



The Historical
Society of
Pennsylvania

Collection 1913

Orphan Society of Philadelphia
Records

1814-1965

6 boxes, 77 vols., 9.5 lin. feet

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Abstract

The Orphan Society of Philadelphia, a privately supported institution, was founded in 1814. In March 1815, the Society began operations and soon was caring for twenty-five orphans in a rented house on Market Street, west of Broad Street. Most of the original orphans were children who were moved from the Almshouse upon a recommendation by the Guardians of the Poor. The orphanage operated continuously from 1815 until 1965 when it merged with the Elwyn School in Elwyn, PA. The institution, while non-sectarian, was Christian-based in philosophy and teaching. For at least the first one hundred years, admission was restricted to “destitute fatherless children of married parents.” Boys were not admitted over the age of seven and were housed until the age of sixteen; girls were not admitted over the age of nine and were housed until the age of eighteen. During the 150 years of its operation, the Society resided in four successive homes in three locations and served approximately eighty to one-hundred orphans most years. However, by the 1950s, applications had decreased significantly; there were only twenty-three orphans under the Society’s care when it merged with the Elwyn School on February 14, 1965.

This collection, which includes annual reports, historical records, committee and financial reports, ledgers, account books, real estate papers, admission books, and indenture and binding books and papers, is richest in the detailed minutes that record the administrative workings of the Society, the Visiting Committee reports, and in the books, correspondence, and papers reflecting the lives of individual orphans.

Background note

In 1814, a group of Philadelphia women met in a schoolroom of the Second Presbyterian Church and founded one of the city’s first orphanages, the Orphan Society of Philadelphia. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Philadelphia had cared for poor and/or orphaned children under a system rooted in the English Poor Law. In this system, children were placed under the guardianship of The Overseers of the Poor, usually were indentured at a young age, and were often housed at the Almshouse with the adult poor of the city. The Orphan Society, the city’s first privately funded

orphanage, differentiated between being poor and being a poor child; for this reason alone it was a step forward in childcare and offered improved lives for most orphans under its care.

Officially incorporated on January 29, 1816, the Society's first Constitution was prefaced by words that clearly established its founding principles: "To rescue from ignorance, idleness and vice, destitute, unprotected and helpless children, and to provide for them that support and instruction which may eventually render them valuable members of the community." However, despite these principles, admission was limited by age, race, and the marital status of a child's parents. To be admitted, a boy or girl needed to be white, fatherless, the child of legally married parents, and could not be older than the established age for admission. Additionally, under the Society's care, children continued to be indentured into the early 20th century. For the ten-year period from 1822 to 1832, 140 children were "bound out." Many boys were trained as farmers or taught a craft while girls learned the art of "housewifery."

Some early indenture records "bound" children about age 10. One written report by Mrs. Susanne S. Brown, the matron in 1917, indicated that in 1901, the age for binding boys had been raised to twelve and for girls fourteen. Regardless of age, the impact of this process on young lives remained well into the early 20th century. In a 1915 letter written by a former orphan, the influence of both the Society and the process of indenture is powerfully evident: "Our treatment at the home was all right. But when you are put in slavery for 5 or 9 years without anyone coming to see you or caring for you, it is hard medicine. We were supposed to have three month schooling a year but did not get one day in the whole 5 years."

As late as 1920, the Society was wrestling with its indenture policy as noted in a letter from a lawyer, Thomas DeWitt Cuyler, to the Directress: "The question has arisen . . . of the present form of indenture used by the Orphan Society when children are placed in its custody. In my judgment this indenture is not only antiquated but of doubtful validity."

Despite the negative effect indenturing had on some orphans, the overall impact of the Society on its children appears to have been positive. The solid foundation laid by the Society's founders resulted in a dedicated and long-serving staff and children who "graduated" to productive lives in the military, in the community, and sometimes in or for the Society itself.

The Society's first Board reflects the strength behind the organization from its inception. Three of the initial Board members were Mrs. Sarah Ralston, the first Directress of the Society; Mrs. Julia Rush, the second Directress and the wife of Dr. Benjamin Rush; and Miss Rebecca Gratz, the Society's Secretary for forty years and well-known for her charitable work within the local Jewish community. The organization's early physicians included Dr. Benjamin Rush and Dr. John Conrad Otto. One of the first and most important committees formed by the Society was the Visiting Committee. Those assigned as Managers for any given year formed the committee and were scheduled for regular visitations to the Orphanage, usually several times during an assigned week.

They submitted detailed written reports of their weekly findings. This responsibility was taken seriously; and in the early years, those not fulfilling their obligations were fined. Since this was a privately supported organization, another area the Managers needed to address from the organization's inception was fund-raising: the first list of subscribers contains almost 1,000 names, many prominent in early Philadelphia history.

Within a year of its inception, the Society had been donated land by Samuel Wetherill, Samuel Richards, Samuel Archer, and Robert Ralston for the construction of its first home located at "Schuylkill Fifth [18th Street] and Cherry Streets." On the Society's second anniversary, thirty-six orphans were housed in the new home. By 1822, this number had grown to ninety. In 1821, Mrs. Ralston died; in 1822, tragedy struck. On the night of January 24, 1822, a fire destroyed one of the buildings and twenty-three children perished. Investigations and eyewitness accounts provide a detailed narrative of the conflagration that may have occurred due to the "improper arrangement of the masonry, in which the boiler was placed." Ward committees were formed to help the Society recover, resulting in public contributions of \$32,417. This combined with an insurance policy for \$6,000 and a \$5,000 donation from the Pennsylvania State Legislature, the only public funds received by the Society until it began billing families and various counties for support in the mid-20th century, helped in the reconstruction. Under the architectural guidance of William Strickland, a second orphanage was erected on the site, and this is where the organization remained until after the Civil War.

Beginning in 1848, an affiliation was established with Girard College, transferring those boys selected by Girard to its care. During the Civil War, fifty alumni from the home enlisted and served. By 1869, the city had grown considerably, and the Society's managers saw the need for a more open and rural setting. A large property at 64th and Lansdowne Avenue in a section then called Haddington was purchased. In 1871, the children moved to the Society's third home and second location, where the orphanage remained until 1904. In 1902, an outbreak of diphtheria and scarlet fever resulted in two deaths and threatened a second major catastrophe for the institution. The need to remove and quarantine the children together with the realization that the city was once again encroaching upon the suburbs, motivated the Society to move further outside the city, taking up residence in Wallingford, its third and final location.

During most of the 150 years of operation, orphans were educated within the orphanage. For a few years beginning in the late 1880s, orphans were sent to local public schools until overcrowding at the schools made it once again more advantageous to educate from within. This practice continued until 1927 when the students began to attend the Wallingford School and the Nether Providence High School.

Other changes over this 150-year period can be discerned. From the Society's inception, the person turning a child over to the orphanage was required to sign a document which read: "I do hereby surrender to the Orphan Society of Philadelphia, the child A. B. to be provided for, instructed and bound out by the said Society, for such a term of years within lawful age, as may appear to be proper; engaging that I will not demand or receive any compensation for the same or in any way interfere with the views or directions of the said Society." If a parent or guardian later had a change of heart or situation, it was

very difficult, and sometimes impossible, to reverse the decision. Because of this strict policy that seemed to be strongly enforced through the early 20th century, the collection contains some heartrending pleas for the return of one's child or children. Despite what Lawyer Thomas DeWitt Cuyler directed in the above-quoted 1920 letter – “it is important that the Society should have exclusive control over the child when once it is placed in its care [and] . . . you should proceed on the assumption that a contract binding in its nature can be entered into between the parent and the Society,” – after about 1920, the records indicate a more lenient approach regarding a child's qualifications for admission and a lessening of the Society's reluctance to return a child to his parent(s) and/or guardian(s).

Another notable shift is in those served by the organization. Despite the name and connection to Philadelphia, once the Society relocated to Delaware County, those served came primarily from Delaware County. In 1951, the orphanage housed twelve children from Philadelphia and forty three from Delaware County.

By the Society's 125th anniversary in 1940, 1,246 children had been cared for and educated by the institution. However, according to the Director's Annual Report in June 1954, the Society was experiencing a drop in applicants. He reasoned that there may have been an abundant number of organizations serving “normal white children” and noted that institutions serving “juvenile delinquents” and “colored children” were “bulging.” The annual reports beginning in 1956 indicate a movement toward “broadening our remedial study program and increasing the availability of psychological help for children with emotional problems.” This plan directed the organization for the balance of its existence. By 1965, a Society that had served at least 1,500 children was “beset with difficult problems of financing and staffing” and was home to only twenty-three orphans, prompting the merger with the Elywn School.

Scope and Content

The records of the Orphan Society of Philadelphia document the founding and operations of the orphanage from its inception in 1814 through its closing in 1965. While records exist for the entire 150 years, some time periods are covered more thoroughly than others.

Admissions books are complete through 1955; minutes are complete through 1956. The Visiting Committee reports, while not complete, are a rich source for learning about life within the Society. They provide vivid details of everyday life within the institution. From these records, one can learn the children's daily schedules, weekly food menus, the rules and regulations guiding everyday life, the social opportunities open to them, and about sensitive family issues affecting certain orphans. Early indenture records are detailed; few indenture records exist post-1872. Early financial records can be found in the papers and Minutes, but the collection contains no separate accounting books for the early years. From the late 1870s until 1963, some financial records were kept for all years. While correspondence and miscellaneous papers are piecemeal and sporadic, what does survive provides a vivid view into the Society.

Despite Matron Brown's comment in her 1917 report that the Society did not keep lengthy, printed accounts of a child's past lest his/her heritage might prove embarrassing or hurtful, the records of the Society are a genealogical treasure trove full of numerous details on many of those children raised under its care. With this in mind, a partial list of orphans' names has been developed from the collection's records and is attached as an appendix.

The records are organized into three series: *Administrative*, *Financial*, and *Orphans' Records*. The *Administrative* series is the largest. It includes detailed information on the Society's organization, Constitution, and personnel through annual reports, minutes, visiting and other committee reports, historical accounts, and anniversary celebrations. There is a miscellaneous subseries with correspondence, material related to the Society's Alumni Association, and papers establishing an association between the Society and Girard College.

The *Financial* series contains more than half of the collection's volumes and mirrors the past and life within the Society and the world at large. One can learn the cost of everyday food items and the ordinary necessities of life. Here is documented that the cost of housing an orphan in 1831 was \$34 per annum; the cost by 1948 had risen to \$900 per annum. There are forty books that detail funds of the organization from the late 19th century through the 1960s. Early papers include the Society's first budget and financial reports from the years 1818 and 1821. Additionally, this series houses records on the Society's real estate holdings, real estate transactions, donations, legacies, and fund raising.

The final series, *Orphans' Records*, includes admission books that note the orphan's name, date of birth, and age and date of admission. Sometimes entries recorded parental information, addresses, the child's health, and detailed family histories. Information was gathered when a child entered, and the collection contains a sizable number of cards with familial data. Interestingly, some of the earliest case histories are the most complete. This series also contains one book that indexed the names of those indentured, the person to whom bound, the trade to be learned, the place of residence, the date when "bound out," and the date "when free." This index covers 1822 through 1832 and seems to draw from two of the three books entitled "Admitting and Binding." Additionally, there is a copybook with indenture information from 1854 to 1872 and some papers ranging from 1863 through 1920 that discuss legal issues relevant to the practice of indenturing.

The correspondence in this series mostly focuses on individual children and comes from a variety of sources, some of the most powerful from parents asking to have children returned home. The miscellaneous subseries includes some interesting individual orphan case studies and a unanimously signed petition by the orphans in November 1914 in which they ask that the Society spend the money that would have gone for Christmas presents on food for the children of Belgium. This series, together with the minutes and visiting committee reports, is rich in what it offers on the lives of certain individual orphans, and on the orphan experience within this Society in general.

Overview of arrangement

Series I	Administrative, 1814-1965 a. Historical, 1814-1965, n.d. b. Minutes, 1814-1956 c. Reports, 1814-1926, 1937, n.d. d. Miscellaneous, 1824, 1830, 1876, 1910, 1916-1949, n.d.	4 Boxes, 24 Volumes
Series II	Financial, 1815-1828, 1851, 1861-1963, n.d. a. Budgets/Treasurers' Reports, 1816, 1818, 1821, 1871-1881, n.d. b. Account Books, 1870-1963 c. Real Estate, 1815-1822, 1861-1863, 1869-1870, 1887-1919, n.d. d. Legacies/Donations/Fund Raising, 1815-1828, 1851, 1888, 1904-1926, 1994, n.d. e. Miscellaneous, 1920-1926	1 Box, 40 Volumes
Series III	Orphans' Records, 1815-1956 a. Admissions, 1815-1955 b. Indenture, 1822-1872, 1890-1920, n.d. c. Correspondence, 1815-1839, 1878, 1893, 1902-1923, n.d. d. Miscellaneous, 1837, 1877-1901, 1914, 1919, n.d.	1 Box, 13 Volumes

Series descriptions

Series 1. Administrative, 1814-1965 (Boxes 1-4, Vols. 1-24)

- a. Historical, 1814-1965, n.d.

This subseries includes constitutional notes and drafts, the Constitution, bylaws, rules and regulations, rules of admission, a book plate, and notes on staff personnel. Also there are several histories of the Society, each building on the previous account, and the final one written in 1940 for the 125th anniversary. There is an address given in January 1830 by Edward Rutledge as part of an anniversary celebration, together with other anniversary and benefit programs. One undated letter written by Rebecca Gratz to Maria Dorsey tenders her resignation from the Society due to a "domestic calamity." She mentions having charge of "a family of young children." She raised the nine children of her sister, Rachel Moses, after the sister's death. Maria Dorsey was the organization's first secretary; Rebecca Gratz succeeded her in 1818. She

served as secretary for forty years, from the age of 21 to 61. Therefore, this resignation was either not accepted or she returned after a brief respite. Additionally this series contains some newspaper clippings and a Society brochure entitled "The Wallingford Home," dated April 1964.

b. Minutes, 1814-1956

The Minutes are complete from 1814 to 1956. These contain detailed information about board members, the names of those who attended meetings, financial matters, everyday concerns of the institution, and substantive discussions about individual orphans and problematic situations. The volumes from 1814 to 1864 include an attendance sheet for Board Members and the fines imposed and paid for missing meetings. Also the 1933-1938 volume includes a copy of the Constitution placed in a folder on the inside cover.

c. Reports, 1814-1926, 1937, n.d.

This subseries is sporadic. It contains a few annual reports from 1815 through 1828, and Visiting Committee reports for all years except 1824-1836, 1841-1845, 1879-1886, and years after 1922. The loose papers removed from these volumes have been placed in folders. Included also are Secretarial reports for 1917-1925, self-study reports for 1920, 1926, and 1937 and all religious material including a prayer book, an Order of Daily Service, a copy of a sermon by William White on "The Drawing of Moses Out of the Waters" dated 1815, and three early Church Committee reports, one dated 1832.

The Visiting Committee reports form a crucial part of this collection. While they read in a routine and patterned manner, their value lies in giving a general impression of daily life at the home. They include comments on current conflicts, the names of those ill at the time of the visit, educational practices, and mention both staff and children by name. For example, in 1837, some of the older girls refused to say grace and cooperate with the rules of the house. For Christmas that year, dinner preparations included baking fifty-seven loaves of bread, forty mince pies, and fourteen Indian and rice puddings. In the summer of 1899, the older girls were once again a problem, especially Edna Baker who was having a "clandestine relationship." In 1921, "Miss Cantner's class in physiology discussed the circulation of the blood with some intelligence and Mrs. Cuyler was struggling to make dry measure interesting to three small boys who were hopelessly confused over pecks and bushels."

This subseries also contains two reports on the fire of 1822, the "Eyewitness Account" book on the conflagration, and papers, correspondence and newspaper clippings on the diphtheria/scarlet fever outbreak in 1901.

d. Miscellaneous, 1824, 1803, 1876, 1910, 1916-1949, n.d.

This subseries contains correspondence and papers related to other schools and institutions including Girard College, The Williamson Free School, and the William T. Carter Junior Republic. In addition to miscellaneous correspondence, there is a receipt from Winterthur Museum for the sale of furniture dated 1957, and an

undated request for information from the Office of the Women's Centennial Executive Committee.

Series 2. Financial, 1815-1828, 1851, 1861-1963, n.d. (Boxes 4-5, Vols. 25-64)

a. Budgets/Treasurers' Reports, 1816, 1818, 1821, 1871-1881, n.d.

These are sporadic. For the early years of the Society, only a few reports exist. One group of Treasurer's Reports from 1871 to 1881 is detailed; 1880 is especially rich.

b. Account Books, 1870-1963

Most material in this subseries will be found in bound volumes. There is a partially used checkbook from 1869 through 1874. The Cash Account book for 1878 through 1901 contains interesting petty cash expenditures along with notes about how much was spent in taking the children on various excursions. At the end of this volume, there are news articles pasted in regarding the 82nd and 85th Anniversaries of the Society along with some obituary clippings. The Treasurer's Account book from 1900 through 1921 includes references to specific orphans on page 384 and includes a list of the 1915 Anniversary donations. There is a gap in the Petty Cash books from 1932 to 1943 and in the Ledgers from 1927 to 1939. Four volumes labeled Board Billed and four labeled Board Received give detailed information on how much was billed for each orphan and who was billed. In some cases the families were billed; in other cases, various counties or agencies were billed.

c. Real Estate, 1815-1822, 1861-1863, 1869-1870, 1887-1919, n.d.

Most of the papers in this subseries deal with transactions relevant to the four homes and three locations of the Society. One group contains eight items concerning the first structure at "Schuylkill Fifth and Arch," the most interesting being a letter describing the building and its date of completion. This letter was signed by William Strickland, the architect, and sent to Rebecca Gratz. Papers, floor plans, and specifications for various work projects exist for the Society's third home at 64th and Lansdowne Avenue. A Brief of Title book details the histories of various properties procured by the Society, in some cases back to the time of William Penn. A diagram for the Hillside Cemetery is part of this subseries together with correspondence dated 1892 related to an exchange of lots at Monument Cemetery caused by "the opening of Norris St. through the Cemetery." Additionally, detailed correspondence exists regarding the purchase and development of the facility in Wallingford.

d. Legacies/Donations/Fund Raising, 1815-1828, 1851, 1888, 1904-1926, 1944, n.d.

Early donor information was carefully recorded by the Society. The original list of donors, together with an early donor list dated 1819 and correspondence on donations from 1815 to 1828 exists. One undated but typed list gives names, addresses and amounts given to the Society. For example, Mrs. Alex. Brown Coxe of Paoli, PA gave \$100; Mr. Lynford Biddle of Chestnut Hill gave \$250. A copy of the will of Robert Fielding, 1851, names the Society as a beneficiary. Papers relating to the only public donation of funds from the Pennsylvania Department of State at the time of the fire in 1822 are included in this subseries. Along with

correspondence relevant to numerous legacies and endowments, the bulk from 1904 to 1926, a few papers relevant to fund raising can be found in the collection.

e. Miscellaneous, 1920-1926

This is a small subseries containing financial papers. There are two legal letters; one addresses the rights of the State Board of Public Charities to inspect the accounts and assets of the Society. There are several letters and figure sheets drawn on Society letterhead regarding those who pay, amounts paid, and the orphans who have/have not such financial backing. There is one report of the Purchasing Committee signed by A. E. Strawbridge. One undated letter appears to be a draft, the subject of which is the “very serious financial situation” which the orphanage faces.

Series 3. Orphans’ Records, 1815-1956 (Boxes 5-6, Vols. 65-77)

a. Admissions, 1815-1955

This subseries contains books, papers, cards, and records on those children cared for by the Orphan Society. There are seven bound volumes, one of which survived the fire of 1822. There is one volume entitled “Record of Persons Taking Children” which appears to be an index to the 1860-1890 Admissions book, the red numbers referencing the page numbers. Additionally, there are pages from the original Register of Admissions, an early 20th century list with birth dates, and some numerical calculations of the number of children cared for each year for the first hundred years of the Society’s existence. This subseries also includes information cards and forms taken upon admission. These are sporadic, also covering the organization’s first century.

b. Indenture, 1822-1872, 1890-1920, n.d.

There are three Admitting and Binding volumes covering 1817 through 1856 and a copybook for indenture records from 1854 to 1872. In Box 7, Folder 26, there are papers with indenture information that seem to be part of the 1854 to 1872 copybook. In addition, there is an Indenture Record book for the early years that was compiled from two of the three Admitting and Binding books with a partial index in the back section. Some of the information in these volumes overlaps. Indenture records post-1872 are non-existent with the exception of a few indenture papers from the early 20th century and some legal correspondence on the practice of indenturing children. Actual indenture papers are sporadic, but those available represent the process from 1819 to 1909.

c. Correspondence, 1815-1839, 1878, 1893, 1902-1923, n.d.

This subseries consists of letters written about orphans from various sources. Some are about work situations; others are about legal or financial matters. The most heartrending, however, are those coming from parents pleading for the Society to return their children. In 1917, one mother writes, “I wrote you last month about getting my daughter . . . home and you said my letter was to [sic] late for the board meeting. . . . I can assure you she will have a good home.” Another mother writes in 1922: “You tell me I cannot have [my daughter]. I suppose you know that she is a jewish child and she is getting old enough now to understand the difference in

religion. And what would my position be if I have to wait until my little girl is grown up out of her own religion.” Other parents address their own financial problems and how difficult it was to contribute to the Society to help defray the cost of raising their child(ren).

d. Miscellaneous, 1837, 1877-1901, 1914, 1919, n.d.

This subseries contains correspondence from former orphans and papers relating to specific orphans: Martha W. Perry, John Kelly, the Crawford children, Christian Sulger, and Katie Lee White. Each of the folders on these respective children presents a piece of a puzzling narrative. For example, there is a marriage certificate between Henry J. Smith and Martha W. Perry, a former orphan. This certificate was enclosed in an envelope together with two rings belonging to Mrs. Martha (Perry) Smith that she “forgot” to take with her on a visit to the Asylum. Another envelope indicates these rings were turned over to The Historical Society of Pennsylvania in 1978. However, these were not found as part of this collection. A letter indicates that Martha (Perry) Smith ran away from both her husband and her child. Hers is just one of the hundreds of stories told, in part at least, within this collection. A Sunday-school attendance book with a few entries from 1837, an undated copybook reporting on the character traits of certain children, a list of orphans sent to Girard College, and a petition by the orphans in 1914 asking that the money to be spent on their Christmas presents be sent to Belgium to buy food for starving children are the final pieces of a collection which offers a view into the Orphan Society of Philadelphia and the many personalities that peopled this organization for 150 years.

Separation report

None.

Related materials

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania:

Constitution of the Philadelphia Orphan Society: with rules for the regulation of the board of managers and the asylum. Philadelphia: L.R. Bailey, 1845. WJ .401

Annual report. Philadelphia, 1816-1965. Wj .4 v.1 Wj .4 v.2 Wj .4 v.3 Wj .4 v.4 Wj .4 v.5

Constitution and by-laws of the Orphan Society of Philadelphia: Instituted December 20th, 1814. Philadelphia: Society, William Fry, printer, 1815. LCP Api* .99 483

A sermon on the drawing of Moses out of the waters: Delivered before the Orphan Society of Philadelphia, on Sunday, the 5th of March, 1815. / by William White, D.D. Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. White, William. Philadelphia: Society, William Fry pr., 1815. LCP Api .99 483

History of the Orphan Asylum in Philadelphia with an account of the fire, in which twenty-three orphans were burned. Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, c. 1831. Wj 4025

Bibliography

“The Early Years: Relief and Employment of the Poor.” Website: www.phila.gov/agencies/exhibit/dhs/part1.htm

“Rebecca Gratz” by Seymour Brody. Website: www.us-israel.org/jsource/biography/Gratz.html

“Rebecca Gratz” Website: www.amuseum.org/jahf/virtour/page7.html

Subjects

Adoption -- Law and Legislation Pennsylvania
Adoption – United States
Adoption – Psychological Aspects
Adoption – United States Statistics
Almshouses – Pennsylvania Philadelphia History
Benevolent Societies -- Pennsylvania
Charities -- Consolidation
Charities -- Pennsylvania Philadelphia
Charities -- Pennsylvania Delaware County
Charities – 19th Century
Child Abuse – Law and Legislation Pennsylvania History
Child Abuse – Pennsylvania Philadelphia Prevention
Child Welfare --Pennsylvania Philadelphia

Child Welfare – Philadelphia History 19th Century
Children
Diphtheria outbreaks
Education – Pennsylvania Philadelphia History
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Friends' Almshouse – Philadelphia PA
Guardians of the Poor—Philadelphia PA Guardians for the Relief and
Employment of the Poor
Homeless Children -- Pennsylvania
Indentured Servants – Pennsylvania History
Orphans
Poverty
Scarlet fever Outbreaks
Social Service—Pennsylvania Delaware County
Social Service – Pennsylvania Philadelphia
Social Work Administration
Special Education -- History

Archer, Samuel
Biddle Family
Coxe, Alexander Brown
DeWitt Cuyler, Thomas
Fielding, Robert
Gratz, Rebecca 1781-1869
Otto, Dr. John Conrad
Ralston, Robert
Ralston, Sarah
Richards, Samuel
Rush, Dr. Benjamin 1746-1813
Rush, Julia
Strickland, William 1787-1854
Wetherill, Samuel 1736-1816
White, Rev. William

William R. Carter Junior Republic
Elwyn School
Girard College -- History
Hillside Cemetery
Monument Cemetery
Nether Providence High School
Williamson Free School of Mechanical Trades
Winterthur Museum
Women's Centennial Executive Committee

Administrative Information

Restrictions

Two volumes in the collection are closed to researchers:

Volume 72: Admittance book, 1946-1955 (will be open January 1, 2020)

Volume 73: Admittance book, 1929-1945 (will be open January 1, 2030)

Researchers should contact HSP staff if they wish to access information in these volumes about themselves.

Acquisition information

Gift of The Orphan Society of Philadelphia, 1965.

Alternative format

None.

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Processing note

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Completed: September 2003.

Box and folder listing

Series 1. Administrative. a. Historical

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
Historical Papers	1901, n.d.	2 items	1	1
Address Given on Anniversary of the Asylum	Jan 1830	1 item	1	2
Benefit Programs, 125 th Anniversary Program, including history	1927-1929, 1940	4 items	1	3
Anniversary Programs	1946, 1948, 1949	3 items	1	4
Article: "A Forgotten Charity, the Philadelphia Orphan Society"	c. 1887	1 item	1	5
The Wallingford Home	1964, n.d.	2 items	1	6
Newspaper Clippings	1822, 1923, 1944, n.d.	4 items	1	7
Book Plate	n.d.	n.a.	Vol. 1	
Impressions from Book Plate	n.d.	2 items	1	8
Handwritten Draft Notes on Constitution/By-Laws	n.d.	12 items	1	9
Early Rules, Regulations, Constitution (Removed from Minutes, 1814-1823)	n.d.	1 item	1	10
Constitution of the Society	1845	1 item	1	11
Papers on Constitutional Revisions	1945-1946	5 items	1	12
Rules for the Regulation of the Asylum	n.d.	1 item	1	13
Papers Regarding Regulations and Government of the Society	n.d.	4 items	1	14
Papers Regarding Regulations and Government of the Society	1814-1825	16 items	1	15
Papers Regarding Regulations and Government of the Society	1836-1898	9 items	1	16
Papers Regarding Regulations and Government of the Society	1905-1946	7 items	1	17

Rules of Admission	n.d.	1 item	1	18
Blank Application Form	n.d.	1 item	1	19
Administrative Matters	1815-1841	18 items	1	20
Administrative Matters	1891-1914 (Bulk 1901)	12 items	1	21
Administrative Matters	n.d.	8 items	1	22
List of Managers	1818	1 item	1	23
List of Board Members	n.d.	1 item	1	24
Funeral of Mrs. Mary Richards	May 3, 1820	3 items	1	25
Death Notices (Removed from Minutes, 1889-1901)	n.d.	2 items	1	26
Resignation Letter of Rebecca Gratz	n.d.	1 item	1	27
Correspondence Regarding Personnel	1829, n.d.	2 items	1	28
Correspondence Regarding Personnel	1901-1906	4 items	1	29

Series 1. Administrative. b. Minutes.

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
Minutes	1814-1823	n.a.	Vol. 2	
Minutes	1823-1831	n.a.	Vol. 3	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Minutes, 1823-1831)	1824, n.d.	2 items	1	30
Minutes	1832-1841	n.a.	Vol. 4	
Minutes	1841-1850	n.a.	Vol. 5	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Minutes, 1841-1850)	1843, 1847, n.d.	5 items	1	31
Minutes	1850-1864	n.a.	Vol. 6	
Minutes	1864-1889	n.a.	Vol. 7	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Minutes, 1864-1889)	1871, n.d.	6 items	1	32
Minutes	1889-1901	n.a.	Vol. 8	
Minutes	1901-1914	n.a.	Vol. 9	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Minutes, 1901-1914)	n.d.	2 items	1	33
Minutes	1914-1933	n.a.	Vol. 10	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Minutes, 1914-1933)	1930-1931, n.d.	5 items	1	34
Minutes	1933-1938	n.a.	Vol. 11	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Minutes, 1933-1938)	1937	4 items	1	35

Minutes	June 1938- June 1941	n.a.	1	36
Minutes	June 1941- May 1942	n.a.	1	37
Minutes	Nov 1942 – Dec 1944	n.a.	1	38
Minutes	Feb 1945- June 1946	n.a.	2	1
Minutes	July 1946- Feb 1947	n.a.	2	2
Minutes	Mar 1947- Dec 1947	n.a.	2	3
Minutes	Jan 1948- Jun 1948	n.a.	2	4
Minutes	July 1948- Feb 1949	n.a.	2	5
Minutes	Mar 1949- Dec 1949	n.a.	2	6
Minutes	July 1949- June 1950	n.a.	2	7
Minutes	July 1950- June 1951	n.a.	2	8
Minutes	July 1951- July 1952	n.a.	2	9
Minutes	Oct 1952- July 1953	n.a.	2	10
Minutes	Aug 1953- June 1954	n.a.	3	1
Minutes	July 1954- June 1955	n.a.	3	2
Minutes	July 1955- June 1956	n.a.	3	3

Series 1. Administrative. c. Reports

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
Annual Reports	1815, 1817, 1818 1822, 1826, 1828, n.d.	10 items	3	4
News clippings, mostly on 55 th Annual Meeting	c. 1870	8 items	3	5
Visiting Committee Reports	1819-1823	n.a.	Vol. 12	
Visiting Committee Reports	1823-1826	n.a.	Vol. 13	

Visiting Committee Reports	1837-1840	n.a.	Vol. 14	
Visiting Committee Reports	1846-1860	n.a.	Vol. 15	
Visiting Committee Reports	1860-1872	n.a.	Vol. 16	
Visiting Committee Reports (Removed from 1860-1872)	1864-1965	1 item	3	6
Visiting Committee Reports	1873-1878	n.a.	Vol. 17	
Visiting Committee Reports (Removed from 1873-1878)	1877, n.d.	2 items	3	7
Visiting Committee Reports	1887-1897	n.a.	Vol. 18	
Visiting Committee Reports (Removed from 1887-1897)	n.d.	2 items	3	8
Visiting Committee Reports	1897-1906	n.a.	Vol. 19	
Visiting Committee Reports (Removed from 1897-1906)	1903, 1905, 1906-1907	3 items	3	9
Visiting Committee Reports	1907-1913	n.a.	Vol. 20	
Visiting Committee Reports	1914-1917	n.a.	Vol. 21	
Visiting Committee Reports (Removed from 1914-1917 and including two lists of orphans assigned to staff)	1910, n.d.	4 items	3	10
Visiting Committee Roster	1920-1921	1 item	3	11
Visiting Committee Reports	1918-1922	n.a.	Vol. 22	
Visiting Committee Reports (Removed from 1918-1922)	n.d.	2 items	3	12
Sermon by William White entitled "The Drawing of Moses Out of the Waters"	1815	1 item	3	13
Prayer	n.d.	1 item	3	14
Report of the Church Committee (Removed from Minutes, 1823- 1831)	1830, n.d.	2 items	3	15
Report of the Church Committee (Removed from Indenture Record, 1819-1832)	1832	1 item	3	16
"Order of Daily Service of the Philadelphia Orphan Asylum"	May 1863	n.a.	Vol. 23	
Secretarial Reports	1917-1925	19 items	3	17
Study Reports	1920, 1926, 1937 (2)	4 items	3	18
Report of the Fire/Newspaper Clipping	1822	2 items	3	19
Manager's Report on the Fire	1823	1 item	3	20
Eyewitness Accounts of the Fire	1822	n.a.	Vol. 24	
Papers Regarding Scarlet Fever/Diphtheria Outbreak	1901	34 items	4	1

Correspondence Relating to Scarlet Fever/Diphtheria Outbreak	n.d.	6 items	4	2
Newspaper Clippings Relating to Scarlet Fever/Diphtheria Outbreak	June 1901	2 items	4	3

Series 1. Administrative. d. Miscellaneous

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
Constitution of the Alumni Association of the Philadelphia Orphanage	n.d.	1 item	4	4
Letter from the Alumni Association	Jan 1921	1 item	4	5
Correspondence from Girard College	1917	2 items	4	6
Papers Relating to Girard College	n.d.	4 items	4	7
Information on The Williamson Free School and the William T. Carter Junior Republic	n.d.	3 items	4	8
Receipt/Letter on Sale of Furniture to Winterthur Museum	1956-1957	2 items	4	9
Request for Institutional Information from Office of the Women's Centennial Executive Committee	n.d.	1 item	4	10
Miscellaneous Correspondence	1824, 1830, 1876, n.d.	5 items	4	11
Miscellaneous Correspondence	1910, n.d.	5 items	4	12
Miscellaneous Correspondence (Two requesting information on former orphans)	1917-1923	6 items	4	13
Miscellaneous Correspondence	1916-1949	7 items	4	14
Miscellaneous Correspondence	n.d.	5 items	4	15
Miscellaneous Items, including a poem.	1869, n.d.	3 items	4	16

Series 2. Financial. a. Budgets/Treasurers' Reports

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
First Budget	1816	1 item	4	17
Early Financial Reports	1818, 1821, n.d.	3 items	4	18
Treasurers' Reports	1871-1881 (Bulk 1880)	13 items	4	19

Series 2. Financial. b. Account Books

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
Bank Checkbook	1869-1874	n.a.	Vol. 25	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Bank Checkbook)	n.d.	1 item	4	20
Orphan Fund Reports	1896-1938	n.a.	Vol. 26	n.a.
Check (Removed from Orphan Fund Reports)	1925	1 item	4	21
Principal Account Ledger	1891-1937	n.a.	Vol. 27	
Check Statements (Removed from Principal Account Ledger)	1936-1938	12 items	4	22
Cash Account	1878-1901	n.a.	Vol. 28	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Cash Account)	1890-1892, n.d.	4 items	4	23
Treasurer's Account	1900-1921	n.a.	Vol. 29	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Treasurer's Account)	1916, 1918	2 items	4	24
Ledger	1921-1926	n.a.	Vol. 30	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Ledger, 1921-1926)	1924	1 item	4	25
Ledger	1940-1942	n.a.	Vol. 31	
Ledger	1942-1945	n.a.	Vol. 32	
Ledger	1945-1946	n.a.	Vol. 33	
Ledger	1946-1949	n.a.	Vol. 34	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Ledger, 1946-1949)	n.d.	2 items	4	26
Ledger	1949-1950	n.a.	Vol. 35	
Memos/Miscellaneous (Removed from Ledger, 1949-1950)	1949-1950	3 items	4	27
Ledger	1950-1951	n.a.	Vol. 36	
Ledger	1951-1952	n.a.	Vol. 37	

Ledger	1952-1953	n.a.	Vol. 38	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Ledger, 1952-1953)	May 1953	1 item	4	28
Ledger	1953-1954	n.a.	Vol. 39	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Ledger, 1953-1954)	1953-1954	3 items	4	29
Ledger	1954-1955	n.a.	Vol. 40	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Ledger, 1954-1955)	1954-1955	2 items	4	30
Ledger	1955-1956	n.a.	Vol. 41	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Ledger, 1955-1956)	1955-1956	1 item	4	31
Ledger	1956-1957	n.a.	Vol. 42	
Ledger	1957-1958	n.a.	Vol. 43	
Monthly Financial Reports (Removed from Ledger, 1957-1958)	1956-1958	4 items	4	32
Ledger	1958-1959	n.a.	Vol. 44	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Ledger, 1958-1959)	1958-1959	3 items	4	33
Ledger	1959-1960	n.a.	Vol. 45	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Ledger, 1959-1960)	1959-1960	1 item	4	34
Ledger	1960-1961	n.a.	Vol. 46	
Ledger	1961-1962	n.a.	Vol. 47	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Ledger, 1961-1962)	1961-1962	5 items	4	35
Ledger	1962-1963	n.a.	Vol. 48	
Calculations (Removed from Ledger, 1962-1963)	n.d.	5 items	4	36
Petty Cash	1920-1931	n.a.	Vol. 49	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Petty Cash, 1920-1931)	1920-1931	2 items	4	37
Petty Cash	1944-1946	n.a.	Vol. 50	
Petty Cash	1946-1948	n.a.	Vol. 51	
Receipts (Removed from Petty Cash, 1946-1948)	1949	8 items	4	38
Petty Cash	1949-1951	n.a.	Vol. 52	
Petty Cash	1951-1953	n.a.	Vol. 53	
Petty Cash	1953-1955	n.a.	Vol. 54	
Petty Cash	1955-1958	n.a.	Vol. 55	
Board Billed	1940-1948	n.a.	Vol. 56	
Board Billed	1948-1951	n.a.	Vol. 57	

Weekly Rates per County (Removed from Board Billed, 1948-1951)	1948-1949	6 items	4	39
Board Billed	1951-1953	n.a.	Vol. 58	
Board Billed	1953-1960	n.a.	Vol. 59	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Board Billed, 1953-1960)	1954	1 item	4	40
Board Received	1940-1947	n.a.	Vol. 60	
Board Received	1947-1951	n.a.	Vol. 61	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Board Received, 1947-1951)	1949	1 item	4	41
Board Received	1951-1954	n.a.	Vol. 62	
Board Received	1954-1959	n.a.	Vol. 63	

Series 2. Financial. c. Real Estate

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
Brief of Title	n.d.	n.a.	Vol. 64	
Miscellaneous (Removed from Brief of Title)	n.d.	2 items	4	42
Papers Relating to Original Property at "Schuylkill Fifth and Arch"	1815-1822	8 items	4	43
Papers and Floor Plan/64 th and Lansdowne Avenue	1869-1870	5 items	4	44
Specifications for Work on House Drainage System/64 th and Lansdowne Avenue	n.d.	1 item	4	45
Real Estate Transactions	1887-1903 (Bulk 1901- 1903)	11 items	4	46
Real Estate Transactions	1904-1919	19 items	4	47
Real Estate Transactions	n.d.	5 items	4	48
Exchange of Lots/Monument Cemetery	June 1892	3 items	4	49
Hillside Cemetery Plan (in Flat File)	n.d.	1 item	n.a.	n.a.
Real Estate Matters	1904-1912, n.d.	5 items	4	50
Correspondence Regarding Facilities and Purchase of Wallingford Home	1902-1911 (Bulk 1904, n.d)	30 items	4	51

Series 2. Financial. d. Legacies/Donations/Fund Raising

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
Original List of Donors (in Flat File)	n.d.	1 item	n.a.	n.a.
Early Donor Lists	1819	2 items	5	1
Early Donations/Legacies	1815-1828, n.d.	16 items	5	2
List of Donors/Addresses/Amounts	n.d.	1 item	5	3
Will/Estate of Robert Fielding	1851	1 item	5	4
Papers Relating to PA Department of State Donation Post-Fire	Jan 1822	3 items	5	5
Papers Relating to Legacies and Endowments	1888, 1904-1926, 1944, n.d.	19 items	5	6
Papers Related to Fund Raising	1919, n.d.	4 items	5	7
Treasurer's "Daybook" on Legacies (Removed from Indenture Book, 1819-1832)	1861-1863	1 item	5	8

Series 2. Financial. e. Miscellaneous

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
Correspondence	1920-1926 (Bulk 1920), n.d.	10 items	5	9

Series 3. Orphans' Records a. Admissions

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
First Register of Admissions	1814-1820	1 item	5	10
Record of Admittance	1815-1913	n.a.	Vol. 65	
Enrollment Book (Fragment with Deaths at Asylum, post-Nov 16, 1835)	1815-1843	1 item	5	11
Number of Children Admitted	1815-1904	2 items	5	12

Lists Calculating Number of Orphans Admitted Per Year (Removed from Record of Admittance, 1815-1913)	c. 1915	2 items	5	13
List of Children Admitted Since Nov 1919	n.d.	1 item	5	14
List of Orphans with Birth Dates/Ages	n.d.	1 item	5	15
Information Forms Upon Admission	1807-1819	18 items	5	16
Information Forms Upon Admission	1820-1829	26 items	5	17
Information Forms Upon Admission	1830-1839	28 items	5	18
Information Forms Upon Admission	1840-1854	29 items	5	19
Information Forms Upon Admission	1855-1864	38 items	5	20
Information Forms Upon Admission	n.d.	17 items	5	21
Admittance Book	1815-1833	n.a.	Vol. 66	
Information Forms Upon Admission (Removed from Admittance Book, 1815-1833)	1815-1833	37 items	5	22
Information Forms Upon Admission (Removed from Admitting and Binding Records, 1827-1850)	1834, 1861	2 items	5	23
Admittance Book	1834-1863	n.a.	Vol. 67	
Information Forms Upon Admission (Taken from Admittance Book, 1834-1863)	1834-1863	71 items	5	24
Admittance Book	1860-1890	n.a.	Vol. 68	
Information Forms Upon Admission (Removed from Admittance Book, 1860-1890)	1860-1890	4 items	5	25
Record of Persons Taking Children (Seems to Index 1860-1890 Admittance Book)	n.d.	n.a.	Vol. 69	
Admittance Book (<i>Divided into three sections</i>)	1864-1903	n.a.	Vol. 70	
Admittance Book (<i>Divided into three sections</i>)	1903-1928	n.a.	Vol. 71	
Information Forms Upon Admission (Removed from Admittance Book, 1903-1928)	1903-1928	12 items	5	26

Admittance Book (CLOSED until 1/1/2020)	1929-1945	n.a.	Vol. 72	
Information Forms Upon Admission (Removed from Admittance Book, 1929-1945)	1929, n.d.	5 items	5	27
Admittance Book (CLOSED until 1/1/2030)	1946- 1955	n.a.	Vol. 73	
Information Cards on Children	1911	4 items	5	28
Information Cards on Children	1917-1931 (Bulk 1920), n.d.	13 items	5	29
Papers with Information on Orphans	n.d.	2 items	5	30
Paper with Information on Orphans	Sept 1900	1 item	5	31

Series 3. Orphans' Records b. Indentures

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
Indenture Record	1819-1832	n.a.	Vol. 74	
Indenture Record (Duplicate from Indenture Record Book)	1819-1832	1 item	5	32
Indenture Book	1854-1872	1 item	6	1
Admitting and Binding Records	1817-1829	n.a.	Vol. 75	
Admitting and Binding Records	1825-1856	n.a.	Vol. 76	
Admitting and Binding Records	1827-1850	n.a.	Vol. 77	
Reports of the Binding Committee (Removed from Minutes, 1823-1831)	1831	2 items	6	2
Papers with Indenture Information Removed from Admittance Book, 1834-1863)	1863-1871	4 items	6	3
Indenture Forms	1819-1909	15 items	6	4
Terms for Indenturing Children/Legal Letters	n.d.	7 items	6	5
Book Recording Monies Due Indentured Children	1890-1918	1 item	6	6
Articles (Removed from Book Recording Monies Due Indentured Children)	n.d.	4 items	6	7
Legal Letter on Indenture	Feb 1920	1 item	6	8

Series 3. Orphans' Records c. Correspondence

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
Letters Regarding Orphans	1815-1839	21 items	6	9
Letters Regarding Orphans	1878, 1920, n.d.	3 items	6	10
Letters Regarding Orphans	1923, n.d.	3 items	6	11
Correspondence from Parents Regarding Orphans	1911, 1913	4 items	6	12
Correspondence from Parents Regarding Orphans	1916-1924 (Bulk 1920), n.d.	23 items	6	13
Correspondence Regarding Work Situations for Orphans	1910-1913, n.d.	16 items	6	14
Correspondence Regarding Orphans' Financial Matters	1893, 1902- 1915, n.d.	13 items	6	15
Correspondence Regarding Orphans from Various Sources	1908-1915	10 items	6	16
Correspondence on Orphans from Outside Agencies, Lawyers	1916-1923 (Bulk 1920)	19 items	6	17
Correspondence from Former Orphans	1911-1915	9 items	6	18

Series 3. Orphans' Records d. Miscellaneous

Folder title	Date	Extent	Box/ Vol	Folder
Papers Relating to Martha W. Perry	1885	4 items	6	19
Papers Relating to John Kelly	Feb-Mar 1919	11 items	6	20
Papers Regarding the Crawford Children	May 1919	3 items	6	21
Biography of Christian Sulger (1789-1877) (Copied from Minutes, 1864-1889)	n.d.	1 item	6	22
Papers Relating to Katie Lee White	Feb 1882	2 items	6	23
Sunday School Attendance Book	1837	1 item	6	24
Report on Character Traits	n.d.	1 item	6	25
Children's Petition	1914	1 item	6	26
Orphans Sent to Girard College	1877-1901	1 item	6	27