

Residential Schools:

Washington State



Girl at Rainier School. Taggart, Janet, "Time to Make A Bold New Start." *Seattle Magazine*, August 1967.

Almost from the very beginning, those running the Washington School for Defective Youth sought to segregate children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"The feeble-minded children require treatment and training so entirely different from that needed by the deaf and dumb and the blind youth, that they ought to be in separate buildings... This plan would carry out the spirit of the law and give to the feeble-minded children that separate care and attention which their unfortunate condition demands."

Report of the Board of Trustees of the Washington School for Defective Youth, 1887-1889.

In 1893, a new building opened more than a mile away from the original school. And then in 1906, 85 children were transported from Vancouver to a new School for the Feeble Minded (now called Lakeland Village) at Medical Lake in eastern Washington. Initially enrollment was limited to children between 6 and 21. The age limit was soon lifted and by 1922 more than half the residents were adults.

Later, additional schools were open: Western State Custodial School in Buckley, Pierce County, 1939 (now the Rainer School); Yakima Valley School, 1958; and Fircrest School in Shoreline, near Seattle, 1959.

"However, basically, Rainier State School and Lakeland Village are special schools for the education and training of those who may be able, at some later date, to take their place in the community as self-sustaining citizens, particularly as group homes and sheltered workshops are developed... Thus, the major aspects of our schools for mentally deficient children is a program of conditioning the handicapped youth to live as happily and purposefully as his limited capacities permit, either in a free society or in an institution."

Washington. Department of Public Institutions. Report. 1954.

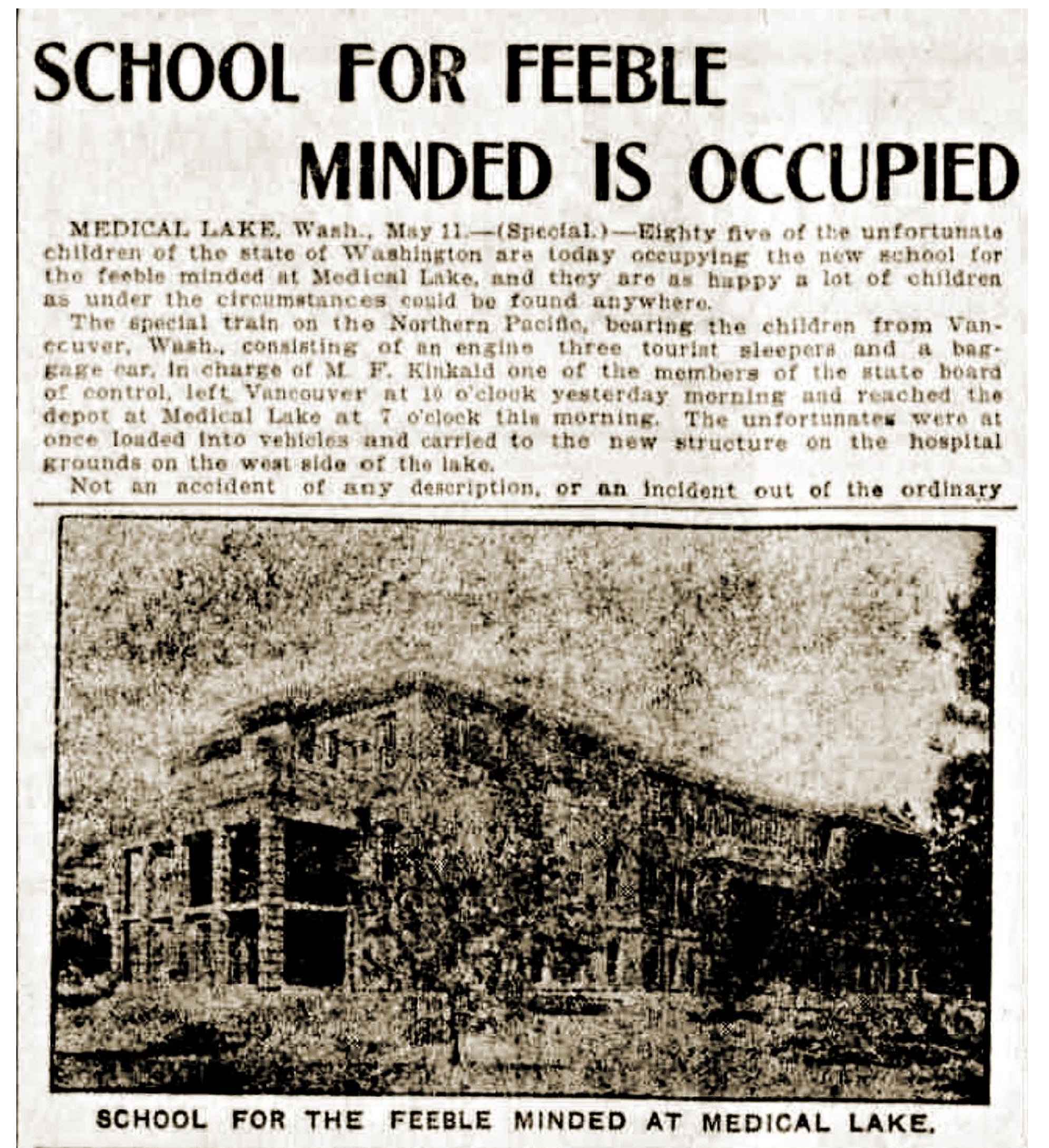


Boys class at the Rainier School, c. 1944.

In 1951, legislation was passed allowing school districts to establish programs for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. However, public schools were not mandated to offer special education until the 1971 Education for All Children Act (a grassroots effort by mothers aided by UW law school students) ensured "a place in the public school for all children with disabilities."

During the 1960s, special education in the public schools along with community programs such as the Epton day-care centers that provided training and education for children with intellectual disabilities, and the group home program, established so that adults leaving the state residential institutions would have supportive care, resulted in a substantial decline in the number of people in state residential facilities. The population peaked in 1968 at 4,212; by 1973 the population declined to 2,791; and by 2010 the population stood at 785.

Today these state residential programs primarily house adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Disability Rights Washington, an advocacy organization, has sued the state and argues that these institutions are dangerous and should be shuttered.



Spokane Daily Chronicle, 5/11/1906.

"For the feeble-minded we cannot promise so bright a future. In their imperfect way, they seem to do the best they can in spite of the heavy mental handicap under which they labor; and while we cannot show the same satisfactory results as with the deaf or blind, we can feel that their training and education renders their condition far, far better than when left to themselves; and their improvement, be it ever so slight, brings sunshine into what was before a darkened home."

Report of the Board of Trustees of the Washington School for Defective Youth, 1898-1900.

"We hope to teach these people to live, nothing more. To some this means that we must direct them in a schoolroom. For some we must direct them in eating. Some may learn to feed themselves in a lifetime. Others, the very advanced ones, may master a few simple jobs."

Frank E. Junkin, Fircrest School Superintendent, 1968

