Jesse Lee Home for Children
Seward

Construction of the Jesse Lee Home for Children began in 1925. The federal government donated one hundred acres that had been cleared for agricultural purposes on the western side of Resurrection Bay, one and a half miles northwest of downtown Seward in southcentral Alaska. The last of the home's buildings was completed in 1937. The complex of buildings included Jewel Guard Hall, Goode Hall, Balto Building, superintendent's house, barn. Mission Territorial School, a residence, garage, cold storage, and several outbuildings.

The buildings at the home were stucco, balloon framed buildings with steep, shingled hipped roofs and gable dormers. All were generous with window fenestration, particularly on the southern elevations of the buildings. The typical window was a 6/6 double hung sash window placed singularly, in pairs, and banded. The buildings had red roof shingles, cream stucco, and dark brown belt courses and trim. During World War II, a portion of the property was acquired by the military for Fort Raymond and the principal buildings were painted in camouflage colors. In 1966 the buildings were abandoned when the home was relocated to Anchorage and the land and buildings were deeded to the City of Seward. The city subdivided and sold the property.

Two (Jewel Guard Hall and Balto Building) of the three core buildings of the home stand, and with the site of the third (Goode Hall), are on a 2.65 acre parcel of land is what was nominated to the National Register for Historic Places in 1995.

The name, Jesse Lee Home, honors a pioneer circuit riding Methodist preacher.

A number of Alaska's outstanding Native leaders were raised and educated at the Jesse Lee Home during its Seward years. John Ben "Benny" Benson, Jr., from Chignik, was one of the children who lived at the Jesse Lee Home. In 1927, his design was selected for Alaska's territorial, later state flag.

Other Native leaders who lived at the Jesse Lee Home include Billy B. Johnson, a director of the Thirteenth Region Native Corporation, who lived at the home from 1926 to 1938; Kenneth Lowney, a civil engineer in Anchorage, who lived at the home from 1933 to 1942; and Linda Trigg who has been president of the Alaska Native Brotherhood.

In March of 1964, a massive earthquake rocked south-central Alaska causing widespread damage. Goode Hall, the largest Jesse Lee building was heavily damaged and later condemned and demolished. The Methodist Church decided to close the Seward building and re-open a new home in Anchorage for two reasons. The Seward buildings were not well insulated and the complex was not economical to heat especially for the small number of children. In addition, the state of Alaska was moving away from orphanages and replacing this system with one oriented around foster care. Now known as Alaska Children’s Services, this organization still provides services to children and their families.
In 1966, the Methodist church deeded the Jesse Lee Home to the city of Seward, who eventually sold the property to the private owners. Today, after being abandoned for nearly 40 years, the property is again owned by the City of Seward.

The future of what remains of the Jesse Lee Home for Children is in limbo. Friends of Jesse Lee Home hope to restore the building but have struggled to fund the project so far.