

## **Children's Home – Northern and Southern Nevada**

Northern Nevada Children's Home 1870-1992

Southern Nevada Children's Home 1973-1993

(Formerly Nevada State Children's Home 1951-1973 & Nevada State Orphans' Home 1869-1951)

The first institutional provision for orphans in northern Nevada was the Nevada Orphan Asylum founded in Virginia City in 1864 by Fr. Patrick Manogue and headed by Sr. Frederica McGrath of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. From 1867-1872 this institution received state funding.

In 1869, the state Legislature passed an act providing for the establishment of a Nevada State Orphans' Home to be built on a lot of at least ten acres within the limits of Carson City to be donated by the citizens of Ormsby County. The site chosen was on Stewart Street, south of East 5th Street. \$12,000 was appropriated for the construction and furnishing of the Home, and \$3,000 to employ a husband and wife as Superintendent and Matron and meet all other expenses. The Board of Directors consisted of the State Controller, State Treasurer, and Surveyor-General; they were required to have the Home ready for occupation by the beginning of October 1870. Children under fourteen were admitted to the Home by presentation of a certificate from the Board of Commissioners of their county of residence, attesting that they were really orphans and worthy to receive the benefits of the Home. The Board kept a record of its proceedings and submitted a biennial report.

The requirements for admission to the State Orphans' Home were made more stringent in amendments of 1873. A written application on behalf of a whole orphan (both parents dead) was to be submitted to the District Judge showing that at least one parent was a resident of Nevada at the time of death. Only after a proper investigation and an order by the judge was a child to be taken to the Home. Admission was limited to children under fourteen and the age of majority of eighteen years was established for wards of state. This amended act permitted the Board to admit half orphans (only one parent dead) at their discretion on a contractual basis that could require the living parent to contribute to the child's support. In all cases, however, children admitted to the Home were wards of the state until discharged.

The education of the children was explicitly provided for in the 1873 act when the Board was given the power to appoint a qualified teacher to reside at the Home and a specific requirement that the children receive a basic education, with the boys being taught "useful trades and occupations" and the girls "housewifery." Children continued to be educated on the grounds of the Home until 1911 when rising salary costs prompted the Legislature to appropriate funds to allow the children to attend Carson City public schools.

The State Controller was replaced on the Board of Directors by the Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1873. The 1873 amendments also gave the Board authority to recapture escaped orphans, to act as guardian for any property in which an orphan might have an interest, and to apprentice orphans.

An act of 1879 gave the Board authority to receive gifts and bequests on behalf of the Home and to invest and expend such funds. Donors could specify conditions by which the Board was bound.

In 1893, the Orphan's Home Act was amended to exclude from admission any orphan who was "either an insane person, an idiot, or a person so mentally or physically deformed as to be incapable of receiving the elements of an education in the usual English branches."

Although the Home was established primarily for whole orphans, there were actually very few admitted. There was a greater need to provide for children whose parents were living but absent or otherwise unable to care for them. On November 28, 1894, the Attorney-General gave a written opinion that it would be "an act of humanity" for the Board to exercise its discretion in exceptional cases even if by strict construction of the statutes only whole and half orphans could be admitted. Subsequently the Board admitted children of living parents but they were listed in the Home's register as half orphans until 1900.

The 1870 building burned in 1902 and the 1903 Legislature approved the building of a new Home. \$38,000 was appropriated from the School Fund to be replaced with 4% twenty year bonds. The new Home, on the same site, was built with sandstone from the State Prison Quarry.

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The 1913 Legislature authorized a Nevada School of Industry in Elko for "delinquent" children which was completed in June 1915. Boys from nine to eighteen could be committed to the School and were maintained at the expense of the State, but children committed to the Children's Home remained a charge on the County. In succeeding decades it was sometimes charged that in some counties this financial consideration was a determining factor in deciding to which institution boys should be committed.

That the Home was an outmoded way of caring for children was suggested at least as early as 1924 when a report on Nevada state government commissioned from the New York Bureau of Municipal

Research recommended substituting home placement for institutional care. The report suggested that this would be both more economical and more in accord with the needs of the children. It was noted that a

number of children were maintained in the Home beyond the legal age for discharge and that some had resided there for very extended periods, for as long as fifteen years in the case of three children.

In 1937, a Senate Committee investigating the Home found the buildings to be "in a dilapidated, run-down condition, greatly in need of repair." They were a "great fire hazard," and "the plumbing is a menace to the health of the inmates." Although the report mostly discussed the physical plant, there was some assessment of the treatment received by the residents. The committee found that the children were healthy and well-clothed, but evidently a misdirected effort in the application of discipline existed in the institution, and the "the atmosphere of 'home' was absolutely lacking."

The Senate committee made several recommendations including replacing the building with a system of cottages, housing eight to twelve children supervised by a housemother, while recognizing that this was not financially feasible for the state at the time.

In 1943, the State Board of Relief, Work Planning, and Pension Control was made responsible for the

Home and constituted as its Board of Directors. This Board was established in 1937 and was also the

Board of the Welfare Department. In 1949, the Board and the Welfare Department were abolished and a newly constituted State Welfare Department established. This new Welfare Department was supposed to administer and manage the affairs of the Orphans' Home, but when a new Superintendent and Matron

were needed in 1951, the Attorney-General rendered an opinion that, as the Board of Relief had been abolished but the Welfare Department had not been constituted the Board of Directors for the Home, the

Department could not make such appointments. To remedy this situation, an amendment of 1951 made the State Welfare Board the policy making body for the Home replacing the Board of Directors.

In 1951, the name "Nevada State Orphans' Home" was changed to "Nevada State Children's Home." A change of name had been proposed by the Superintendent in 1948, but he wanted a "happy-sounding name." Along with the new official name, the Home was also known as Sunny Acres.

In the 1950s there were still concerns about the physical problems of the 1903 building. It continued to be cited as a fire hazard, and there was severe overcrowding. There were also continued questions about the suitability of congregate care in large institutions for the satisfactory social development of children.

In 1947, the State Planning Board had formally proposed that the Home be rebuilt on the cottage plan.

The first step toward this was the building of the Food Service Unit in 1951-2. In 1959, the Legislature appropriated money for the first cottages.

For some years, there had been a call to make residential facilities available in more than one part of the state. In 1967 the Legislature appropriated funds for a cottage plan facility in Clark County. The Southern

Nevada Children's Home, in Boulder City, admitted its first children in August 1969. This facility was administered by an Assistant Superintendent. In 1973, the legislature renamed the Nevada State

Children's Home the "Northern Nevada Children's Home" and gave the Southern Nevada Children's

Home equal status, creating a separate fund for each Home. The legislature also established a state

Department of Human Resources and made each Home a division of the Youth Services Agency of this department with the agency Administrator responsible for appointing both Superintendents.

The Northern Nevada Children's Home ceased operations in 1992 and the Southern Nevada Children's

Home in 1993, by administrative action when no funds were appropriated for their continued operation.

#### Nevada Children's Home Case Files – Policy on Access

Case files document the intake, care and release of young children in the Northern and Southern

Nevada Children's Homes. Files do not exist for every child cared for over the history of the Home.

Most files date from the 1950s-closing of the home; occasionally there are older files. The case files are usually divided into two separate groups of documents: official records and personal records.

The official records that are permanent records of state government, include:

1. Case summary information and historical sheets,
2. Psychological and psychiatric reports,
3. Case reports from social workers,
4. Juvenile court and probation documents, and
5. Correspondence dealing with care in the home.

Sometimes permanent records for whole families are in one folder.

The personal records may include:

1. Correspondence (original and copies) to and from family, friends and the home;
2. Vital records (original and copies) including birth certificates, marriage certificates, social security cards;
3. Church records including baptism, confirmation, first communion and other certificates;
4. School records;
5. Medical and dental records;
6. Photos, greeting cards, awards, certificates and original drawings.

These are sometimes separated in an envelope, sometimes not. Sometimes personal records for whole families are in one envelope.

#### Access and copying

Former Children's Home residents may look at everything in their own files except the juvenile court and probation documents. These are only accessible through the juvenile court system. The copies in the files exist because the staff at the home needed to have that information to provide proper care for the individual.

Family members of former residents may look at everything in the file except the juvenile court and probation documents; medical and dental records; case reports from social workers; and the psychological and psychiatric reports. Medical files and psychiatric reports are restricted under NRS

629.021-061 and social worker reports are restricted under NRS 49.251-254.

Family members with power of attorney may see everything except juvenile court and probation records.

All official records can be photocopied except juvenile court and probation documents.

Personal files will be given to the individual or to a family member with power of attorney upon completion of Receipt for Personal Items in the Records of the Nevada Children's Homes form.

#### Northern Nevada Children's Home - Records

Records 1870-1992 58.5 cubic feet and 20 volumes

The records of the Northern Nevada Children's Home consist of administrative records: annual reports, financial materials, admittance records, correspondence, newsletters, architectural plans and drawings, Board of Directors' minutes, and photographs; and client files. The client files are arranged alphabetically with an index available.

Access to individual client or case files is limited to the clients themselves.