

CHILDREN'S FARM HOME

A Lacey Museum Publication

April 2014

“To Establish Home in Lacey,” read the headlines in the December 17, 1925 edition of the *Olympia News*. The Washington Juvenile Protection Association founded the Home to be a place for orphaned or neglected children. Established in Seattle in July of 1925 by representatives from various locations in Washington, this private organization set out to fill a need in human services, in particular the need for a home for children in southwestern Washington state. The goal was to find families for the children as quickly as possible. Although the Association worked closely with the state and hired Clara J. Upton, a former state agent for the Human Bureau, as the first superintendent, the Home was to survive solely on private contributions.

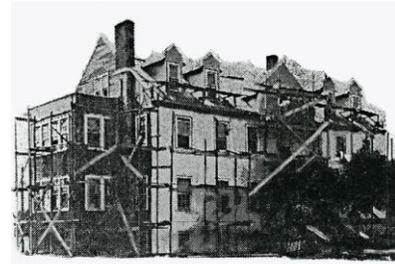


Lacey Children's Farm Home
Courtesy Lacey Museum

In December 1925, the Association purchased a little over 71 acres in Lacey. The property chosen was the southeastern portion of the original Isaac Wood Donation Land Claim. Ideally located near a public highway (Pacific Avenue), a railroad station and a public school, the property also featured an orchard, greenhouse and a large dwelling which was easily refurbished to accommodate up to 25 children.

The Home was due to open January 3, 1926, but nearby St. Martin's College requested a restraining order. The College, which included a boarding school for boys, feared that the Home would admit juvenile delinquents and prove to be detrimental to the neighborhood. A King County Superior Court lifted the restraining order after determining that the charter of the Home prevented it from admitting “incorrigible” children. The Lacey Children's Farm Home officially opened January 22, 1926 with the first children arriving from Seattle in February.

The Home grew quickly. By June 1927, the Home had cared for over 200 children and there were 82 children in residence at the time. Construction began as early as August 1926 on another large building. Although contributions from charitable organizations were constant throughout the life of the Home, the board of the Washington Juvenile Protection Association went directly to the citizens of Olympia to request \$1,500. The campaign was successful. The new dormitory opened on June 19, 1927 in a ceremony that attracted thousands.



New Boys' Dormitory
Courtesy Lacey Museum/City of Lacey

The *Morning Olympian* described the building as “modern throughout;” The *Olympia News* called it, “quite complete...fireproof.” Constructed of concrete, this large structure contained three stories and a basement. It housed the kitchen and dining room for the entire Farm Home and dormitories for the boys. The girls remained in the original structure.

G. A. Paulson replaced Clara Upton as the superintendent in 1928. Later he was replaced by Fred Munz, who stayed for the remainder of the life of the Home. They were aided by numerous other paid staff members. During the Depression, the staff also included parents whose children had been placed in the Home due to extreme poverty.

The Home depended on the contributions of numerous organizations from Lacey, Olympia, Fort Lewis and Tacoma. The Lacey community frequently chipped in through the efforts of St. Martin's College, the Elephants' Club and the Lacey Women's Club. Local stores contributed food and clothing. The Church of the Brethren came each Sunday to conduct Sunday school.

Accounts in the Olympia newspapers usually praised the activities at the Home and the efforts of the staff to provide a healthy environment for the children. In truth, life for the children was not so rosy. Several children ran away. One former resident describes her three months at the Home in the late 1920s as the worst three months of her life. She remembers the staff eating hearty meals as the children received meager amounts of food. Another recollects spending his first night in the Home listening to crying babies and enduring the smell of stale urine. Older boys were expected to work in the fields tending to the hay and weeding the corn. Despite the initially stated goals of the Association to place children with families as soon as possible, many children spent years at the Home. When placed with different families, brothers and sisters lost track of each other.



Children from the Home

Courtesy Lacey Museum/City of Lacey

Even before they entered the Home, however, tragedy had usually struck these children with the death of one or both parents, so that the Home faced an uphill battle trying to make life happy for them. One former resident does remember his life there fondly, appreciative of the generous efforts of various charities and thankful for the fact that during the Depression he had food and clothing when so many lacked these basic necessities. Another remembers going to Fort Lewis at Christmas-time to receive presents. He would go swimming in the nearby lake and watch the horses run around the racetrack on the property next door.

On November 30, 1936, a small fire started on the third floor of the boys' dormitory around the flue on the furnace. Efforts to contain the fire failed. Although it was still small by the time the Olympia Fire Department arrived on the scene, the fire continued to grow because there was not enough water pressure to put it out. The concrete building burned slowly, providing enough time not only to rescue all the children, but to salvage most of the furnishings as well. The building, however, was completely destroyed. The Lacey community responded with generosity. The boys stayed at St. Martin's College or with local families. Local organizations provided hot meals.

Despite fundraisers after the fire, the boys' dormitory was never rebuilt. The boys were placed with foster families and the Farm Home gradually ceased its activities. The Munz family continued to occupy the original dwelling and provided foster care for several children for years to come. Fred Munz died in 1978. The site of the Farm Home is now the Homewood Addition on the east side of Homann Drive.

Revised April 5, 2014 by Lanny Weaver

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