

# 'The Making of A Good Woman'

## Montana and the National Florence Crittenton Mission

by Ellen Baumler

“A good, warm hearted girl,” wrote the Florence Crittenton Home matron in a sprawling, angular hand on December 16, 1905. In a few terse phrases she told the story of a girl barely out of her teens who had lived a fast life. “Father of the child said to be F—L—,” she wrote. “Lived with him as Mrs. L—.” When the man deserted her, the young woman became desperate and “threw herself away.” The next entry, on January 7, 1906, indicates that Dr. G. H. Barbour of Helena delivered a nine-pound daughter. In the third and final entry on May 15, the matron noted: “From conferring with L— I find she has run a house of ill fame. Had six girls in her house but has the making of a good woman in her. Loves her baby.”<sup>1</sup>

The little book in which the matron recorded her observations, written in more than half a dozen different hands, lies in a box of yellowed clippings and creased photographs in the archives of the Florence Crittenton Home in Helena. The book’s pages tell the stories of the young women who passed through the home between 1900 and 1915. In many ways, the brief glimpses of these Montana

women illuminate a national movement whose mission was to offer sanctuary and rehabilitation to women and girls. The Helena home was one of more than seventy Florence Crittenton Homes established in cities across the United States by 1909.<sup>2</sup>

Florence Crittenton Homes were the brainchild of Charles N. Crittenton, a self-made New York businessman who built an empire in pharmaceuticals in the mid-1800s, but whose personal life was beset by tragedies. Scarlet fever claimed his firstborn son, and, twenty years later, in 1882, it stole the life of four-year-old Florence, his third child. In his grief, the wealthy entrepreneur committed himself to Christian service. Soon after, Crittenton met street evangelist Smith Allen who invited him on a missionary tour of New York City’s underworld. Sickened by the sordid, prisonlike “safe havens” that offered the only alternative to women who wanted to change their lives, Crittenton and several of his friends vowed to establish a better sanctuary. In 1883 the Florence Night Mission, named for Crittenton’s little daughter, opened at 29 Bleeker Street in New York City. The refuge, later known as the

In the early 1880s Charles N. Crittenton, a self-made New York businessman, began helping “fallen women and wayward girls.” Inspired to this Christian service by the loss of his four-year-old daughter, Florence, Crittenton, together with physician Kate Waller Barrett, founded the National Florence Crittenton Mission in 1895. By 1909 there were seventy Florence Crittenton Homes established in cities across the United States. The young woman at right climbs the stairs of the Florence Crittenton Home at 22 Jefferson in Helena.



Florence Crittenton Home, Helena, Montana

(right) After achieving financial success in the pharmaceutical industry, Charles N. Crittenton devoted his life to the movement whose mission was to offer sanctuary and rehabilitation to young women and girls.

(below, right) Women's advocate Kate Waller Barrett became a doctor to better help women and children trapped in poverty. Because of her involvement in the National Florence Crittenton Mission, many of the Crittenton homes focused their efforts on helping unwed expectant mothers.

Both photographs Florence Crittenton Home, Helena, Montana



Mother Mission, welcomed "fallen women and wayward girls" who had nowhere else to go.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1880s Crittenton so tirelessly pursued the difficult task of helping unfortunate women that his health was in serious jeopardy.<sup>4</sup> On the advice of his physicians, he embarked upon an around-the-world trip that terminated in California in 1890. There he renewed his efforts, establishing rescue homes in San Francisco and Los Angeles and a mission in San Jose. In 1892 Crittenton's passion gained a national scope when he joined with the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), an organization that had pioneered rescue work with the help of prominent reformer Frances Willard. Collaborating with Willard, Crittenton funded the establishment of five new rescue homes for the WCTU. The following year, in 1893, Crittenton attended the WCTU



national convention in Atlanta. There he met Dr. Kate Waller Barrett.

Kate Barrett was born Katherine Harwood Waller on January 24, 1857, at Clifton, her father's thousand-acre plantation in Stafford County, Virginia. During the Civil War Kate and her family became refugees, but after the war they returned to Clifton. At eighteen, Kate married Reverend Robert South Barrett. The newlyweds made their home in the slums of Richmond, Virginia—an area known as "Butchertown"—where the reverend had his first parish. Kate, who had never been exposed to poverty or vice, was quickly educated to the horrors of the district. It was the abandoned children roaming the squalid streets that especially elicited her compassion. When the Barretts' first child was several months old, Kate had an experience that shaped her life.<sup>5</sup>

On a cold, rainy December evening Reverend Barrett answered a knock at the door. A homeless young mother, shivering in the cold, clutched her baby. He ushered them into the warm parlor. As the woman ate the supper Kate prepared, her plight came tumbling out. Wooed by a man with dishonorable intentions, she found herself unwed, disgraced, and cast out. The story was all too common, and life's ironies struck a deep chord in Kate. She and the young mother shared similar upbringings; the difference was that Kate had an honorable husband. She later wrote, "There the two babies laid side by side, my boy and hers, both with equal possibilities . . . both equal in the sight of God; and yet in the eyes of the world, how different."<sup>6</sup>

Kate Barrett began her efforts to aid young women in Richmond and continued this work in Henderson, Kentucky, when her husband was transferred in 1880. In 1886 the Barretts moved to Atlanta. Kate believed that educating society about prostitution and venereal disease would help generate support for rehabilitation efforts. She therefore

these women. Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Women and Prostitution: A Social History* (Buffalo, N.Y., 1987), 259–65.

5. Kate Waller Barrett, "Making a 'Covenant with God,'" *Florence Crittenton Magazine*, March 1899, excerpted in Lee Woolf, "Ahead of Her Time," *Town and Country* (June 23, 2001), 7–13.

6. *Ibid.*

1. "Florence Crittenton Home Daybook, 1900–1915," confidential record housed at the Florence Crittenton Home, Helena, Montana (hereafter FCH). Information from this book and quotes cited from it were supplied to the author in Xeroxed copies with all client names censored in strict accordance with the home's rules.

2. *Helena (Mont.) Independent*, November 17, 1909. There were also Florence Crittenton Homes in China and Japan.

3. Florence Crittenton Association of America, *Field Reporter* newsletter, 1968, copy in FCH files. For an account of Crittenton's life, see Charles Nelson Crittenton, *The Brother of Girls: The Life Story of Charles Nelson Crittenton as Told by Himself* (Chicago, 1910); and "Florence Crittenton Homes: 117 years of service to young women," n.d., p. 1, FCH files.

4. In his efforts to help prostitutes, Crittenton built on the work of other reformers, particularly Englishwoman Josephine Butler, who challenged the traditional male viewpoint and revolutionized attitudes toward



Florence Crittenton Home, Helena, Montana

Helena Florence Crittenton Home residents lived under strict rules of conduct, especially in the 1930s when “parental emphasis” characterized the home’s atmosphere.



Florence Crittenton Home, Helena, Montana

In his private railcar, Crittenton crossed the nation evangelizing and visiting homes sponsored by the National Florence Crittenton Mission. In 1896 he brought his message to Montana, inspiring local groups to establish homes in Helena and Butte. Helena’s home, the only one to survive, was the sole facility in the state providing care to young pregnant women.

sought to educate herself to better help others. Kate, the mother of five young children, attended Women’s Medical College of Georgia. Three years later, in 1892, Dr. Kate Barrett graduated as class valedictorian with a medical degree in obstetrics; she was thirty-five. Although influential community members opposed Kate’s efforts, with financial aid from Charles Crittenton, she founded a rescue home in Atlanta for unmarried pregnant girls.<sup>7</sup>

7. *Ibid.*, 10.

This endeavor proved to be only the first of their collaborations. Together Crittenton and Barrett founded the National Florence Crittenton Mission, which incorporated in 1895 with Crittenton serving as president and Barrett as vice president. By 1897 forty-six homes operated across the country, “engaged in the work of reclaiming unfortunate women.” Because of Dr. Barrett’s involvement, many of the homes focused their efforts on helping unwed expectant mothers. The homes, “Christian and parental” in character, encouraged young mothers to keep their babies. They provided support, medical care, and housing for mother and newborn for six months or longer while the mother became self-supporting. On April 9, 1898, President William McKinley signed a special act of Congress granting a national charter to the National Florence Crittenton Mission, the first such charter granted to a charitable entity.<sup>8</sup>

Traveling across the nation in a private railcar dubbed *Good News*, Charles Crittenton spent his time evangelizing and visiting homes sponsored by the mission. On one such trip in 1896 Crittenton brought his message to Montana, inspiring local groups in Helena and Butte to establish

8. Child Welfare League of America website, “History of the Florence Crittenton Division,” <http://cwla.org/programs/prev/floccrit.htm>, April 20, 2003; *ibid.*, “National Florence Crittenton Mission Board,” September 7, 2003; Florence Crittenton Association of America, *Field Reporter*. Under this charter, the National Florence Crittenton Mission continues today to administer the endowment established by Charles Crittenton.

## Rules and Regulations of the Florence Crittenton Home— Helena, Montana, circa 1910

1. Destitute, dissipated or fallen women or girls desirous of living a better life are cordially invited to this Home, and may remain for such period of time as the Board of managers shall deem best.
2. All inmates shall be required to conform strictly to the Rules, to rise and retire at the time specified, keep their rooms in order, be neat and tidy in dress, and person, industrious during working hours and listen attentively to such advice as maybe [sic] given them by the Ladies in Charge.
3. Girls or women on entering must submit to be thoroughly searched as no liquors[,] opiates, firearms or objectionable literature will be allowed on the premises. Profane language, slang phrases and all coarse jesting are strictly prohibited.
4. The discipline of the Home shall be strictly parental in its character. The order and decorum of a well regulated Christian family shall be carefully carried out. Family worship shall be observed morning and evening.
5. The hour for retiring shall not be later than 10 P.M., the Matron shall pass through the dormitories [sic] to see that lights are extinguished at this hour, unless in case of sickness. The hour for rising shall be fixed by the Matron according [sic] to the season and circumstances and all written regulations pertaining thereto shall be understood as endorsed by the board of Managers.
6. The inmates will not be allowed to receive promiscuous visitors, men or women. Visitors that are permitted will be seen under the surveillance [sic] of the Matron.
7. Everything shall be done to shelter the girls from unnecessary publicity.
8. All letters received must be read by the Matron and all letters sent out must be read by her before they are mailed.
9. All inmates must be taught plain sewing and general house work, to set the table neatly and keep dining room and kitchen in good order.
10. All who are able must attend the Bible Readings at the Home unless satisfactorily excused.
11. All inmates shall assist in the general work of the Home as the Matron may require.
12. No girl about to become a mother shall be admitted into the Home free unless she is willing to remain and take charge of her child. Girls who are able to pay shall give as much as twenty-five (\$25) toward the expense of their confinement.
13. Street girls and dissipated girls shall be required to remain one year—Maternity girls until some opening presents itself that will afford proper care and protection for both mother and child.
14. One of the inmates selected by the Board shall assist in the Maternity room and no other girl shall be allowed in the room except upon permission from Matron.
15. Each room shall have but one occupant [sic] and at no time shall two girls be allowed to occupy the same room.
16. The inmates shall not be permitted to go outside the Home to spend the night.
17. The family is expected to gather in the sitting room to spend the evening. Girls will not be allowed to gather in their rooms and gossip.
18. Transients may be admitted into the Home temporarily at the discretion of the Matron, but are expected to remain in their room except when assisting in the household duties under direction of the Matron.
19. Inmates when admitted into the Home are adopted into the family and are expected to give the loving obedience of dutiful children towards their parents.

homes in their communities. Montana's strong associations with the WCTU and Crittenton's close connection to Frances Willard likely drew him to the state. Neither of these early homes was officially affiliated with the National Florence Crittenton Mission. However, both Helena and Butte had active chapters of the WCTU.<sup>9</sup>

Butte, Montana's largest urban center, had need of such a home. With a population dependent upon mining, an industry dominated by men, social relief and reforms had little impact, and women in trouble had few places to turn. Yet the Butte home closed within a year. The reasons for its closure are unclear, but perhaps the home's administrators decided

to adopt the Crittenton policy of not placing girls in their own communities. The book kept by matrons of the Helena home shows that many young women came from Butte.<sup>10</sup>

Although there is no official record of residents prior to 1900 at the Helena home, there is ample evidence to support a founding date of 1896 or 1897. A request for records written in the 1930s and folded among the pages of the matrons' book reads, "I was sent from Fargo, North Dakota, in the years of 1896 or 1897 to the Florence Crittenton Home in Kenwood in Montana. . . . I was between ten and eleven years old. I went to school in Kenwood." Further, an informational pamphlet prepared in 1931 states that the home "was started 35 years ago."<sup>11</sup>

9. WCTU founder Frances Willard visited Montana Territory in 1883, helping to form chapters in both Butte and Helena. Isabella Kirkendall, a founder of Helena's Florence Crittenton Home, was also a charter member of Helena's WCTU. See Manuscript Collection 160, Women's Christian Temperance Union Records, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.

10. The only reference to the Butte home is a listing in the 1897 *Polk City Directory* with the address 317 South Montana and the name of the matron, Mrs. Clara Hall. For more information about Butte's red-light

district, see Ellen Baumler, "Devil's Perch: Prostitution from Suite to Cellular in Butte," *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, 48 (Winter 1998), 4-21.

11. An article in the *Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune*, June 10, 1962; undated clippings in the FCH files; and [Florence Crittenton Home], "Salient Facts about the Florence Crittenton Home for the Year 1931," mimeographed pamphlet, *ibid.*, indicate that the Helena home was established as a result of Crittenton's visit in 1896.

In the 1920s and 1930s the National Florence Crittenton Mission strongly advocated that mothers keep their babies, and most followed this recommendation. These children were photographed in the Helena infant's nursery in 1926.

In April 1900 the Florence Crittenton Home Circle of Helena, the auxiliary organization charged with financial support of the home, secured a five-hundred-dollar donation from the national mission to purchase the building it had been renting in Kenwood, an addition platted on Helena's west side. Originally constructed as a hospital for Drs. Parsons and Roberts, the facility never served that purpose, but it was large enough to accommodate thirteen women and children, and its location in an area still largely undeveloped assured residents' privacy.<sup>12</sup> The national organization sent Maria Dadman to assume duties as the home's matron at the end of April. On May 2 Mrs. Dadman recorded information about her first resident: "Born in Finland. Maternity case. Her father dead. Mother still in Finland." A baby girl was born to the nineteen-year-old mother on May 21. The child, named Florence Dadman, lived at the home for a year while her mother worked in a nearby home. When the two left Helena, Mrs. Dadman noted that the mother had "endeared herself to us all."<sup>13</sup>

With its incorporation on June 12, 1900, the Helena home became officially linked to the National Florence Crittenton Mission.<sup>14</sup> During the next few years a succession of troubled, sick, and homeless women and teens found refuge there.<sup>15</sup> Many of the young women were pregnant, but some were homeless, some were orphans, and others were, in the eyes of their families, wayward, dissipated, or immoral. Many were victims of abuse. They

12. The flyleaf of the "Florence Crittenton Home Daybook, 1900-1915," FCH, is inscribed: "Purchased old home of Dr. Roberts and Dr. Parsons." *The Helena (Mont.) Weekly Independent*, April 26, 1900, noted purchase of the property and the impending arrival of Mrs. Dadman and solicited donations of furniture. This building, now known as the Cottonwood Apartments, still stands on the north side of Hauser Boulevard between Laurel and Linden Streets.

13. "Florence Crittenton Home Daybook, 1900-1915," FCH. The Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of Population 1900, Montana, Lewis and Clark County*, sheet 2B, enumeration district 160 (hereafter e. d.), roll 912, microfilm 251, copy in the Montana Historical Society Library, Helena (hereafter MHS Library), records the name of the Finnish-born mother and her child, which had been censored in the

came from all walks of life, from all ethnic and religious backgrounds, from across Montana and neighboring states. The matrons' book documents cases referred by the judicial system, conveyed by relatives or ministers, and occasionally brought by the sisters of the House of the Good Shepherd, a Catholic institution that moved from central Helena to Kenwood in 1909. The sisters' mission, to rehabilitate delinquent and wayward girls, closely paralleled that of the Crittenton Homes but did not extend to expectant mothers.<sup>16</sup>

The Helena Crittenton Home was unique to Montana in its broad acceptance of young women, mothers, and children, and it was also the only facility in the state that provided care to young pregnant women. Pregnant residents paid a twenty-five-dollar maternity fee if they could afford it, but the home refused no one. Isabella Kirkendall, the first president of the Helena Florence Crittenton Home, and secretary Anna Boardman sometimes paid maternity fees out of their own pockets and often helped the matron with household chores.

In December 1903 Dr. Kate Barrett came to Montana in response to Great Falls's plea for its own Crittenton Home. Great Falls, like Butte and Anaconda, was at that time a

Crittenton records. Mrs. Dadman, the mother, and her child were the only residents in June when the census was taken.

14. Each Crittenton Home was autonomous, and the national organization assumed no financial obligation for its administration.

15. According to Polk directories, the women who served as matrons between 1900 and 1906 were Mrs. Maria Dadman (1900-1901), Miss Florence Wiedman (1902), Miss Victoria Vincent (1903), Mrs. Mary C. Watts (1904), Mrs. Susan Foster (1905), and Mrs. Anna Dugas Barrett (1906).

16. National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the House of the Good Shepherd Historic District in Helena, housed at the State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, Montana; *Helena (Mont.) Independent Record*, August 31, 1997.



Florence Crittenton Home, Helena, Montana



Florence Crittenton Home Circles formed around the state to assist with referrals from their communities and to raise money to pay for maternity fees and other expenses. In the early years of the Helena Florence Crittenton Home, Helena's home circle organized a Harvest Shower to provide needed household goods; later the annual Silver Tea replaced the fall event. The home circle members above gathered circa 1950 when the home was located at 22 Jefferson Street.

company town dependent upon the mining industry. Proponents argued that Great Falls was the "center of a vast territory not tributary to Helena." But Dr. Barrett countered that her organization had all it could do to keep the Helena home maintained. Besides, she argued, "Our purpose is to place girls who desire to reform where they are not known and it would not be advisable to place Great Falls girls in a Great Falls Home." Dr. Barrett promised to send an affiliate to help establish a Great Falls Home Circle. "Such a circle will look out for fallen women . . . who desire to lead better lives and will enable them to secure admittance to our Helena home."<sup>17</sup>

17. *Helena (Mont.) Semi-Weekly Independent*, December 8, 1903.

Florence Crittenton Home Circles, already active in Helena and Butte, formed in Great Falls, Anaconda, Miles City, Billings, Dillon, and other communities across the state. Membership was open to any woman interested in the Crittenton Homes. These local circles referred girls from their communities, and they raised the funds to pay maternity fees and other expenses. In the early years, the Helena Home Circle organized a fall Harvest Shower that provided needed items such as pillows, sheets, blankets, and towels for the home. Local stores ran sales of these staples for the event. A Silver Tea later replaced the shower. Guests arrived at the home for light refreshments; included on the tea table was a silver bowl to receive monetary donations. By the 1930s the home circles were raising money to



give to each girl as she departed; this money was provided on loan without interest to help the girl find employment or further her education.<sup>18</sup>

When Lena Jobe Cullum became matron of the Helena Florence Crittenton Home in 1907, it marked a turning point in the history of the home. Mrs. Cullum brought her own teenaged daughter, Georgia, and her aging mother, Faith Jobe, to live with her in the crudely furnished frame house. A strong sense of family, a homey atmosphere, and stability pervaded the home during Mrs. Cullum's thirty-eight years of dedicated service. During that time she saw the best endings and some of the worst. Among her first cases was a fifteen-year-old from Kalispell sent to the home by "Humane Officials." Mrs. Cullum wrote, "Most appalling [*sic*], her brother, 22, being father of her child. He was

sent to the Penitentiary for 15 years." The girl showed signs of consumption and was taken to the county hospital where she died four weeks later. The matrons' book records numerous cases of incest, stillborn babies buried in the Crittenton plot at Helena's Benton Avenue Cemetery, and mothers who died in childbirth. But for every sad ending, there were successes, too. An adoptive mother wrote in 1931 that her eighteen-year-old son had been born at the home and needed a birth certificate so that he could apply for a passport. "He is a fine fellow," she wrote. "He made good in school and is quite well-balanced. . . . We taught him he was adopted so he would never be shocked with that knowledge [*sic*]."<sup>19</sup>

When the Helena home was established, the National

18. [Florence Crittenton Home], "Salient Facts . . . 1931"; *Helena (Mont.) Daily Independent*, November 17, 1929. At first, the board of trustees and the Helena Home Circle were composed of the same members. *Helena (Mont.) Independent Record*, February 5, 1939.

19. Bureau of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States 1910, Montana, Lewis and Clark County*, sheet 4B, e. d. 168, roll 833, microfilm 377, copy in MHS Library; "Florence Crittenton Home Daybook, 1900-1915," FCH. For the obituary of Faith Jobe, see *Helena (Mont.) Independent*, September 23, 1909.



By the early 1920s Helena's Florence Crittenton Home needed more space. In 1924 Matron Lena Jobe Cullum and the Helena Home Circle scraped together two thousand dollars to buy the dilapidated Albert Kleinschmidt mansion at 22 Jefferson Street.



Early days at 22 Jefferson.

Florence Crittenton Mission strongly advocated that mothers keep their babies, and most followed this recommendation. The matron wrote of a fifteen-year-old from a small community in western Montana in 1905: "Looks much younger. Is pregnant and will stay six months. The mother supports the family by working and the children have little care or training. . . . The mother is not able to pay anything." A few months later the teen went home to her mother with her newborn. The matron noted, "Willing to

bear disgrace rather than give her baby away."<sup>20</sup>

In the home's early years, there were also several cases involving babies left in the care of Isadora Dowden, the first superintendent of the nonsectarian Montana Children's Home. In 1901, for example, the matron described a sixteen-year-old girl: "Born . . . in Ireland. [Parents] Irish, occupation farmer. Her childhood spent in Montana. Attended summer school for nine years. Always lived at home. Father of child married man and farmer by occupation. She is a communicant of the Catholic church. Feb. 26:

Gave birth to a male infant. April: Went home to her parents leaving her baby at the Dowden Home. Paid maternity fee."<sup>21</sup>

Among the many girls who were not pregnant who came to the home was a seventeen-year-old whose mother had died. Mrs. Cullum wrote on July 2, 1908: "She had

20. "Florence Crittenton Home Daybook, 1900-1915," FCH.

21. *Ibid.*



Florence Crittenton Home, Helena, Montana

Anonymity and privacy was, and is, a Crittenton priority, as this photograph from the archives of the Helena Florence Crittenton Home demonstrates.

been keeping house for her stepfather, but the Masons thought it wise to send her here as she did not wish to go to the Masonic Home in California where her little sister and brother were sent. G—— is a bright cheerful girl and willing to work.” Another entry notes: “G—— is an exceptionally good girl, has made many warm friends outside the Home by her good conduct.” Mrs. Cullum lavished praise on her young charges when it was due.<sup>22</sup>

In 1908 the Helena Home Circle hired a field secretary, Mrs. E. K. Moffat, to travel the state soliciting donations. In two years the effort raised sufficient money to build a nursery addition and install plumbing in the Helena home. It was a welcome expansion. By 1910 the household included seven children under two and sixteen young women between twelve and twenty-six.<sup>23</sup>

Even as Montana’s Crittenton Home settled into its role as protector of young women in need, changing times during the 1910s—Prohibition, Margaret Sanger’s crusade for birth control, woman suffrage, and leadership changes—prompted both the Helena home and the National Flo-

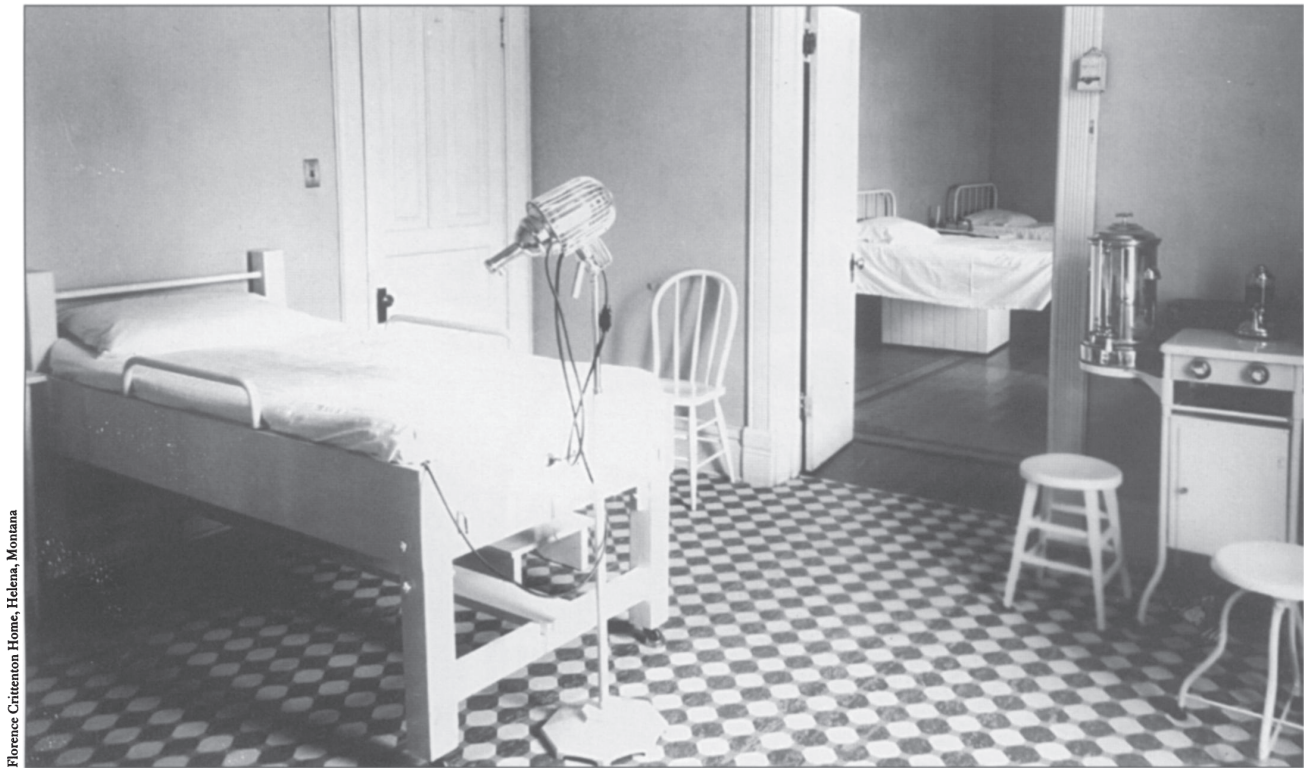
rence Crittenton Mission to assume a larger role in helping women. In 1909, following Charles Crittenton’s death, Kate Waller Barrett assumed presidency of the national organization, involving it in the crusade to eliminate red-light districts and the traffic in white slaves. During World War I, the government contracted with Crittenton Homes to retain “women who had disobeyed rules prohibiting camp followers” because of concern over the spread of venereal diseases among the troops. In Montana the federal laws that closed red-light districts nationwide in 1917 displaced hundreds of women who worked in Butte’s well-known district. In addition, Montana sent forty thousand young men, 10 percent of its population, to the armed forces, leaving young pregnant wives and girlfriends at home. Many of these women sought refuge at the Crittenton Home. As these changes occurred, the organization’s focus began to shift from rescue to maternity homes.<sup>24</sup>

The 1920 census illustrates the need for Crittenton services in Montana. In that year the home reported a staff of four, ten children, and twenty-seven women between the

22. *Ibid.*

23. “Fiftieth Anniversary Being Observed By Florence Crittenton Home Groups,” 1933 newspaper clipping, FCH files; Bureau of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States 1910*.

24. “Florence Crittenton Homes,” 4; Baumler, “Devil’s Perch,” 17; Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, rev. ed. (Seattle, 1991), 268–70.



Florence Crittenton Home, Helena, Montana

Residents had their babies in the upstairs maternity hospital at 22 Jefferson Street until the end of the 1930s.

ages of fourteen and thirty living within its walls. With this influx, the home had become much too small. In 1924 Mrs. Cullum and the Helena Home Circle scraped together two thousand dollars to purchase the dilapidated Albert Kleinschmidt mansion at 22 Jefferson Street. Mrs. Cullum later joked that the stone retaining wall around the property cost two thousand dollars; “they just threw the house in.” Every window was broken, and there was not enough glass in Helena to fix them all. Once repaired, there was space for fifty women and girls and thirty children as well as a private room for widows or wives of servicemen stationed at nearby Fort Harrison.<sup>25</sup>

By the 1930s Helena’s Florence Crittenton Home operated entirely on donations and endowments under a board of officers and trustees. The trustees included the president, vice president, attorney, secretary, treasurer, matron, field secretary, and others. Among the home’s trustees was the governor of Montana. An advisory board represented communities outside Helena. In 1931 the advisory board

25. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of Population 1920, Lewis and Clark County*, sheet 21A, e. d. 92, roll 972, microfilm 432, copy in the MHS Library; *Helena (Mont.) Independent Record*, November 17, 1929; “Lena Cullum, who resigned in 1945 after 38 years Continuous Service to Institution Recalls With Humor Early Trials and Tribulations,” undated newspaper clipping, FCH files.

included members from Townsend, Livingston, Libby, and Plains.<sup>26</sup>

Anonymity was a Crittenton requirement, and residents often used assumed names. The box of clippings in the archives of the home includes many photographs of young residents with their backs to the camera. Mrs. Cullum was always respectful of the need for discretion, but she welcomed each girl as if she were family, treating her as an individual with a future. One young resident wrote in 1931: “A calm and peace had come to me after the long months of worry and heartache. . . . I shall never forget how the matron took hold of my arm and walked with me to the parlor. Her touch poured strength and courage into my soul.” On the average, there were 66.8 residents, including staff, living in the house during 1931, and the home reported no deaths that year. The average age of unmarried mothers was under sixteen.<sup>27</sup>

Eighty-one-year-old Lila Schroeder Anderson fondly recalled that need was the only criterion for admittance to the Helena Crittenton Home. The daughter of a rancher in the Sumatra-Melstone area near Nye, Montana, Lila was three or four when her mother died; her father was unable

26. [Florence Crittenton Home], “Salient Facts . . . 1931”; *Bozeman (Mont.) Chronicle*, October 10, 1947.

27. *Ibid.*

to care for the children. She was the third of six children and the only one among her siblings sent to the Deaconess School, a private Methodist boarding school that also took children whose parents were either deceased or could not care for them. Staff at the school immediately recognized that Lila could manage chores other children could not, and she was put to work peeling potatoes and doing myriad other household tasks. She was homesick, miserable, and determined to run away.<sup>28</sup>

En route to a meeting at the Deaconess School, Lena Cullum noticed the little ten-year-old, her meager belongings in a pillowcase, marching down the sidewalk. She stopped to inquire what the youngster was doing. "I will get to my brothers somehow," Lila answered. Mrs. Cullum opened the car door and invited the child to get in. From that moment, Lila Schroeder belonged in the Crittenton family. Always adept at brushing and braiding her own mother's hair, Lila spent hours with the other young residents in that endeavor. She discreetly answered the phone and the door, always mindful of the need to protect the girls' identities. Sometimes she helped girls her own age through hours of labor in the upstairs maternity hospital where, until the end of the 1930s, residents had their babies. Mrs. Cullum saw Lila through school, including four active years at Helena High School. When Lila's wedding day came, it was Mrs. Cullum who gave her away. The "parental emphasis" that characterized Helena's Crittenton Home in the 1930s provided Lila Schroeder Anderson with wonderful memories—although a little unconventional—of growing up.<sup>29</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, when Lila Schroeder was living at the Crittenton Home, most young mothers still chose to keep their babies, and the goal of keeping mothers and babies together remained strong through the 1920s. But, starting after World War I, when the first legitimate adoption agencies emerged and laws began to recognize parental and child rights on the national level, adoption gradually became a more feasible choice. By the late 1940s the National Florence Crittenton Mission discouraged young mothers from keeping their babies, and by 1957, 98 percent of Helena's Crittenton teens chose to put their babies up for adoption through one of the state's four licensed agencies: the Montana Children's Home, State Welfare, Lutheran Social Services, and Catholic Charities.

28. Lila Schroeder Anderson, interview by author, April 15, 2003, Helena, Montana. The Deaconess School was the forerunner of the Inter-mountain Children's Home.

29. Anderson interview.

## From the "Helena Florence Crittenton Home Daybook, 1900–1915"

### May 12 (circa 1905)

M— was sent by the circle and promised to stay six months. She is twenty-four years old. . . . Maternity case. Catholic in religion. Mother living in Butte and a married sister. The Butte circle made all business arrangements with M— and she agreed to pay maternity fee when able to earn a living.

Sept. 12 Girl baby born this morning at 1:30. weighed seven pounds. Mother and child doing well

Nov. 28 Little E— died this morning. Feeble from birth. The flame of life flickered and went out.

M— grieved for her baby and will go to her home in Butte this week.

### May 20, 1909

— came to the home. sent by —. Age 15 years. case is peculiarly pathetic her own father being responsible for her condition. At the trial he at first denied his guilt but later changed his plea to guilty and was sentenced to State Penitentiary for 35 years.

— is an Austrian and does not speak English.  
Birth of child not on record.

By 1960 the Helena home had cared for approximately 5,800 girls, and it remained the only licensed maternity care facility in the state.<sup>30</sup>

Another significant change to the Crittenton Homes came after World War II when social workers with college degrees began to replace occupational staff and retirement plans offered some reward for longtime employees. This was true in Montana as well. In 1945 Mrs. Cullum resigned after thirty-eight years of service, and Jessica Simmons, former head of the Warm Springs State Hospital student-nursing program, became superintendent. Mrs. Simmons brought to the home her professional social-work experience and practice in dealing with mental illness. Following national models, she emphasized the stigma of teen pregnancy and counseled adoption as the best choice for mother and baby, but she also advocated passionately for her girls, silencing those who criticized them by saying that each girl was suffering enough. Most of the young women living in the home came from respectable families. One twenty-year-old came to Helena because she was afraid people would turn against her family if they knew about her pregnancy. "I didn't care so much what they said about me as what they would say that would hurt my relatives," she said.<sup>31</sup>

As adoption came to be an acceptable choice, the National Florence Crittenton Mission pioneered the study of trends in unplanned and adolescent pregnancies.

30. "Florence Crittenton Homes," 4; *Billings (Mont.) Gazette*, July 14, 1957.

31. "Florence Crittenton Homes," 4–5; Gayle D. Thompson, "Florence Crittenton Home—Alternative to Despair for Unmarried Mothers," *Episcopal Evangel* (November 1960), 3.

Florence Crittenton Home, Helena, Montana



Jessica Simmons became superintendent of the Helena Florence Crittenton Home in 1945. Following national models, she emphasized the stigma of teen pregnancy and recommended young mothers give their babies up for adoption.

Florence Crittenton Home, Helena, Montana



In 1973 a decline in demand for its services forced the Helena Florence Crittenton Home to move from its spacious mansion to the first of two woefully inadequate buildings. During her twenty years as administrator, Karen Northey (pictured on the right, with field representative Joyce Norgard) worked to build a modern facility that would better serve at-risk teens.

Thanks to this research, teen pregnancy came to be recognized as a symptom of social and emotional problems in the 1960s and 1970s. Young unmarried mothers needed more than medical care and shelter, and programs evolved accordingly, providing new services such as day-care, planned parenthood counseling, and emergency housing.<sup>32</sup> But as contraceptives became more available and single parenting became more widely accepted, the

32. Vicki Smith, "Warmth and Professional Care Administered at Helena's Florence Crittenton Home," *Focus* (April 1972), 2.

demand for the services of the Crittenton Homes began to diminish. This prompted the Helena home, located in the smallest community of any Crittenton Home in the country, to move from the spacious Kleinschmidt mansion to the old Montana Children's Home at 830 North Warren Street in 1973. There was room for twenty-three girls, but there were no maternity facilities and no nursery. Girls typically stayed for about fourteen weeks before delivery and only several days after, paying \$270 a month for room and board if they could afford it. If not, county welfare often, but not always, picked up the bill.<sup>33</sup>

During her twenty years at the Helena Crittenton Home, administrator Karen Northey dreamed of a modern facility, but financial difficulties always loomed. In 1982 Northey saw the home through another move, this time to a converted grocery store on Fifth Avenue in central Helena. The facility was woefully inadequate, with space for only fourteen girls and five

babies. Also during this decade, the home's clientele changed significantly. At one time, many of the girls had come from supportive families, but that was no longer the norm. Dysfunctional relationships, multiple foster-care placements, abuse, and neglect put the women at greater risk than ever before. A twenty-four-year-old resident in 1990, for example, was five months pregnant when her

33. Dillon (Mont.) *Silver State Post*, September 30, 1955; Helena (Mont.) *Independent Record*, March 13, 1977. The move was facilitated by the merging of the Helena Florence Crittenton Home and the Montana Children's Home in the early 1970s.



Florence Crittenton Home, Helena, Montana

As adoption became a more accepted practice after World War I with the emergence of licensed adoption agencies and laws that recognized parental and child rights, the National Florence Crittenton Mission began to encourage young mothers to consider this option. This trend changed in the 1990s with many teens choosing parenting over adoption. Above, volunteer Hazel Mihelish, retired Crittenton housemother, day-care aide, and cook, rocks an infant.

abusive, alcoholic boyfriend locked her out on Christmas Eve. Driving the streets of Helena in her nightgown with no money and nowhere to go, she heard an ad for the Florence Crittenton Home on the radio. She later said, "It probably saved my life."<sup>34</sup>

34. *Billings (Mont.) Gazette*, March 6, 1990.

35. *Helena (Mont.) Independent Record*, August 29, 1993; *Prevention Connection Newsletter* (Spring 2002), 18–19; Pat Seiler, conversation with author, April 15, 2003, Helena, Montana.

36. Florence Crittenton Association of America, *Field Reporter*. For more information on the Florence Crittenton Home and its current financial needs, write FCH, 901 Harris, Helena, Montana 59601; phone (406) 442-6950; or e-mail [mothers@initco.net](mailto:mothers@initco.net).

The 1990s marked another change: 70 percent of Crittenton mothers were keeping their babies. The new Crittenton Home, the culmination of Karen Northey's dream, reflects this trend. Divided into two separate areas, the modern facility at 901 Harris Street, completed in 1995, mirrors the change in attitudes toward at-risk teens that has taken place over the years. One side offers rehabilitative services for girls who are not pregnant, and the other is for expectant and parenting adolescents. Pat Seiler, the home's current executive director, says that today residency is no longer a moral issue but a matter of protection and advocacy for those who have no options. Helping teens break the cycle of poverty, welfare, and abuse has far-reaching consequences. The need for the Helena home, still the only licensed maternity home in Montana, is overwhelming and adequate funding is critical.<sup>35</sup>

Charles Crittenton had a tremendous influence on Americans' attitudes toward sexual misconduct, foreseeing prevention and rehabilitation as the key. His contribution was not in preaching not to sin, but rather in realizing that preaching was not enough: "the where to go and how not to sin was . . . a cornerstone from which today's treatment-oriented Florence Crittenton agencies developed." In its long history, the National Florence Crittenton Mission has been praised by nine presidents, including Theodore Roosevelt, who said in 1903 that those in need "pay a heavy penalty and the road to reform is made so difficult that I can conceive of no more worthy work." In recognizing that an individual has "the making of a good woman," dedicated workers past and present perpetuate Crittenton's legacy, touching young

lives and influencing generations. The matrons' book, the photographs and clippings, and the vital work still being done every day are profound evidence of the difference the Helena Florence Crittenton Home has made to so many young women.<sup>36</sup>

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