

A Living Library Project

History of Children's Services

**The History of the Carlton Refuge
from the 1850's to 1920**

First Published 1920



History of the Carlton Refuge
First Published 1919

The report was originally published by Ford,
a printer in Carlton.
There is no information about author.

Republished by the Crow Collection Association as part of the
1992 Living Library Project on the History of Children's
Services

Booklet Number 1.

Illustration by Simon Kneekone, from "Do It Yourself Social
Research" by Yoland Wadsworth.

Introduction

The History of the Carlton Refuge Reprint of

Reminiscences of the Carlton Refuge Report published 1919

This booklet, about a "home for unmarried mothers", describes how "some of the poor girls never had a chance, and were quite ignorant of ordinary housework". However :-

Many of the inmates responded to the teaching, and are turned out quite good servants. All are better workers when they leave than when they are admitted. It is not uncommon to hear the remark, "I like a girl from the Refuge - they are such good laundresses."

The Carlton Refuge, established in the mid 1850s, was where the Queen Elizabeth Centre now stands on the block bounded by Swanston, Keppel, Cardigan and Lytton Streets in Carlton.

The report presents a pen picture of life in an institution for single mothers and the social attitudes of the "large hearted citizens" who dominated the philanthropic organisations from the mid nineteenth century until after the Second World War.

The booklet has been republished to help students and community organisations to visualise the past. It is part of a series called "Just Before Living Memory". The report shows that the moral attitudes of the nineteenth century continued well into the twentieth century.

History of the Carlton Refuge
From 1850s to 1920

Reprint of Report called
Reminiscences of the Carlton Refuge
June 1919

(Note :- Headings have been added but no other alterations have been made to the original text).

"The Weak, the Wasters and Undesirables Needed Protection"

In the eighteen fifties, when Melbourne was an undeveloped State, the discovery of gold caused a great influx of population into Victoria. Immigrant vessels were bringing from Britain hundreds of young girls, many of them friendless; on arrival the girls were lodged at a depot, and as labour was scarce, they quickly obtained situations, then all Government supervision ceased.

Many of the girls were soon married, others became useful members of society in various positions, but the weak, the wasters and the undesirables needed the protection of a home, especially those who found themselves in trouble, so the Bishop of Melbourne (Dr Perry), Dr Cairns and other large hearted citizens decided to a home for such girls.

A cottage was rented in South Yarra, not far from where the railway station now stands, but a cottage was soon found to be too small and altogether unsuitable for the work.

Government Land Near the University

The Government was approached, and sympathising with the movement, gave monetary assistance, and also a block of land in the wilds at the north of the town - near where some forty acres had been granted a short time before as a site for a University.

The land given for the home was a large triangular shaped block, high, well drained, and with an extensive view of Kew and the surrounding country.

Wide roads were surveyed but not made, on each side of the block: at the north was some vacant land which for years was used for breaking-in horses, but which was now been turned into a rock garden. Beyond the gardens is the Melbourne General Cemetery. The ground being quite isolated was most suitable for a home.

Designs were called for and a building soon started. A most imposing brick wall, some ten feet high, with bluestone foundations, was erected all around the land. A small cottage was built for the head matron close to Keppell Street.

A large block of buildings was placed in the middle of the land, consisting of a committee room, which also did duty as matron's dining room, a large dining room for the inmates, kitchen, laundry, nursery, pantries etc. Connecting the cottage and the main building was a long corridor, opening off which were a number of cell-like rooms about ten feet by six feet, with narrow slots for windows, altogether a most prison-like place.

This was the sleeping accommodation for the girls, who peeping from their narrow windows, could see the high brick wall whichever way they looked.

Locked Gates a High Brick Wall and Prickly Pear

There was little attempt at a garden, and the only thing that flourished was prickly pear, which was planted on the inside of the wall, whether for ornament or protection it is hard to say, and it was both troublesome and expensive to remove at a later date.

In the wall were high gates; there was a great turning of locks when anyone sought ingress to the institution.

The entrance was in the centre of the block, and about the middle of the land. Every time the doorbell rang a matron had to walk half across the land, in winter's cold or summer's heat, with only an overhead protection. There was not much protection from the wind, and answering the door was not too enviable an undertaking on a cold winter's night.

In a short time the sleeping accommodation was found to be insufficient, so a new wing was added, with the same long corridor, and the same small rooms, and the same small windows - just a facsimile of the old wing. The building could now accommodate about forty girls and four matrons.

At the end of the corridor a nice little church was built, where divine service was held every Sunday, the various clergymen in the neighbourhood taking the services in turn.

"The Highland Laddie"

A rather amusing episode occurred one Sunday; the minister who was a Highlander, happened to be unavoidably detained just as he was starting for the Refuge. The girls were all assembled at the usual time, the matron waiting to answer the door on arrival of the clergyman. As he approached he heard the lusty singing of the familiar tune "O where and O where has our Highland Laddie gone." There was great confusion of face when the Highland Laddie entered.

Rules were drawn up for the government of the institution, the most important of which was that the inmates should remain in the home for a period of twelve months. A committee was appointed. The Bishop wrote a beautiful prayer, which is read to this day at the opening of the meetings.

No Definite Name

One thing the founders evidently neglected to do was to give the institution a definite name. People of doubtful character are usually contented with one alias, but the Refuge had many.

The receipt books were headed "The Refuge". Other printed papers were headed "The Protestant Refuge". The public used the name that came to hand such as "Carlton Refuge", "Female Refuge", "Woman's Refuge", "Keppell Street Home". Indeed when money was donated to charity and the list printed in the daily papers, it was quite difficult to decide if the Carlton Refuge had been mentioned or not.

When the institution was incorporated in 1895 the name was fixed definitely as the "Carlton Refuge", but even now one or other of the old names are sometimes used.

Unfortunately, many of the early records of the Refuge were destroyed by fire, so it is difficult to obtain much information respecting the work done.

Teaching Washing and Household Duties

For many years a large laundry business has been carried on, and the funds of the institution have been augmented by the income derived from the work done by the inmates, but the main aim of the committee has been to teach the girls washing and other household duties.

Some of the poor girls when admitted have never had a chance, and are quite ignorant of ordinary house work. One child came in when she was about twelve or thirteen. Her figure was twisted and out of shape because she had been milking quite a number of cows, starting often before daylight.

Many of the inmates respond to the teaching, and are turned out quite good servants. All are better workers when they leave than when they are admitted. It is not uncommon to hear the remark, "I like a girl from the Carlton Refuge - they are such good laundresses."

Some of the girls when their time is up are sent to suitable homes in the country, taking their babies with them. Often word comes back that the girl is comfortably married, and can the committee send someone to take her place.

For some time the institution was run partly on institutional lines, as there were so many young girls admitted about twelve of age. But now it is young mothers and their babies that are looked after.

The nursery is the most interesting spot in the home. On one occasion the President took a member of Parliament to see the babies. When he went away he said "He had never seen such a sight in his life - a large room with some thirty or forty women sitting all around and each nursing a baby."

Developing the Maternal Instinct

The numbers vary greatly. Occasionally there are more babies than girls - that is when there has been an epidemic of twins, but that does not often occur. Sometimes a baby is adopted, and sometimes one is put on the State. But this is only done when the mother is either physically or mentally unfit to earn enough to keep herself and her child.

The great desire of the committee is to keep mother and child together, and so develop the maternal instinct.

From the dim echoes that reach us from the past the Refuge must have been quite a popular institute in the early days. We hear of matrons that were entertained and befriended at Government House.

A market gardener kept the home in vegetables to the day of his death, to show gratitude on account of the good treatment of one of the inmates. On one occasion when matron answered the bell she found a man at the gate who gave her a small parcel, saying it was for the Refuge, and then departed. On opening the parcel it was found to contain a neat bundle of bank notes.

Even in those days there were some thrifty souls. The secretary received a letter from a man stating that his wife had died, and that he thought of marrying again, and would the committee be so kind as to send him a suitable girl. He would like her height to be five foot four inches and she should be of slight build, for then she could wear the clothes of the departed dear one. "Thrift, thrift, Horatio".

For some years nothing of public interest is recorded. Matrons came and went, inmates came and went, and to make a diversion a girl would go over the wall. In 1882/3 no less than twelve girls are reported to have escaped.

Disastrous Times when the Banks Closed

The year 1893 was a disastrous time for Melbourne and the Carlton Refuge did not escape financial trouble. The institution being well in funds the committee decided to lay in a large stock of drapery, soap, etc so that the monthly bills were than double the usual amount.

The week before pay day the crash came. The London Chartered Bank closed its doors, and all the Refuge money was locked up. The Committee met, but did not know where to look for money. The Gentlemen's Committee was called, but they were unable to help. Most of the banks had closed. Few people in Melbourne knew where to lay hands on ready cash.

Mrs Goe was president at the time and she put the case before the Treasurer and he allotted a sum of fifty pounds. Bishop Goe was kind enough to lend ten pounds, but still the debt loomed large before the committee.

What was to be done ? Every day brought pay day nearer, and there was only sixty pounds to meet the bills. The ladies paid up their subscriptions for the year, but this did not amount to much. By payday there was just enough money in hand to meet the salaries and the smaller accounts, but the treasurer was obliged to go around and ask the shop people where there were large amounts owing to wait a little for their money. They all agreed to wait, but how they were to be paid the committee did not know.

However, there was four weeks to look around and that was something. Then wonderful to relate, the money began to come in. Washing bills were paid promptly. No large sums were received, but just a little here and there, so by the next month, all the tradesmen were paid in full and the following month every penny was paid off, and there was a little in hand. When the banks released the money, as was done to all charities, the committee were able to go on their way with grateful and thankful hearts, feeling assured that the Lord had helped them in their time of difficulty and trouble.

Funds from a Garden Party

In 1898 the funds were running low, so it was decided to hold a fete. Mrs Robert Harper, daughter of Dr Cairns, one of the founders of the Refuge, kindly granted the committee the use of her garden at Toorak.

A number of friends assisted in various ways, and a most successful fete was the result, some 300 pounds being raised in the afternoon. All goods were not disposed of, so the next spring, Mrs George Howat, of Royal Park, kindly lent her garden, and a small sale of gifts was held. All goods were disposed of, the Refuge benefiting by nearly 100 pounds. Thus the ladies were relieved of all financial anxiety for some time to come.

The Carlton Refuge was founded in 1854, so in 1904 it was decided to celebrate the Jubilee by improving the building. The first idea was to have quite a new building, but after considering the matter the committee was afraid to incur such a large responsibility, so a compromise was decided on.

The central block was retained, but all the small insanitary rooms were razed to the ground. The money question had to be considered, so Lady Weedon was approached by the Lady Mayoress and she kindly agreed to make a public appeal for funds to enable the desired improvements to be carried out. The public responded liberally, and some 5000 pounds was subscribed. Designs were called for, and those sent in by Messrs. Clark and Son were accepted. Tenders were called for, and the new building was soon started.

Steam Heating and Fresh Air in New Building (1904)

The foundation stone was laid by Lady Weedon on 10th May 1907. The building was designed to accommodate fifty girls with nice bedrooms, large windows and good ventilation. The rooms opened off wide corridors, bathrooms were provided, with hot and cold water laid on. The front entrance was off Keppell Street, opening on a hall from which a committee room and a waiting room were approached.

Two nice rooms next to the committee room were provided for the matron, then followed a long corridor, with sleeping accommodation for the inmates. An enclosed ramp connected the building with the central rooms, which were all improved and thoroughly done up.

The laundry was enlarged. Steam heating was installed. Drying rooms were erected, and everything brought up to date.

The nursery was much improved. Wide verandahs were erected on all sides, so that the babies could be in the fresh air all day. A small laundry was attached, so that inmates washing could be kept quite distinct.

The Kitchen was improved and good store rooms were added.

The old cottage which was used as matron's quarters was converted into a store room to keep the bulk stock of drapery etc and also for the girls' boxes - as while in the institution the inmates were all provided with clothes.

In due time the building was finished, the Bishop of Melbourne conducted a thanksgiving service, Dr Sugden assisting. There was a large attendance of the friends of the institution.

The opening ceremony was performed by Lady Northcote on 5th December, 1907, in the presence of a large representative audience. A marquee was erected, where afternoon tea was served. Altogether it was a gala day for the institution.

The Police and Fire Brigade Tattoo

Owing to the expenses of the building and furnishing the funds were at a low ebb, so the committee began to look around to see if there was any means of raising money. While in a state of uncertainty as to what was best to be done, Mr W. J. Strong undertook to see if a tattoo at the Exhibition could be arranged.

The Police, the Fire Brigade, and others were kind enough to give a tattoo. so a date was fixed, tickets were printed and the tattoo was held, and the Refuge was again in a sound financial condition. The amount received was 700 pounds.

When the rules of the institution were first made, one was that the inmates could stay for twelve months in the home, but owing to modern ideas, the love of liberty, and the dislike to any restraint, there was a difficulty in keeping the girls so long. The committee reluctantly altered the rule, and now a girl seeking admission is only expected to sign on for six months after the birth of the child.

A Cab Load of Babies for Baby Week Exhibition

When "Baby Week" was being arranged the Carlton Refuge was asked to join in the movement. After much discussion the committee decided to send an exhibit in the afternoon only, so the matron, with a cab load of babies and assistants, went to the Town Hall and made a most interesting show. Fortunately, none of the babies were any the worse for the outing, thus relieving the committee of much anxiety.

Another new departure last year (1918) was "Wattle Day". The Refuge had never joined in the movement before, but as the institution is essentially a children's charity, and in these days of high prices, funds are always wanted, the committee decided to put their dignity in their pockets and join in the movement.

On Wattle Day the ladies were seen up and down Elizabeth Street selling roses and other posies like French flower girls. Some of them quite enjoyed the work, and another time may not be so diffident about undertaking to sell flowers in the streets of Melbourne.

Some Girls Turned Out Well

The committee will go on with the work they have undertaken. Sometimes it is discouraging. Then, again, girls are heard of who have turned out well. Many are comfortably married. One of the girls lived for many years with a lady who, on her deathbed, left her children to the care of this girl, a one-time outcast.

The girls are not followed up when they leave the home. If they like to keep in touch with the matron the committee are always pleased to hear of them. But, after all, there is little for them to be proud of, and if they can forget the time they passed in the home it may be best for their happiness.

Some of the children have grown to manhood, and have given their lives for their country "Somewhere in France".

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Carlton Refuge, June 1919.
(Ford and Son Printers, Drummond Street, Carlton).

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Crow Collection Association
Victoria University of Technology

Living Library Project on History of Children's Services
Funded by the Lance Reichstein Charitable Foundation
Sept. 1991 to May 1992
Booklets Published as Background Material.

1. The History of the Carlton Refuge from 1850s to 1920
First published 1920
2. Two Articles about Health of Women and Children :-
"The Neglected Children's Aid Society"
First published 1911
and
"The After Care Home and the District Nurses".
First published 1925
3. Two Documents about Attitudes to Slums
"Slum Babies and Slum Mothers"
First published about 1914
and
"You can't lift every baby out of the slums
The Slum Abolition Movement in the 1930s
4. History of Children's Services in Melbourne Municipality
1910 to 1980
5. "Bread and Treacle Diet"
Extracts from documents of the 1930s.
6. "Mothers must Work To Win"
Photos and leaflets from the Brunswick Children's
Centre, 1943.
7. "The Deprived West/ The Determined West" an extract from a
report by Ruth and Maurie Crow, first published 1972.
8. Creating Community in the Neighbourhood - Neighbourhood
Houses in the Western Region", transcript of a tape by
Meredith Sussex, 1978.
9. History of the Tweddle Baby Hospital, by Kathleen
Codogonotto
First published 1992
10. The past, present and future - Community Development in
the Western Region, a report by Louise Gianville, 1992
11. "Magic in the Lives of Children, Participation in the
Lives of their Parents" report prepared by Christine
Carolan and Sheila Byard, 1992.
12. Kit on Federal Funding of Children's Services.

About the Project

The Lance Reichstein Charitable Foundation funded the Crow Collection for a Living Library Project on children's services in the Western Region.

A Project Steering Committee has assisted the project worker (Christine Carolan) who has worked with providers of children's services teachers and students in the Region.

The project resulted in the production of a video which includes information on the history of child care, a kit about the way children's services are funded, a series of booklets describing community movements which resulted in initiating some of the present children's services and a display of photos of some of the people who have helped to establish these services in Melbourne's Western Region

A seminar on May 22nd 1992 marked the end of this project but the video and publications can be used well into the future.

About the Collection

Ruth Crow and her late husband, Maurie were involved in movements on urban issues from the mid 1930s. Over the years they built up an extensive collection of documents :- books, pamphlets, posters, photos and working papers.

In 1990 the Victoria University of Technology (Footscray Campus) invited Ruth to donate the collection to the VUT Library.

The Crow Collection includes documents written and/or used by groups and individuals committed to social change. This store of information from the past is being used to generate ideas about the future.

A Crow Collection Association has been formed and incorporated. One of its aims is to enhance the comprehensiveness and accessibility of the Collection through Living library Projects.

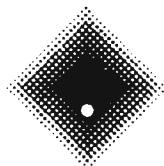
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This kit has been funded by the Lance Reichstein Charitable Foundation