FIND & CONNECT

Launceston Girls' Industrial School

1877 – 1921

Other Names:
- Industrial School for Girls - Launceston

Details

The Launceston Girls' Industrial School, which was managed by a Board of Governors and Ladies Committee, opened in 1877. It trained girls up to the age of 16 in domestic and laundry work. In 1921, it became the Launceston Girls' Home.

The Launceston Girls' Industrial School was established under the auspices of the 1867 *Industrial Schools Act* which provided for volunteers to establish and manage industrial schools. Children could be sent there for neglect by a Police Magistrate or following an application to a Magistrate by their parents.

Launceston Girls' Industrial School was a certified children's Home under the Youthful Offenders, Destitute and Neglected Children's Act 1896.

The School was run by a Board of Governors. A Ladies Committee, which was closely involved in the School's day to day life, assisted the Governors. It claimed to be non-denominational. This meant that the people who ran it were members of a number of different Protestant churches. Some of the Ladies Committee belonged to the Woman's Christian Temperance Union which placed a great emphasis on the moral purity of women, that is, their chastity and alcoholic abstinence, especially if they were wives and mothers. The Union's influence is evident in the School's management.

As an industrial school, but not a reformatory, the School accepted girls who were neglected according to the law but had not broken it. There was a widespread belief that neglect would eventually lead them into crime. The managers hoped that by learning housework, needlework, and laundering, the girls would eventually earn a living as domestic servants. In 1901, the Mayor of Launceston, FK Fairthorne, said he 'hoped they would in years to come be the wives of honest men and mothers of respectable members of society'.

The girls learned basic literacy and numeracy but not enough to give them opportunities beyond domestic service. This education took place within the institution. A few had attended state schools as early as 1890 but this was not the general practice until much later. The school room was organised along the lines of a state school.

To give the girls a taste of life outside the institution, they had outings on the omnibus or a steamer. According to the Chairman of the Board in 1891, these 'removed that restraint which must exist in an institution such as that in which they lived'.

The girls attended an Anglican service on three Sundays of the month and a Methodist or Presbyterian one on the other Sunday. They also belonged to the Band of Hope, a temperance organisation for young people. According to the Reverend C Price, quoted in the Launceston *Examiner*, the girls enjoyed it, 'entering into it heartily, the meetings breaking the usual monotony of school life and giving them an interest'.

When the girls reached the age of 16, the Ladies Committee placed them in domestic service positions in rural areas. They had a policy of not placing them in the cities because they believed there were too many temptations. Girls who, in the eyes of the managers, behaved well could return to the School during breaks between positions or if they became ill.

The government paid five shillings for girls sent to the School because a Police Magistrate considered them neglected and half that for those placed in the School at their parents' request. Other financial support came from public donations and the earnings of the older girls in laundering and needlework. The School also received donations of fruit, vegetables, milk, and clothing as well as books and pictures for the library. This income was not adequate and the Committee found it difficult to cover their costs. The government contributed to the School's building funds.

In 1882, there were 19 girls in the School. The building was too small for this number. By the following year, the School had moved to new premises in, according to the *Examiner*, a 'large and commodious house in the centre of town'. The house apparently had major problems. In 1884, one speaker at the Annual General Meeting said that:

> *The present premises were totally unfitted for the object, the sleeping places were most miserable, very cold in winter and very hot in summer; besides which he believed there were a number of little animals which were not very welcome.*

The Board had already purchased some land to put up a new building. Apart from the poor accommodation offered by the new house, the managers wanted extra room so that the Matron could discipline girls by isolating them. In addition, they planned to accept more girls. By 1888, there were 33 girls in the School, suggesting that by then they were in the new premises on the corner of Wellington and Galvin Streets.

The Board of the School became involved in public debates over whether the boarding out system or industrial schools offered the children the best opportunities. Some of the debate focused on the suitability of the foster mothers. In 1884, after the Chief Secretary stated that he preferred 'farming out' to industrial schools, one speaker at the Annual General Meeting argued that it would be difficult to get foster mothers who could train the girls, given that the payments were so small.

Another criticism was that institutional life damaged children. A correspondent to the *Examiner* in 1890, suggested that the girls should leave the School at the age of 12 because:

> *With the longer period of detention I have ventured to suppose that the girls' natures must become saturated with the system and rigid adherence to form and order, to their actual detriment, and that they become less able to met the troubles and vexations of human life.*

The debate about foster mothers continued up to 1920, with the government still favouring boarding out over industrial schools. At the Annual General Meeting of 1920, the Chairman of the Governors said that:

> *The boarding principle of the State was not pleasing to him…He could not think that people took children into their homes, and looked after them, unless there was an element of profit about it. There should be no element of profit in the matter.*

During the early twentieth century, the School changed direction. It began accepting children who were physically vulnerable or as young as two. Some had parents with tuberculosis and needed extra care. The Board considered accepting babies and young boys but this did not happen.

This change led to an easing in the conditions in a number of ways. The girls began having an annual holiday. In 1915, the School stopped taking in laundry work from outside customers because of the youth of the children. By 1919, the girls were going to Glen Dhu State School instead of being educated in the institution. However, the emphasis on housework and laundering, now confined to that of the School, remained, with girls over 14 training in domestic duties during the day and doing classes in the evenings. An extension of domestic training was the girls' own vegetable and flower gardens.

The School needed an isolation dormitory for minor epidemics and a 'sleeping-out balcony' for children who had been in contact with tuberculosis. A new wing was planned with an opening date in 1921. To coincide with the opening and to get rid of the stigma associated with the term 'industrial school', the Board changed the name to Launceston Girls' Home.

More info

Chronology

- **Launceston Girls' Industrial School (1877 – 1921)**
  - Launceston Girls' Home (1921 - 1989)

Related Entries

Related Legislation

- Industrial Schools Act 1867, Tasmania (1867 - 1896)

Resources

- *Launceston Girls' Industrial School*, Examiner, 1911

Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

Records

- Correspondence Files (1919 - 1998)
