



FROM THE COLLECTION

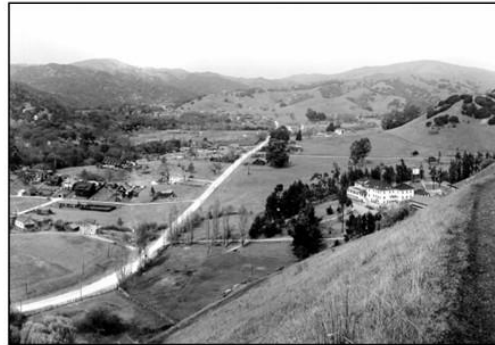
This past year the Historical Museum received an album of photographs that offers a rare glimpse of the lives and activities of children at the Presbyterian Orphanage and Farm in San Anselmo from 1926 to about 1933.

The donor, Oregon resident Cynthia Wolfe, wrote, "My Dad, Joe Francis, attended the Seminary after WWII. He and my mom were house parents to a group of boys, I believe. I don't know how the album ended up with them, but it traveled with them from California to Texas to Iowa to Illinois to California (again) to Oregon. It has had a long trip to get home to San Anselmo. Hope you can use it to connect the present-day folks with the past."

This exhibit features many photographs from the album with additional information from published reminiscences and historical research.

Presbyterian Orphanage and Farm Sunny Hills Timeline

- 1895** San Francisco Presbyterian Orphanage and Farm, founded by Mary Frank Browne, opened in a rented home in San Rafael and was incorporated under that name in the same year. Overcrowding forced a move to a larger home in San Rafael in 1896.
- 1898** 20 acres were purchased in San Anselmo's Short Ranch for a larger and permanent place.
- 1900** The original building, on the site of today's Parkside Apartments, was dedicated February 10, 1900. Shipping magnate Robert Dollar was a major donor. It became the home to 135 children aged 3-17.
- 1901** A small hospital was added in 1901, and Captain Dollar donated funds for a school named in his honor. The school was located behind today's CVS at Red Hill Shopping Center.
- 1913** The Robert Dollar School burned and was immediately rebuilt with Dollar again donating the funds.
- 1916** A pool was added in 1916 and a boy's dorm the following year.
- 1918** Additional lots were purchased along the County Road (Sir Francis Drake Boulevard).
- 1920** As a Christmas gift, Robert Dollar donated 42 acres of pasture.
- 1922** In May, the main building was destroyed by fire. Rebuilding happened immediately using fire-resistant construction methods.
- 1923-1929** Dormitory buildings, administrative buildings and a new pool were constructed.
- 1931** The Board approved "Sunny Hills" to be used as the name of the place at San Anselmo, but not as the name of the institution. This was in reference to the idyllic San Anselmo campus. By the 1940s, Sunny Hills was commonly used as the name of the orphanage.
- 1941-1945** The population increased to 240 during WWII as children of service men and women were taken in for care.
- 1951** The Nursery Department closed.
- 1955** The expansion of foster care and government aid after WWII changed the needs for institutional care. In response, the Child Welfare League of America requested that Sunny Hills begin a program to provide highly individualized care for troubled adolescents.
- 1965** Residential cottages for up to 40 adolescents and the administration buildings were built on San Anselmo campus. The older buildings were demolished, and the San Anselmo School district condemned 14 acres for the site of Red Hill Middle School.
- 1967** Name legally changed to Sunny Hills Children's Services.
- 1999** Merged with Children's Garden of California and name changed to Sunny Hills Children's Garden Family & Children's Services.
- 2005** Name legally changed to Sunny Hills Services.
- 2018** Rebranded as Side by Side to better capture the essence of the relationship with the youth that are served across a diverse array of programs.
- Today** Side By Side now serves more than 1,800 youth and their families in programs across Alameda, Marin, Napa, and Sonoma Counties.



The Presbyterian Orphanage and Farm is on the right in this 1918 panoramic view to the west.



San Francisco Chronicle, September 16, 1898. The drawing of the orphanage is by newspaper artist and San Anselmo resident Arthur Cahill.



San Francisco Chronicle, February 11, 1900.



Capt. Robert Dollar with students. Courtesy Marin History Museum.

"San Anselmo is an ideal, healthy location for the upbringing of young children. The orphanage is ideally situated on a hillside under big trees. Though all of us realize that there is no substitute for a home, still everything possible is done to make little ones happy and contented, so that their future lives may be brightened by pleasant early memories."

—Memoirs of Robert Dollar, 1925

Presbyterian Orphanage and Farm Sunny Hills

The Children—Faces, Memories & Stories

There were 100-150 children living at the orphanage in most years. During World War II, the population increased to 240 as children of service men and women were taken in for care. There were always more boys than girls.

While there were orphaned or abandoned children, many were half-orphans, those who were from broken homes due to death or divorce with the remaining parent unable to provide support. There were also cases where the families were too large to support all of the children. Many kept family ties and moved back home when circumstances were better. Graduation from grammar school generally marked the termination of a child's stay



The children received excellent schooling. The two-room Robert Dollar School was part of the Confederated School District with Wade Thomas as principal. The lower grades were taught there, and the upper grades attended schools in town. The Robert Dollar School closed when Red Hill School opened in 1929. The children were also taught practical life skills – home economics for the girls and wood shop for the boys. While the orphanage was always a nonsectarian institution, the children received religious training with Sunday school and church services at the local Presbyterian church.



Presbyterian Orphanage and Farm Sunny Hills

The Children—Faces, Memories & Stories

Cakin, Marie	Smith	7	6	3	5
Cakin, Eugene	Smith	M	U	2	5
Cakin, Alice	Smith	M	U	5	5

Cakin children listed in the 1920 census at the Presbyterian Orphanage. They are listed there in 1930 also.

In 1919, the three Cakin children, Marie, Alice and Eugene were taken to the Presbyterian Orphanage by their father who could not care for them. In 1981, Alice Cakin Lescalleet wrote of her memories of the home from 1920 to 1930. Some of her memories are quoted here.



Christmas 1926.

"The success of the administrative staff in making our holidays special is attested to by warm memories, still bright and sharp 50 years later. Halloween parties in a barn in Sleepy Hollow; tables beautifully decorated at Thanksgiving; and the high-pitched excitement of opening presents in the auditorium on Christmas morning. Always the Christmas stockings with an orange in the toe and other little gifts, plus several more packages, many furnished by a women's Guild in Vacaville."



Alice Cakin



Marie Cakin



Grape Festival, 1927. Orphanage children were strolling gypsy players. The Grape Festival was the major annual fundraiser for the Presbyterian Orphanage and Farm.

"The Grape Festival was the highlight of the year. Originally held on the Kent Estate in Kentfield, where the most delicious grapes were gathered fresh from their vineyards, it was then moved to the large open meadow below Red Hill, bordered by tall rustling poplar trees. The especially talented children among us participated in the Grape Festival entertainment. Marie danced in many of the plays."

"More of a school than an institution, Sunny Hills functioned as a home away from home, as family rather than facility, and as a repository for many happy memories of a time long gone by."



"Feeding a group of hungry children was a major effort 50 years ago, as it is today, but it always went smoothly. The dining matron assigned tasks on a rotating basis—the girls set the tables, washed and wiped the dishes and silverware, and made the lunches; the boys washed and waxed the floors.

Every school day the lunches consisted of three sandwiches, one raisin with peanut butter, one white bread and one whole wheat with meat or spread, and a fruit. There were no sluggish appetites. Helping the cooks was extra. I remember swishing sand off spinach leaves in the huge sink while the boys peeled spuds in Army-size pans."



Many children learned to swim in the orphanage pool.



The small children go to Bolinas, circa 1930.

"Special occasions were frequent—a trip to the San Francisco Zoo; a stage play in San Francisco starring Mary Pickford; a minstrel show in the auditorium; a weekend at Bolinas Beach in the home of one of the Board members. Every Saturday found all the children ensconced in the wooden seats at the San Anselmo Theater waiting for the next episode in the spine-tingling weekly serials. In partial payment, the girls stuffed theater announcements in envelopes for local distribution."



"We were nothing if not active at Sunny Hills. Hiking Red Hill, Albert's Hill and Mt. Baldy, with overnight hikes up Mt. Tamalpais; playing baseball and marbles ("pug"); swimming, skating—whatever—there was always something to do and plenty of outdoors to do it in."

Presbyterian Orphanage and Farm

Sunny Hills

The Farm

The original charter of the orphanage was "the care, support and education of children including the teaching of trades and agriculture, maintaining and conducting a farm." A working farm became integral to the mission of the orphanage in San Anselmo. It was considered a benefit to the children to be given the responsibility to care for a chicken, rabbit, pig or cow as they could provide comfort and relieve anxiety.

Small children had garden plots and older boys grew peas, corn and potatoes. The farm became more of a reality in 1920 when Robert Dollar donated 42 acres of pasture for a working dairy. By 1927, the stock consisted of five young heifers, ten cows, two horses and about 200 hundred chickens.

The Sunny Hills 4-H Club provided hands on training for its members. The boys fixed up an old chicken house with paint and electrical wiring for a clubhouse. Club members won awards and exhibited at the Marin and Sonoma County Fairs and the State Fair.



This aerial photograph was taken in the late 1950s and shows the Sunny Hills grounds and the farm.

Here and There in Club Work

Eight boys at the Presbyterian Orphanage and Farm under the guidance of Mr. David Freehand, 4-H club leader, secured eight pigs weighing between 30 and 50 pounds at the Marin County Fair at Novato last August. The boys had built pens for the pigs and have fed and cared for them. The pigs have grown and gained until one of them weighs 200 lbs. or more.

The pigs will be sold now and the boys will reinvest their earnings in another lot of pigs to be sold this spring.

The First National Bank of San Rafael loaned the boys money to buy the pigs with, and Dr. W. H. Bushner gave his time gratis to vaccinate the pigs against hog cholera.

San Anselmo Herald, Feb. 3, 1928

Sunny Hills Is Training Some Fine Future Farmers Through Its 4-H Club

