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Carrie steele-pitts home and the church partners in mission

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SENIOR ESSAY

**THE CARRIE STEELE-PITTS HOME AND THE CHURCH
PARTNERS IN MISSION**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements For The Master of Divinity Degree**

By

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The Interdenominational Theological Center

Atlanta, Georgia

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INTRODUCTION

This brief history on the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home is an out-growth of the writer, having worked and lived in the "Home" for three and a half years as a House Father-Counselor. During his tenure, trying to help improve the lives of children and young people, he grew in wisdom and stature himself.

This institution, when founded, was not intended to be a Christian institution, but over the years it has become a church-related institution to a very high degree. The present Director feels that it was a divine spirit that inspired the founders to work untiringly for the establishment of a sanctuary for displaced and unwanted children.

Words cannot express the writer's gratitude to the present Director, Mrs. Mae M. Yates, for her guidance and her constructive criticism in his working endeavors at the Home. The writer is also grateful for her assistance in the forming of this paper and for the use of her personal and historical documents.

THE CARRIE STEELE-PITTS HOME AND THE CHURCH

PARTNERS IN MISSION

The Carrie Steele-Pitts Home functions as a private agency giving a Christian, though non-denominational, home to boys and girls. Children between the ages of five and fourteen are accepted for care, although they may live there until they are much older.

Since its founding in 1888, the Home has attempted to serve the community and to meet the real needs of children who, because of circumstances beyond their control, are displaced. The Home tries to provide these children with needed training, care, and love as nearly commensurate with a home as a group setting can afford.¹

The Carrie Steele-Pitts Home endeavors to create opportunities through new experiences, both physical and spiritual. For these individual children within its confines, endeavors are made to raise their standard of thinking and return them to the community as assets, rather than liabilities. The Home realizes also that many of these children come with limitations due to the economic, social, and environmental pattern of our community. Many of these limitations may

¹The reader will note the use of the term, "Home". This term is used in reference to the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home.

not be decreased. But, it is the aim of the Home to work with and to train these children so that when they are returned to their homes, or go out to establish new homes for themselves, they may be able to live constructively--without frustrations, within their own limitations. Attention, however, must be given to the exceptional child, preparing him whenever possible for a fuller life with larger horizons.

The Carrie Steele-Pitts Home works with children from Fulton, Dekalb, Gwinnett, Cobb and Clayton Counties' Departments of Family and Children's Services, Juvenile Courts, and also private families. Carrie Steele-Pitts Home is able to meet some of the needs of our community and nearby counties because of the financial support and encouragement of the Metropolitan Atlanta Community Services.

The Carrie Steele-Pitts Home, Incorporated, was founded by Mrs. Carrie Steele in 1889. Her interest came from picking up little children who were abandoned by their parents at the Terminal Station. Mrs. Steele, a maid working almost twenty-four hours daily, could not help but care for the little children. Her first step was to put the little ones in carboxes and care for them. She later built a Home from funds received from the sale of her own home. The original site was on Flat Shoals Road (now Memorial Drive), the

present location of the Warren Manufacturing Company.

Following the death of Mrs. Carrie Steele, the Home was under the direction of Mrs. Augusta Goodrum, who served for twenty years as Superintendent. Mrs. Goodrum, now deceased, maintained the high ideals which Mrs. Steele had envisioned for the home.

In 1919 Mrs. Clara M. Pitts, who had long been associated with the home as President of the Woman's Auxiliary, became Manager--serving in that capacity until her death in 1950. Since 1950 Mrs. M. M. Yates, Mrs. Pitts' daughter, has served as Director.

Mrs. Yates and her Board successfully raised almost a half million dollars and built their present Home at 667 Fairburn Road Northwest, which moved them from deplorable living conditions at the old 305 Roy Street address (constructed in 1928 by the City--later purchased by the Board of Trustees of the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home). The Home moved into the four-cottage and administration building set-up December 14, 1964--the grandest Christmas present ever received by the children.

A better understanding of the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home's organizational structure might be gained from Chart "A". This chart was designed to simplify the understanding of the organizational structure of the Home for visitors, workers, and the Board of Trustees.

STAFF ORGANIZATION

TRUSTEES
Officers
Members

DIRECTOR

SECRETARY & BUS. MGR.

BOOKKEEPER

SUPERINTENDENT BUILDING
and
BOYS RECREATION

DIRECTOR OF CASEWORK SERVICES

Part-time Physician

"GIRLS"
House Mother

"BOYS"
House Father
and
Mother

SENIOR COOK
Kitchen Helpers

In studying the requirements for admission to the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home one finds that admissions are made upon request for services from other agencies. These agencies pay the Home on a per diem basis for their services. Children are also admitted because of family deterioration, death of parents, or peculiar conditions and difficulties. In cases where there is only one relative or parent involved and no other resources are available to meet the working hours of the applicant, a child is accepted. A complete investigation is made which deals with the emotional and physical needs of the child and a fee is charged, based on the financial ability of the parent or relative to pay.

The Home services are not for the chronic delinquent, but rather for the child on the border line with suggestive delinquent behavior. The Home does not accept a child where both natural parents are living together. The physically handicapped or the mentally handicapped child is not accepted because there are no adequate facilities or staff to meet the basic needs of such children.

It is the object of the Home to provide a Christian home for neglected children and to train them so that they might return to the community as able citizens. Carrie Steele is a non-denominational institution. From its inception a seminary student has been part of the staff. These students came from Gammon Theological Seminary,

which is now a part of the Interdenominational Theological Center. The writer has served in such a capacity for three and a half years.

The children in the Home are members of many different and diverse churches, and are allowed to freely attend the churches of their choice, under supervision. Two churches that have rendered long and untiring services to the home are: the First Congregational Church where Dr. Homer C. McEwen is the Pastor; and the Wheat Street Baptist Church, where Dr. William Holmes Borders is the Pastor.

Each child is respected as an individual and his needs are taken into consideration insofar as that is possible. The case worker, house parents, school and other necessary resources available in the community come together as a group to provide complete (medical, dental, food, clothing, recreation, moral, and spiritual) services for the children.

The children attend public schools (elementary and high) in the community at large. Study hours are set aside five nights a week under the supervision of the house parents. A complete record is also used in recording all school grades. A fund (The Hamid Educational Fund) is set aside to finance boys and girls who have the desire and who possess the requisite emotional and mental ability to attend college or to take a specialized trade.

In dealing with the question of when a child is ready to leave the Home, the reader finds that if a child or his family has not been rehabilitated so that the child may return to his or her home by the age of 18, he may remain. In the event of this situation the Home continues to work towards the goal of helping the child become self-supporting, or until such time as the child makes his or her own plans. In many cases they get married or are so encouraged.

The Home is proud of the fact that many of its young men and women have finished college and are teaching in the public school systems in many major cities. There are other young people who work as secretaries, beauticians, and in other specialized trades.

In looking at the medical and dental program of the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home, the writer finds that the physician is a member of the Board of Trustees. Dr. H. E. Nash has given the Home fulltime service and conducts a bi-monthly clinic. There is a semi-annual physical examination of all children. Immunization, special x-rays and special blood tests are secured in the nearby Health Center. If a very serious illness or accident occurs, the Home uses Grady Hospital. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the health record in the Home is excellent. Dental care is provided by a private dentist.

Looking at the social activities of the Home, the writer found that each high school boy and girl receives a weekly allowance in addition to other requests for special school and activity fees. Each elementary school child receives spending change according to his grade level. During the summer the more mature teenagers and college students acquire special duties on campus and are allowed to have jobs in the city from which they earn spending money.

In the field of recreation, the public school is predominantly in charge. During the summer season recreation is provided through extra-curricular activities which the Home provides. Recreation consists of sewing, cooking, swimming, outdoor games, movies, day and resident camping. Each child's birthday is recognized by the receiving of a card, a cake and a special dinner on the last day of that month.

The Home is visited by groups who provide music, storytelling and organized parties. Civic minded groups, such as The Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, do a tremendous amount of work with the teenage girls at the Home. The Omega Psi Phi Fraternity of Morehouse College also visits the Home for an annual Easter Egg Hunt.

There are house parents for the girls and boys. The house parents work along with the caseworker in solving special problems that arise. The caseworker, however, is responsible for total

casework services and cooperates with the Department of Public Welfare Caseworkers and Juvenile Court Probation Officers. These agencies have children in the Home--thus, making the Home responsible for them. The Home also has a full-time secretary who is responsible for total secretarial duties. There are two kitchen technicians who are responsible for preparing three meals daily. One maintenance man is employed. The teenage boys and girls assist in performing duties in the Home, which is part of the training.

The Director is responsible to the Board of Trustees and all employees are responsible to the Director. It is interesting to note that all Directors from the inception of this institution have been women. The staff, however, is composed equally of men and women.

In talking with Mrs. M. M. Yates, the present Director of the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home, the writer had a chance to view and copy some historical data on the institution. One such document on the struggle of the Home was a newspaper article appearing in "The Atlanta Georgian and News", March 31, 1911. The article dealt with one of the many fund raising drives to help the Home financially. A complete account of this article is given in the next paragraph.

A mass meeting, looking to the interest and welfare of Negro orphans of the city, will be held Sunday afternoon beginning at two o'clock at Big Bethel A. M. E. Church, Auburn Avenue and Butler Street. The meeting will be held under the auspices of the Carrie Steele-Pitts Colored Orphanage

and a program, both interesting and constructive, will be carried out.

The crying need for a home for Negro orphans is emphasized in the courts of Atlanta every day. Judges are called upon to send little boys to jail and the chain-gang, who should rightfully be under the care of some institution which can help reform them. The movement looking to the erection of such a home is a worthy one, and should receive the support of all right-thinking citizens.

PROGRAM FOR SUNDAY MEETING

Chairman - Reverend P. J. Bryant

Selection - Bethel Choir

Invocation - Reverend J. R. Sheppard, Zion Church

Selection - Wheat Street Choir

"The Need of an Orphanage" - Probation Officer Glaer

"When and How The Carrie Steele Orphanage Was Founded and Fostered" - Mrs. S. S. Butler

Song - The Orphans

"The Duty of the People of Atlanta to Care for the Home" -
Dr. J. W. E. Bowen

"The Relation of the Churches, Ministers and the Leaders of the Race in Atlanta to the Carrie Steele Orphanage" - Bishop H. M. Turner

Song - There's a Stranger at the Door - Bethel Choir

Contributions for children's clothes, furniture, repairing building, for lights and water.

All persons interested in the moral, religious, and intellectual betterment of the Negro children and families of this city are urged to be present and encourage the cause.²

The July 6, 1948 edition of the Atlanta Daily World carries an article on the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home written by the late Mrs. Julia Pate Borders. Mrs. Borders states, "A strong sense of mission expressed through long years of devoted service has brought telling and encouraging results in the lives of the children and young people who have been nurtured and trained in the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home."

When one thinks of the fine record and unusual achievements of the members of the Home, in both public and private schools of the city, he cannot help but appreciate the work of the Home. This institution has done a tremendous task of producing students, teachers, and useful citizens of note-worthy quality. As one looks at the deep dedication of the founders of the Home, he cannot help but feel and express the deepest appreciation for the consistent and consecrated efforts of this institution. Mrs. C. M. Pitts, the Manager of the Home for thirty-six years, was one of these dedicated workers. Mrs. Mae M. Yates, the devoted daughter of Mrs. Pitts, has given untiring and invaluable services for more than twenty years. This

²The Atlanta Georgian and News, "Mass Meeting Sunday for Negro Orphanage", March 31, 1911.

high degree of success would have not been possible without the able staff of workers who have lived and served in the Home both day and night. In short, one has only to visit the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home and look about him for tangible evidence of needed social services being rendered to under-privileged children.

The following article was taken from an undated newspaper, "The Voice of The Negro", and speaks of how much the Home is appreciated by the community.

"No institution among us illustrates more than the Carrie Steele Orphanage; it is Christianity applied. It was a divine thought that entered the mind of the founder and its whole history is filled with heroic sacrifices and great deeds. We call special attention to the article in this issue of The Voice written by the matron of the institution. The Superintendent and his thoughtful wife, Mrs. Gussie M. Logan, the Matron, have buried themselves in their work and are bringing forth results that tell of the lives of these children. We commend this institution to philanthropists everywhere as a needy and worthy project in our city."³

It was the desire of the first Board Members that the boys be given industrial training so as to better qualify them for life's work. Originally, the Home was in need of shoe-making, house-building, painting, laundry and needle work supplies for the training of these

³The Voice of The Negro, "In The Sanctum-Carrie Steele Orphanage", Undated newspaper.

children. The opinion of the Board was that these children were the wards of the public and that they (the trustees), being servants of the people, should take such an occasion to report this plight to the people through the ministers and churches. With this task in mind, the following statement was published in local papers.

"The Board of Trustees of the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home appeals through you, to your Christian congregation, for donations of articles of clothing for this band of poor and otherwise homeless children. By caring for them in this Home, we are reducing the possibilities of the increase of the already Negro majority in the chain-gang and penitentiary system; and by giving them a Christian education, we are endeavoring to so strengthen elevate, and Christianize their moral character, so as to give to society young men, and women, whose lives will be an honor to our race by leading upright Christian lives."⁴

As one views the physical structure of the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home in 1969 he cannot help but be favorably impressed. The grounds and buildings are attractive for they are always clean and home-like. Meals are well-balanced and carefully prepared. Untiring efforts are put forth to teach the children personal hygiene, self-respect, and personal worth. A wholesome recreational program has been established and the principles of good sportsmanship and Christianity are never forgotten.

An atmosphere of freedom, happiness and warm family life are easily recognized in the smooth operation of the Home. Special

⁴The above statement is taken from an undated and unlisted newspaper article of appeal by The Carrie Steele-Pitts' first Board of Directors, for financial assistance.

efforts are made to secure for the children every recreational, educational and cultural experience that is generally available to any other child or young person in Atlanta. In addition to the well-planned recreational activities of the Home, the children go regularly to the theater, on educational tours, and to cultural and inspirational programs. The children also participate in the activities of schools, clubs, and churches of their choice. Several high school students in the Home, both boys and girls, have achieved noticeable success scholastically. They have also made outstanding contributions in scouting, bands, advanced choirs, patrol service, and oratory.

The writer is well aware of the fact that there is no real substitute for a child's own home. There are also many situations where it is not possible for a child to remain in his own home and a foster home placement may not be available. In such cases institutional care is needed, such as provided for by the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home.

Many circumstances occur which prevent a child from being brought up by his natural parents and in his own home. Frequently the deprivation in his own home leads to substitute parental care for a child, and it becomes necessary to place him where the best possible attention can be obtained. A tenancy is often provided far away from

his home through the help of a public or private agency.⁵ I believe that the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home has striven to provide this type of agency, one that resembles a real home as much as possible.

It is interesting to note that many people are not knowledgeable of the difference between a foster home and an institution. The foster home and the institution, however, are the two types of substitute parental care most frequently used.

In many cases, institutional placements are regarded as the last resort for children after other methods of treatment have been tried. Sometimes institutions are used if there are no other facilities for a dependent child. "The stigma attached to the institutions exist at the present time because in many cases they are considered places where "bad" children are sent."⁶

Those who have had some dealing with institutions for children, and have done research on their living conditions, know that they (institutions) can serve a valuable purpose as temporary placements. Sometimes a child needs institutional care prior to placement in a

⁵Emma O. Landberg, Unto the Least of These: Social Services for Children (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1947), p. 281.

⁶Doris Evelyn Mark, "A Study of Selected Children Known To The Carrie Steele-Pitts Home, Atlanta, Georgia, 1948-1949" (unpublished Master's thesis, School of Social Work, Atlanta University, 1949), p. 29.

home, particularly in cases where he is more comfortable in a large group or has had traumatic experiences in his own family relationship. If this is the case, the institutional experience helps him feel more comfortable and enables him to make adjustments.

Some sociologists and social workers say that experience has shown that adolescents prefer the group life of the institution. It is believed that group living enables them to form some positive relations and to acquire for the first time, in many instances, a feeling of belonging. This is the aim of the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home to develop a more wholesome life for displaced children.

CONCLUSION

Truly it is a strong sense of mission expressed over eighty long years of devoted service that has brought telling and encouraging results in the lives of the children and young people who have been nurtured and trained in the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home. It was readily seen from this institution's inception that it would have the ability to make law-abiding and respectable citizens out of the children who might have otherwise, because of conditions beyond their control, become educated for the chain-gang or a life of poverty.

One would be naive to assume that the story of the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home has been one of complete success through the years. The Home, like many other institutions, has had its share of successes and failures, but nothing seems to stop its progress. Mrs. Mae M. Yates' attitude seems to be that of the old prophet, "It has not yet been revealed what it shall be."

The good which this institution has accomplished and will accomplish at large, in addition to its benefits to individual humanity, ought to be sufficient to guarantee the complete success of its future. The Home's significant contributions to humanity are outstanding enough to make anyone respect and admire its founders.

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