

Women of the Shadows: Propaganda vs. Reality in the Berachah Industrial Home for the Redemption of Erring Girls, 1915-1920

by Megan Joblin

Three days before the new decade of the 1920s, Tempie Reeves, a fourteen-year-old girl, and her eleven-year-old sister Iny Hudson, arrived at the Berachah Industrial Home for the Redemption of Erring Girls in Arlington, Texas, dropped off by a woman noted only as Mrs. Anderson.¹ The girls traveled from Greenville, Texas, a seventy-three mile trip, in the midst of the 1919 winter, with temperatures below freezing.² The cause for their long trip through the cold? “Betrayed by their brother-in-law” was the simple explanation given in flowing script on a weathered ledger page.³ In July of 1920, Tempie would give birth to a little boy in the Berachah Industrial Home, giving a face to the betrayal.⁴ Census records from 1920 confirm Tempie’s residence in the home, her relation to the head of the household: *inmate*.⁵ Tempie’s sister Iny would remain in the home for years. These young girls were just two of hundreds of thousands of women who ended up in maternity/rescue homes in the early twentieth century in the United States.

To gain funding and dispatch their message, the Berachah Industrial Home, like many other rescue homes, produced their own periodicals, written, edited, printed, and published on the Home property in Arlington, Texas. Titled, *The Purity Crusader*, this religiously steeped propaganda, was a monthly periodical published from 1915-1935.⁶ Each edition typically ran from eight to fifteen pages and were most often written and edited by J.T. Upchurch, the founder and leader of the Berachah Industrial Home. The periodicals included

¹ “1918-1920 Admittance Ledger,” Berachah Home Collection, AR280, Box 1, Folder 7, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries Special Collections.

² “DFW - December, Normals, Means, Extremes” *National Weather Service*, accessed October 18, 2017, <https://www.weather.gov/fwd/dfw12nrm>.

³ “1918-1920 Ledger,” Berachah Home Collection.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ 1920 United States Federal Census, Heritage Quest, accessed October 18, 2017.

Merriam-Webster Third Collegiate Dictionary, s.v. “inmate,” 1916 :

1. One who lives in the same house or apartment with another. 2. One of a family or community occupying a single dwelling; also, one kept in an asylum, prison, etc. 3. An inhabitant.

⁶ *The Purity Crusader* was formerly known as *The Purity Journal*, which was also written and published on the Berachah Industrial Home property from 1903-1915.

stories, some of them supposedly written or dictated by female residents of the home. They described visually titillating tales with the underlying request for donations. *The Purity Crusader* reported deaths and births, the comings and goings of the home and its staff members, and contained articles for other maternity homes across the nation. Subscribers of the periodical were not limited to the local Arlington area, but lived elsewhere, with mailings to forty-five states and over ten foreign countries.⁷ Use of *The Purity Crusader* in formal scholarship has been limited with few scholars including the periodical in their studies. Much of the scholarship discusses the early *Purity Journal* published by the Home and is limited to 1904-1905. By using *The Purity Crusader* as a central element this research explores and exposes a largely overlooked portion of information relating to the Berachah Industrial Home.⁸ Preliminary research has determined *The Purity Crusader* does not give a transparent and accurate description of life inside the home, especially for the unwed mother when compared to private Berachah Industrial Home ledgers. *The Purity Crusader* exaggerated the needs of the Home and left out pertinent information about day-to-day life.

A History of Rescue Homes in the United States

Maternity or Rescue Homes surfaced in the United States in the late 19th century, founded with the specific purpose of “redeeming” women who had intercourse before marriage. These homes were not founded by the elite reformers of the Gilded Age, but rather by white middle-class evangelical Protestant women with the rescue of “fallen women” through religious redemption as their focus.⁹ These reformers considered themselves rescue workers and the institution, a rescue home, where they saved women’s souls from damnation.¹⁰ The term maternity home is a modern term not used during the period. Many of the women accepted in these homes had become pregnant, the most obvious tell of their fall from grace. However, unwed mothers were not the only women these homes sought out, especially early on. Prostitutes, homeless women, and widows were also accepted.¹¹ Their families and society as a whole often shunned unwed mothers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

7. Leah L. Ochoa, “The Power of Observation: Dallas Progressives and the Prostitutes at the Turn of the Century” (Master’s thesis, Texas A&M University-Commerce, 2016), 37, 41.

8 *The Purity Crusader* (Arlington, TX: Berachah Printing Company, 1915-1930) University of Texas at Arlington Libraries Special Collections, Microfilm.

9 Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (Ann Arbor, MI: Yale University Press, 1993), 10.

10 J.T Upchurch, “God Give Beautiful Victory,” *The Purity Crusader* 13, no. 4 (June 1916): 3.

11 Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 11.

century. Rescue homes created an acceptable space for these women to go temporarily.

To fully understand rescue homes like the Berachah Industrial Home in the United States it is important to look at the broader national organizations where much of the academic research of the field has been done. The most prominent network of rescue homes were the Florence Crittenton Missions founded by Charles Crittenton.¹² By 1910 the National Florence Crittenton Mission operated over seventy homes across the United States and in 1918 became the first charitable organization to receive a national charter through a special act of the United States Congress.¹³ The Florence Crittenton Mission is the most well-known organization for rescue homes, however, the Salvation Army also had a national organization of homes that spanned across the United States, with its roots originally in England in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁴ Other homes spawned through religious denominations existed throughout the United States simultaneously, and were part of the Social Gospel movement. Social Gospel, the religious wing of the progressive movement, had the specific aim of combatting social evils, like the use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs, as well as prostitution and child labor. These religious homes rooted in the Social Gospel movement, include the Berachah Industrial Home for the Redemption of Erring Girls in Arlington, Texas, which had intimate ties with the Church of the Nazarene.

Many of these evangelical reformers had overlapping memberships with highly influential progressive era groups like the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).¹⁵ The founding of these homes reveals strong ties to these causes, as most were not founded with the specific interest of accepting unwed mothers. Most of these organizations began with the attempt to reconcile and eliminate vice districts. These districts had a heavy concentration of sex-oriented businesses such as brothels, as well as easy access to alcohol, drugs, and tobacco through saloons.¹⁶ Red-light districts influenced the leading members who

¹² Kunzel, *Fallen Women Problem Girls*, 10.

¹³ Ellen Baumler. "The Making of a Good Woman': Montana and the National Florence Crittenton Mission," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Winter 2003, 50.

Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 1993, 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* The WCTU focused its reform efforts primarily on the prohibition of alcohol. The YWCA sought to provide safe havens, education, and skill training for women in cities in the late nineteenth century. It is still in existence today.

¹⁶ Vice districts are also called red light districts interchangeably. However, rescue workers, especially from the Berachah Industrial Home, referred to these places primarily as "vice districts" probably due to their belief that prostitution, alcohol, tobacco, and drug use were all

started these homes. Charles Crittenton, leader of the Florence Crittenton Mission, William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, and James Tony Upchurch, founder of the Berachah Industrial Home, all describe separate instances where they came into contact with vice districts, an experience which inspired each of them to combat the “social evil of fallen women” and end prostitution.¹⁷ However, nationally and locally these homes were unsuccessful in keeping prostitutes there to be “rehabilitated” and trained for menial labor jobs. Even with training, many of these women could not earn as much money outside of vice districts, and most did not want to trade their freedoms for the structured religious environment they would encounter inside rescue homes.¹⁸ Prostitutes less often committed themselves voluntarily, and evangelical workers had to rely on their own persuasions by taking nightly walking expeditions through vice districts to recruit these women. Unwed mothers were easier to detain because they were bound by the condition of their “illegitimate” pregnancy; they would often seek rescue homes as a way to preserve their societal image, along with adequate care through the length of their pregnancy and the preceding months after.¹⁹

Early twentieth century rescue homes in the United States functioned under the intention of redemption of the girls and women who had “fallen out of grace” by having sex before marriage. The evangelical people who ran these homes often made religion the core focus of their attempts to redeem these women. Unwed mothers’ daily routines in the home were punctuated by multiple religious services. When these women were not praying, they were working. All women accepted had to assume their fair share of the workload, unless they were physically incapable of doing so.²⁰ Many rescue homes had to provide for themselves, so unwed mothers often worked the fields, did laundry, sewed, cooked, cleaned and did other related tasks. The workload, depending on the home, often kept the unwed mother busy from seven to ten hours daily.²¹ In addition to work, the unwed mother received training in menial skills. Some

immoral and wicked behaviors;

Baumler, “The Making of a Good Woman,” 2003, 52;

Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 1993, 11;

Gerald D. Saxon, “The Berachah Home: A Home for the Homeless and a Friend to the Friendless,” *Legacies: History Journal for Dallas and North Central Texas* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁸ Gwinnetta Malone Crowell. “To Keep Those Red Lights Burning: Dallas’ Response to Prostitution, 1874 to 1913” (Master’s thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 2009), 51.

¹⁹ Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26-27

²¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

historians suggest this was due to the belief that an unmarried mother, with her low moral and social standing, could only be educated in the most simplistic, basic tasks.²²

This understanding of a woman's moral standing after an out-of-wedlock pregnancy held persistently in the early part of the twentieth century. These women could not remove the stain of "moral error" or illegitimacy from themselves, or their children; however, the evangelicals who ran the homes firmly believed in redemption for the unwed mother. This redemption could be gained through a lifetime of menial work and the rearing of her illegitimate children.²³ Unwed mothers in the early twentieth century were most typically expected to keep their children. Adoption, while possible in some homes, was uncommon in practice and policy in most. On the national level, the Florence Crittenton homes allowed adoption occasionally; however, at the Berachah Industrial Home adoption was a violation of procedure.²⁴ Historians who focus on the post World War II years have found a changed perception of unwed motherhood, where adoption became the only policy of maternity homes.²⁵

Religious Affiliation of the Berachah Home

Through *The Purity Crusader*, the Home-sponsored periodical, the Berachah Industrial Home had a constant plea for increased donations. The Home had no specific affiliation through either a church or a government body like some of the similar rescue homes of the time. The Berachah Home had to operate strictly on the donations of local Arlington people, as well as people across the United States. During the May 1916 annual Berachah Industrial Home anniversary celebration, a vote was held amongst over seven hundred people present, on whether the home should remain interdenominational or join with the Church of the Nazarene, of which they already had close ties.²⁶ J.T. Upchurch had helped found the First Church of the Nazarene in Dallas and was the first minister there in the early twentieth-century before he focused solely on his work with the Berachah Industrial Home.²⁷ The Home had functioned as an interdenominational society since its founding in 1903. The vote came back as

²² Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v. Wade*, 2nd ed (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000) 122, 127.

²³ Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie*, 106.

²⁴ Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 33.
Saxon, "The Berachah Home," 31.

²⁵ See Rickie Solinger's full work, *Wake Up Little Susie* for more information on maternity homes post World War II.

²⁶ J.T. Upchurch, "Direct Ownership," *The Purity Crusader* 13, no. 4 (June 1916): 7.

²⁷ Dorothy Upchurch Betts, *Berachah: The Life and Work of J.T. and Maggie Upchurch*; (1993, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries Special Collections) 7.

almost entirely unanimous – Berachah would remain without specific religious affiliation, something Upchurch defended proudly through *The Purity Crusader*. He believed the lack of direct connection to a religious body would be better for the cause and fundraising efforts, with the Home and its land, approximately twenty-seven acres in 1916, going into a trust where neither he nor anyone else could profit from it for reasons outside of helping the outcast and erring girl.²⁸ Upchurch also utilized this unaffiliated status to dispatch his message outside the Nazarene Church, and multiple Methodist ministers supported the call and spread the word of the Berachah Industrial Home.²⁹

Fundraising at Berachah

This ecumenical backing of the institution led to increased attempts at fundraising for the Home. In 1917, the Berachah Industrial Home started a \$130,000 campaign to expand. These donations were for a receiving home, an infirmary, a school, and a tabernacle. Upchurch claimed the expansion was needed because of an increased amount of women who had to be turned away by the Home each year.³⁰ By August 1919, the fundraising goal had moved from \$130,000 to \$500,000, with only the tabernacle built from their list of proposed buildings by that time.³¹ The reason for the increase: World War I, or at least that was what Upchurch insisted in *The Purity Crusader*. World War I caused the Home to be unable to garner the full \$130,000, and with the cost of building materials on the rise, and the amount of women who had fallen victim to the wiles of returning soldiers, the home needed more than they originally asked for.³² However, Berachah Industrial Home private ledgers reveal a different story than the one told inside *The Purity Crusader*.

Exaggerated Applications

In 1917, a total of 109 girls and women applied for entrance into the Berachah Industrial Home.³³ 33 were accepted, while 39 were rejected because of lack of space.³⁴ An article in the January 1918 edition of *The Purity Crusader* asserts that 105 girls and women had to be rejected from Berachah in 1917

²⁸ Upchurch, "Direct Ownership," *The Purity Crusader* (June 1916): 7.

²⁹ J.T Upchurch, "Editorials," *The Purity Crusader* 13, no. 5 (July 1916): 4.

³⁰ J.T Upchurch, "One Hundred and Thirty Thousand Dollars for the Betterment of Berachah Campaign Launched," *The Purity Crusader* 13, no. 11 (January 1917): 1.

³¹ J.T Upchurch, "Five Hundred Thousand Dollars for Berachah Home," *The Purity Crusader* 16, no. 5 (January 1917): 7.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Applications Ledger, 1917-1920, Berachah Home Collection, AR280, Box 1, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries Special Collections, 1-21.

³⁴ The other 37 women of the 109 were either left blank in the ledger or rejected from the Home with no explanation given.

because of a lack of space.³⁵ The Berachah Industrial Home exaggerated their need in *The Purity Crusader* in an attempt to garner more donations. While it cannot be denied that a significant amount of women had to be turned away, the next several years' documentation of applicants in the ledgers reveal a decrease in women seeking refuge overall. In 1918, 85 women applied, followed in 1919 by 77 total applicants for that year, revealing a 29% decrease in applicants between 1917 and 1919 and the amount of women rejected by the Home decreasing by 50%; yet donation requests increased by 74% during this time.³⁶

Runaways

While *The Purity Crusader* provides almost an overload of information on the Home, it also seems to purposefully leave out pertinent information. Examples of this are women who ran away from Berachah. Runaways are noted in the ledgers, however, only once between 1915-1920 is a runaway mentioned in *The Purity Crusader* – and only to reference a former runaway in jail, who regretted leaving. A total of 10 girls of the 92 accepted into the Home ran away between 1917-1919.³⁷ The absence of this information misled readers, leading them to believe that if anyone ran away, it was rare and they regretted their actions. However, 11% of the women accepted into Berachah between 1917-1918 chose to run away, many of them taking their children with them.

A descendant of J.T. Upchurch claimed there were no fences around the Berachah Home property and the girls could leave at any time they desired without penalty.³⁸ However, this was not reality. The Berachah Industrial Home had rules. A new inmate of the Home had to stay for at least one year after the birth of her child.³⁹ Parents or relatives who dropped the unwed mother off at the Home would often have to sign a contract, with the promise they would not visit the unwed mother, or do anything to try to cause her to “become dissatisfied” with the Home or attempt to get her released from the Home before said year ended.⁴⁰ Preliminary findings reveal that women who chose to leave the Home before the allotted amount of time were considered dishonorably discharged – however this does not include runaways. 50% of the women who left the Home

³⁵ Nettie Norwood, “Home Notes,” *The Purity Crusader* 14, no. 11 (January 1918): 3.

³⁶ Applications Ledger, 1917-1920, Berachah Home Collection, AR280, Box 1, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries Special Collections.

³⁷ Admittance Ledger, 1916-1918. Berachah Home Collection, AR280, Box 1, Folder 7, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries Special Collections; Admittance Ledger, 1918-1920. Berachah Home Collection.

³⁸ Dorothy Upchurch Betts, *Berachah: The Life and Work of J.T. and Maggie Upchurch*; (1993, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries Special Collections) 9.

³⁹ Admittance Contract, 1929, Berachah Home Collection, AR280, Box 1, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries Special Collections.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

in 1918-1919 fell into this dishonorable category. When including runaways for those two years – 56% of the women who left the Home left without Berachah’s blessing.⁴¹ The Home defined itself as a place where women who fell from grace had a chance to become “honorable useful citizens.”⁴² If more than half of the women leaving the Home were doing so without “honor,” then the Berachah Industrial Home was not meeting their own internal standards. These staggering percentages were not made available to subscribers of *The Purity Crusader*, thus skewing readers’ perception of the Home’s success.

This research has determined that *The Purity Crusader*, a Home-sponsored propaganda periodical published by the Berachah Industrial Home, did not display a clear and accurate depiction of the Home during the years 1915-1920. *The Purity Crusader* exaggerated the needs of the Home by claiming more women were applying when a decrease in applications had occurred. *The Purity Crusader* also left out important information about runaways and they factored in to day-to-day life of the women inside the Home.

The Closing of Berachah

The Berachah Industrial Home for the Redemption of Erring Girls ultimately closed January 1, 1935. Different sources claim varying reasons for Berachah’s closing, from issues with J.T. Upchurch’s health to financial problems. The Home hit hard times along with the rest of the United States during the Great Depression. Since the primary source of income came directly from donations given by independent entities and people, the Home could not afford to remain open.⁴³ J.T. Upchurch coupled this problem with the fact that many of the Home’s financial friends had died by 1935, and new donors were not coming forward due to economic hardships.⁴⁴ The children in the Home were found new places to live, in many cases, without their mothers in the rush of closing down – an interesting twist for a place founded on the idea of keeping mother and child together at all costs. Eventually the Home and its land would be retained by the State of Texas and is currently the location of the University of Texas at Arlington. The cemetery, where many women and children who resided at Berachah are buried, is the only remnant left of the Berachah Industrial Home for the Redemption of Erring Girls.

⁴¹ Admittance Ledger, 1918-1920, Berachah Home Collection, 28-29;

J.T. Upchurch, “You and Berachah,” *The Purity Crusader* 15, no. 10 (January 1919): 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴³ “Reorganizing of Berachah Home Aim,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, November, 29, 1934.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*