



# The Lakewood Historical Society

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## LAKWOOD DAY NURSERY

By Liza Stewart

Many residents in Lakewood and far reaching areas remember one of the first childcare facilities in Greater Cleveland across from Harrison School. Lakewood Day Nursery at 2070 Dowd Avenue will close its doors at the end of June 2002. The nursery richly reflects the growth of Lakewood and childcare in the city.

In 1920, The Federated Parent-Teachers Association composed of Mothers' Clubs in Lakewood Schools became aware of a need for child care in the vicinity of the National Carbon Company which employed men and women from the area, known as Bird Town. They found that many widows who had to earn a living were leaving small children alone all day while other children were allowed to shift for themselves under casual supervision of neighbors.

This group appealed to the Cleveland Day Nursery and Free Kindergarten Association for the establishment of a day nursery in Lakewood. On December 20, 1920 the association passed a resolution to take over the management and control of such a nursery if a suitable building could be secured and the Welfare Federation could help with necessary expenses. The Parent-Teachers' Association enlisted Nation Carbon Company for assistance. This company, later Union Carbide, provided initial rental space on Plover Street. The PTA solicited funds and raised money for the May 11, 1921 opening. Only one-parent families were certified as eligible. Children, 1 to 10, were eligible and each child was given a physical examination prior to being accepted. There was a minimum charge of 10 cents for the first child and 5 cents for each additional child.

Emphasis was placed on health, cleanliness and diet. Communicable diseases were rampant in Greater Cleveland. Mumps, measles, chicken pox and scarlet fever were common. Immediately upon arrival (often at

6:45am) temperatures were taken and throats examined. Younger children were given kindergarten exercises and taught to play games outdoors when weather permitted. Those under six were required to take a two-hour nap. Older children attended near-by public and private schools, returning to the nursery for a brief lunch as well as after school.

Word spread quickly of the fine work being done at the nursery and a waiting list grew! By 1924 the Lakewood Day Nursery had outgrown its quarters. The only choice seemed to be to raise funds for a building of their own. A small group of women decided engaged Charles Marsh to manage the drive. The Lakewood Chamber of Commerce provided office space and students at Lakewood High School participated. The drive was well publicized and much to the amazement of all, the group raised \$27,479.71.

Two adjoining lots at 2070 Dowd were purchased for \$3200. Architects and contractors were chosen and the building was opened on February 19, 1925. Capacity of the new nursery was twice that of the old. As time passed, some of the old practices were discarded such as weekly baths, daily temperatures, nose drops and cod liver oil. More creative programs were instituted including a dental plan and regular parental meetings.

During the Second World War, women working at Union Carbide often brought their children to "The Nursery" for care.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's the original mission of the day continued. Periodically children were referred to the nursery by the Children's Aid Society, the Society for the Blind, and Psychiatric Clinic. At the time, about 45 children received care from 7:30 am to 5:45 PM. Fees were on a sliding scale and had risen to a ceiling of \$6.00

per day!

In the past thirty years, the Center for Families and Children has run both Head Start and pre-school childcare at Lakewood Day Nursery. A hallmark of the service throughout the 80 years of service has been the high level of credentials and continuity of staff. As more and more women have returned to the workforce, Lakewood Day has been a comforting resource for parents. It has continued to serve families of Lakewood and western Cleveland with many children coming from Bird Town. A sliding fee scale has also continued and encouraged children from diverse economic backgrounds. Throughout the years, Lakewood Day Nursery has remained a happy place where each child followed a healthful routine of indoor and out door play, stories, group games, crafts, music, lunch, nap time, afternoon snacks, all under the supervision of an understanding, qualified staff.

However childcare options have grown and with these choices has come competition. In a letter to staff and parents, Center for Families and Children cited growing costs and the outdated, small facility as reasons for closing. Although the Center for Families and Children will not have childcare in the Western Suburbs, it has indicated it will continue to seek out a new facility. In the meantime, the rich history of Lakewood Day will be written into the hearts of many. Lakewood Day Nursery has reached directly and indirectly into the lives of an uncounted number of children and their families.

There [was] a reunion celebration for those whose lives were touched by Lakewood Day on Friday, June 7th (2001) from 3 PM to 6:30 PM.

*Much of the information presented here was taken from a pamphlet written by Margaret Manor Butler for Lakewood Day's 50th Anniversary in 1971. Mrs. Butler was a member of the Advisory Committee.*