

The Early Years

The third annual meeting of the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans Home Association was held in Des Moines on June 6, 1866. The presidential address of C. C. Cole of Des Moines outlined its progress for the past two and a half years:

The association had been formed late in December 1863. Its stated objective was "to provide a home and education for the orphan children of those who had fallen, or might thereafter fall, in the defense of our country. . . ."

When the 10th General Assembly of Iowa rejected the association's request for "aid and cooperation in the accomplishment of our objectives," a public appeal for support, funds, and contributions was made.

Grounds and a building were secured in Farmington in June of 1864 and a home was opened. Harrison Fuller, Mt. Pleasant, was named steward and placed in charge. He was succeeded by a Miss Elliot of Washington, who had the title of matron. Mrs. E. G. Platt took over that position in March of 1865.

An increasing number of children brought the employment of John A. Parvin, Muscatine, as the first superintendent on April 21, 1865.

A fair, which was held in Marshalltown on August 28, 1865, gathered \$17,290 in cash for the new home in addition to a large amount of goods, clothing, household articles, quilts, etc. At this time it was said the home "had fed, clothed, and instructed 97 children of our martyrs."

A second home was opened at Cedar Falls in August of 1865 with Arthur Morrison as superintendent. Also requesting similar homes were Davenport and Glenwood.

Mrs. Wittenmyer headed a committee which called on the War Department seeking possession of the almost new, but abandoned, Camp Kinsman army barracks in Davenport. When the committee secured temporary approval for its use, the Farmington home was closed on November 14, 1865, and its 150 children were moved by boat from Keokuk to Davenport.

Rufus Hubbard, who had become superintendent at Farmington in August of 1865, was sent to Davenport to get the camp ready for the children. Hubbard continued as superintendent until April 25, 1866, at which time Mrs. Wittenmyer, who had been serving as matron, succeeded him.

Judge Cole completed his remarks by noting that Dr. M. B. Cochran, Iowa City, had become superintendent on June 1, 1866.

Mrs. Wittenmyer left Davenport in 1867 and went on to conquer new worlds as a lecturer, author, temperance worker, and Relief Corps of-

ficer. She died February 2, 1900, at Sanatoga, Pa.

Camp Kinsman, activated on July 14, 1863, was originally named Camp Roberts for General B. S. Roberts, commander of the Iowa district. It was renamed for William H. Kinsman, a Nova Scotian, who was admitted to the Iowa bar in Council Bluffs in October of 1858. Kinsman served as a first lieutenant and captain in the 4th Iowa Infantry and as a lieutenant colonel and colonel in the 23rd Iowa Infantry. He was killed at the Battle of Black River Bridge, Mississippi, on May 17, 1863.

The delegation which Mrs. Wittenmyer headed not only secured temporary use of the barracks but also secured as a gift, all camp supplies, bed linens, pillows, mattresses, blankets, etc. On January 22, 1866, Congress formally approved transfer of the camp and all its equipment to a private organization, the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans Association.

Also, in 1866, the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home became a state supported agency, governed by a Board of Trustees composed of one person from each congressional district and one from the state at large. The legislature, in setting up support for the institution, allowed \$10 a month, per child. At the first meeting of the Board of Trustees, the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans Home Association turned over to the State of Iowa all of its property, which was valued at \$160,000.

A branch of the home was already in existence in Cedar Falls and in 1866 another one was opened in Glenwood, to serve western area residents. During the next 10 years Iowa liberally supported three homes with an average enrollment of 721 children.

F. W. Pierce succeeded Dr. Cochran at the Davenport home on December 1, 1867. His wife was named matron at the same time. Mr. Pierce's tenure in office (19 years) is the longest on record for any superintendent. The other two homes were also operated under husband and wife teams — the Henry F. Tuckers at Cedar Falls and the Thomas L. Stephens at Glenwood. In his fourth biennial report, Tucker reported to the Board of Trustees:

No improvement that you have authorized will contribute more to the health of the children than the enlargement of the barn, whereby adequate storage for straw for their beds and for hay has been secured.

In 1872 the legislature reduced the board membership to four (one from each county where a home was located and one from the state at large) and the Board of Trustees continued at that number until just prior to the transfer of the home to the supervision of the newly established Board of Control of State Institutions in 1898.

Superintendent Stephens resigned at Glenwood on January 1, 1875, and Pierce was sent to check

him out. The Glenwood home was closed later that month and the 14 children in residence were transferred to Davenport. Included in this group was a boy who was destined to become the world-renowned baseball player-evangelist — William A. (Billy) Sunday. Billy and his brother lost their father during the Civil War and were placed in the Glenwood home when their mother was unable to support them.

Billy Sunday never begrudged his start in life. Years later he wrote in his autobiography:

At both Homes, religion had an important place in our training. All our teachers and officers were Christians. I never knew a boy from either Home to be an infidel or a criminal. Of those of whom I have kept track, some became lawyers, merchants, farmers, railroad men, educators. I was the only one who ever became a big-league baseball player.

A resident of the Cedar Falls home was William E. Haskell. Born in Mitchell on October 2, 1864, he was one of five children orphaned when his father died four years later. He started his schooling in the home. After completing his education in the Osage schools, he held various positions there and in Fremont, Nebraska, before forming a partnership in Fremont that led ultimately to the formation of the Beatrice Foods Co. Haskell is recognized as the founder of this modern day corporation.

A boy at the Davenport home who rose to fame

and fortune was Wayne King, saxophonist and orchestra leader. He was admitted to the home in 1908.

The home at Cedar Falls was closed on June 7, 1876. Real estate and some of the personal property was transferred to the trustees of the normal school there. The remainder of the personal property and the children were transferred to the Davenport institution.

It was in 1876 that the legislature first looked at the home's placement practices. Prior to that time placements could be made only with the consent of the child's parents. The legislature now instructed the trustees to assist children in finding homes and suitable employment upon discharge. By 1880 a program of foster home placement with non-relatives had begun. Ten years later the institution was given full custody of all children in order to prevent their placement with unworthy relatives. The first social worker was employed in 1898 to find and supervise homes for the children away from the home. Later all children placed in the home became wards of the state until they were 21 years old.

In a plea to the 16th General Assembly to open the home to the orphan poor generally, William H. Leas, president of the Board of Trustees, wrote:

We believe, by the natural love and sympathy we bear to the *orphan child*, that we would be recreant to our du-

ty, if we omitted at this time and in this manner to press the following subject upon your serious attention. The State of Iowa, above all states of the Union, because, mainly, from her freedom from debt, can well afford to provide for and foster her indigent children. . . .

The true wealth of a community is not in its storehouses of wheat and corn; nor in its factories and mechanic arts alone; but in the proper culture of its children and their preparation for the real and useful duties of life. . . .

President Leas' plea met with the approval of the legislators and in July of 1876 the home was opened to indigent children. With this move the name was changed to Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home and Home for Indigent Children.

As of November 1, 1875, there were 109 children in the Davenport home; 189 in the Cedar Falls institution. At this time the state provided \$10 monthly to care for each child; \$12.50 if the number of children fell below 100. A year after the change a total of 139 soldiers' orphans and 41 indigent children were listed as residents.

As the Davenport institution passed its tenth year, Superintendent Pierce reported to his trustees that the condition of the buildings was poor. He noted they had been erected in 1862, to be used only for a short period as a soldiers' camp, and continued, "They are now in such a condition from wear and tear and decay that it is a sad waste of money to try and make them safe and comfortable abodes for children." He called for the construction of seven brick cottages.

Two years later Pierce was back again asking for an appropriation to erect new cottages and to partially complete one central building and one school building. This recommendation was made even though the resident population had declined slightly — to 92 soldiers' orphans and 38 indigents.

In July of 1880 the structure housing the dining room, kitchen, and bakery burned. An insurance payment of \$2,000 allowed the construction of a two-story 66x80 foot brick building. An appropriation of \$26,000 by the 18th General Assembly permitted the remodeling of eight cottages by the addition of a brick facing, and the construction of one schoolhouse, four coal houses, and out buildings. Pierce, still not satisfied, asked for five new cottages, a new central administration building, and new stables for the cattle and horses.

An appropriation of \$10,500 by the 19th General Assembly permitted the construction of a brick hospital, two additional cottages, an out house, and the finishing of the dining hall. With these completed, all buildings erected for army use had been replaced except the stables.

After the law had been revised to permit counties to commit their orphans and indigent children to the home, these same counties were called on to assume half the cost of their wards. The state absorbed the full cost for soldiers' orphans. By June 30, 1883, the number of soldiers' orphans

had dropped to 68 and county commitments had risen to 150, a total resident population of 218.

A. C. Litchfield succeeded Pierce as superintendent in 1886. The following year the 22nd General Assembly elected an entirely new Board of Trustees. When the new trustees took over they found Pierce back in temporary charge. He had replaced Litchfield who resigned. J. R. Bowman became superintendent on June 1, 1888.

A disastrous fire, November 10, 1887, destroyed the main building, burning all books, vouchers, and other papers. Only the secretary's records and admission papers for some of the children were saved. Inmate records were not kept prior to June 1, 1888. The loss did bring a request from the trustees for an appropriation of \$35,000 to erect a central administration building.

Superintendent Bowman reported, as of June 30, 1891, that the population had grown to 198 soldiers' orphans and 202 county charges.

Dr. W. E. Whitney, who succeeded Bowman in August of 1892, reported to his trustees on the unique cottage plan of institutional life which had brought much favorable publicity to the state:

The institution is conducted on what is known as the cottage plan. The buildings are located in the central portion of the farm and form three sides of a hollow square facing the east. Each cottage is equipped with the most modern conveniences and facilities. It is intended to make each cottage a miniature home, where all the

surroundings and associations approximate as nearly as possible to the true ideal. For this purpose every cottage is under the care of a Christian lady, whose business it is to see to the normal training of the children and look carefully after their behavior and personal welfare. It is her duty to see they are neatly and suitably clothed, regularly bathed, and liberally supplied with wholesome food. The preparing and serving of meals for the entire institution is done in the main building.

Actually the Davenport home's cottage plan had developed because of the several scattered buildings which made up Camp Kinsman. There was no one large central building in which the children could all be housed together. The cottage plan permitted the formation of small groups with children of various ages being brought together. An almost normal family life was thus achieved. The plan was widely copied by institutions in other states.

Whitney's tenure was short and he was followed by J. H. Lukens, whose main contribution seems to have been the formation of a military company of boys, 10 to 14 years of age. He noted that drill "wrought a wonderful change in the manners and bearing of the boys. . . ." He was so satisfied with the company that he suggested an appropriation be earmarked for the organization of a military band.

The number of children housed climbed steadily with each passing year. On June 30, 1895, there were 248 soldiers' orphans listed along with

210 county charges. Additional room was needed and it became necessary to enlarge the cottages. This was accomplished by the addition of a second floor to each, thus allowing each unit to accommodate more children.

With the home soon to move under the direction of a new governing body, the *Iowa Official Register* for 1897 carried this quaint description of the Davenport institution:

There is in connection with this institution a school building, pleasant, commodious and well lighted, and it is the policy of the board to have the course of instruction of the highest standard. A kindergarten is operated in connection for the very young.

A library of well-selected juvenile literature is a source of pleasure and profitable entertainment to the children, as from necessity the pastimes and pleasures of the children are otherwise somewhat circumscribed; we feel they should be well supplied with books and reading matter of suitable character for their improvement and enjoyment.

It is the aim to provide the children with plenty of good comfortable clothing, and to have them taught to take good care of the same. Their clothing is all manufactured at the home, the large girls assisting in its manufacture. The table is supplied with a good variety of plain, wholesome food, and a reasonable amount of luxuries, and when the funds of the different appropriations fail the support fund has to make up the deficiency, which necessarily, causes a reduction of the luxuries from the table that are so much enjoyed by the children.