

Rest Haven Not to Be Opened

Residents of Monroe (New York) may well find a sense of something missing this summer. For a special group of visitors that has arrived annually for the past 43 years will not be showing up this year. They are the blind and deaf-blind women who have enjoyed a summer vacation at Rest Haven, a house located on a five-acre estate in Monroe.

Whether the name "Rest Haven" will have future significance, or simply become a part of Monroe's history, is the question raised by a recent announcement from the board of trustees of the American Foundation for the Blind, owner of the property and organizer of the summer programs since 1943.

After many months of study, the Foundation's trustees have reached the decision that the vacation program for blind women, which were provided at the Rest Haven site, would be discontinued after last summer's session and that the property would not be reopened for active occupancy under the Foundation's auspices. The action is the result of two major considerations.

First, the American Foundation for the Blind, with national headquarters at 15 West 16th Street, New York City, has been called upon increasingly over the past few years to devote its staff and funds to activities for the blind that have an overall impact, such as special aids and appliances used by blind people, research, publishing, and talking books.

Second, the trustees decided it would be desirable to eliminate from the Foundation's responsibilities those services that are provided directly to blind persons and, therefore, more normally are the responsibility of local agencies. An example of this local approach is the 42-year old Vacation Camp for the Blind in Spring Valley, New York, which receives support from the Greater New York Fund.

Furthermore, the trustees were aware that facilities similar to Rest Haven, including summer camps for all age groups and both sexes, have been established in the immediate New York State area and also throughout New England. Therefore, the discontinuance of Rest Haven, the trustees believe, will not constitute a serious loss to those persons in need of the experience and who have been accustomed to the Rest Haven programs.

"When Rest Haven was first conceived and inaugurated in 1923, it was virtually the first and only facility of its kind in this immediate region" according to Richard H. Migel, an officer of the American Foundation for the Blind and a resident of Monroe. "In the light of changing times in the field of social welfare in general, and the welfare of blind persons in particular, our Foundation would not these days consider it appropriate to directly operate such a residence or program. Rather, it makes more sense to

day for us to help stimulate local agencies to meet a need of this kind.

"We have continued to operate Rest Haven for a number of years primarily because of our own affection for the people it served and because we wanted to carry out as long as it was at all feasible to do so the tradition it had acquired as a unique bit of comfort for as many blind women as possible".

Mr. Migel is the son of the late M. C. Migel, who not only was a principal founder of the American Foundation for the Blind in 1921 but also, with the assistance of the late Mrs. Migel and others, created and managed the Rest Haven activity from 1923 to 1943, primarily as a personal philanthropy.

After carrying the full responsibility for Rest Haven for 20 years, the Migel family and their friends found that its growth had reached a point where an established and functioning organization should assume the responsibility. Thus, the property was donated to the American Foundation for the Blind.

Monroe citizens, in their capacities as tradespeople, members of civic groups, the professional community, and even occasionally as contributors of support, have always expressed an admirable group attitude as though Rest Haven and the women who have come each summer were somehow the community's own. The staff at Rest Haven each summer, most of whom have been volunteers, have never lacked for ready assistance from the town, be it of a minor problem of meeting a bus, a more major problem of clean-up after a hurricane, or even a major problem of emergency illness.

Monroe's older generation undoubtedly can count many persons who knew and loved the long-time director of Rest Haven, Mrs. Elsie H. Macafee. For a few years before Mrs. Macafee retired, she had the assistance of Mrs. Dorothy B. Wallendorf. After Mrs. Macafee's retirement in 1957, Mrs. Wallendorf assumed the responsibilities and continued through last year's final season.

The trustees of the American Foundation for the Blind are currently considering a number of alternatives with regard to the future use of the property on High Street. Mr. Migel and other officers explained that for the past several years efforts were made to secure the interest of establishing agencies serving blind persons in the Metropolitan New York area in the hope that some other agency would take over Rest Haven, either to continue its established summer program or even undertake to use the facility on a year-round basis for a needed and related purpose.

For a number of reasons, no agency of sufficiently substantial nature has yet expressed interest.

The trustees of the Foundation will be considering over the next few weeks and months what action will be taken in respect to the property.