

Memorial Day Nursery, in 80th Year, Has Given Shelter to Thousands

By ANNE TAND

The Memorial Day Nursery is a children's world, a world where tender, loving professional care has been provided for many thousands of youngsters of the city for 80 years. It was continued in operation through the high and low years of Paterson's growth, providing a warm daytime shelter for the children of working parents.

The 80th anniversary will be observed with a Donation Day Open House on Thursday from 3 to 5 p.m. at the nursery home, 399 Grand St.

The child care center had its beginnings in 1887 when the Children's Day Nursery was started at 399 Straight St., as a branch of church work, by 20 women from the Church of the Redeemer. As child attendance increased the nursery was relocated three times before it was established in 1904 at its present site.

Hobart Endowment

The new home was endowed by Mrs. Garret A. Hobart of Paterson, widow of the Vice-President of the United States, in memory of her 17-year-old daughter, Miss Fannie Beckwith Hobart, who died in 1895 while vacationing in Europe with her parents.

Paterson was the hub of industrial activity in 1887; known as the "Silk City of the World," it had also become the locomotive manufacturing capital of the nation. Industry was attracting immigrant families from all sections of Europe and the city was still faced with a severe labor shortage. This situation led to the large scale recruitment of wives and mothers to do lighter work in the silk mills. With new-found jobs, mothers were faced with providing care for their children.

Answering industry's need for community help in this area, the church women formed an independent organization to establish the nursery for the specific purpose of dispensing daily care to children of working mothers.

The nursery, which soon became known as "The Nickel House" because that was the daily fee for the care of one child, opened its doors on Dec. 1, 1887.

Four children were admitted the first month, six in January and by February 10 children were receiving daily care.

Day Began at 6 A.M.

During its first year of operation, 62 children from 45 families were cared for in the nursery, with a total aggregate day-care attendance of 1,844.

In those days the nursery opened at 6 a.m. and closed at 7 p.m. because working hours in industry were longer and travel from the various sections of the city took more time.

Four-month old babies to seven-year-old children were admitted to the nursery in the beginning.

Then, as now, training and care of the children was of utmost importance. The daily routine included a wholesome hot mid-day meal, in-between nourishing snacks, training in cleanliness, proper rest and interesting play periods.

Within two years the nursery outgrew its original quarters and the home of the late Mayor Charles D. Beckwith, also on Straight Street, was placed at the disposal of the board of managers by William Strange, an industrialist and a generous benefactor. Strange assumed the rental fee for these quarters for many years.

Nickels Add Up

After five years of providing care for children of all nationalities, color and creed, the Children's Nursery of Paterson was incorporated in 1892, making it tax exempt. For the first five years of its existence the nursery received \$1,621.06 from mothers for the five-cents a day board for their children, approximately the same amount then needed for one year of nursery maintenance.

The nursery survived the recession of 1897 when many persons were jobless. When business revived during the next few years, the nursery continued to provide its child care service to the community.

In 1901 the nursery purchased



MEMORIAL DAY NURSERY — Many thousands of youngsters have been cared for daily in this child care center at 399 Grand St., established in 1904 as a memorial to Miss Fannie Beckwith Hobart, the daughter of Vice President and Mrs. Garret A. Hobart. The nursery was founded in 1887 to provide care for the children of working mothers by a group of community-minded, sympathetic women from the Church of the Redeemer.

at a cost of \$10,000, the Straight Street home where it had been functioning for 12 years, providing its first permanent home. However, the permanency was of brief duration.

Land, Cash Donated

Before the year had ended, Mrs. Hobart offered a gift for a new and larger home. It consisted of a plot of land at the corner of Grand and Hamilton Streets, with an endowment of \$25,000 for the erection and furnishing of a building on the site, as a memorial to her daughter.

The Straight Street property was sold to McNab and Harlin Co. in 1902 and through the generosity of Mrs. Hobart and the Hamilton Club, the nursery was moved for one year to the McChesney Building on Church Street.

The new Grand Street building was dedicated and formally presented to the board of managers on Oct. 14, 1904. The presentation address was given by Hobart Tuttle, brother of Mrs. Hobart, who announced an additional gift from the generous benefactor. It was \$10,000 under a deed of trust, the interest of which was to be used for repairs and maintaining the property.

Shortly thereafter the name of the child care center was changed to the Memorial Day Nursery, a male advisory board was initiated and the medical staff was enlarged.

Mrs. Hobart was one of the 20 women who organized the nursery in 1887. At the initial meeting she was named vice-president, an office she was to hold for 50 years. In the late 1930's she was elected honorary president.

Embark on New Project

In 1910 the nursery embarked on a new project, the Babies Dairy, providing milk for the babies of the community who were suffering from defective nutrition.

The Dairy was open every day of the year from 8 to 11 a.m. during which time a mother brought her infant to the nursery.

The baby was examined by a doctor and its medical history was recorded. A correct formula



MISS H. VEENSTRA
Nursery Superintendent

la was decided upon and was then prepared in the diet kitchen by the nurse in charge. The mother was furnished a 24-hour supply of milk which was put in small nursing bottles, then in wooden boxes lined with zinc, and packed with ice. The next morning the mother returned with the baby and the empty bottles. After the baby was again examined she received a new supply of formula.

The routine continued until the baby was cured. For this service the mother was expected to pay 10 cents a day, but if she were not able, the baby received the treatment and the milk, free of charge. Over a two-year period the Babies Dairy supplied 29,104 bottles of formula.

Expansion Again

The nursery reached its 50th year of operation in 1937. At that time the country was recovering from a long and serious depression but no one could foresee the war clouds that were gathering. The board of managers planned for the continued expansion of its services and within a year the number of children attending the nursery has increased to a daily average of 100.

The attendance has gradually increased and in its 80th year averages 112 children, with a constant waiting list of well over 100. The youngsters range in age from nine months to nine years.

Miss Henrietta Veenstra, superintendent of the nursery for the past decade, was honored this year for her dedicated service of 40 years with the day care center. A native of The Netherlands, she came to the nursery as a kindergarten

teacher in 1927, and was assistant superintendent before assuming full charge in 1957.

Among her present charges are children whose parents were once cared for at the nursery. Many of the youngsters keep in touch with her after they leave, sending her wedding and birth announcements and invitations to their homes.

The three-floor nursery building with its fenced in grounds is well maintained today and cheerfully decorated. The youngsters are separated in groups by age categories. There are approximately 40 school-age children who leave the nursery every morning to attend classes at School 3, accompanied by a police officer and a nursery supervisor. The school children remain at the nursery after school until called for by a parent.

The 13-member staff, including a laundress, two cooks and a cleaning woman, have the active youngsters under constant supervision.

During play time the exuberant youngsters enjoy the outdoors in the fenced-in area. A popular recent pastime has been watching construction work on the nearby courthouse complex. During inclement weather they play indoors with occasional television programs to view.

The community service that began before the turn of the century by sympathetic and generous people, continues on a straight course under the direction of the present board of managers.

Staff Takes Special Courses

Continually on the alert to provide ways and means to up-

grade the activities and educational program at the nursery, Mrs. Victor F. Desmet, board president, said staff workshops have been held for several years on new techniques, under the supervision of Miss Claire Shulman, professor of the Early Childhood Department of Paterson State College.

Mrs. Desmet said the board has also provided the staff with opportunities to observe methods practiced by other day nurseries, as well as to attend courses given in early childhood training by the Newark State Teachers College.

Modern materials and play equipment have been provided and the physical facilities in the various departments have been made more workable and efficient for the enjoyment of the children.

Board officers serving with Mrs. Desmet are Mrs. William H. Knosp, first vice-president; Mrs. Joseph D. Donato, second vice-president; Mrs. Charles E. Ludwig, treasurer; Mrs. Robert M. Loftus, recording secretary; and Mrs. Dean Lewis, corresponding secretary.

Board members are Mrs. Sidney Aldman, Mrs. Edmund H. Bishop, Mrs. Howard L. Bristow, Mrs. Ralph Burstlin, Mrs. Frank T. Conlon, Mrs. James S. Gallo, Mrs. V. Joseph Grasse, Mrs. Edward B. Haines, Mrs. Peter Hauser, Mrs. Fred Hoelscher, Mrs. Ralph Hutcheson, Mrs. George C. King, Mrs. Frank Knorr, Mrs. Lawrence F. Kramer, Mrs. Alexander MacLeod, Mrs. Wilfred R. Marold, Mrs. Harold J. Miller, Mrs. Edward O'Byrne, Mrs. John Schweizer, Mrs. Norman Weir, and Mrs. John J. White.

The advisory board members are Norman Brassler, Gordon Canfield, John J. Devlin, Leo Eirich, Henry D. Fairhurst, Harry B. Haines, publisher of The Paterson News; Dr. Kenneth W. Hall, George C. King, Mayor Lawrence F. Kramer, Walter A. Lindell, Edward F. Merrey Jr., John K. Pollitt, Harold H. Ramsey, Joseph Weny, and John J. White.

Associate members are Mrs. Albert L. Bohl, Mrs. Gordon Canfield, Mrs. William Doremus, Mrs. Henry D. Fairhurst, Mrs. Harry B. Haines, Mrs. J. Nevins McBride, Mrs. G. William Phillips, Mrs. John K. Pollitt and Mrs. William Wollen.