

# Carlton Refuge

c. 1854 – 1949

**Other Names:**

- Protestant Refuge
- Carlton Home

## Details

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The Carlton Refuge was a non-denominational institution established in 1857 to 'reform' women working in prostitution. From 1860 the Refuge accommodated mothers and their babies, and over time offered care to 'neglected' children, training in mothercraft and other related services. The Refuge closed in 1949.

The Carlton Refuge was a non-denominational institution established in 1857, guided by Protestant Evangelical principles, to target and reform 'fallen women' (women engaged in prostitution).

The operations of the Refuge shifted away from this original aim – by 1860 it was accommodating single mothers and their babies after they were discharged from hospital. By 1880, single mothers were its major 'clientele'.

Over time, its functions expanded further to include care for 'neglected' children, training for mothercraft and infant welfare nurses, residential care for married mothers and their babies, and other services.

The Refuge at Carlton was the first female refuge in Victoria. Other 'female rescue' institutions were established in the 1860s, at Ballarat and Geelong, as well as the Catholic rescue home at Abbotsford run by the Good Shepherd Sisters. The Carlton Refuge took its aims and objectives from London Magdalen Hospital, which was established in 1758.

Its 1866 annual report outlined the aims of the Carlton Refuge:

*To provide a refuge for females who have fallen into vice, and who are desirous to return to the paths of virtue ... To reclaim them from their evil courses, and fit them to become useful members of society ... To assist in procuring them situations, or otherwise providing for them on leaving the Institution.*

According to this report, the Refuge also attended to the 'restoration of the bodily health of the inmates; and to the inculcation of proper religious feelings and principles'. This was achieved through prayer and hard work, mainly in the laundry.

From around 1860, the Refuge was moving away from its original 'reformatory' ideals, and taking in unmarried mothers and their babies, following their discharge from hospital. While the institution focused on the 'care' of mothers, it is evident that the Refuge also accommodated some babies and children after their mothers were discharged. However, the historical sources contain many references to the Refuge's approach of encouraging unmarried mothers to keep their babies if possible.

In 1890, the address of the Refuge changed from Madeline Street (later known as the northern end of Swanston Street) to Keppel Street, Carlton. The Refuge continued to be housed in the same buildings.

In 1907, Archbishop Clark opened new buildings at the Refuge, for administration and a dormitory. He reflected on how the Refuge's approach to single mothers and their children had changed since the 1850s. Its traditional reformatory approach 'had become increasingly unappealing'. He stated that the Refuge was intended for

*unfortunate, friendless girls about to become mothers ... The inmates were tenderly taken care of and at the birth of their children they were given every encouragement and attention. What was more, the infants were looked after with the greatest care.*

The Refuge closed in 1949. Two years later, another institution for mothers and babies operated on the same site, the Queen Elizabeth Maternal and Child Health Centre and Infants Hospital. This centre closed in 1997.

## Gallery



**Former Carlton Refuge, Keppel St**

**Description:** The Victorian Heritage Database has an entry about the Queen Elizabeth Maternal and Child Health Centre (which occupied the former site of the Carlton Refuge from 1951). The entry in the Heritage Database discusses the significance of the site and has several pictures of the remaining buildings from Carlton Refuge.

## More info

### Resources

- Australian Heritage Council, [A thematic heritage study on Australia's benevolent and other care institutions](#), 2016
- Wickham, Dorothy Glennys, [Beyond the Wall: Ballarat Female Refuge, A Study in Moral Authority](#), 2003
- Swain, Shurlee with Renate Howe, *Single mothers and their children : disposal, punishment and survival in Australia*, 1995
- Francis, Rosemary, [Carlton Refuge \(1854-1949\)](#), Australian Women's Register, 2010
- Carlton Refuge, [History of children's services: the history of the Carlton Refuge from the 1850's to 1920](#), 1992
- Kernot, M.J., *Reminiscences of the Carlton Refuge, 1854 to 1919*, 1919
- [Annual report of the Committee of Management: Carlton Refuge \(Vic.\)](#), 1865 - 1930
- [Annual report of the Committee of Management: Carlton Home \(Vic.\)](#), 1931 - 1949

## Records

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

### Records held by other organisations

- [Records, 1875-1949 \[Carlton Refuge\] \(1875 - 1949\)](#)
- ['Closed' Agency and General Correspondence Files \[Charities Board of Victoria\] \(1923 - 1983\)](#)

- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)  
Item B80 of the Child Endowment correspondence files relates to Carlton Refuge
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://findconnect.efront.digital/entity/carlton-refuge/>