

Notes on the British Columbia Protestant Orphans' Home

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Bishop and Mrs. Cridge were asked to take an orphaned child into their home, and having accepted one child, were requested to take several more. It became evident to the Cridges that a home was needed in Victoria to accommodate orphaned and destitute children.

Bishop Cridge engaged the interest of a group of philanthropic citizens to support an Orphan's Home. The Home was opened in 1873 in a very small house accommodating a matron and five children. This rented house became inadequate very quickly but the idea of an Orphan's Home was established. The group next erected a two-story frame building on Rae Street (now Courtney Street) on part of the Present YMCA site, where the Orphans' Home remained until a large gift made another move possible.

John George Taylor was an adventurer who had prospected in the California gold rush in 1849 and in the Australian gold rush of 1851, returning to Victoria in 1859 to settle down as a policeman. He died in 1891 leaving a cash legacy of \$30,858 to assist orphaned children. This bequest was used to build "a modern, up-to-date, brick building in large grounds that would be useful for generations to come in caring for our less fortunate children and turning them out as useful and Christian citizens."¹

Twelve and one-half acres at Hillside and Cook were purchased for \$12,500. A competition was held to plan a one hundred-bed structure, and Mr. Thomas Hooper's plans were accepted. The present structure was built for \$20,310, and officially opened on November 18, 1893. The event, according to the newspaper report, 'was largely attended, both by those in active sympathy with the objects of the institution and the general public'. Bishop Cridge spoke a few words and referred to the fact that he was the oldest of the first movers of the Home. He also wrote a brief history of the rise and progress of the B.C. Protestant Orphans' Home, which was placed with other items in a cavity in the cornerstone, and published in the *Annual Report* for 1893.

The B.C. Protestant Orphan's Home had been incorporated in May, 1873 under the Benevolent Societies Act. The aims of the Society were stated as follows: "the object of this Institution is to receive and to provide a Home for orphaned, destitute and other children, under the age of ten years, requiring such care; and to educate them in the Protestant faith, and instruct them in the elements of secular knowledge". These goals were to be reached by volunteer administrators using money raised entirely through voluntary subscriptions.

The Committee of Management was to consist of three men elected by each of the major Protestant churches: Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Reformed Episcopalian, Congregational and Baptist. The Committee of Management was responsible for raising funds and administering the finances of the Home.

The Constitution provided for another group to take on a more direct service: "The Committee shall also, at their first meeting after election, appoint a Committee of Ladies composed of an equal number from each denomination to take charge of the internal

management of the Institution. Such Committee of Ladies shall appoint their officers and make their own regulations equitable according to the spirit of this Constitution, and the basis on which the Association is formed. On approved monthly requisition they may draw on the Treasurer for necessary funds, and shall therewith pay all bills. They shall also present the President a monthly report of the state of finances and the condition of the Institution.”

The role of the Ladies Committee was clarified in the by-laws: “The Ladies Committee shall have power, and it shall be their duty (subject to the approval of the General Committee) to superintend the internal business of the Home; to make, alter and amend by-laws or rules for the proper guidance of the matron and other employees, and for the discipline and control of the inmates; to exhibit in the public office at the Home, the house rules, time tables, bill of fare, etc., in force for the time being; also the name, age, and sex of all the children and when and how received; to elect their own servants and officers; to meet at least once a month; to receive and consider all accounts for supplies, etc., and after approval forward same to the Secretary for payment.”

Women contributed to the Orphans’ Home in very practical ways, by supplying food, clothing and ‘extras’. Participation in the B.C. protestant Orphans’ Home ladies Committee was an indication of status, but it appears to have required a great deal of hard work. In the early *Annual Reports* monthly supplies donated by the women were listed. For example, the report for February, 1888 stated: “Milk, daily, Mrs. Cridge; clothing, Mrs. Jordan; school books, Mr. Hibben; samples of cloth, Mrs. A. Harvey; clothing and sundries, Mrs. Roso; milk, Mrs. McDonald; child’s crib, Mrs. Geo. Henderson; underclothing and stockings, the “King’s Daughters”, Vancouver, per Mrs. Maitland Dougall; clothing and boots, Mrs. Ward; underclothing, Miss Langley; cakes, the Misses Shield, Fried, and Jones”.

Financial contributions also were listed, and voters in the annual meeting must have donated at least \$2.50 during the previous year.

The essential role of the ladies Committee in the running of the Home was acknowledged in the President’s Report for 1898: “So economical a result has been maintained mainly by the exertions of the ladies Committee who, assisted by a host of friends with needlework, clothing, provisions, etc., have thus been enabled to keep down the working expenses to so satisfactory a point.”

Certainly economy was practiced; in 1889, 32 children were given care, all for less than \$150 per month. In 1893, the cost for care for each child was just under \$77 for the year.

The role and hopeful expectations of the members of the ladies Committee are reflected in the reports of the presidents of the Ladies Committee. The Ladies Committee president in the *Annual Report* for 1905 comments with typical high hopes about children, nature and nurture:

The Committee does not, from their experience, contend that the whole problem is in proper surroundings; that there is everything in the pasturage and nothing in the stock, but it does know – for a certainty – that the removal to new and stimulating associations works

wonders, often in the most unpromising material. It is one instance of greatest satisfaction, to workers among neglected and unfortunate little ones, to see the veritable miracle of growth that takes place under these vitalizing conditions. It is as a garden of weeds had been made to blossom like a rose. This is the secret of the devotion of the workers who choose to labour in the children's home. They acquire, from positive results, a boundless faith in human possibilities. There are discouragements and disappointments as in all efforts of philanthropy; stubborn heredities, deeply rooted; impulses to overcome; sometimes sudden relapses into old conditions, but even here some hopeful signs that better impressions are gaining the mastery, and slowly laying the foundations of better things.

Clearly their optimism was tempered by the recognition that failure was possible.

The 1913 depression affected the Orphanage too. Expenditures had increased \$3,638.79, while receipts had only increased by \$1,734.38, "leaving a balance on the wrong side of about \$2000". For the first time in many years, the books did not balance. The decision was made to suggest that the honour of a seat on the Management Board should imply an obligation to personally assist in the collection of the necessary funds.

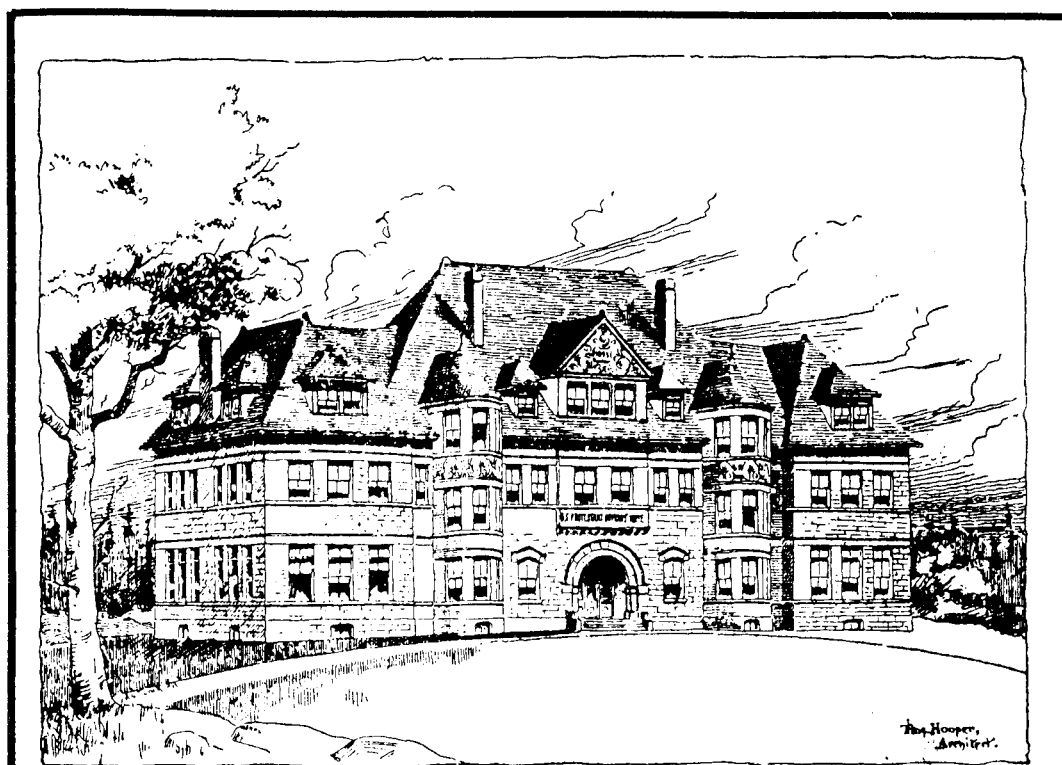
Through the greatest economy had been practiced by the Ladies Committee in the internal management of the Home, the costs of maintenance had gradually increased "due to causes over which the ladies [had] no control, viz., the higher cost of food, clothing, etc. and the necessity for employing a larger staff, at increasing salaries, to adequately provide proper attention to the additional number of inmates". Costs had reached \$11.88 per month per child "with no prospect in the immediate future of its being reduced."

The Manager, mindful of another deficit, in the 1914 *Annual Report* stated, "We are very hopeful that before another year rolls by we shall be living in more peaceful times, when confidence will be restored and improved financial conditions will naturally bring about a return to those pleasant days when revenue more than equals expenditures". The Orphanage did not receive government funds or civic aid.

Still the Managers maintained an open door. The policy of the Home was to keep brothers and sisters together, so all the children from any given family were accepted for care. In addition to orphans, other children were accepted for periods of need, varying from a few months to a few years. Employers expected adults to work long hours, six days a week, so child care was at best inadequate. On the other hand, destitution was a reality for the children of the unemployed, since no government welfare system existed and mothers' Allowances did not begin until 1920.

During the hundred years between 1873 and 1973, over 150 children were cared for at the B.C. Protestant Orphan's Home. Children were given a practical education to train them for work: manual training for the boys, cooking and sewing for the girls.

However, children with special aptitude were permitted to remain at the Orphanage for post-secondary education.



THIS perspective view of the new Home gives a fair idea of its proportions, but cannot show the completeness of its internal arrangements, or the beauty of its surroundings. The site on which it stands, (12½ acres) as well as nearly the entire cost of the building itself, is the outcome of a bequest of the late John G. Taylor, a pioneer, of this city, who, dying in 1891, vested the whole of his real and personal estate in Mr. P. R. Brown and the late A. A. Green, for the benefit of the British Columbia Protestant Orphans' Home. The Taylor estate netted the magnificent sum of \$30,358. On receipt of the amount the managers of this charity owing to the crowded condition of the old Home, and in deference to the known wishes of the deceased, resolved that the whole of it should be expended in the purchase of a suitable site, and the erection of buildings designed for the accommodation of 100 children, and steps were immediately taken to carry the resolution into effect by the appointment of the following gentlemen to select a site, viz.: The Rev. P. McF. McLeod, James Hutcheson, Esq., and Chas. Hayward, Esq.; and the nomination of F. H. Worlock, Esq., James Hutcheson, Esq., and Chas. Hayward, Esq., as a building committee. The building committee were greatly assisted in their labors by Mr. Thos. Allsop, of London, England, who kindly undertook the task of visiting several similar institutions in the mother country, and embodying the results of his enquiries and investigation in a complete set of suggestive plans by the well known London Architect, Mr. R. Owen Allsop, and from which the plans of the present structure were prepared by Mr. Thos. Hooper. The amount expended to the present date is approximately as follows:

The Site, including Conveyance, &c.....	\$12,700 00
The Buildings, including Architect's fees, electric lighting, furniture, &c.....	25,525 00
Total.....	\$38,225 00

Much remains to be gradually done in the way of new furniture, fencing, laying out the grounds, etc., for which the managers confidently rely upon the continued support of the kind friends who for years past have so generously responded to their appeals. The Home at present sustains, clothes, educates, and prepares for the active responsibilities of life about fifty destitute orphans. It is hoped that with the economical arrangements of the new institution, very little additional effort on the part of the annual subscribers will enable the managers to operate it to its fullest capacity.

Children were well-fed, well-cared for and healthy. The Annual Reports show regular surges of childhood illnesses, but record very few deaths in a time when children were very vulnerable. The goals of the B.C. Protestant Orphans' Home, to give care, secular education and practical training and Christian education to the children, were fulfilled throughout the years of its services. The women of the Ladies Committee worked to bring about the success of their project. One matron, Ada Barner, remained for more than 36 years, caring for more than 500 children.

The orphanage began in 1873 and continued to give much of the same service a hundred years later. Changed concepts of social service and social welfare meant that poor and separated parents were usually able to provide for their children unless there was some family disturbance. This meant that fewer children were orphaned. By the 1960's no child in the orphanage was without at least one parent. The children were from disturbed families or were disturbed themselves and in many cases required a different kind of care from the one provided in the orphanage. The number of children in the orphanage had decreased and community support was lessened. In fact, some negative comments were made about the orphanage in Victoria newspapers. Because the Committee of Management wished to provide a useful community service, it decided to turn for evaluation and suggestions to an organization which had shifted its form of service, the Parry Centre for Children in Portland, Oregon.

Richard D. Boro, director of the residential program at the Parry Centre, who conducted the evaluative survey for the orphanage, made some recommendations for future changes in service and in administrative style. His report also emphasized the excellent service that had been provided through the many years of the Home's existence.

The recommendations made in Boro's Report take into consideration the needs of a community one hundred years older in a society and a world much changed. The Report suggested some possible directions the changes in service might take, including residential treatment for the disturbed; day treatment; day care service; group care for adolescents; group home services; special services for the retarded; special programs for children with learning problems; and shelter care programs. The survey also pointed out some factors that limited the usefulness of the services provided to the children currently living in the Home. These factors had become serious problems as the Home now served many children who were disturbed, personally or situationally.

Boro also suggested that the Home begin to hire professionally trained staff. In the past, staff selection was often based on personal acquaintance rather than on special training and aptitude. He said that the program continued to reflect the original goals set up in the Constitution in 1893, but the staff was less able to achieve these goals with the children in residence in the 1960's. It was found that the Board of Management needed a clearer idea of welfare trends and changing social needs in order to respond with suitable programs to provide a new kind of service.

After consideration of the recommendations, the Board decided on a changed direction of service. The name of the institution was changed to Bishop Cridge Centre for the Family, and a proposed plan for development was made in 1970. While this plan has not been finalized, and some of the original services have been discontinued through lack of funds, much has been accomplished.

It was perceived that family disturbances still accounted for many of the sufferings of children. The decision was made to use some of the orphanage property for low-income housing. Twenty-nine townhouses were built to accommodate single-parent families with two or more children. Three group homes were established. A one-day care opened to serve the needs of the children in the family housing, and an after-school program was provided for older children. A summer program serves school-age children all day during school vacations. A teenage drop-in centre was opened, but later discontinued because of problems in establishing a suitable program. Family counselling was also dropped because of insufficient participation. Perhaps too many programs were started with not enough advance planning and experience, and insufficient and uncertain funding.

It is useful to think about the services for children and parents provided in the past by the Orphans' Home when planning future services. We must look behind the flowery language in the ladies Committee Reports to see how their work could be applied to present times. Many family problems are still to be solved, and the problems have not changed very much from the point of view of the child.

Families then and now are in distressed circumstances due to poverty and family disruption. Death now is a less frequent cause of distress but separation and divorce continue to dislocate families. Now, as then, the poor are particularly subject to social stress, and are often viewed as being "at fault". Society and the economy still function in a way that inevitably results in a difficult life for many children.

In earlier times, many people used Christianity as a basis for interpreting people and problems and for judging behaviour and providing solutions. Middle-class people seem to have seen themselves as having special privileges, and special responsibilities to encourage stability in the community. Middle-class women derived considerable satisfaction and status from taking a helping role in the community. Still, prosperity and social status were not guarantee against death; the Cridge family lost three sons and a daughter to scarlet fever in 1864. Perhaps this common vulnerability gave people some feeling of community that went beyond the barriers of class.

Christianity was a genuine force in individual and community life. Although judgments on conduct may appear harsh, the early *Annual Reports* of the Committees expressed a strong belief that changes could be effected in young children and even in adolescents, given kindly care, a decent place to live, Christian training, and some education and skills. Community opinion, as reflected in the *Reports*, was firmly on the side of family life as a Christian responsibility. It seems clear that parents were expected to put aside their personal antagonisms and set about providing homes for their children. Self-expression was not considered important. Committee decisions on giving temporary help to parents were based on the belief that parents should be responsible for their children.

People working with the children hoped for an expected change and improvement. They were confident in the possibilities of helping children make a better life and orphans and destitute children were considered as perfectible as anyone else. The President of the Ladies Committee in 1905 said that the work of her committee had been "productive of the happiest results. We must have money to meet constant emergencies, but better spend our money on [Homes] than on prisons and reform

schools. As we gather them in, may we feed their hungry hearts and groping minds with the Bread of Life."

The world has changed since 1873. The industrial revolution has been replaced by the technological revolution; machines produce goods, and people are valued mostly as consumers; religious interpretations of life have largely been replaced by psychological interpretations. But perhaps the needs of children have not changed very much. It may be that children need hope and high expectations and a clear set of values to help them on the way into whatever kind of world values to help them on the way into whatever kind of world they find. The successful lives of many ex-orphans from the B.C. protestant Orphans' Home, the warm feelings they express about the Home and about each other, suggest that there is more thinking to be done on the question of caring for children whose parents are unable to provide homes for them. Old *Annual Reports* of the B.C. Protestant Orphans' Home might be a place to begin looking for some new approaches.

FIRST COMMITTEE, 1873 – PROVISIONAL

Armstrong, Hon. W.J.,	Mrs. Cridge,
Cridge, Rev. Dean,	Mrs. Dupont,
Langley, A.J., J.P.	Mrs. Kent,
Macdonald, Hon. W.J.,	Mrs. W.J. Macdonald,
Jessop, J.,	Mrs. Jeffree,
McMillan, J.E., J.P.	Mrs. Pollard,
Pollard, Rev. W.,	Mrs. Sargison,
Spencer, D.,	Mrs. Stafford,
Macgregor, Rev. S.	Mrs. Finlayson,
Munro, Alex.,	Mrs. McGregor,
Robson, J., M.P.P.,	Mrs. Raymur,
Wallace, R.	Mrs. Watt.

(above) *Members of the first Committee of Management.*

<i>Number of Children:</i>	
in the Home at last report.....	43
admitted during the year	18
removed by guardians during the past year	6
placed at service during the past year	5
adopted during the past year	3
at present in the Home.....	47
Jessie F. McCulloch, President, Ladies Committee, BCPO	
Home, 1905	

(above) *Children in attendance.*

(below) Applications for admittance.

Girl, 11 years, Aug. 6, 1928

...This child has been in the Solarium with a bad leg, and now has to leave. Mother working in an hotel and could not take this child with her. The mother has been paying the amount agreed for the other three children's keep...

Decision: Application approved on condition that mother gets a certificate of health from the doctor at the Solarium and also passes our own doctor, and that mother pays \$10 per month for support of the child.

3 boys, ages 4 – 12, Aug. 1921

Father died in Seattle during influenza epidemic. These children were in the Home and taken out by the other when she was given a widow's pension. Just recently this widow's pension was taken away from her because the Pension Board say they find that owing to the father having died out of Canada, she does not come under the head of those allowed pensions. Thus, this leaves the mother in the same position as she found herself after her husband died...(approved).

Footnotes

¹ Quotations come from the several *Annual Reports* of the British Columbia Protestant Orphans' Home and from the *Minute Book*. A complete set of documents for the Orphans' Home does not exist.

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