortly before the home closed in 1947. Lottie added McBride's obituaries, eulogies, and formal minutes of the home's board of directors for the years 1916 to 1947 to the scrapbooks, articles, notes, and annual reports he left behind. Together

these records document McBride's personal history and the internal management of the home, and evince conversations and attitudes regarding penal reform and the parole system in early 20th-century Western Pennsylvania. The Parting of the Ways Home Records were donated to the Detre Library & Archives by the

McBride's granddaughter in January 2019.

To find out more about Rollo McBride and the Parting of the Ways Home, you can visit this and other archival collections documenting Western Pennsylvania history at the Detre Library & Archives.



McBride used public speaking to solicit interest in the home and raise funds for its operations, which relied solely on private donations.

HHC Detre L&A, Parting of the Ways Home Records, MSS1186.

