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THE WAY WE WERE

## Anthony Home housed young offenders

### Unruly behavior common at Mission Valley facility

By Richard Crawford

*A 13-hour riot by nine teen-aged girls at Anthony detention home was quelled yesterday when deputy sheriffs forced their way into a cell in which the girls had barricaded themselves . . . The girls broke every window in the cell, tore beddings to ribbons, plugged up the plumbing, overturned double-deck bunk beds, piled mattresses on the floor and attempted to ruin them by flooding the quarters, and shouted and screamed themselves hoarse.*

San Diego Union  
Nov. 26, 1946

Long before the shopping malls and traffic gridlock arrived, Mission Valley was the site of the Anthony Home for troubled juveniles. Supervised by the county Probation Committee, the San Diego Detention Home — as it was first known — housed youths held for crimes ranging from burglary to drunkenness,

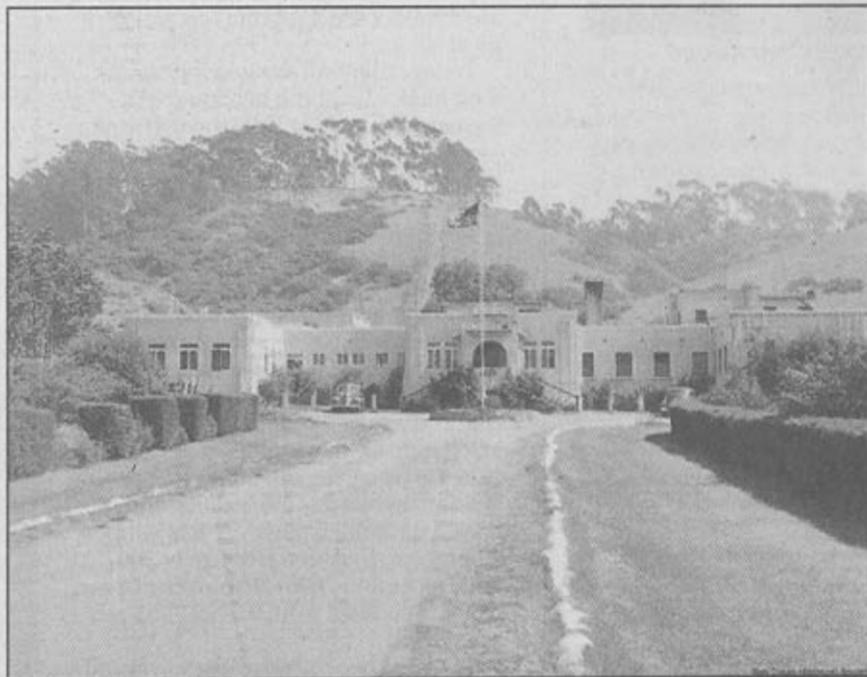
along with runaways from broken homes.

The institution began in a seven-bedroom farmhouse around 1908. Sarah A. Anthony, 50, became the first “professional” superintendent of the home in 1919, when 13 children were being detained.

Additions to the home in the 1920s added a dormitory for older boys and individual rooms for girls and smaller boys. School rooms, workshops and garden areas completed the small facility.

On less than 2 acres, juveniles ranging in age from 6 to 18 raised chickens and rabbits, grew vegetables and tended beehives. Most of Anthony’s wards spent days or at most a few months at the home, “pending clarification” of the circumstances that brought them to the attention of the “corrective authorities.”

The home emphasized education and close, personal tutelage from adult coaches. Anthony refused to believe that “naughty children” were doomed to failure just because “they started life out of step.” Most juveniles get over the “nutty age,” she said.



The Anthony Home for juvenile criminals in Mission Valley was named for its first “professional” superintendent, Sarah A. Anthony, who assumed the post in 1919. 1939 file photo / San Diego Historical Society

SEE Anthony Home, Page 3

## Thanksgiving 1946 saw a riot staged by 9 girls

In 1939, county supervisors renamed the facility the Anthony Home in honor of its respected superintendent. A county newsletter boasted that the home was "the best-conducted institution of its kind in the state." By the time she retired in 1941, Anthony had overseen the care of more than 14,000 boys and girls.

But the population of the home had grown, and the quiet days of Anthony's tenure would end with her retirement. Gladys Sanderson, the new superintendent, inherited a facility that was rapidly becoming inadequate. As the number of detained juveniles swelled to nearly 80, cots began to appear in hallways that were being transformed into dorms.

Severe understaffing became a problem, particularly when wartime San Diego offered better-paying jobs in the defense industries. One staff member

covered the entire building at night.

Serious incidents became frequent. In November 1942, a boys matron was beaten by a 16-year-old with a fire-hose nozzle. Two days later, a fire started at the home when a boy smashed a hole in a wall and ignited papers he stuffed into the opening.

"A veritable firetrap," San Diego Mayor Howard B. Bard called the home.

As a safety measure, the fire marshal on Dec. 3, 1942, ordered that all doors be unlocked and bars removed from windows. But with unbarred windows and open doors, "the youngsters went out of control."

Sanderson and her assistant spent a sleepless night trying to control the juveniles. "All during the night, the boys were shouting and climbing in and out the windows, and forcing their way into rooms occupied by girls," Sanderson reported.

When daylight arrived, the staff discovered that five boys had escaped; they were found that evening at a downtown bowling alley.

"We have got some pretty tough nuts at the home," Dis-

trict Attorney Thomas Whelan said. "If proper supervision is not maintained, the inmates will do as they please and walk out anytime they feel like it."

Sanderson and her assistant abruptly quit. Supervisors responded by authorizing five new correctional workers for the home. Money was appropriated for fire extinguishers and for rebuilding walls to reduce the fire hazard.

A new superintendent arrived the following July. Charles O. Yost, 34, was an experienced juvenile probation officer from York, Pa. To cope with discipline problems, Yost sent miscreants to "the Max"—a hated, maximum-detention unit built behind the main buildings.

The youths were confined in small, six-person cells with 20-foot-tall concrete walls. Barred windows high above the boys' heads allowed little natural light. An open toilet sat in the center of each cell.

Despite the attention to discipline, escapes became a regular occurrence, and the staff often had to chase down youths in the brush of Mission Valley.

Yost's biggest test came during Thanksgiving in 1946. Nine

girls between the ages of 14 and 17 barricaded themselves in a room late at night with their bunks and began screaming and smashing windows. Yost first decided to let the girls "yell it out," but after 13 hours, sheriff's deputies had to be called to break up the melee.

The county grand jury investigated the riot, and some faulted the superintendent for losing control of the facility. Yost resigned, saying, "I have tired of recent attacks against me concerning the operation of the institution."

But the grand jury's report assigned most of the blame to the county Probation Committee for poor supervision. It also criticized county supervisors for failing to budget for a modern facility.

The jurors demanded immediate rehabilitation of the buildings and suggested that the name "Anthony Home" be dropped, declaring, "The last few years' operation and serious incidents lend no glory to Mrs. Anthony's name; rather, the name has grown to represent the poorest type of juvenile detention home in the West."

A ballot measure in 1948 proposed \$500,000 in bonds for a

100-bed detention home on a new, 10-acre site in Mission Valley. Voters rejected the bonds.

Supervisors tried again in November 1950. Long-retired Sarah Anthony, then 81, urged passage of the new bond measure. "Those youngsters need a home," she said. "I hope they get a new building which will be one."

This time the voters approved. But more troubled years would pass before Juvenile Hall was dedicated in Kearny Mesa on June 21, 1954. Ninety-one wards from the Anthony Home were transferred to the new facility.

Several buildings from the infamous institution survived until the early 1970s. The old "Max" unit served as an auxiliary county jail. South Dakota Sen. George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign used one building as its county headquarters. And only weeks before bulldozers cleared the land in the fall of 1973, a youth group turned the decaying facility into a Halloween haunted house.

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