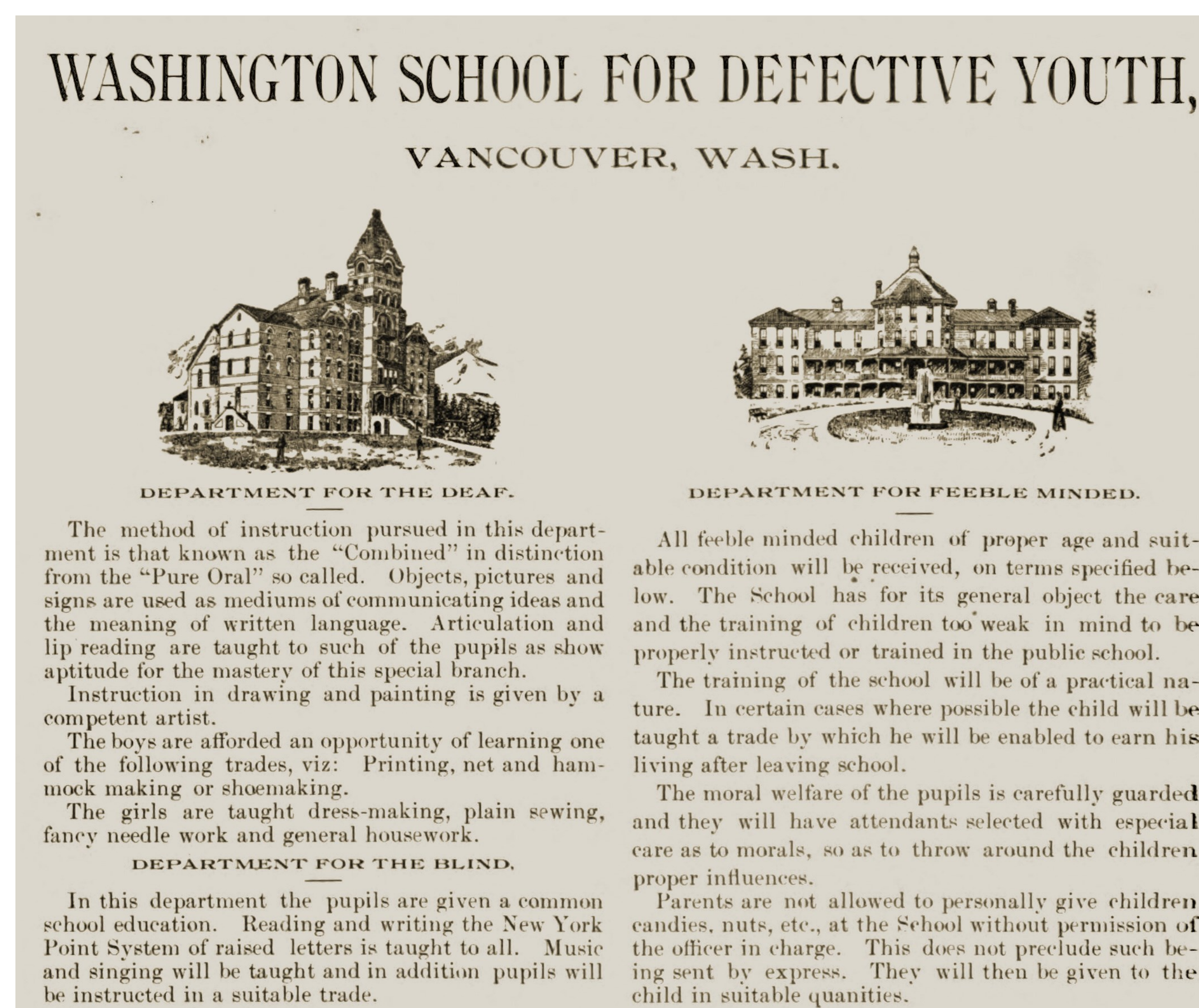


# Residential Schools: Washington State

Prior to the mid-20th century, students with disabilities, had few educational options. In the early 19th century, states and charities created residential schools for students with specific disabilities. In 1886, in what was then the Territory of Washington, a law passed establishing the “Washington School for Defective Youth, for the education of the deaf, blind and feeble-minded youth of the Territory of Washington.” This school “shall be free to all resident youth in Washington Territory, who are too deaf, blind or feeble-minded to be taught by ordinary methods in the public schools: Provided, they are free from vicious habits and from loathsome or contagious diseases.”

Later the school was divided into the Washington State School for the Blind and the Washington State School for the Deaf. Both remain open as a day program for those in the Vancouver area and as a residential school for those who come from other parts of the state.

Note: The primary sources on this poster include outdated and offensive language used to label and describe people with disabilities that reflect the attitudes and biases of their time.



The Washingtonian, May 2, 1892. The Washingtonian was published at the school from 1892 to 1961. It served three purposes: advertising the school, as a communication channel to parents, and to train deaf boys to become typesetters & printers.

Description of curriculum for deaf students. Report of the Board of Trustees of the Washington School for Defective Youth, 1887.

1908 postcard showing the school and students.



Washington State School for the Deaf Students, ca. 1900, Clark County Historical Museum.



The Washingtonian reprinted letters from parents. These examples are from the 1890s.

*“I am very much pleased with Leona's progress and in every way find her much improved. I find she is more ambitious for an education than ever before. She can do many things her sister cannot. I thank God every day of my life for the school and the loving hearts that have it in*

*“I must say Carrie has made excellent progress this term in all her studies. There have been five of her brothers and sisters going to school, but she is the best educated of all. It is wonderful how she has been taught. We are thankful to the state of Washington for giving all the chances there are possible for the deaf and dumb and the blind to get a good education.”*

*“I can hardly enumerate the glad surprises and evidences of your tuition to which we are treated day by day and hour by hour while being in company with our little one. Such wonderful development seems hard to realize is true. That a child could master so much and have the signs of good breeding indelibly stamped upon every word and action, could but be accomplished by tutors whose hearts are in their work... Truly the state of Washington can feel gratified, not alone in possession of such an able institution, but in acquiring the services of such worthy people as you to guide and place that institution foremost and second to none in the country.”*

*“Everyone who knows Saxton speaks of the great improvement he has made in every way the past year. I assure you, Mr. Watson, that when I see how much he has learned and realize that if he keeps his health, that under your kind treatment and guidance he will receive an education which will be of priceless value to him, I cannot express my gratitude and thankfulness.”*