

# Nazareth House, Ballarat

1888 – 1976

## Details

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Nazareth House, Ballarat, was opened in December 1888 to cater for aged people and girls aged between 6 and 16. The support of children at Nazareth House discontinued in 1976. In 2011, Nazareth House is an aged care facility.

Nazareth House was opened in December 1888 to cater for aged people and young people who needed care. The support of children discontinued in 1976.

Nazareth House Ballarat accommodated girls from the age of six. Girls younger than six were previously accommodated at St Joseph's Home, Sebastapol, which was for girls and boys.

The accommodation for aged men and women was situated at the rear of the property.

A departmental inspection report from 1938 contained the following description of Nazareth House, Ballarat:

*The Institution is situated in one of the best parts of Ballarat surrounded by a large property. They are at present milking 10 cows and keep enough fowls to supply the Home in eggs all year through. Staff kept: 19 Sisters, who are assisted by some of the inmates.*

*The Home is very well equipped for its purpose. School is held in the Home. School rooms (were) especially built for the comfort of the children within the last 4 years. They are without doubt the finest school rooms I have seen in any Institution and very well furnished. Bathrooms and conveniences are modern and most satisfactory.*

At its peak in the 1950s, Nazareth House housed around 100 children at a time. Girls from the age of 5 were educated at Nazareth House Primary School which was on site. When they reached high school age, girls attended a number of local schools including Loreto Convent in Dawson Street, Ballarat; St Alipius in Ballarat East; St Columbus in Ballarat North; St Joseph's in Lyons Street, and Sacred Heart in Victoria Street at Ballarat East.

Numbers at Nazareth House diminished by the 1960s and the Home ceased 'caring' for children in 1976. At that time, some girls were transferred to Hayeslee House in Ballarat.

One former resident, Grace Ryan nee Charlton, included many fond memories of Nazareth House in her childhood reminiscences of the early twentieth century. Grace was admitted to Nazareth House as a toddler in 1913. She recalled:

*There were tiny little babies there. I remember one who was left at the gatehouse. No-one could get in unless the gatekeeper unlocked the gate and let them in, but maybe there wasn't a gatekeeper on duty after a certain time at night.*

*Babies would be brought in in the middle of the night, screaming, and I'd always wake up. One night they brought this baby in and it was crying like anything, and one of the nuns came, and seeing I had woken up, she said, 'Will you take the baby into bed with you, and get it warm?' Oh, I thought it was the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me, and I sat up all night looking at it. It was just left at the gate like a foundling. It never had a name or anything, so the nuns called her Margaret.*

Grace moved out of the nursery when she was about six years old. Girls were housed 'downstairs' until they left the Home to go to work:

*Most of the girls would be about fifteen or sixteen, before they went out to work. They never sent them out too early because they'd have to learn a bit about how to work before they went. Some of them went to do domestic work in the toffs' houses.*

After some ten years at Nazareth House, Grace describes the circumstances of her discharge, when she went to live with relatives in Geelong:

*One day, it was in May, 1924, I got the biggest shock of my life. One of the nuns came to me one Saturday, and I was with all of my mates one minute, and the next minute I was gone. She took me into the bathroom for a hot bath, and that is when she told me I was leaving – I never saw any of the kids again. She said, 'You're leaving here today; you're going to Geelong to live with Mag and Ernie.' I was just gone from all my mates – I couldn't tell them, or say goodbye.*

Other accounts of childhood spent at Nazareth House paint a very different picture. In fact, the word 'nightmare' is a common feature of many of the mentions of Nazareth House, Ballarat, in submissions to the Forgotten Australians enquiry.

One former resident of Nazareth House Ballarat submitted to the Forgotten Australians inquiry:

*I was in Nazareth House, Ballarat in about 1957. I was 4 years old. It is something that has never left me. How and why these places were allowed to run the way they were is impossible for me to comprehend. It made no sense. A place to de-humanise children? It worked.*

The convicted paedophile Father Gerard Francis Ridsdale was a 'visiting chaplain' at Nazareth House in the 1960s (he also had this role at St Joseph's Home in Sebastapol). The organisation Broken Rites has reported that some of Ridsdale's victims were residents at Nazareth House, Ballarat.

Numerous survivors have given testimony about the abuse of children in St Joseph's Home and Nazareth House Ballarat, including to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care (2003-2004), the Victorian Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations (2012-2013) and the Royal Commission into Institutional responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-2017).

When Nazareth House Ballarat ceased to house children in 1976, the Lisa Lodge Girls' Hostel in Ballarat established a new transition facility for adolescent girls leaving Nazareth House. This new institution was called

Hayeslee House.

## Gallery

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### Negative - Ballarat, Victoria, 1934 [editor's note: Nazareth House in background]

**Description:** The fleet of rowing boats owned by D. A. Gill. Gill 's boat house on the left and Nazareth House in the background.

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### Nazareth House, Ballarat

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### Postcard: Nazareth House, Ballarat

**Description:** The black and white card shows Nazareth house in Ballarat. A high fence is in the front of the building, a tower is the most prominent point in the middle of the picture and there are two trees in front of the fence nearest the street. The name is in white along the nature strip.

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### Forgotten Australians & UK children abused by nuns

**Description:** This YouTube video is a documentary from 1998 produced for Frontline Scotland about the Poor Sisters of Nazareth, and abuse of children in Homes in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Kilmarnock run by this religious order. The program also features 3 former residents of Nazareth House in Ballarat giving testimony about abuse. Representatives from the Catholic Church in Australia are interviewed and provide details of the Church's response to abuse allegations in 1998. The content relating to Nazareth House in Australia starts at the 19:56 point of the video.

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### Nazareth House Christmas Concert

**Description:** The former resident who supplied this photo included the following description: This photo was taken in December 1963 just before the annual Christmas Concert. The Bishop of Ballarat Bishop Collins used to attend, he used to sit at the front in the middle, and as our names were called out to receive a Christmas present we had to walk up to the Bishop and genuflect and kiss his ring then he would present us with the present. After the concert was over, and the outsiders had gone, we had to hand back our presents, god knows where they ended up, because we never saw them again.

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## Two-way Cool-off [Nazareth House, Ballarat]

**Description:** This is a copy of a newspaper clipping from 1963 or 1964, showing a group of children from Nazareth House, Ballarat, who were at a swimming pool. Gabrielle Short, a former resident of Nazareth House, kindly supplied this image to Find & Connect. She wrote this about the photograph: "This photo was another display of their publicity stunts, where we had to stand and smile and look happy, well in a way we were happy for a few minutes, drinking cool aid, it certainly wasn't the norm. It was more for the camera ... These photos do not tell the real story, but maybe some past residents who look at your website and may be interested in seeing photos that they don't have." The date provided below is of the original photograph, the copy was taken in 2006.

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## Nazareth House Choir

**Description:** The former resident who supplied this photo included the following description: This is a photo of the choir taken in 1964. The Nazareth House choir used to enter the South St Competitions every year in September.

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## Nazareth House Reunion

**Description:** The former resident who supplied this photo included the following description: This is a photo was taken at a 2007 Nazareth House reunion. The photo shows the statue that we stood in front of on our communion day, it is still there.

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## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Sisters of Nazareth \(1888 - current\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [St Joseph's Home \(c. 1911 - 1980\)](#)  
Girls were housed at St Joseph's Home only until the age of six. At six, they were transferred to Nazareth House, Ballarat.
- [Hayeslee House \(1976 - 1994\)](#)  
In 1976, when Nazareth House closed, Hayeslee House was established as a transition facility for some adolescent girls from Nazareth House.

## Resources

- Davis, Donna with Amy Willesee, *Sins of the mothers: a memoir of abandonment, love and redemption*, 2006
- Bissett, Margaret, [Submission no 108 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 19 July 2003
- Turnbull, Margaret, [Submission no 111 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- Stevans, Leesa, [Submission no 5 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- Cronin, Bryan, [Submission no 290 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2005
- [How the church harboured this criminal, Father Gerald Ridsdale, for thirty years](#), Broken Rites, No date
- Short, Gabrielle, [Transcript of Gabrielle Short's presentation to the Family and Community Development Committee: Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations](#), 26 March 2013
- Marshall, Debi, [The girls, the paedophile and Cardinal Pell](#), SBS, 2016

- O'Neill, Cate, [Spotlight on Ballarat](#), Find & Connect web resource blog, 9 March 2016
- [Nazareth House Children's Home \(1949-75\)](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance:* See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Nazareth House, Ballarat
- [Nazareth House \(1888-1976\)](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance:* See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Nazareth House, Ballarat
- Savidis, Penny, [Sex abuse Royal Commission urged to hold public meetings in regional Victoria](#), Ryan Carlisle Thomas Lawyers, 2014
- Thompson, Ann, [Submission No 410 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 26 July 2004

## Records

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

### Records

- [Bates, Smart and McCutcheon Pty Ltd \(1858 - 1995\)](#)
  - ['Closed' Agency and General Correspondence Files \[Charities Board of Victoria\] \(1923 - 1983\)](#)
  - [Admission and Discharge Registers, Nazareth House, Ballarat \(1889? - 1976?\)](#)
  - [Voluntary Children's Homes Files \(1921 - 1989\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/nazareth-house-ballarat-2/>