

Preserving the Disability History of Lakeland Village and Washington State

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- Content today: historical ableist language, eugenics, sterilization
- History of Lakeland Village encompasses the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as people with other stigmatized differences.

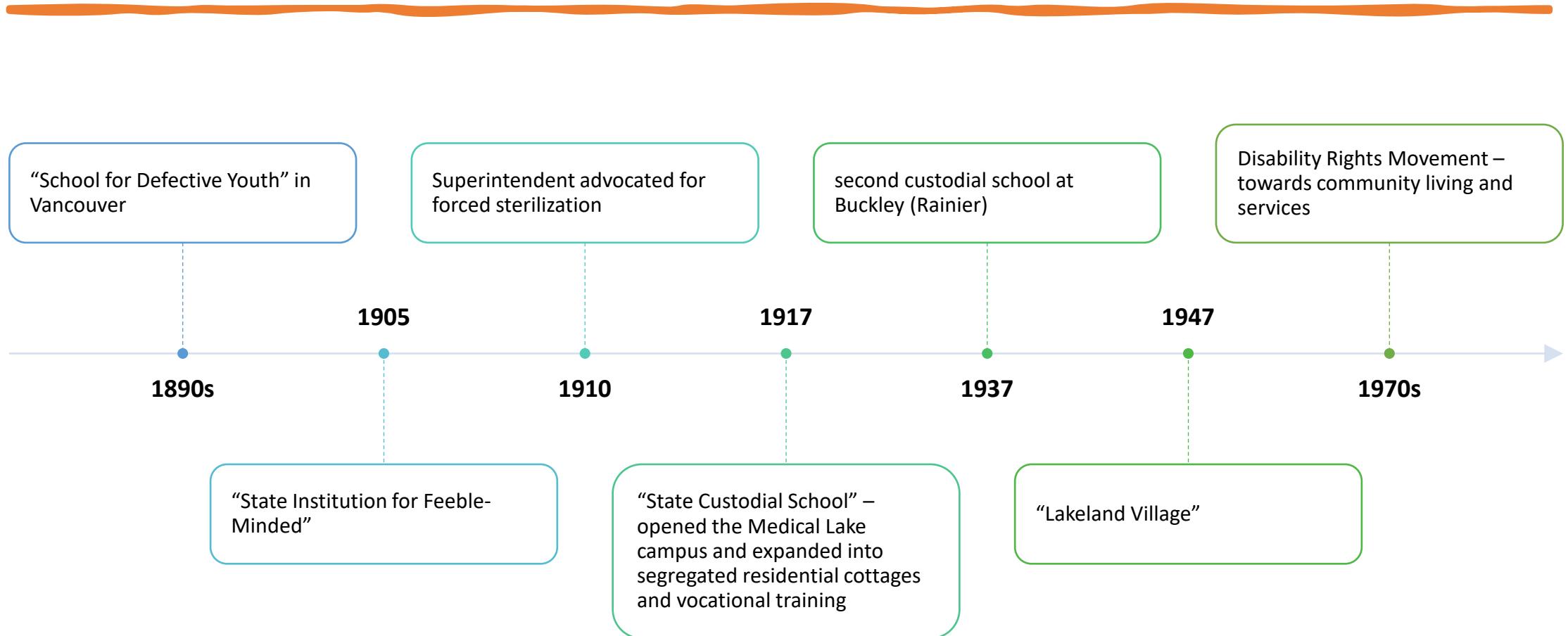
Lakeland Village Historical Preservation

- SSB 6125 (March 2024)
 - “Preserving records and artifacts regarding the historical treatment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Washington state”
- Documents discovered at Lakeland Village are administrative, photos, and resident case records (RCRs).
 - The RCRs comprise most of the collection that was found (80% or around 1,800 boxes).
 - They help to trace the lives of 6,200 residents dating from 1892 to 1975 (130 of those boxes).
 - These are designated non-archival and eligible to be destroyed.

Lakeland Village Project Members

- DSHS manages the records.
- State Archives prepared a complete inventory – authored the preservation plan.
- UW IHDD (Institute on Human Development and Disability) with faculty & students who specialize in archives (Information School) and history (Disability Studies) evaluated their historical value and made recommendations about appraisal and public access – wrote a companion report.

Brief History of Lakeland Village



Agreed Recommendations for the collection

- Administrative records will be permanently archived in Olympia per retention policy, with a new finding aid and a small collection of photos digitized and published online.
 - Consists of 250 boxes that document the establishment, development, and history of Lakeland Village
- Non-archival records will be retained by DSHS for their approved records retention period.
- The state should explore an amendment to RCW 40.14.030 that would automatically phase out the protection of confidential information in records held by the Archives after 75 years (“historical” classification).

Disagreement between UW IHDD & Archives



- What to do with the Resident Case Records that have met their retention period and are now slated to be destroyed?
 - 6,200 RCRs from 1892 to 1975
 - Rich source of information about daily life:
 - Admittance forms, photographs, vital records, demographic information, court records, family, resident and professional correspondence, financial information, medical records, psychological tests, school reports, work assignments, transportation and attempted escapes, disciplinary actions, reports on relationships with staff and other residents, death certificates and discharge papers.

Mission & Values

State Archives

- preserves state records of enduring value, provides access, and ensures the protection of individual privacy.
- protects “impartiality” in collection development and cautions against creating precedents that could allow external parties to dictate archival designations.
- balances limited state resources against the mandate to preserve enduring records for all Washingtonians.

UW IHDD

- emphasizes active stakeholder participation—centering disabled people in decisions about non-archival records, particularly RCRs, and in efforts to reckon with history.
- prioritizes informed consent and attention to inequitable dynamics in archival practices.
- sympathetic both to privacy concerns and to expressed concerns for transparency about state-operated facilities.
- affirms the importance of all voices and stories of people whose lived experiences were shaped by the institution, which are often absent, silenced, or hidden because of practices that have prevented preservation of and access to records.

UW IHDD Recommendations

1. Temporary Moratorium on Destruction of Records in the scope of SSB 6125.
2. Stakeholder roundtables with residents, family members, disability community advocates, local communities, researchers, educators, lawmakers, legal experts.
 - Use roundtables to inform decisions on the RCRs: potential uses for these materials, how to balance with concern for patient privacy.
 - Participatory and community-based practices in archival work are becoming best practice in the field, and archival values continue to shift to account for privacy, access, and community expectations.

UW IHDD Recommendations, continued

3. Potential Archival Designations for Resident Case Records

- they document significant shifts in disability policy, care, and civil rights, essential to understanding Washington's history.
- other states permanently archive resident or patient records from state institutions, demonstrating feasible models for balancing preservation, privacy, and access.
- research value for insights into medical, educational, and social practices that shaped the lives of disabled people in the state.

4. Repatriation of Resident Case Records

- offer residents and families a choice: return the files to them, archival accession, or destruction.

5. Targeted Digitization of Lakeland Village Records

- prioritize historically significant, community-relevant, and at-risk records will ensure that essential aspects of history are preserved and accessible.

National Context for Historical Preservation

- This work is timely since there is wide public interest in history and its significance. The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, University of Texas at Austin, published in April 2025 a report and data set of their comprehensive survey of almost 500 preservation projects for “state schools for the feeble-minded” and “asylums for the insane.” They identified seven categories of projects: architecture, cemeteries, exhibits, museums, history, records, and policy work including how to balance access and privacy of records and how to support stakeholder engagement in decision-making.

Conclusions

- The disagreements represent differences in perspective and in how we understand the importance of the Lakeland Village records. They represent an opportunity to assess community perspectives and values as they relate to the sharing of personal stories, as well as histories of our state and its treatment of people with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities and other identities.
- The goal of preservation should be to learn from our past and to improve our future.
- We urge the Washington State legislature, in partnership with disability organizations and communities, Archives, and DSHS, to undertake the challenge of preserving this extensive and unique set of records from Lakeland Village for future educational and historical purposes.