

# Ballarat Female Refuge

1867 – 1941

**Other Names:**

- Ballarat Female Home
- Ballarat Town and City Mission Rescue Home
- Ballarat Rescue Home
- Ballarat Female Rescue Home

## Details

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The Ballarat Female Refuge was established in 1867 by a group of protestant women, with the objective of reforming 'prostitutes'. It became a shelter for single mothers. It was the first such institution on Australia's goldfields. In 1921, the Refuge became part of the Ballarat Town and City Mission Rescue and Children's Home.

Initially, the Female Refuge was managed by a ladies' committee and a committee comprising lay men and ministers from various Protestant denominations.

The Ballarat Female Refuge's first location was in Grant Street, Ballarat. In 1885, it moved to new premises at 183 Scott Parade. The institution's commercial laundry, where residents worked, was located at the back of the building. It was later known as the Alexandra Steam Laundry (Victorian Heritage Database, "Former Female Refuge Complex).

The Refuge added a maternity ward in 1887 and later set aside specialist accommodation for infants. In 1909 the infants were moved into a newly-erected single storey building next door to the refuge, which was named the [Alexandra Babies' Home](#) (Wickham & Golding, *Refuge, Rescue and Reform*, 2024, p.262).

Wickham and Golding write that in contrast to larger institutions with a similar function, Ballarat Female Refuge required mothers to stay with their babies after birth. "But it must be said that these rules seem to have been more in the interests of controlling the movements and morality of the young mothers and to give the staff and committee sufficient time to reform and reshape them" (pp.297-298).

From 1900 until 1921, the institution was also known as the Ballarat Female Home.

In 1921, the Ballarat Town and City Mission took over the management of the Ballarat Female Refuge. The committee that had been running the institution for over 50 years held a public meeting in June 1921 to explain its position. The number of women needing accommodation with their babies was dropping off. At the Refuge, since around 1914, babies outnumbered women. In 1921 the Refuge had capacity for 30 women and 40 children, but had only 8 women and 10 children. Because of the low numbers, the laundry was faltering, which was leading to financial problems. Its matron had also recently resigned.

Initially, the committee had invited the Salvation Army to take over the running of the Ballarat Female Refuge. The two parties signed a draft agreement and the Salvation Army installed its own matron at the institution. Subscribers to the Female Refuge were not happy with this arrangement, and feared that, under the management of the Salvation Army, the institution might not remain a "Ballarat public charity" and "Ballarat people would have no say in regard to it".

After the public meeting where the subscribers aired their concerns, the Salvation Army agreed to withdraw their matron – the committee made a 25 pound payment to the Salvos for their trouble. It was decided that the Ballarat Town and City Mission would close its Canadian Home and consolidate all of its activities on the Refuge property in Scott Parade (Wickham and Golding, 2024, pp.251-257).

At its annual meeting in July 1922, the City Mission announced that the site was now named the Ballarat Female Rescue and Alexandra Homes (*Ballarat Star*, 20 July 1922). The [Alexandra Babies' Home](#) (built in 1909) was located in a single storey building adjoining the Rescue Home.

In 1941, the Town and City Mission ceased providing services to single women and their infants and the Ballarat Female Rescue Home closed in 1941. Around this time, it was becoming much more common for childbirth to take place in a hospital setting, rather than in institutions or private homes.

## Gallery



**Female Refuge Complex, 183 Scott Parade, Ballarat East [former site]**

**Description:** This two-storey building was constructed c.1884. Before the building at 187 Scott Parade was built for the Alexandra Babies' Home (later known as the Alexandra Toddlers' Home), babies and their mothers were accommodated at this site.

## More info

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Ballarat Town and City Mission \(1867 - 1974?\)](#)  
Date: 1921 - 1941

#### Related Organisations

- [Alexandra Babies' Home \(c. 1909 - 1973\)](#)  
The Alexandra Babies' Home began operation as part of the Ballarat Female Refuge. It was located on the same site as the original refuge at 183 Scott Parade.

## Resources

- Wickham, Dorothy and Golding, Frank, *Refuge, Rescue & Reform: voices of suffering and survival*, 2024

## Records

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

### Records

- [Ballarat Town and City Mission records \(c.1887 - 1973\)](#)
- ['Closed' Agency and General Correspondence Files \[Charities Board of Victoria\] \(1923 - 1983\)](#)

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/ballarat-female-refuge/>