

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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BOISE CHILDREN'S HOME (Advertiser Column By Nancy DeHamer)

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Combine one Boise schoolteacher who owned a block of land, a minister interested in children, a group of concerned citizens led by the governor, and homeless children with nowhere to go. The result? A children's home.

The founding of the Children's Home Finding and Aid Society in the spring of 1908 was the first major step in providing a temporary home for Idaho children who were orphaned or whose parents could not care for them. Cynthia Mann donated almost an entire block on Warm Springs Avenue for use by the Society. The Rev. O. P. Christian, a minister concerned about homeless children, was appointed state superintendent of the project. The Board of Directors included the Governor of Idaho and many other of the state's leading citizens.

As soon as the Society was founded, a building on Mrs. Mann's property was renovated for use as a Children's Home, providing temporary shelter until the youngsters could be returned to their parents or placed in adoptive or foster homes.

But the Society was planning bigger things; a new building was badly needed. The state legislature was persuaded to appropriate \$20,000 on the condition that the Society match it with another \$20,000, all to be used for the new building.

Plans were made for fund-raising. Many people made donations, and communities across the state arranged their own activities and contributed the proceeds to the fund. Boise's first major fund-raising event was a Tag Day held on October 31, 1908. On that day the city was governed by a woman mayor and

woman officials. Girls with tags stood on each corner imploring passersby to purchase one or more tags at 10¢ each. The Capitol News commented that "one may purchase as many tags as he feels his conscience will be eased by or his purse will permit, but everyone is expected to buy at least one tag which insures the purchaser from further requests." The citizens of the city entered into the day with a festive spirit. The police chief for the day "arrested" many citizens and held them until their fines were paid. A local editor was fined for not reading the paper and prominent businessmen were fined for loafing. A baked-food sale was held and the day's proceeds of all the city's theaters went to the fund. Twenty-five hundred dollars were raised during that day, and a charity ball the following week raised another \$1,000. Later local theatrical productions were also used as fund-raising devices.

An elaborate ceremony and an address by the national president of the Children's Home Finding Society marked the laying of the cornerstone of the new building on May 14, 1910. The home was completed in December and formally dedicated on December 28. J. E. Tourtellotte, the architect of the Statehouse, also designed the Home. At the time of its dedication, the Society had already cared for 465 children, finding permanent homes for most of them.

Pictures in the Historical Society's files show Cynthia Mann with some of the first children the Society aided. Another photograph shows the cast of "A Night Off," a benefit for the Home given at the Pinney Theatre; a third the Home as it appeared shortly after its completion looking much as it does now [1970].

It stands today as a monument to Idaho citizens who saw a need and acted to do something about it.

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