



THE CAPITAL'S CHILDREN:  
THE WASHINGTON CITY ORPHAN ASYLUM, 1815-1890

by

JAMALIN RAE HARP

Master of Arts, 2012  
Texas Christian University  
Fort Worth, Texas

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
AddRan College of Liberal Arts  
Texas Christian University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2017

Copyright by  
Jamalin Rae Harp  
2017

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The list of people to thank in helping me through this process is too long for the confines of this short space. Thank you to the colleagues, professors, and many others who have read things, given me feedback, and helped me shape this into a better project. Thanks specifically to my advisor Dr. Kenneth Stevens, and the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Gene Smith, who also helped form the basis of this project, Dr. Rebecca Sharpless, and Dr. Alan Gallay. Thanks also to the Lonely Dissertators Club, who slogged through my work when it was at its roughest. Many people also listened to portions of my research at conferences, provided me with encouragement, and pushed me to think about it in different ways. Conferences can create community, and I am blessed to have continued some of the scholarly relationships began there to the benefit of my professional development and the betterment of my work.

Thank you to Robyn Reid of the Texas Christian University library and the archivists and other staff members at the Library of Congress, Princeton University, New York Historical Society, and the University of Virginia. Writing this dissertation was much easier thanks to their skill and helpful attitudes. Thank you also to the Friends of Princeton University Library, TCU's Graduate Studies, TCU's Department of History, and Paul F. Boller, Jr for financially supporting my research. Travel was also made easier by those friends and family who opened their homes to me during research trips and conferences; my deepest thanks to Wayne and Mimi Barnard, Alex and Bonnie Grubbs, Nicole Garcia, and Traci and Ryan Ellison.

My family and friends have been beyond supportive. Thanks particularly to my brother and sister-in-law Clint and Kelsey Harp, my loyal and understanding graduate school roommates Miriam Villanueva and Jessica Webb, the fierce women of my graduate school cohort Meredith May, Amanda Milian, and Miriam Villanueva, my Team Stevens co-member Miles Smith IV, the ladies of BFTT, and any friend who ever asked how this whole thing was going.

My parents John and Necia Harp probably deserve the largest thanks. Not only did they field panicked, desperate phone calls, help me move several times, provide financial support, and generally keep me from falling apart at the seams, but they also provided their professional expertise. My father, who has been a minister for almost forty years, leant the wisdom of a fellow, more-experienced writer. My mother, a licensed professional counselor, granted the insight of someone who works with at-risk children in the twenty-first century, and reminded me that often people stepping into difficult family situations, trying to find the best solution, have an impossible task at hand. They both also listened with the proficiency of the trained professionals that they are. This dissertation is dedicated to them.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Introduction	1
Part I: Children	
Chapter 1: Families	19
Chapter 2: Orphans	49
Chapter 3: Citizens	78
Part II: Reformers	
Chapter 4: Managers and Trustees	125
Chapter 5: Workers	166
Part III: Asylum	
Chapter 6: Institution	201
Chapter 7: City	232
Chapter 8: Nation	262
Conclusion	300
Bibliography	315



## INTRODUCTION

One of the persisting social issues in history is that of the orphan, the child that circumstance, fate, mishap, or parental choice has left to face the world without the guidance, protection, and care of parents. Providing for dependent children often falls to society. How the treatment of these children manifests changes with time and place. The manner in which people within a community or city decide to care for dependent children, and the very need for those social services, reveals much about the fabric of that society. This was the case with the Washington City Orphan Asylum, an orphanage founded in 1815, and the District of Columbia's first institution dedicated to the care of children. The primary focus and argument of this dissertation is that Washington's first orphanage can serve as a lens to analyze Washington society, and to a degree American society, and to use it for that purpose.

The Washington City Orphan Asylum was founded as one prevailing philosophy about social welfare waned and another began to develop. Though a few orphanages existed in the American colonial era, the care of orphaned and poor children who did not have family or friends step into guardianship roles was left largely to the overseers of the poor. They usually tried to place children in indentures though in some cases the children went to live almshouses. A few more orphan asylums were established in the earliest years of nationhood, such as the Charleston Orphan House in 1790 and the Boston Female Asylum in 1800. Orphanages remained rare until a period of social change deemed the "Reform Era" began in the 1830s. Reformers in the years before the Civil War believed in the ability to fix society's problems, attempting to do so through several means, including the creation of asylums. The number of orphanages grew at a greater rate beginning in the 1830s and continued for the rest of the

century.<sup>1</sup> The founders of the Washington City Orphan Asylum, though sharing many of the motivations of the reform movement, established their institution a decade-and-a-half earlier because of the War of 1812 and its impact on the city of Washington.

The study of orphans and orphanages is a relatively young field. It was born out of other social history fields such as the history of women, childhood, and social institutions, which grew during the 1960s and 1970s. Books like Barbara J. Berg's *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism: The Woman and the City, 1800-1860* (1978) pioneered the study of women's actions, including benevolent organizations, in connection to the growth of feminism. Philippe Ariès's publication of *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1960) established childhood as a lens of examination. Works such as David J. Rothman's *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (1971) laid important groundwork in examining the intent of reform institutions and their break with colonial practices. Scholars like Christine Stansell in *City of Women*, also began more and more to publish works that endeavored to see the position and view of the recipients of social welfare, rather than focus on the reformers and people in positions of power.<sup>2</sup>

In 1994 the field of orphan studies, in existence but small, expanded when Representative Newt Gingrich, who was soon to become Speaker of the House, stated that the welfare of American children would perhaps be better served by the revival of orphanages rather than allowing them to continue living in their current situations or their parents to receive welfare

---

<sup>1</sup> John E. Murray, *The Charleston Orphan House: Children's Lives in the First Public Orphanage in America* (The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 3; Susan L. Porter, "The Benevolent Asylum—Image and Reality: The Care and Training of Female Orphans in Boston, 1800-1840." PhD diss., Boston University, 1984 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International), 10; David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 3-4, 206-207.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara J. Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism: The Woman and the City, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 3-7; Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* trans. Robert Baldick, (New York: Vintage Books, 1962); Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*. Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986).

payments. Gingrich's comment incited backlash from several different sources. The ensuing argument directly resulted in at least one scholarly work on the history of orphanages, a collection of essays titled *Home Away from Home: The Forgotten History of Orphanages*, and created a general atmosphere of interest in the dependent childcare practices of the past.<sup>3</sup> Many of the works published on orphanages were written in the mid-1990s or later.

Most scholars who write about the history of American orphan asylums typically focus on a particular orphanage or a couple of institutions within one city or metropolitan area, a strain that this dissertation continues. These works acknowledge the importance of place and community in the development of an institution. One important work that breaks the localism mold is Timothy A. Hasci's *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (1997), which provides a comprehensive view of institutions for dependent children. Many historians focus on institutions founded during a later period, such as the Progressive Era at the turn of the nineteenth century. This concentration is consistent with the advent of orphanages in American society, but also limits options for comparison in the Washington City Orphan Asylum's earliest years. Kenneth Cmeil's *A Home of Another Kind: One Chicago Orphanage and the Tangle of Child Welfare* (1995) looks at the Chicago Nursery and Half-Orphan Asylum, founded in 1860, and its development well into the twentieth century. Nurith Zmora in her *Orphanages Reconsidered: Child Care Institutions in Progressive Era Baltimore* (1994) examines three different institutions—the Samuel Ready School for Orphan Girls, the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, and Dolan's Children's Aid Society—to argue for the differences between

---

<sup>3</sup> Richard B. McKenzie, *Home Away from Home: The Forgotten History of Orphanages* (New York: Encounter Books, 2009), vii; E. Wayne Carp also mentions Gingrich at the beginning of his essay "Orphanages vs. Adoption: The Triumph of Biological Kinship, 1800-1933" in *With Us Always: A History of Private Charity and Public Welfare*, eds. Donald T. Critchlow and Charles H. Parker, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 123; LeRoy Ashby, *Engangered Children: Dependency, Neglect, and Abuse in American History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 176.

asylums as well as complicating the standard negative narrative about orphanages. One work that provides some antebellum overlap is John E. Murray's *The Charleston Orphan House: Children's Lives in the First Public Orphanage in America* (2013), which looks at the first public orphanage in the United States. In addition to examining the orphanage's management and the lives of the people it served, Murray argues that it was important in maintaining the white status quo in Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>4</sup>

Many scholars grapple with the same question that Gingrich brought to the forefront of political and public debate in the early 1990s, and the one introduced at the beginning of this introduction—what is the answer to caring for dependent children? Historians are particularly focused on how people of the past sought to resolve this problem. The answer for the people of Washington in the early nineteenth century was institutionalization followed by placement in homes. The founders, managers, workers, and supporters of the Washington City Orphan Asylum believed in the benefits of a controlled environment where children would receive the necessities of life and an education to become productive citizens rather than drains on or problems for society. They also believed that in most cases the orphanage was ultimately not the best place for children. If children could leave to live with families—their own, adoptive families, or families willing to take them in indenture contracts—then that was for the best.

Most children entering the asylum had living parents. That all orphans had two dead parents is perhaps one of the greatest myths about orphans perpetuated in American lore. An examination of almost any orphanage in western society dating back to at least the early modern age in Europe shows that often the children in homes for orphans were in fact not full orphans

---

<sup>4</sup> Nurith Zmora, *Orphanages Reconsidered: Child Care Institutions in Progressive Era Baltimore* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 1-17; Kenneth Cmiel, *A Home of Another Kind: One Chicago Orphanage and the Tangle of Child Welfare* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1995), 1-8; Murray, *The Charleston Orphan House*, 3-12.

but possessed one or even two living parents.<sup>5</sup> A variety of issues or conditions brought children to the institution. Examining these circumstances grants a small but valuable portal into the lives of these families, as well as their hopes of having their families reunited. I join other scholars in trying to understand the viewpoint of the people bringing children to the institution, and also seek to uncover the children's perspectives.

One group denied participation in the Washington City Orphan Asylum was African Americans. Race was an inherit to the Washington City Orphan Asylum's story because of the institution's lack of racial diversity—the orphanage exclusively admitted white children during the nineteenth century. Though the asylum's leaders did not explicitly say as much in any of their rules, it was an established and uncontested custom. The Board of Managers' leader Elizabeth Blair Lee stated the standard practice when an African-American woman applied to enter a child in 1863.<sup>6</sup> The institution likewise did not hire African-American employees. The concern about interacting with African Americans was even reflected in the indenture process. Samuel Estes, in his letter to the Board of Managers in 1881 asking for a boy, promised the child would “not be allowed to keep company, nor associate with colored people.” In denying African-American children admission, African-American parents or families support, African-American women opportunities for employment, and possibly even restricting the contact the white children had in their indentures, the institution crafted a narrative of racial homogeneity and

---

<sup>5</sup> Ondina E. Gonzalez and Bianca Premo, eds, *Raising an Empire: Children in Early Modern Iberia and Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 41; Nicholas Terpstra, *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance: Orphan Care in Florence and Bologna* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 27; Timothy J. Hacsí, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 106.

<sup>6</sup> Virginia Jeans Laas, ed., *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 256-257.

exclusion, one similar to other contemporary orphan asylums.<sup>7</sup> The greatest ethnic minority within the institution were German children, which reflected the increased German immigration to the United States in the nineteenth century. There also were a few children of Irish immigrants.<sup>8</sup>

One of the important characters in the institution's story was the city Washington. A chapter in this dissertation focuses specifically on the relationship between the orphanage and Washington as a city and another examines its connection to Washington as the nation's capital; many of the other chapters weave the city's story with that of the institution. Washington was born a political city. Following extensive sectional debate over the location of the United States capital, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison brokered a deal that placed the capital between Maryland and Virginia, with land coming from the two states. Southerners Madison and Jefferson achieved their desired location for the capital, and northerner Hamilton succeeded in having the federal government assume state debts, a compromise first suggested by Richard Bland Lee, a congressman from Virginia.<sup>9</sup> Congress agreed in July 1790, with the passage of the Residence Act, that an area no larger than ten miles would become the district housing the federal government.<sup>10</sup> Congress gave President George Washington the right to choose the specific location of the city, as long as it was on the Potomac River within a designated area. In 1791, the commissioners Washington appointed named the selected ten-mile area the "District of Columbia" and the capital city after the president. The District of Columbia

---

<sup>7</sup> Timothy A. Hacsí, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 120-2.

<sup>8</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 679-681.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 141-142.

<sup>10</sup> The ten-miles designation was consistent with Article One, Section Eight of the U.S. Constitution.

also included Washington's more settled neighbors, Georgetown and Alexandria.<sup>11</sup> During the allotted ten years before the seat of government had to relocate from its temporary home in Philadelphia, builders began working on creating a capital city.<sup>12</sup>

In the creation of the nation's capital, Congress also stipulated, in keeping with the United States Constitution, that the capital would not be under the jurisdiction of any state. James Madison argued the necessity of having an independent capital in *Federalist* Number 43, stating that having the federal government rely on a state would foster resentment and inequality and would hinder the government in fulfilling its role. Thus, the newly formed District of Columbia was separate from any state. During the years between Washington's founding and its establishment as the seat of government, Maryland and Virginia's governments maintained their governance. By the time the Washington City Orphan Asylum was founded, Washington was a city within a district whose local rule was closely tied to the federal government, which would greatly affect the institution's efforts to receive governmental support.<sup>13</sup>

The District of Columbia grew from a population of 14,000 people in 1800 to just over 130,000 in 1870. Within that population, Washington consisted of 3,000 in 1800 and 109,000 in 1870. Compared to other United States cities—such as New York City, which numbered 814,000 in 1860—Washington was small.<sup>14</sup> Though not a colossus like the rapidly growing New York, Washington experienced some of the plights of urban areas, such as epidemics, which played a

---

<sup>11</sup> Alexandria voted for retrocession in 1846, and left the District of Columbia and rejoined Virginia; Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878* (Princeton University Press, 1962), 173-174.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-14, 174; *An Act for Establishing the Temporary and Permanent Seat of the Government of the United States*, 1 Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., July 16, 1790.

<sup>14</sup> Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 736.

part in shaping the Washington City Orphan Asylum. Washington also differed from other large cities in that it developed around the federal government. As the nation's capital, Washington hosted politicians and their families, developing a community in which the city's social and political worlds entwined, as historians such as Catherine Allgor and Rachel Shelden examine in their works.<sup>15</sup> Washington politicians and their families were a deep part of the orphanage's story from its origins, and remained so well into the twentieth century.

The consideration of Washington and its place in the story in the Washington City Orphan Asylum is part of a holistic approach to studying the institution. This dissertation is constructed to examine the orphanage's many actors, influences, and characteristics, organized into three parts consisting of two or three chapters each. The first part, "Children" focuses on the people the asylum intended to help. The managers' main focus was the District of Columbia's children, though in helping them they often ended up aiding families too. The three chapters in this part follow the children's journey through the institution—their admission, residence, and lives after departure. Chapter One, "Families," explores the conditions of the children's admissions, which most often included the children's families as well, since so many children had living parents. The title "Families" serves a dual purpose, as the chapter broadens the scope beyond the children to include their families, but also reflects a shift in many children's lives, as they went from being members of a family to residents of an institution. Even if the transition did not wholly sever biological ties, it put a temporary strain on kinship. Some families were able to reunite, removing their children from the institution. These reunions show the factors that could repair, or seemingly repair, a family's circumstances. Also important in the admissions' process were the managers who made the admission decisions, often acting on ideas about whom merited

---

<sup>15</sup> Rachel Shelden. *Washington Brotherhood: Politics, Social Life, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 1-2; Catherine Allgor. *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 1-3.

help and what would logistically work within the institution, as well as from information provided by the Washington community.

Chapter Two, “Orphans,” looks at the children’s period in the institution. Life within the asylum was according to the managers’ will, and they crafted the children’s education, their work, and other aspects of their daily lives with the intention of forming useful members of society. They also controlled the children’s interactions with their parents and other family members, doing so in large part to maintain their authority over the children. At times, the children did not behave according to the managers’ wishes, perhaps using their actions as a means to exert their power in a setting in which they had little. Also affecting the children’s lives in the institution was the presence of illnesses that could result in death.

Chapter Three, “Citizens,” examines the children’s departures from the institution. The title “Citizens” is slightly problematic, particularly in two ways: first, a large portion of the chapter covers a period when the children were still under age and second, some of them would never enjoy full citizenship rights like voting. I kept it as my title because though the children were not of age in their placements, they were fulfilling what the managers envisioned as the second step in creating good citizens and because the managers crafted much of their language around citizenship, even though they, like the girls in their asylum, did not have full citizenship rights. The first part of this chapter focuses most extensively on this first consideration, the children’s placements in indentures or adoptions. The managers placed children in positions where they would learn a future skill, be treated as a member of the family, or experience a combination of the two. All the participating parties had specific expectations for the placement. At times the indentures or adoptions would end prematurely due to reasons including abuse. Placements could also wreak havoc on a child’s biological family, as they were further separated from not only parents but siblings. The chapter additionally explores the outcomes of some of the

children after the institution and their placements, including their lingering connections to the asylum.

Part Two, “Reformers,” looks at the people who ran the institution. Chapter Four, “Managers and Trustees” examines the women on the Board of Managers and the men on the Board of Trustees. The institution was founded and managed by women, particularly by middle- and upper-class women, many of whom were connected to local and national politics. At a time when women faced restricted civic and economic participation, the asylum was a place for them to find fulfillment through benevolence. The women drew from their communities to facilitate the admissions and placement of children, a few of them even taking children into their own homes. For the institution’s financial business, they relied on the male Board of Trustees, many members of whom were related to the Board of Managers. The managers occasionally faced conflict within their own board and with the Board of Trustees, disagreements that evince the gendered tensions of the nineteenth century. The managers and trustees also formed relationships with the institution’s children that exhibited varying levels of closeness. Chapter Five, “Workers” examines the people the managers and trustees hired to work at the asylum, particularly its matrons and teachers. The asylum’s employees formed complicated relationships with the managers and trustees, ones in which they fought, collaborated, and formed true friendships. At times the workers brought the asylum’s internal problems to a public forum, turning to the city of Washington as an audience to hear their injustices, real or imagined. Matrons and teachers enjoyed a certain level of agency in their work, but always under the authority of the managers, who prioritized the institution over their individual workers, just as they did with children. The workers likewise had complex relationships with the institution’s children, some of whom were their own biological children, an allowance that complicated the institution’s stance on parents interacting with children.

Part Three, “Asylum,” looks at the institution more contextually, each chapter widening the focus to show the varying ways the orphanage interacted with its surroundings. Chapter Six, “Institution” examines two meanings of the word—the physical institution and the institution of religion—and their influence on the people of the asylum. The former explores the story of the orphanage’s buildings. The manner in which those running the orphanage constructed its space spoke to how they ordered their world. The buildings’ problems created financial troubles and impacted its residents in tangible ways including their health. As a private institution, the managers and trustees sought financial resources to ensure the asylum’s survival, often facing difficulties in that mission. The chapter also examines the power of religion, as Protestant Christianity affected several aspects of the asylum’s management and led to a complicated relationship with Catholic families and institutions.

Chapter Seven, “City,” examines the orphanage’s relationship with the city of Washington. The founding and development of the institution were tied to conditions that shaped and affected Washington, such as the War of 1812 and the cholera epidemic of 1832. Those managing the institution turned to the people and local government of the District of Columbia as a system of support, using language about citizenship to create a narrative of symbiotic responsibility between the asylum and the city. The orphanage also worked with other institutions and organizations within the city, such as other area orphanages, a network meant to ensure the care of the city’s dependent population and prevent their delinquency. Chapter Eight, “Nation,” examines the asylum’s place within the nation’s capital. As the first home for dependent children established in the District of Columbia, the Washington City Orphan Asylum paved a unique trail. The managers appealed to the national government for money, an act that prompted debates within the federal government as to the suitability of helping a private institution. The people who ran the institution formed political connections which they used not

only to help the orphanage financially but also the indenture process. They used the orphanage's ties to the executive branch of government, particularly to Dolley Madison, as a marketing tool. Most of the time the institution transcended political lines, but at particularly tense points, such as the Civil War, the nation's problems became the orphanage's.

The two main collections for this project were the institution's collection at the Library of Congress and the Blair and Lee Family Papers at Princeton University.<sup>16</sup> The asylum's main collection includes bound record books of admissions, relinquishments, indentures, and adoptions as well as the minutes from managers' meetings, correspondence, and financial records.<sup>17</sup> The records at Princeton focus on Elizabeth Blair Lee and Blair Lee, a mother and son pair whose combined involvement with the institution spanned the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. They both served in leadership roles during most of their tenures and therefore accrued some of the asylum documents, but also collected valuable correspondence with fellow managers and trustees, the asylum's employees, and the orphanage's children. Given the period of their service, their documents strengthen the available information during and after the 1850s. Unfortunately, leaders of the asylum's earliest years either do not have family collections or their family collections contain few asylum documents.<sup>18</sup>

The record keeping of the Washington City Orphan Asylum was problematic at times. As with many archival collections, the institution's records suffered from inconsistencies in record

---

<sup>16</sup> The collection at the Library of Congress is titled "Hillcrest Children's Center," the current name of institution.

<sup>17</sup> In order to piece together the fragments of individual children's stories as well as to have an analytical tool for determining demographic trends, I created a database from the institution's records. This was done primarily through the minutes from the managers' meetings, the admissions' records, the indenture and adoption forms, and the relinquishment forms.

<sup>18</sup> One example of a family collection that does not have many documents pertaining to the asylum is the Van Ness-Philip Papers at New York Historical Society. Marcia Burnes Van Ness helped found the asylum and was a crucial part of its management until 1832. Her husband John Van Ness also served as one of the first Board of Trustee members; Van Ness-Philip Family Papers, MS 652, The New-York Historical Society.

keeping, the ravages of time, and poor treatment of historical documents. Generally the records improved as the century progressed, especially in terms of the managers' records of children entering the institution and the details provided in the minutes of their meetings. The admissions records suffered particularly during the 1850s, when the managers briefly attempted a different style of record keeping that proved more complicated to decipher. At times children appear in the managers' minutes that are missing in the admissions records. In some of these cases, it is possible the managers approved the application, but the families ended up not bringing the child or children. In many more instances, the children are simply not in the admissions records, though other records verify their residence in the orphanage. A few pages in books have been torn. In one book, which contains letters recommending people for indentures and adoptions, some likely well-intentioned but devastatingly misguided person glued letters to the book's pages as well as layered the letters on top of each other, obscuring the full content of several letters.<sup>19</sup> Despite these difficulties, the collection remains intact as well as expansive enough to provide a rich well of information. I have maintained the grammar, spelling, and emphasis used in the letters that I have quoted.

It is the nature of most records, but perhaps particularly of an institution like the Washington City Orphan Asylum, that certain voices are heard and others are underrepresented. The inclusion of children and workers' correspondence in the collections at the Library of Congress and Princeton helps to counteract this imbalance to a degree, as do other records, but most of the records are written from the perspective of the managers and at times the trustees. I have done my best to bear in mind this inherit bias in the sources.

---

<sup>19</sup> I imagine the person who glued down these letters was not a staff member at the Library of Congress but rather a person associated with the asylum before the records were donated; the archivist I consulted about the book shared my deep distress at the poor treatment of the historical documents.

External forces and a top-down approach determined this dissertation's end point, 1890, far more than I had hoped they would. Several different dates vied for the termination point. One option was 1897, and it was the working end date for much of this project. Following 1897, there is a period for which the admissions records are missing from the Library of Congress collection, a tragedy that presented itself as a suitable break point, and one that centered on the children, which was even better. Then in working on the "Reformers" chapters, particularly in looking at the mentality of the managers and the workers, it became clear that I could not properly contextualize their actions in a period considered by historians to be the "Progressive Era," typically beginning in the 1890s, without looking at their decisions and statements for the *whole* era, which extends to the 1920s.<sup>20</sup> For seven years of records, from 1890 to 1897, I found myself repeatedly asking, "Does this signal a break from the managers' previous mentality in a way that reflects broader societal changes? What does this say about the institution's place within the Progressive Era? Does it affirm Progressive Era historiography or contradict it?" The answers to these questions fell flat without the broader context. There were also some documents pertaining to the asylum from the 1890s, particularly a few custody battles and a criticism of the institution published within a United States congressional report, that supported my decision to end the study before a period of large social reform changes. My hope and plan is to extend the examination of the institution forward chronologically into the twentieth century for an eventual book. In some places I extend beyond 1890; particularly, I follow the lives of many of the institution's children who were admitted before 1890 into their placements and even adulthood. I also explore the historical memory of the institution's nineteenth century, which extends in some cases into the twentieth century.

---

<sup>20</sup> Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 195, 351-352.

Before beginning an in-depth look at any orphanage, an examination of terms is necessary, as well as some explanation on language choices. The use of the word “orphan” is complicated. The word had different meanings when used in reference to individual children and the collective whole. Institutions typically categorized each child as either a “full orphan” with no living parents or a “half-orphan” with one surviving parent. They also found themselves accepting “non-orphans”—children with two living parents. Society and asylums did not treat all orphans with the same level of care and concern in terms of admissions. Often the asylum’s records applied specificity to the word “orphan” when referring to individual children, reserving it for children who were full orphans. In referring to the children collectively, however, they used the word “orphan” regardless of whether the term applied to all the children. They likely did so for the sake of simplicity, but also because that was their primary mission, to care for truly orphaned children. It was possibly a marketing strategy as well to invoke the image of a parentless child rather than drift too far into the gray areas of poverty, dependency, illness, and vice. I reserve my use of the word “orphan” for talking about children who had no living parents, and generally use “children” or “residents” to refer to them collectively.<sup>21</sup> To talk about the concept of being a full orphan I employ the term “orphanhood.” Much like the terms “childhood” and “parenthood,” the word “orphanhood” invokes a status. I use it largely to discuss the difference between full orphans and children with one or two living parents, particularly the managers’ conceptualization of need in relation to a child’s orphanhood.

Another important language choice I have made is in using the term “asylum.” A majority of the homes for orphans that began in the early nineteenth century used the term “asylum” in their title (Washington City Orphan Asylum, Boston Female Asylum, Cincinnati

---

<sup>21</sup> The use of the term “orphan” becomes even more problematic as society often considered children “orphans” if their father was dead, even if their mother was still alive, because they had lost the parent most capable of caring for them financially. The Washington City Orphan Asylum did not typically refer to half-orphans whose fathers had died as orphan, so I have not either.

Orphan Asylum, etc.).<sup>22</sup> Several of these homes originated in the nineteenth-century reform movement. Their usage of the word embraced its meaning of providing a haven for the needy. “Asylum” did not carry the same negative connotation commonly used in the twenty-first century. People within the Washington City Orphan Asylum began questioning it as a title word at the end of the nineteenth century, wishing for something warmer like “home.” I choose to use the word “asylum” because the word is in the institution’s name and it was the term used by the people associated with it. I use it interchangeably with other words, specifically “institution” and “orphanage.” I refrain from using the term “home,” because it comes with kinder connotations. While some children may have felt the institution to be a home, this may not have been the norm, and I certainly am not ready to assert that it was.

One place where I deviate in language from the original sources is the use of the word “inmate.” I do this mostly to avoid the negative connotations connected to the word, especially as they would taint the perception of the children, the people I am endeavoring to understand better. I made this language choice also because historians of orphanages such as Timothy Hacsí have argued the different intentions behind orphan asylums versus the other asylums of the reform era.<sup>23</sup> I also avoid the use of the word “adolescence” in referring to the teenage years of the asylum’s children. The concept of “adolescence” as a special time of development emerged in the twentieth century, and as such would be a foreign idea to the people in this study. I refrain

---

<sup>22</sup> Hacsí, *Second Home*, 151.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59: Hacsí particularly takes umbrage with David Rothman’s characterization of orphanages, arguing instead that people founding orphanages did not see their wards as problems to be fixed but characters to be molded.

from using the word so as to maintain the nineteenth century mentality in the treatment of children's ages.<sup>24</sup>

The asylum this dissertation examines changed names with some frequency during its history. The institution's founders first named it the Female Orphan Asylum of Washington. The orphanage's name officially changed to the Washington City Orphan Asylum in 1828 with an act of incorporation by Congress. The change of name was fitting, as the asylum would soon start accepting boys as well as girls, and the title Female Orphan Asylum of Washington no longer applied. The institution bore the name Washington City Orphan Asylum until the early twentieth century, when it changed unofficially to Hillcrest Children's Village in 1927 and to Hillcrest Children's Center in 1953.<sup>25</sup> The people of Washington also used the name Protestant Orphan Asylum in reference to the orphanage. Rather than trying to use the different names of the institution at its different points in the nineteenth century, especially as they all used the term "asylum," for the sake of clarity and consistency I solely use "Washington City Orphan Asylum," unless citing a direct quote. The institution also changed terms they used to refer to the women leading the asylum. The managers of the asylum were originally called "trustees." With the creation of the male Board of Trustees in 1828, the women became "managers." I solely refer to the women on the board as "managers," unless talking about a specific officer position, and do not ever use the term "trustee" to refer to them.

The Washington City Orphan Asylum grew from housing approximately ten children in its first year to over a hundred at the end of the century. Its story contains triumph and heartbreak, joy and sorrow. The hundreds of children that entered its doors endured hardships,

---

<sup>24</sup> Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Sullivan, "Hillcrest Children's Center: A Register of its Records in the Library of Congress," Finding Aid, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C., 2009), ii.

facing illness and loss, but several of them saw happiness as well. In telling the orphanage's story, we can see the circumstances that shaped its history as well as the lives of its children.

## **PART I: CHILDREN**

### **CHAPTER ONE: FAMILIES**

#### **Introduction**

The majority of the children living in the Washington City Orphan Asylum were not true orphans.<sup>1</sup> Approximately ten percent of the children living in the institution throughout the nineteenth century did not have living parents; the remaining ninety percent had one or even two parents. This admittance record contrasted with the core vision for the institution, to help fully orphaned children.<sup>2</sup> The managers far more often found themselves fulfilling the condition in their constitution that allowed them to accept children with living parents if the asylum had the resources and if there were insufficient full orphans for admission. In allowing half and non-orphans to enter the institution in such large numbers so early in their history, they predated many other orphan asylums in making that shift.<sup>3</sup> It also meant that the children that entered the institution frequently came from familial circumstances filled, in addition to death, with illness, poverty, alcoholism, and abandonment. In becoming a child of the Washington City Orphan Asylum, the asylum's residents often left family members outside the institution walls, family that often wished to be reunited with their children in the future, a desire sometimes realized.

Frequently it was a parent who brought their child or children to the institution, but on occasion it was someone else such as an aunt or a friend or a reverend, for orphans and non-orphans or half-orphans alike. This was the fruit of an involved community within the District of Columbia, as friends, neighbors, ministers, and other interested parties stepped in to fulfill some

---

<sup>1</sup> Timothy J. Hasci, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 106.

<sup>2</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> Hasci, *Second Home*, 113-114.

role in the care of the city's dependent children. In the application process there were primarily two parties, the applicants and the managers. Each possessed their own motivations and agendas. The managers might deny an application for admission based on their perception of the family's capability to care for the child as well as factors such as the child's age. Though the children found ways to make their opinions heard once in the institution and when preparing to leave it, their voices are mostly silent in the historical record as far as their admission.

### **Familial Relationships and Circumstances**

Records do not always clearly indicate the relationship of the person admitting a child into the institution; the information for approximately half of the children is missing. From the existing material, as well as the rate of full-orphans, half-orphans, and non-orphans in the orphanage, certain trends are evident. When a family member entered a child into the institution, it was most commonly the child's mother. At least four hundred of the asylum's approximately fifteen hundred children were placed in the institution by their mother. Mothers accounted for over half the family members that entered children. Fathers admitted their children most frequently after that, the records recording over a hundred children entered by their fathers.

Parents primarily admitted their children to the institution because they were unable or unwilling to care for them. The former was likely much more common than the latter. Poverty, sickness, death, and desertion played roles in many of these cases. A lengthy illness could render a parent unable to either care for or provide for their children. The loss of one of the parents through death or abandonment could spell financial trouble and hardship for the rest of the family, particularly when it was the father who died or left. Given the difficulty for many women to earn a sustainable livelihood for themselves and their children in the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that mothers admitted their children in disproportionate numbers compared to

fathers.<sup>4</sup> For some families, like the Evans, hardship after hardship compounded into a situation that brought them to the asylum. John Evans admitted his nine-year-old daughter Belle Evans to the asylum in July 1882. Mrs. Evans was in an insane asylum, rendering the Evans's home a single-parent household. John Evans had to pay for Mrs. Evans's stay in the institution, an expense that he found difficult on the "scanty living" he made as a painter. It also meant he did not have enough money to care for his child. Belle Evans' admission to the institution stemmed from the combination of poverty, sickness, and prior familial separation.<sup>5</sup>

At times, an admission came from an abusive situation. In at least one case, the mother had experienced violence that affected her ability to care for her children. Mrs. Hopkins admitted her children, Annie and John, in November 1867. Hopkins' husband left his family, but before doing so he had abused her so severely that she was unable to work or provide for her children. More frequently it was the child that was abused, and the parent or friends of the family felt the need to separate them from an abusive family member, often a stepparent. The board accepted a four-year-old German child named Katrina Gunch in March 1856, noting in the minutes from their meeting the haste with which they admitted the child due to a bad relationship with her stepfather. The case was one of such urgency and need that the asylum had the child legally bound to the president of the institution's Board of Trustees, Benjamin Ogle Tayloe, so she would "be free from the power of [her] stepfather." They likely did as much because there were contests to the child's remaining in the orphanage, and the managers wanted to ensure that there could be no question as to her place in the asylum. Eight-year-old Annie Weber's mother Louisa

---

<sup>4</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage Earning Women in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1982), 22, 30, 37, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Containers 2, 36, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

Kinney likewise asked the board to take her child in 1884, as her new husband was “very unkind” to her daughter, to which the managers agreed.<sup>6</sup>

Many of the parents in families that admitted children were not employed for reasons such as illness or alcoholism, but several had jobs. The asylum did not keep clear records on all the parents’ occupations, but they do list some, for both living and deceased parents. Some were the children of craftsmen, such as Elizabeth and George Read whose father was a bookbinder and Mary Jane, Lizzie, Maggie, and Sally McKenney whose father was a mason; both of these families came to the institution in 1858. Others had parents who were unskilled laborers, such as Elizabeth Gardner, admitted in 1816, whose father Peter Gardner was a boatman and Mary Isabel Carr, admitted in 1862, whose father drove a team of livestock.<sup>7</sup> Several children, especially during the Civil War and the decades following, had fathers that were or had been soldiers or sailors. These fathers were varying levels of engaged in their children’s lives at the time of admittance—some were deceased, some had abandoned their families, and some were the ones who placed their children in the orphanage.<sup>8</sup>

Some children came from families where the fathers’ occupations denoted some level of education; these families especially might have extenuating circumstances that brought them to the asylum. Professor Bennet asked to admit his two children Jeannie and Harry in 1877. Bennet taught music, but had been unable to obtain a position. Moreover, his wife had recently died and he had been robbed while staying at a boarding house, the perpetrators taking his money and a diamond ring belonging to his late wife. The father of Lillie, Edward, and Ida Bailey admitted his three children in 1881. Bailey was a lawyer, and being sick wished to place his children there

---

<sup>6</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>7</sup> The manager’s referred to him as “waterman.” I consulted the Oxford English Dictionary for a definition.

<sup>8</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

temporarily. No record indicates that he ever removed his children, though, and Lillie Bailey appears in asylum correspondence as late as 1886.<sup>9</sup>

Some parents' occupations reflected the District of Columbia's economy. The District did not develop an industrial sector to the extent that other cities did during a time of growing industrialization. Manufacturing was an economic sector that might have employed the class of people who generally admitted children to the institution. Instead the capital's economy was based largely on the federal government, banking, the print industry, and the construction of new buildings.<sup>10</sup> Laura V. Jordan, a widow who admitted her daughters Ima and Eugene in December 1865, was employed at the Treasury Department. Though she had a job, it did not pay enough for her to support her children. She was also in poor health. The managers declined to accept Kate Reapsomer's child in 1866, even though she was a widow, as she had a good job at the General Printing Press. Rosetta, George, Charles, and Ernest Thompson's father George Thompson worked as a janitor at Armory Hall when he admitted them in 1882. Alice Lavinia Caywood entered the institution in 1886, shortly after her father, who had been a guide at the Capitol, died.<sup>11</sup>

Some families entered their children with the promise they would provide money for their support, either because the managers required it as a condition of admission or because the family volunteered to pay. The number of such cases were few, approximately thirty-five families from 1815 to 1890. The managers required payment in the 1865 case of Lucy and Christine Johnson, stating that their widower father was "to pay five dollars per month the Ladies

---

<sup>9</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; J. B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee, May 3, 1886; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228, Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>10</sup> Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878* (Princeton University Press, 1962), 35-37, 157, 191-192, 263-264, 314-315, 331, 356.

<sup>11</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

believing it best that the Father should have some responsibility to remind him of his helpless little ones.” In this situation, at least, they connected the payment to duty, thinking the father might forget his children, and his obligation, if he was entirely separated from them. In other instances, the family expressed a desire to contribute to their child’s care. When Charles Rempp brought his four-year-old daughter Carrie in 1878 he agreed to pay, the managers recording “As Mr. Rempp wished to do something for his child it was agreed that he should be required to pay \$25 per year to be invested for her benefit.” In Rempp’s case, it appears that the managers had no idea of requiring him to send money and that the idea originated with him instead.<sup>12</sup>

The infrequency of the cases suggests that the managers did not believe that it was something all parents who admitted children should do, even though the orphanage frequently needed the funds. It seems also that the managers did not threaten to remove a child from the institution if the parents failed to contribute the agreed upon amount. From either the managers’ or the parents’ point of view, contributing money to the asylum and therefore their child’s care was a way to keep families connected. When Mr. Linell admitted his daughters Ellen and Annie in 1890 he pledged not only to pay \$10 a month for their support, but also gave his life insurance policy on their behalf as well as entrusted the managers with some linen that had belonged to his wife which he wished his daughters to have. For some families, it was only after admitting children that they were able to earn money to support their family; having their child housed at the institution allowed them to seek employment with the asylum serving as childcare. George Donaldson’s mother asked them to receive her son in 1861 so that she could go to work. She agreed to pay \$5 a month for his support.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>13</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

Even for families that did not pay, admitting children to the institution could be the answer to a childcare problem—they could not otherwise provide their children with safety and supervision. Without other options for childcare, parents faced the possibility of leaving their young children at home alone while they went to work to earn money for the family’s sustenance. This might more so have been the case for fathers than for mothers. James Wallace admitted his sons James and Thomas in 1863, promising to pay \$6 a month. He was a member of “Scott’s 900,” a cavalry regiment in the Union army. His circumstances likely did not allow him to take his children with him in the course of the war, especially if their mother was not with them; housing them in the institution was a suitable alternative. Caroline Lowe asked to admit her daughter Katie in 1876. Lowe worked as a housekeeper where she could not keep her daughter “as there [were] four children already in the house, and they treat[ed] her little girl very badly.” W.A. Barkley, who worked for Libbey & Millett Lumber when they were able to give him employment, applied to admit his children Frank, Annie, and Willie in 1880, the managers noting, “his wife had deserted her family, and he had no one to take care of the little ones.” This was not the case for all families—many did not have employment and wished to remove their children once they secured employment or saved enough money—but for some families the institution served as childcare.<sup>14</sup>

These cases align with what Jessie B. Ramey shows on a larger scale in her book *Child Care in Black and White: Working Parents and the History of Orphanages*. Ramey examines two Progressive era orphanages in Pittsburgh, the United Presbyterian Orphan’s Home and the Home for Colored Children, finding that parents consistently paid for their children’s board in the institutions, so much so that “parents’ board fees . . . represented a significant portion of

---

<sup>14</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Thomas West Smith, *The Story of a Cavalry Regiment: “Scott’s 900” Eleventh New York Cavalry, from the St. Lawrence River to the Gulf of Mexico, 1861-1865* (Published by the Veteran Association of the Regiment).

orphanage revenue streams.” Parents admitting children to these institutions often viewed them as a source of childcare, and frequently negotiated with the managers as to the terms of admission.<sup>15</sup> In the 1860 case of Martha and Laura Cadman, the Washington City Orphan Asylum managers noted that their father wished to “board the children at the Asylum,” language that reads more like temporary childcare rather than relinquishment, and indeed, the father removed his children three months later. This shows that even earlier in the century than Ramey’s study, some families approached placing their children in institutions differently, and that managers believed partially in parents contributing to their children’s care.<sup>16</sup>

At times, in cases of both full orphans and children with living parents, family members besides parents admitted children to the institution. Barbara Ellender was entered by her grandmother in 1844. Mary E. Dobbins entered her niece Minnie Marshall in 1884; the girl’s father was living but the aunt had guardianship, due to the child’s mistreatment from her stepmother. Josephine Fugett was admitted by her uncle Reverend Fugett in 1853. When her father removed her in 1857, he informed the board “that circumstances beyond his control induced him to make the arrangement.” Mary B. Gill entered her two stepsons, James “Harry” Henry Gill and George Richard Gill in 1887. The managers do not state that they were orphans, but implied as much when they recorded “their Father was an Englishman and they have no relatives in this country.” Gill was not the only person to admit stepchildren following the death of their biological parent. Sarah Jordan requested the entrance of her two sisters, Jennie and Gertrude, in 1882. The girls’ father had abandoned them and reportedly then died, after which their mother left them. They had lived for a while with another sister who was married, but her new residence would not permit her to have the two children. The managers characterized Sarah

---

<sup>15</sup> Jessie B. Ramey, *Child Care in Black and White: Working Parents and the History of Orphanages*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 68-72.

<sup>16</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

Jordan as a “young girl” herself, and agreed to take her siblings. These cases show that family might take responsibility for children, at least to a certain extent, when the parents were unable to or did not; and, just as with parents, they might find they were unable or unwilling to fully shoulder that obligation.<sup>17</sup>

In two cases, the child requested the managers to admit them. In both instances, the children had few options. In 1877, twelve-year-old Maggie Dattler made an application for the orphanage to admit her. Her father was preparing to ask to live in the Soldier’s Home, suffering from debilitating rheumatism. As her mother was dead, “she would be houseless and without care.” After the managers looked into her case, they agreed. Nine-year-old Robert Ogden, through his brother, asked the asylum in 1882 to accept him. His mother was in the hospital, his father was dead, and his brother was frequently at sea, so he, like Dattler, had no one to care for him. The managers agreed to take him, but he did not come to the institution.<sup>18</sup>

### **Community in the Admissions Process**

Several applications for children to enter the institution involved people from the District of Columbia who were not related to the families entering children. As far as records indicate, these cases, though not wholly uncommon, were in the minority of the applications made to the institution. Those that do exist indicate a level of community involvement in the care of dependent children that later carried into the children’s lives in the institution and their placements once leaving. People with various positions in the District of Columbia community played different roles in the admissions process. Sometimes community members made applications with little to no family involvement. If the parents were living, the managers might

---

<sup>17</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>18</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

require the father or mother to sign a relinquishment. Other times non-relations worked in conjunction with the families, often appearing at the institution together. They also provided references for families admitting children when they were not the main applicants. In aiding a family's application, either as a reference or as the primary applicant, these community members likely bolstered the merit of the request in the managers' view. The board often relied on references to determine the virtue of a case.

The managers did not always reveal the nature of the relationship between the people bringing the children to the institution and the child or the child's family. It was likely a friend. John Forest, for instance, was admitted in 1876 through the request of Violet Williams. Forest's mother, originally from Ireland, had been incapacitated on her trip across the Atlantic Ocean and been admitted to the insane asylum. Likewise Julia Golden brought her neighbor and friend, Mrs. Vessey to admit her children Lenetta and Mary in 1882. Golden had brought her nieces and nephew, Benjamin, Fanny, and Lucinda Streeks in 1876, and thus was already familiar with the board. Dr. J.H. Barnes had been the longtime doctor for the Lyons family, whose children he recommended in 1876. Other people may not have known the families on such a personal level, but knew them well enough to request their admittance. Emma and Mary Mills, whose mother was dead and father not in condition to care for them, entered the institution in 1879 at the request of three women from Capitol Hill, members of a church that had been supporting the Mills family for nine months.<sup>19</sup>

In some cases, friends had cared for the children when family could not. Mrs. Portello housed Henry Perry temporarily in 1858 until he entered the institution; his mother was dead, his father had abandoned him, and his stepmother had abused him before leaving, too. Prior to

---

<sup>19</sup> Containers 2, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

Harry, William, and Francis Martin's widower father admitting them to the institution in 1880 they had stayed with "kind neighbors." The family knew Reverend Meador well, and he provided the managers with a detailed account of their situation.<sup>20</sup>

As with the Martins, local reverends were frequently involved in the admissions process, making applications or providing references. Reverend Miller, a minister at a Baptist church, requested the managers to take Mary, James, and John Griffin in 1858. Their mother was dead and their father severely ill. Mrs. Atkins used Reverend Shudd from Christ Church, Navy Yard as a reference in 1869 in her application to admit her sons, Henry and William. Reverend Reitz of the German Lutheran Church came in March 1876 to ask the managers to take children from two separate families, the Senfs and the Lembergers. After the managers accepted both, Louis Senf signed the relinquishment of his children along with Reitz. Two years later, Reitz returned to ask for the admission of the Engel children. In 1881, Mr. Smith brought Casper Norcomb, using as his reference Reverend Charles Mead, who was assistant minister at the Epiphany Church. In 1889, Reverend Gilbert F. Williams from Christ Church, Navy Yard brought Willie Shull, whose father had left him and his mother. Reverend Shields brought Kate, Alice, and Norah Nalley in 1870. Their late mother was a member of his congregation, and their father, according to Shields, was an alcoholic. The managers did not always explicitly state the relationship between the ministers and the community members they represented to the asylum, but it is likely that these people, like in the case of the Nalleys and Shields, attended their church. Reverend Reitz's wife was possibly the guardian of the Lemberger children when they were admitted in 1876. It is also possible that the ministers came to know of these cases through their charitable works.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.; *Christ Church, Washington Parish: A Brief History*, <http://washingtonparish.org/wp->

## Relinquishments, Investigations, and Misrepresentations

The managers required upon admission to the institution that a family formally relinquish their child so that the orphanage had legal control over the children—as to when they would leave the institution and the nature of their interactions with the outside world. If a family member could not sign a relinquishment form, the managers had other members of the community perform this task, such as Justices of the Peace or police officers, especially towards the end of the century. At times they failed to secure a relinquishment for one reason or another, a failure that could cause future problems as family members might try to challenge their authority.<sup>22</sup>

A few people admitted their children under conditions that the managers acknowledged as temporary. This went against the normal terms of admissions in regards to relinquishments. Several of these parents ended up removing their children from the institution. Dora Landvoigt, whose husband was in prison, entered her son Edward into the institution in December 1838 with the condition “until such time as I may be able to reclaim him.” She removed him in May 1839. Mary Edwards asked the board to take her children Edward and Claudine in July 1866, her husband being disabled and incapable of providing for them. She removed the children who, “were placed . . . only temporarily,” the next month, the managers recording that the matron Mary Wannall informed them of the children’s departure. Mr. Ballman entered his daughters Virginia and Augusta in November 1866 “until he [was] able to support them.” The mother of Jacob Halbert, who was in “delicate health,” admitted him temporarily in December 1868. Leonora Marshal, a widow, asked to admit her daughter Emily Daisy Marshal in July 1877,

---

[content/uploads/2013/09/Christ-Church-History-2015-Final2.pdf](#), 18.

<sup>22</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

“until she could secure work and be enabled to support her.” Once remarried, Marshal’s mother, now Mrs. Baker, removed her in May 1878.<sup>23</sup>

Occasionally, the managers investigated an admission application before they decided to accept or decline. The reasoning behind looking into most cases likely mirrored their stated cause for investigating Lydia Beaton’s request to admit her two children John and Susan in 1866—the managers wanted to see if her summary of her situation “proved a correct one.” Typically the board appointed one or two managers for the task of verifying the details of the case. Often they entrusted those selected with making a decision based on their own judgments after looking at the particulars more closely. The reason the managers looked into some cases and not others is unclear. Some of the applications they decided to look into came with references, enough so that it seems that lack of reference did not prompt an investigation.<sup>24</sup>

In a few cases, the families or friends making applications possibly misrepresented their situation to the managers, either intentionally or unintentionally. The managers did not explicitly state in most of these cases that they received misinformation. Rather it is the discrepancies in the children’s stories that indicate that at some point in the admissions process the communication system broke down. In all of these cases, the managers either believed the child or children were full orphans, to later discover they had a living parent, or thought the mother was a widow and it turned out the father was alive as well. The managers had accepted the children under circumstances that improved their application; considering their official position on accepting children with parents, had the truth been known, the managers might have been more inclined to decline admission.

---

<sup>23</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Thomas and James Reiley entered the institution in May 1862 under the claim that they were full orphans; records do not indicate who applied for their admission. The managers learned that the boys had a mother when she came to the orphanage a year later in May 1863, requesting to remove them. After supplying enough proof to convince the managers of the veracity of her claims, the managers allowed her to take her sons to Norfolk, Virginia. The managers likewise believed two-year-old Grace West to be an orphan when her grandmother admitted her in January 1879. Later that year in August, West's mother came to the asylum under a different married name, Mrs. Robert Campbell, to request her child. Records do not state if they granted her application. Robert, William, and John Milligan entered the institution in August 1885, also admitted by their grandmother and under the label of "orphan." The following December their mother appeared to ask to remove them, which the managers, content with her ability to provide for them, allowed. The managers admitted Irene and Sevilla Smith in June 1866 at the request of their mother, whom they believed to be a widow. Three years later in September 1869, their father asked to remove his two daughters, he having remarried with a good home for them in Virginia. The managers agreed.<sup>25</sup>

The duplicitous nature of the discrepancies in these cases is difficult to discern. It is possible that the grandmothers and mother who admitted children misrepresented their familial situation in an effort to improve their chances of acceptance; if such was in fact the case, they were successful, at least in admitting their children to the institution. They were less successful keeping their children separated from wayward parents in some cases, if that was also a desire, as these parents later removed the children from the institution. If the families did intentionally twist the particulars of their situation to gain an admission to the institution, they were not alone

---

<sup>25</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

in doing so, as other applicants did similarly at other orphanages in the nineteenth century. As Timothy Hacsí notes in *Second Home*, for some families it was a “question of survival” that their children gain admission to the institution, a desperation that could push them to distorting the facts.<sup>26</sup> It is also entirely possible, given the frequency of abandonment in admissions cases, that those who made these applications honestly did not know that the children’s parents were alive.

### **Changing Rules and Declined Admissions**

Decisions regarding admissions lay almost entirely with the asylum’s managers. Parents and other applicants could choose in the course of the process not to bring their children, which some of them did. Whether or not their children were *allowed* to enter, however, depended on the Board of Managers. The board admitted far more children than they turned away, but they did decline some applications. The women on the board made decisions based on their constitution, which altered slightly over the course of the century. Perhaps the most significant change was in 1833, when they officially amended their bylaws to allow the acceptance of boys in addition to girls. Their constitution previously allowed for the acceptance of boys if the funds allowed, but the cases were few. The change in their rules resulted in girls and boys being accepted in almost equal measure.<sup>27</sup>

Some rules were more rigid than others; the managers never permanently admitted a child they knew to be illegitimate. Several other policies, such as the age of the child and the status of the parents, were pliable. In many cases, the managers denied a family whose circumstances, at least on paper, were the same as another family that they granted admission. In

---

<sup>26</sup> Hacsí, *Second Home*, 108.

<sup>27</sup> Containers 34 and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.; “Female Orphan Asylum of Washington: Report of the Board of Managers to the Society at the Annual Meeting, Oct. 8., 1833.” *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 25, 1833, <http://infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu>

all cases the managers determined their decision based on their own perceptions. In assessing an application, any number of factors could be part of the equation, including the family's poverty, the child's age, and how many children the institution already housed. While one of these variables might prove the deciding one, they also might work in conjunction with one another. Many of the judgments the managers made reveal their philosophies about the position and the abilities of the families applying to them, and who deserved their help.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the most common reason for turning a family away was the status of the child's parents. The managers were far more likely to decide against a case in which one or two of the parents were living. However, given the managers' general willingness to admit children with parents, and the details in and language regarding admissions cases, the greater determinant for admission was often a family's poverty, and maybe even more so, the perceived legitimacy of their poverty. The managers made destitution one of the contingencies for half and non-orphans' admittance. Within the mentality that drove these decisions were the concepts of "deserving" and "undeserving," "worthy" and "unworthy." At times the managers even labeled the parents in the same way. The managers' treatment of seemingly contrasting characterizations was complicated, for they accepted children whose parents fell under either category.<sup>29</sup>

The managers generally would not turn away a child for their parents' "worthlessness," which included alcoholism and leaving their family. They preferred instead to protect and separate children from harmful environments. The managers overcame oppositions to Julia and Clara Miller entering the institution in 1847, as children with two living parents, since the father was "worthless" and the mother was ill. The asylum received Emma Tucker in April 1876, whose mother was "an unworthy, intemperate woman, being obliged to go the Providence

---

<sup>28</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Hospital for treatment.” In the cases of both the Mills children in 1879—Emma and Mary—and the Green children in 1882—Rosie, Bertie, Mary and Eddie—the mothers were dead and the fathers “entirely” or “perfectly worthless.” Arthur and Ida Kidwell’s father was characterized “as generally worthless and incompetent,” in addition to being in jail at the time of their acceptance in May 1880. Their mother was in Providence Hospital.<sup>30</sup>

Likewise they accepted children who came from parents that were considered “worthy” people, who often had community members testifying to their good character. The managers admitted William Henry Sacks in 1865, whose mother had a letter from General Barnes testifying that she was “a worthy object of charity,” a widow whose husband’s recent death “left her destitute of the necessities of life, and her little child was too great a burden to her at this time.” The mother of seven-year-old Mary Virginia Streek, admitted in 1866, came with the recommendation of manager Emma Smoot’s husband, who characterized her “as a correct and deserving woman.” George Donaldson requested to enter his daughters Maria Katherine and Laura Elizabeth in 1885, with a reference from Dr. Gallaudet “representing him as a worthy person.” In the case of the Anderson children—Lillie, Mary Catherine, Jessie Clarence, and Charles Edward—in 1885, their mother Mary was said to be “a worthy industrious woman” whereas their father who had abandoned his family was “dissipated and worthless.” Another mother, Mrs. Dietz was characterized “as being a very worthy woman, but entirely destitute” when she entered her sons Frank and Charles in February 1867, but as “worthless” when they accepted her daughter Augusta a few months later in July.<sup>31</sup>

It seems rather than “worthy” or “worthless,” the label that doomed an application was “capable.” If the managers believed a family, particularly one with one or two living parents, had

---

<sup>30</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>31</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

the ability to care for the child or children in question, they might be less inclined to accept them. This was closely linked with their perception of a family's destitution. They declined Cornelius Leanord's request to admit his two-year-old child to the asylum in 1865, though his wife and the child's mother had abandoned them, because they considered the "the father . . . quite able to support [the child]." They denied Lucretia Jones's request to admit her eight-year-old daughter in 1869, despite the fact that Jones was a widow and had recently lost her brother-in-law, who had been supporting her and her child. They did so "upon settled conviction . . . that a healthy young mother can support one child." As with other admissions decisions, a family's ability to care for their children might work against them in conjunction with other factors. In 1855, the managers denied Mrs. McMannis's request to admit her three-year-old child, believing "she was young and able to take care of it," but also noting the lack of space in the institution.<sup>32</sup>

Several of the letters of recommendation sent to the institution in support of applications focused on the theme of ability, making it clear to the managers that not only was the person they were recommending a good person deserving of help, but they were also incapable of taking care of their child or children. Dr. J.H. Barnes included in his June 1876 letter for Mrs. Lyons the statement, "She is a cripple and really not able to make a living for herself much less for three children." In recommending Florence Filgate, a sick woman who was divorced, in December 1876, S.T.G. Morsell concluded his letter, "She is a poor woman and not able to raise her children." Philip D. Haines wrote to the managers in June 1882 that Lucy Brown, likely the mother of Archie Webster Brown, was not only "a widow . . . unable to take the proper care of her boy" but added to his claim, "I sincerely believe that your good offices in her favor will be

---

<sup>32</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

strictly fulfilling the noble objects of your institution.” He had no question that Brown fit within the managers’ guidelines. The managers accepted the children in all of these cases.<sup>33</sup>

Other factors besides a family’s destitution, or lack thereof, might prompt the managers to decline an admission application. In addition to adapting their policy concerning the gender of the children accepted into the institution, the managers also altered their policy regarding the age of the children, but in a way that limited the children granted admission. The two policies were entwined. While the managers denied some individual girls on the basis of age, they passed resolutions more often about the age of boys eligible for admission. The specificity in addressing the boys over the girls most likely had to do with behavioral issues. The age policy was also closely tied to the rules concerning orphan status; age was far more likely to be a strike against a family’s case if the child had one or two living parents. While the managers used age to decline some children, they accepted others in spite of it.<sup>34</sup>

In their original constitution the managers included no provision for the age of the children, focusing exclusively on their orphanhood and the family’s financial position. In 1835, a few years after changing their admission policy in 1833 to include boys, the managers decided “not to receive any Boys into the Institution who are not entire orphans, and none under any circumstances who are over six years of age.” The resolution was doubly limiting, both in terms of parentage and age. Over time, the strength of their decision waned, and the board began admitting boys in violation of both parts of their resolution. In 1860, they once again addressed the issue of admitting older boys, resolving for the second time to not admit any over the age of six. In their amended constitution in 1878, they stated the age cut off as six for boys and ten for girls, “unless entire orphans, or by unanimous vote of the Board.” In this amendment they

---

<sup>33</sup> Containers 2, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>34</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

provided for flexibility, allowing the board to override the age restrictions. The managers continued to admit children who were not full orphans and were older than the official age limits.<sup>35</sup>

The managers not only placed restrictions on children that were too old, but also too young, particularly infants. Babies required extra care. They were harder to feed. As the managers noted in 1856 when they refused to take a sixteen month old that they did not have “a Room or nurse for children so young.” The year before they had told the orphan asylum in Georgetown that they would take a child only after it was “weaned.”<sup>36</sup> Infants were typically weaned at seven or eight months. Nineteenth-century Americans generally believed that a mother’s breast milk was best. If the mother could not provide the child with milk, a wet nurse should be used, though the frequency of nurses declined as the century progressed. Some people used altered cow’s milk, but it was also unreliable. Towards the end of the century, scientists devoted more time to perfecting an alternate food source to breast milk, many of them using cow’s milk as their base. More people began using baby formula created through this scientific experimentation, but it was not until the twentieth century that it became a consistent alternate food source.<sup>37</sup>

The Washington City Orphan Asylum’s policy on accepting infants to a degree follows the shifting history of infant feeding. The managers admitted some infants throughout the antebellum period, the Civil War, and the decade following the Civil War while they denied entrance to others. In some situations, the managers offered to financially assist in housing the

---

<sup>35</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>36</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>37</sup> Rima D. Apple, *Mothers and Medicine: A Social History of Infant Feeding, 1890-1950* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 3-19, 36.

child elsewhere. In 1847, they proposed to help Mrs. McGark lodge her child someplace else. The board paid Mrs. Dayton, who brought the orphaned fourteen-month-old Iola Collins to the institution in 1870, seven dollars a month to keep the child while they figured out what to do. They eventually found Mrs. Glascoe, who was willing to foster the child, and eventually adopted her.<sup>38</sup>

In January 1881, the asylum began an addition that affected their admissions policy regarding infants. Former Board of Trustee member James C. Hall had left the asylum \$50,000. John C. Harkness, another trustee, asked the institution's matron Harriet J. Wright for a recommendation for the best way to use the money, to which she said an addition devoted to infants. The trustees and the managers agreed, and the asylum began accepting far more infants than previously. Between 1881 and 1890 they accepted approximately forty-seven children under the age of two, whereas they had admitted around thirty-five over the course of the previous seven decades. Not only did they increase the number admitted, they consistently accepted younger babies than before. Previously those accepted were generally between one and two-years-old; following the addition of the infant department, the youngest children admitted were typically less than a year old. It is not clear whether the increasing options for alternate infant feeding methods influenced Wright's recommendation, or if she was responding more to a need she saw within the institution's applications; likely it was both.

### **Siblings**

Many children that entered the institution, approximately half, did so with siblings. Most families remained intact through the admission process. At times, though, siblings were

---

<sup>38</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

separated, either because of the managers' or the parents' decision. Some parents or friends representing families with several children applied for only one or two to enter the asylum. The determining factors that led families to choose which child to let go and which to keep are hard to pinpoint. Parents might choose to keep the child that was most useful in their household, usually an older child. They might admit their older children and keep their infant, a decision possibly connected to the necessity of infants remaining with their mothers for feeding purposes. Parents often came to request the admission of only some of their children in the midst of dire financial circumstances. It is quite possible that their request for the institution to take only some of their children stemmed from a hope to keep the others near, that lessening the burden of a couple of mouths to feed and backs to clothe would mean survival for the rest of their slightly smaller family, and possibly the eventual reunion of them all.

Sophia Cook, whom the managers noted was a "widow in very indigent circumstances," asked the asylum to admit three of her seven children, nine-year-old Virginia, eight-year-old Charles, and four-year-old William in 1865. Her oldest daughter, who was sixteen, could not work due to illness, and the mother was "unable to give her children food and clothing." The board agreed to take them. Mrs. Heard applied in May 1872 to admit her seven-year-old son Harry, one of her four children. Her husband suffered from mental illness, likely creating a situation in which Mrs. Heard struggled to care for all four of her children. The managers admitted James, Charles, and Joseph Payne in June 1874, their mother opting not to apply for the acceptance of her infant. In November 1874, Mrs. Arnold asked the board to admit Arthur Marsden, one of five children deserted by their mother. In 1880 Mrs. Kearney applied to have two of her seven children admitted. Mrs. Rittenhouse and Mrs. Voorhees from Georgetown presented the case, stating that they found the Kearney family living in a barn in "great poverty and destitution." The Industrial School had admitted three of Kearney's children and she

believed herself capable of caring of the other two, so asked the institution only to take Rose and Lilly, two-year-old twins, to which the asylum agreed.<sup>39</sup>

At times parents or friends applied for all of the children in a family, but the managers determined to only take some of them. As in other admissions applications, one prevailing reason they denied these children was age. Mrs. Hale applied in 1845 to place three sons in the asylum. The oldest was too old for the managers to admit. They agreed to take the other two, Cletus and John, with the contingency of accepting the middle one only until his mother could care for him. Miss McRain asked in 1857 for the managers to admit the orphaned Chains children. The managers agreed to take the older siblings, but not the eight-month-old baby, as it was too young. They likewise denied Lydia Beaton's infant in 1866, but accepted her two-year-old daughter Susan and four-year-old son John Noble. The asylum admitted George Franklin Barret, seven-years-old, but not his brother in 1867. Given that his brother was older than him, and George himself was older than the age cut off, it is possible they made this decision based on the older son's age.<sup>40</sup>

In a few cases, families admitted a few of their children only to return later and ask to admit the others as well. This likely shows that the hope of improving their living conditions and that they would be able to care for fewer children were not fulfilled. Mrs. Yeatman admitted her four-year-old daughter Charlotte in September 1844 and entered her son Robert, who was almost three, in July 1845. She removed them both in 1847 as she had married again and could care for them. In October 1868, Reverend Meador told the board about the Goss family, asking them to take George and Richard Goss. The father, John Goss, was mentally ill and the family as a whole was "destitute." Mrs. Goss did not come to the institution to relinquish three of the children until

---

<sup>39</sup> Container 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>40</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

April 1869. The asylum admitted nine-year-old Eva, six-year-old George, and four-year-old Richard. Later that year in October, Mrs. Goss returned and requested to admit seven-year-old Ellsworth and two-year-old May. The family remained in poverty, and Goss's sick infant required almost constant care that prevented her from working. Goss had several references to attest to the family's state. The asylum agreed to accept them. Grace King asked the asylum to take eight-year-old Harriet, six-year-old Almada, and three-year-old Sarah in April 1876. King was a widow and could not earn enough money to support her family through sewing. The family had also lost many of their belongings in a fire. The managers accepted the three sisters. Almost a year later in February 1877, King returned to ask the asylum to take her fourth child as well. The board decided against taking the last child, as the mother was healthy, implying that the managers believed that the able-bodied woman with one child could care for it. Four years later in July 1881, Grace King had remarried and returned to the institution to request Harriet, Almada, and Sarah. The managers agreed.<sup>41</sup>

### **Removing Children from the Institution**

Some families were able to realize the dream of reuniting and removed children from the institution. The mother of Ida and Lillie DeGaw, who admitted them in March 1880 and removed them in August 1880, likely captured the feeling of many parents in her letter to First Directress Elizabeth Blair Lee when she said "I can never be satisfied with my children away."<sup>42</sup> Approximately a quarter of the children who left the asylum before coming of age did so with a family member. These reunions could happen after anywhere from a few months to several years. James Poole's father removed him after just two months in 1858. Edwin O. Eckels,

---

<sup>41</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>42</sup> LC DeGaw to Elizabeth Blair Lee, Box 228, Folder 4. Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box and Folder Number; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

admitted by his mother Margaret Eckels in 1873, remained until 1881, when his aunt removed him to take him to his mother. Eckels was five at the time of his admission; how familiar the thirteen-year-old was with his biological family following eight years of separation, if he and other children in similar situations even remembered their relatives at all, can only be speculated. The rate at which particular family members removed the children reflected the admission rates. Mothers removed their children most frequently, followed by fathers, and then others such as aunts, uncles, and grandparents. The removal of the children from the institution, as well as the language of many families that admitted children, shows that many families admitted their children because of specific circumstances, and that they hoped the separation from their children would not be permanent.<sup>43</sup>

Most often it was the same family member removing the child or children that placed them there, though there was the occasional exception. One example was Alva and Ada Paddock, removed by their grandfather in September 1866 after having been placed the previous May by a woman wrongfully claiming to be their stepmother. In a story filled with human error as well as serendipity, Nathan Paddock was allowed to take his seven and four-year-old granddaughters home with him to New York after someone found his lost letter regarding them on the street and delivered it to the asylum. Matron Mary Wannall recounted “it was touching to see the big tears chase each other down the stalwart old farmers cheek” as he left with his grandchildren, for whom he had been looking for several months.<sup>44</sup>

One reason parents, particularly mothers, were able to retrieve children from the institution was remarriage. For women, marrying again often meant they shifted from poverty to

---

<sup>43</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>44</sup> M. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee, September 20, 1866, Box 228, Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

economic stability, partially because they were no longer a single parent household, but also because men typically earned more money in the nineteenth century. This was the case for Robert and Charlotte Ann Yeatman, whose mother removed them in 1847 after remarrying, Margaret Strain whose mother removed her in 1860, and Jessie and James Cage, whose mother Alice Cage Nash removed them in 1888. For men, remarrying likewise meant they had the stability of a two-parent household, someone to help care for their children, possibly while they were at work. Mr. Boswell removed his three daughters—Mary, Bertha, and Blanche—in April 1880 after they lived in the institution just two months. The three Boswell girls had been admitted by friends due to their father’s sickness. When he removed them, their father had not only recovered physically but also remarried. The managers recorded that he believed “himself in a condition to maintain his family.”<sup>45</sup>

In one case of remarriage, a mother, rather than separating her children upon admission, contemplated separating her children by removing just one. George and Susan McDonald entered the institution in 1850. In 1855, their mother Mrs. Dill asked to take George, as she felt following her new marriage that she was able to care for one of the children. As with families divided during the admission process, this speaks to the realities many families who had children in the institution faced—they could only take as many children as their economic situation would allow. It is likely that Dill did not remove her son, as the managers discussed placing both siblings in an indenture the next year.<sup>46</sup>

Some families were not able to keep their children once they removed them from the institution. Their improved situations proved temporary. George Hilton admitted one of his children, two-year-old Joseph, in November 1858. Hilton’s wife was mentally ill, his primary

---

<sup>45</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>46</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

grounds for his application. He agreed to pay \$4 a month for Joseph's care. Four months later in March 1859 Hilton retrieved his son from the institution, as Mrs. Hilton had improved. The next year in March 1860, Hilton brought the child back to the asylum, as Mrs. Hilton was once again ill.<sup>47</sup>

Mary Evans also removed her three children, Louis, Richard, and Robert. Louis and Richard had lived in the institution longer, since March 1859; Robert, the youngest of the three, entered January 1860. Admission records do not state when exactly Mary Evans removed her children, though it was sometime that year. She asked to readmit them in October 1860, as they found themselves in poverty due to her husband's inability to provide for them. The board disagreed over Evans's request, but in a nine to six vote agreed to take the three boys again.<sup>48</sup>

Millie Ann Bergess removed her children Lillie and Cleveland in May 1889, after having placed them there in August 1888. The managers noted in their records that her new husband, John Knight, adopted the children.<sup>49</sup> Some time later, Bergess returned and requested they readmit her children. Matron Jeanette B. Wright reported that Bergess had not married the man whom she claimed would be a stepfather to her children. She had had another child by him, meaning she had five children total when he left her, rendering her impoverished. Records do not indicate if the managers agreed to readmit the Bergess children, though, as Wright noted, they could not accept her youngest as it was illegitimate.<sup>50</sup>

In at least one case, a mother returned a child with the request that the institution take additional children as well. Sarah Brenner entered the institution in September 1867. The

---

<sup>47</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>50</sup> J. B. W. to Elizabeth Blair Lee, July 4, Box 228, Folder 4; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

following March, her mother removed her, “as she was now doing well and desired to have all her children at home.” In May 1869, Mrs. Brenner requested that the board readmit Sarah and take her little sister Emily Jane as well. Mrs. Brenner had believed she would be able to provide for Sarah along with the girl’s siblings, but her husband was a physically handicapped alcoholic, a situation that required Brenner to work and rendered her incapable of caring for her children. The managers, noting the need of the situation, accepted both girls.<sup>51</sup>

In some cases the managers denied families’ requests to remove children from the institution. Though they did not expressly state their reasoning in all situations, the managers often based their choice in their opinion about what was best for the child. Their fears often reflected the situations of families who requested to readmit children after removing them—that the family was not quite ready, financially or otherwise, to provide for their children. They refused to let Frank Haywood’s mother take him in 1854 because they thought, “she had not the means for his support.” The managers denied the request of Catharine Williams to remove her daughter Susan in 1861 because they wanted the widowed mother to be “more certain of [her] support.” The board would not let John Walker have his ten-year-old sister Lizzie in 1868 because the board believed that “on account of her tender years, that she should remain in the Asylum.” They would not let Mr. Gates take his daughter Edmonia in 1854 because they did not consider “his house under present circumstances a proper place for his child.”<sup>52</sup>

Some families applied more than once to remove a child. In most cases the managers eventually caved to repeated requests and allowed the family to have their child or children. While most families that applied more than once usually had their request granted on their second application, some found themselves asking three or even four times. Richard Abraham

---

<sup>51</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

was one such case. Abraham, a former soldier who admitted his sons Richard and William in February 1878 after several applications and the promise to pay for their care with his pension, applied four times over the course of several years to remove them. The managers even referred to his application in July 1878 as his “usual request for his children.” On that particular day, managers Elizabeth Blair Lee and Mary Wickliffe Merrick made an “earnest appeal” for the children staying, to which he conceded. He finally removed them in July 1880.<sup>53</sup>

In a few cases, both when the managers would not let families take their children and when the family had not applied to remove the child, the families took them by force. When the managers would not let Catherine Williams take her daughter Susan, she “stole her away.” Mary Warfield, the mother of Margaret Warfield, likewise took her daughter without permission, whom had been admitted in 1826—the managers had previously defended their right to keep Margaret with a legal opinion from Richard S. Coxe. In some cases, the managers had not adequately secured a relinquishment of the child, so when parents came to remove their children, the managers could not decline their request. This happened in 1849 when Eliza Swinsbare applied for the second time to remove her children George and Amelia and in 1867 when Mrs. Boyd wanted to take her children Minnie and Joseph.<sup>54</sup>

In general, the managers were more likely to approve a request for family to remove children from the asylum than deny it. Such was a reflection of two aspects of the managers’ mentality—a desire to have children leave the institution and a willingness for them to be reunited with families. In general the managers did not want children to stay in the institution if they had the opportunity to go. The latter showed that the managers usually did not believe that the parents that entered children into the institution were in essence incapable or unworthy of

---

<sup>53</sup> Containers 36 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>54</sup> Containers 12, 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Swinsbare is also spelled “Swinsby” in the records.

caring for their children. For most cases, the family's circumstances were just that, circumstantial. If situations shifted to where parents or other family members could care for their children, then the managers were amenable to the children leaving. In this way, they were consistent with many other orphanages during the nineteenth century, though not all, that were willing for families to be reunited.<sup>55</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The stories of the children who entered the Washington City Orphan Asylum more often than not included the stories of their families as well, as most had living parents. Those that did not having living parents frequently had other family members active in their care. For those without family of any sort, the lack of family was a story in and of itself. Within the admissions applications are found families separated by poverty and illness, homes dissolved by alcoholism and abandonment, parents forced to make choices about which child to part with and which to keep at home. For some families, the separation was not permanent, and they were able to reunite with their children. Assisting the families in the admission process were members of the District of Columbia, people who had some form of relationship with the family and stepped in to play a role in helping care for a dependent child. The managers of the orphanage, as they decided whom to accept and who to turn away, made judgments centered on their perception of a family's capability to care for their child, in addition to factors practical to the institution, such as age and available space. Once they determined a child to be in need of care, of matching their definition of "deserving," he or she became a member of the asylum; once there, the managers shaped their daily lives in an effort to produce productive and virtuous citizens.

---

<sup>55</sup> Hacsí, *Second Home*, 141-142.

## CHAPTER TWO: ORPHANS

### Introduction

When children entered the Washington City Orphan Asylum they became residents of the institution, an “orphan” by association and circumstance, even if not in actuality. Some children stayed for years. Others lived there for a much briefer period, just a few months or even days. Regardless of the duration, all but a very few children—the one or two who were placed out the day they entered the institution—came to know the orphanage as “home,” in the sense that it was the place where they slept, ate, attended school, and formed relationships with the other children and the adults in the institution. Some of the people involved with the institution came to view it as a home; matron Jeanette B. Wright wrote to First Directress Elizabeth Blair Lee in 1884 that she wished the asylum could be called “Orphans Home” instead of its current title of “asylum.”<sup>1</sup> This reflected the shifting views about the best way to care for orphaned and dependent children at the end of the century; it also indicated a desire to have the institution seem more like a family and less like the increasingly criticized asylums established during the reform era.<sup>2</sup> The managers and women working at the institution even referred to the asylum’s residents and its employees as a “family,” especially in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>3</sup> Whether the children felt the orphanage to be a home, or something representing the familial, is less clear; in some cases it is evident that they did not.

The Washington City Orphan Asylum was very much a place shaped by the ideology of the managers. Their beliefs about gender roles and the future of the institution’s children shaped

---

<sup>1</sup> Jeanette B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee, September 22, 1884, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy A. Hacsí, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 148, 159-160.

<sup>3</sup> Catharine C. Gideon to Elizabeth Blair Lee, July 10, 1886, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 4; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Containers 44 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

the educational curriculum. Their ideas about proper behavior, and punishments for bad conduct and rewards for good performance, effected the treatment of the children. Their philosophies about nutrition established what the children had to eat. They determined when the children went to bed and woke up, where they worshipped on Sundays, what their extracurricular activities would be and how often they could take part in them. In most cases, their policies resembled the practices of other American orphan asylums, though in some cases, such as punishments, they differed. The orphanage was also influenced by conditions outside of the managers' control, such as infectious diseases that could harm or even kill the asylum's children. Also not entirely under the managers' control were the children themselves; though the women in charge of the institution determined many parts of the children's lives, the children still found ways to assert their own power, particularly through defiance and statements about what they wanted in terms of their education.

### **Regimentation**

Like many other orphan asylums in nineteenth century America, the Washington City Orphan Asylum instituted a daily schedule for their children, one of consistency and repetition. The schedule itself, the activities and their order within the day, likewise resembled other institutions.<sup>4</sup> The orphans' days comprised set times for school, meals, and rest. In the beginning months of the institution, the managers produced the "Laws for the Regulation of the Asylum," in which they plotted the day-to-day lives of the orphans. The children would wake when the sun rose and "after, washing, dressing, making their beds, and cleaning their rooms . . . meet in the apartment of the Governess" for morning prayer. In the warmer months of the year, they would work in either the house or the garden until they ate their morning meal at 7:00 AM. In winter,

---

<sup>4</sup> Hacsí, *Second Home*, 149.

the asylum delayed breakfast until 8:00 AM. The children would attend school from 9:00 AM until 12:00 PM, break for time to “play”, and recommence from 2:00 PM until 5:00 PM. The governess determined when the children would go to bed based on their ages.<sup>5</sup>

This schedule applied Monday through Friday. On Saturday it altered slightly as the children went to school in the morning but in the afternoon focused on religious learning, receiving instruction in catechism and hymns. They then helped clean the asylum and get ready for the next day, Sunday, when they went to church. Their Sunday schedule required that they make all the food preparations in advance on Saturday.<sup>6</sup> An amended constitution in 1878 relaxed some of the policies, such as the time for breakfast, which was no longer specified though lunch was set at 12:30 PM, but the spirit of regimentation remained constant.<sup>7</sup>

As with other orphanages, the children of the Washington City Orphan Asylum dressed uniformly and according to the managers’ decree. Records rarely reveal the specifics of the children’s wardrobe. The most detailed information comes from the years just before the Civil War, glimpses that make evident not only the standardization in the children’s dress but also their similarities to the dress of everyday Americans. In October 1859, when deciding on new clothes for the girls, the managers agreed they should all be dressed in green. There could be some demarcation between the ages of children, such as in 1856 when the managers agreed on “Cottage Hats with green Gingham curtains” for the children, but that the older girls should have straw hats with ribbons. The difference in hat style according to age was common for antebellum girls. On occasion the children’s wardrobe centered on the donations from people outside the institution. William Shields gave the asylum enough material in 1858 to provide each boy a set

---

<sup>5</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

of clothing and a cap and each girl a dress. Among the fabric given was calico, a material commonly found in dresses belonging to girls of their social class at the time. The managers also chose when to replace the children's garments, doing so periodically as they believed their existing pieces too worn. They changed their wardrobes according to the season, a requirement for Washington weather.<sup>8</sup>

### Education

A part of the children's schedule went to one of the asylum's main goals, to form its residents through proper education. Their mission was to care for them physically and shape them into virtuous and contributing members of society. The orphanage's children generally came from families in which the parents worked, at least the father, and the managers expected as much for them. The managers sought to provide a general education as well as some life skills. For true occupational training—most of which was farming, housekeeping, sewing, and some sort of trade—they counted on placing the children in indentures. Before children reached the point where the managers agreed to place them out, the managers generally wanted them to attain a certain level of traditional education.<sup>9</sup>

According to the bylaws established in 1815, in their morning sessions of school, the children studied “reading, writing, and cyphering.”<sup>10</sup> Learning to read and write placed some of these children at an educational level above their parents who could not do either. Especially in the earlier years of the asylum, several parents signed the relinquishment papers for their

---

<sup>8</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Anita Stamper and Jill Condra, *Clothing through American History: The Civil War through the Gilded Age, 1861-1899* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2011), 196-197; Ann Buermann Wass and Michelle Webb Fandrich, *Clothing through American History: The Federal Era through Antebellum, 1786-1860* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010), 370.

<sup>9</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>10</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

children with a mark rather than with a signature.<sup>11</sup> Later asylum records indicate that the children learned “geography, arithmetic, and grammar” as well. In the afternoon, after a break time for recreation, the lessons turned to “sewing, knitting, [and] spinning.” The managers drafted this course of instruction when the asylum only admitted girls.<sup>12</sup> In their constitution they also introduced the idea that if money allowed they would establish a day school connected to the institution, one they would open to children outside of the asylum. In 1829, they established a day school attached to the asylum. While records do not fully elaborate, or provide any list of pupils, it appears that the institution provided education for some children not admitted to asylum.<sup>13</sup>

The managers adapted and expanded their educational programs over the course of the century. When funds allowed, they employed a seamstress to teach the children how to sew, at times for specific children. Towards the end of the century they began teaching some children courses according to their skill and desire. They agreed in 1890 to teach Julia Wheat bookkeeping. In 1883 they hired someone to instruct in singing. One of the institution’s matrons, Jeanette B. Wright, suggested in 1886 that they add a horticultural program to teach “a means of livelihood.” In 1888 the managers agreed to provide cooking classes.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the alterations the managers made to the curriculum were based on larger educational changes in society. One of these was public education. The Washington City Orphan Asylum was like many other institutions that increasingly took advantage of public schools

---

<sup>11</sup> Containers 34 and 37, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>12</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>13</sup> Containers 32 and 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>14</sup> Containers 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

following the Civil War.<sup>15</sup> Nineteenth-century reformers believed in the importance of education in improving society, and partly because of their efforts public education became more common as the century progressed. Gradually secondary schools, which included more in-depth education for older students, began to appear, especially in cities.<sup>16</sup> Washington's public education system included secondary schools starting in 1863.<sup>17</sup> As early as 1873, some of the Washington City Orphan Asylum's children attended Washington public schools. The children listed attending the public school were older, generally between nine and thirteen years old. They were likely of the age where they could responsibly travel to and from school alone, as well as benefit more from external education, likely at one of the recently founded secondary schools.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1870s, the asylum introduced a program targeted towards their younger pupils, one that was relatively new to the United States—the kindergarten system. Educator Elizabeth Palmer Peabody had introduced to the United States in 1860 an English-speaking format of the German program centered on early childhood development and it had gained national popularity.<sup>19</sup> This reflected the increasing societal view of childhood as a particular time of formation and growth, one that needed to be treated specially.<sup>20</sup> How consistently the asylum had

---

<sup>15</sup> Hacsí, *Second Home*, 190.

<sup>16</sup> William J. Reese, *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind"* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 2-3, 15-17, 33.

<sup>17</sup> The first year that Washington had secondary schools was determined in comparing city directories from 1862 and 1863: *Hutchinson's Washington and Georgetown Directory. Containing Also a Business Directory, Congressional and Department Directory, and an Appendix of Much Useful Information* (Washington, DC: Thomas Hutchinson, Publisher, 1862), 253-4; *Hutchinson's Washington and Georgetown Directory. Containing Also a Business Directory, Congressional and Department Directory, and an Appendix of Much Useful Information* (Washington, DC: Hutchinson & Brothers, Publishers, 1863), 292-4.

<sup>18</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Dale Ross, *The Kindergarten Crusade: The Establishment of Preschool Education in the United States* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976), 2.

<sup>20</sup> June Edwards, *Women in American Education, 1820-1955: The Female Force and Educational Reform* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 25.

a kindergarten program is unclear; the proposal to create one appears several times in the institution's records, even after they conducted classes under the system. For the latter quarter of the century at least, the asylum participated to some degree in the early childhood program.

The managers contemplated establishing a kindergarten department as early as 1873 when they hired a Miss Franklin as an Assistant Teacher and agreed that she should learn about the program so she could instruct the younger children accordingly. It does not appear to have happened, as in December 1876 the teacher Amelia R. Charles suggested the asylum implement the new program into their curriculum. Charles believed their kindergarten would not add too greatly to the asylum's expenses. The managers assented and charged Charles with spearheading it. The following June the asylum school presented the progress of its pupils, and the managers noted that "the little children who had been instructed upon the Kindergarten plan gave some interesting illustrations of their rapid improvement under the system. . . ."<sup>21</sup>

In 1882, Louise Pollock, who was associated with the Kindergarten Normal Institute in Washington and was president of the Washington Kindergarten Union, communicated the request of a Miss Perry from Massachusetts to come lead a kindergarten program at the orphanage. Pollock had been previously associated with the Washington City Orphan Asylum.<sup>22</sup> The managers opposed the idea. In January 1883 they decided to end their kindergarten program; if they did so, they later reinstated it as it continued to appear in asylum records.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Containers 44 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>22</sup> Louise Pollock to Elizabeth Blair Lee, July 6, 1882, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 227 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>23</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

## Children's Work within the Institution

Academics were not the only form of education the managers wished for the children. From the beginning, they intended the children to labor, at least the older ones. This coincided with their mentality about preparing the children to be good citizens. Work would make them industrious and virtuous. Having the children do some of the asylum's chores would also reduce financial expenditures. In the rules they created in 1815, the managers stated that the older girls would perform work determined by the governess at the end of the day, when there was sufficient time. They would also take turns cooking, washing laundry, and cleaning. Though they still did some, the children likely did less of this sort of work than outlined initially, as the managers often hired women to fulfill these roles, especially as the century progressed.<sup>24</sup>

Female children sewed more than they did of any other type of work. Sewing was perhaps the most gendered aspect of their education, for teaching them to sew served as both instruction and work, and it was restricted to the girls. The boys did not have as consistent a form of labor as the girls, at least not according to the historical record. The matron often reported to the managers the number of pieces that the children produced. The children sewed an array of things, mostly garments. These included dresses, pants, shirts, jackets, aprons, nightgowns, and bonnets. The children even made a rug in 1854, which the managers observed at a meeting and "thought very credible to the Institution and very pretty." The purpose of these sewing projects, in addition to learning the trade, was mostly likely to clothe the institution's residents, though the managers do not state explicitly. Mention of the children doing work for profit or some other purpose was rare. Instances include in 1829, when Letitia Breckinridge Grayson Porter paid the

---

<sup>24</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

institution \$5.26 for pieces the children made and in 1855 when their work was placed in an exhibition at the Smithsonian Institute.<sup>25</sup>

At times, the importance of children's schooling competed with their work. This was also possibly a gendered issue; the 1878 constitution notes that the work in the asylum should not conflict with the boys' education, but does not make that specification for the girls. Girls were probably more likely to have their education preempted to do work in the asylum. Particularly for the older girls, the managers weighed the value of having their labor as a resource against their need for an education. In some cases they decided on the side of education, in others on the side of work. In 1873, the managers decided to split time in the dining room between Mary Stewart and Ambrosia Goddard so that both could receive an education as well. In 1864, the institution was in financial trouble and short of employees, as Rebecca McMannin, a former resident who worked as an assistant in the sewing room, was about to leave. Thus, the managers decided that four of the oldest girls should no longer attend the asylum's school, but help with the sewing and household chores. They instructed the teacher to select the four "most advanced scholars." They believed that the chosen—Mary McKenney, Sarah Shafe, Elizabeth Reed, and Mary Wise—"have now quite a suitable education [and] may make themselves useful to the Institution, and at the same time, fit themselves for their own support in two and three years more." This shows their mentality concerning both education and work; traditional education was useful to a certain point, but the children must also do their part for the asylum and receive another important type of instruction, that of labor.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Containers 32, 34, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the Peter B. Porter Papers in the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society," Buffalo and Erie County Historical, 1968, (Accessed September 15, 2015), <http://www.buffalohistory.org/docs/3bb4ff10-2e49-4316-9f3b-322c328f389f.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Containers 32 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

## Nutrition

One of the tasks girls in the institution might help with was preparing food. Scholars examining other orphanages of the nineteenth-century generally agree that the diet of asylum children left much to be desired, in terms of both nutritional value and variety. In his work on the Charleston Orphan House in South Carolina, John E. Murray states that preceding the Civil War children's health suffered from consumption of too much meat and not enough vegetables.<sup>27</sup> The Cincinnati Orphan Asylum provided their children with a steady diet of bread supplemented with molasses in the 1830s. The Boston Female Asylum, founded in the early 1800s, offered more substance, but very little variety or vegetables. They relied heavily on soup, pork, and lamb.<sup>28</sup> The menus of these orphanages are consistent with food trends in the rest of the nation. Before the 1850s, Americans relied heavily on a diet of meat, potatoes, and bread, as well as any vegetables that could be locally grown. Region and environment determined diet. It is not surprising then that orphans maintained the same monotonous diet as their contemporaries in both class and location. The growth of industrialization in the middle of the century created the ability to transport perishable goods before they went bad. Americans could then purchase vegetables and other foodstuffs that provided a more balanced, varied diet.<sup>29</sup> Several reform groups of the mid-nineteenth century also began to advocate a better diet with the regular inclusion of vegetables.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> John E. Murray, *The Charleston Orphan House: Children's Lives in the First Public Orphanage in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 45-48.

<sup>28</sup> Hacsí, *A Second Home*, 151.

<sup>29</sup> Elaine N. McIntosh, *American Food Habits in Historical Perspective* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 77-78, 94-96.

<sup>30</sup> Susan Williams, *Food in the United States, 1820s-1890* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 198-200.

The Washington City Orphan Asylum managers at least tried to start the orphanage on a varied diet. In 1816, the orphanage received several food donations from individuals on the Board of Managers, donations that included meat, poultry, fruits, vegetables, and spices. Sophia Meigs gave raisins, cloves, herring, butter, onions, and apples. Mrs. Bradley donated turnips, potatoes, and herring. The asylum received cabbage, beef, shad, ham, and oysters from Frances Dandridge Lear and carrots and other vegetables from Marcia Van Ness. The donations continued, as in 1818, when Marcia Van Ness again donated vegetables as well as a turkey, and Ann Tayloe and Mrs. Dr. Bradley both gave turnips. Dolley Madison at her departure from the institution donated money for the asylum to purchase a cow to provide milk. How long donations of this kind continued is unclear. They likely were not regular contributions that created the foundation for a diverse diet, but rather sprinkled the children's plates with occasional color. They were also made in the years when the asylum had approximately twenty children; establishing a good diet based on managerial donations would be much harder when the asylum housed over a hundred children.<sup>31</sup>

An examination of the Washington City Orphan Asylum's menu in 1854, which, according to the managers, was to "be without variation," reveals a nutritional regimen similar to but perhaps a little more diverse than other asylums. While the diet was still heavily based in meat, potatoes, and bread, it likely included more vegetables and variety than other institutions. Still, the children did not eat vegetables every day. On Monday the orphans ate "pea or bean soup, salt pork, bread," on Tuesday, "stewed beef, potatoes, bread," on Wednesday, "Indian pudding, molasses, bread," on Thursday, "Mutton soup, vegetables, potatoes, bread," on Friday "fish, either salt or fresh, bread," and on Saturday "beef soup, vegetable, rice, bread." Sundays

---

<sup>31</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Sophia Wright Meigs," <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=meigs&GSfn=sophia&GSbyrel=all&GSdyrel=all&GSob=n&GRid=14567657&df=all&>.

were special, as it was the Christian Sabbath, and, the menu reflected the day's sacredness: "cold beef (reserved from day before)[,] bread, cake, apple or pie."<sup>32</sup> The asylum's financial ledgers also indicate they frequently purchased milk for the children.<sup>33</sup> The asylum received the donation of an icebox in 1852 and some of the men associated with the institution built a smoke house that same year, which improved the asylum's food storage and preparation.<sup>34</sup> Occasions certainly arose in the asylum's history when their financial situation affected what they could feed the children, such as in 1858, when the managers resorted to giving the older children tea because they could not afford milk for all of them.<sup>35</sup>

When the managers updated their constitution in 1878, they delivered a less detailed menu, one that did not call for the variety found in the 1854 menu, but did not prohibit it either. It also included more vegetables. The children's breakfast was to consist of bread and coffee, along with meat, butter, or molasses. Lunch would include "meat, and two vegetables, and a good slice of bread," except for on Sundays, when they would eat "cold meat, with some simple dessert." Dinner comprised bread and milk or bread and butter.<sup>36</sup>

### **Health, Illness, and Death**

Other important factors in the children's health, besides the food they ate, were cleanliness and the risk of disease. The managers placed great importance on the cleanliness and neatness of the asylum and, more importantly, its children. The rules followed the belief that "not

---

<sup>32</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>33</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>34</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>35</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>36</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

only [the children's] health, but their welfare in life naturally depend[ed] on habits of order and cleanliness." The managers required that the children's hair stay short and frequently washed.<sup>37</sup> Each child received clothing, a towel, toothbrush, and comb that they were responsible for keeping clean and stored in their proper space when not in use. The managers instructed the governess to monitor hygienic habits and punish those in neglect. One of the main reasons the managers prioritized hygiene stemmed from concern for the children's health. Cleanliness helped stave off illness where many people lived in close quarters in the middle of an urban setting. The best guard against disease was to take preemptive measures. The health of the children was an area of concern that the managers grappled with throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup>

The managers took other measures to ensure the health of the children. They welcomed the assistance of doctors, and frequently had ones associated with the institution. The concentrations of the doctors could be specific, as a Dr. Hagner in September 1870 was the physician but Dr. William Drinkard saw to the children's ears and eyes. The managers often asked the doctors to screen the children before admittance to the institution, as early as 1815, but may have not done so consistently. They passed resolutions as late as the 1880s stating all children required a doctor's examination before admittance.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout the century, the asylum had bouts with various life-threatening and often contagious sicknesses, including small pox, malaria, diphtheria, measles, and scarlet fever. Approximately fifty children died while living at the institution from 1815 to 1890. The causes

---

<sup>37</sup> Later in the asylum's history older girls may have been exempt from this, as in 1882 the managers decided that the girls younger than twelve should have their hair cut, Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>38</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

included typhoid, whooping cough, croup, and tetanus. The most at risk population were the infants. About fourteen of the fifty children who died were under two years of age. Several had been accepted in 1882 and 1883, shortly after the institution created their special department for infants.<sup>40</sup> The death of the institution's children, especially its infants, mirrored the experience of other orphan asylums.<sup>41</sup>

When it came to the children's health, the managers adopted the philosophy of sacrificing one for the sake of the many. If a child's illness had a negative effect on the other children, the managers sought other arrangements for the sick child. In September 1835, M.A. Titcomb, the matron, informed the managers that Martha Owens' illness was affecting the rest of the children. Martha previously had lived with Mrs. Cartwright, who returned Martha to the asylum due to the child's unnamed sickness. The managers decided to exchange Martha for a healthy child from the almshouse whom they previously had agreed to accept.<sup>42</sup>

### **Recreation and Entertainment**

The managers perceived the importance of recreation in the children's lives. By 1863 they had a playground. At some point they added a library, one they supplied with books over the course of the century, often through donation. For example, they received one hundred books in October 1858. The library was largely meant for the older children. In May 1856 they bought a piano. On occasion, some of the students performed on the piano at asylum gatherings. The

---

<sup>40</sup> Container 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>41</sup> Hacı, *Second Home*, 152-153; Julie Miller, *Abandoned: Foundlings in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (New York University Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>42</sup> Containers 32, 34, and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

library, at least, was used under specific guidelines and likely supervised; this was likely the case for the piano, playground, and other leisure activities as well.<sup>43</sup>

On occasion, the children had the opportunity to engage in activities outside of the institution. In 1854, they took the children to see both the Panorama of the City of New York and the Panorama of Creation and Deluge. In allowing the children to venture outside the asylum, the managers likely had to consider factors such as cost and the potential risk of the children getting lost, being harmed, taken by family members, or misbehaving. The managers reflected some of these concerns when they decided in July 1882 to take some of the orphanage's residents to the river, not specifying which one but likely the Potomac, every week when the weather was warm enough. They agreed the treat should just be for the "young children and those who deserved rewards for good behavior." Whereas the younger children were automatically included in the journey, adolescents, the group most prone to rebel, needed to prove they were worthy of such a treat.<sup>44</sup>

Several of these outings occurred because people associated with the institution facilitated or provided money for them. In 1854, Thomas Parker, a lawyer, paid for the children to take a trip to Mount Vernon. The orphans were hosted during Christmas 1856 and given gifts by a Miss Hogan and her "scholars," likely meaning her students at an all-female academy. They spent New Year's Eve that year at the house of trustee William W. Corcoran and New Year's Day at a Mrs. Keep's. William Bickerton gave \$10 in 1858, which the managers used to take the children on a trip to the country. The children were invited to a Fourth of July picnic by the Ninth Street Presbyterian Church in 1859 and to another picnic in September 1859 by the Church

---

<sup>43</sup> Containers 44 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>44</sup> Containers 34 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

of the Ascension. They participated in the Christmas activities of the Memorial Church in 1877 and went to the Masonic Temple's Horticultural Exhibition in October 1881.<sup>45</sup>

The most consistent outing for the children was attending Sunday church services. The asylum rotated attending Protestant churches, going every Sunday as often as was feasible. When Dr. Paret of the Church of the Epiphany, a church long associated with the orphanage, offered pews for the children in 1881 the managers accepted, informing him they would come every fourth Sunday every other month. The managers also allowed children, in at least one case, to go to the church of their own denomination. In 1884, they permitted Florence Tenly and Cora Graham to take communion at St. Andrew's, Episcopal church. They also agreed to have an Episcopal service at the institution every month.<sup>46</sup>

### **Visitation**

As they ordered the other aspects of the children's lives, the managers also determined the amount and type of contact permitted between children and their family and friends. The managers generally allowed contact, as long as interaction did not turn into interference. They likely did not want people previously associated with the children to challenge the asylum's authority over the children or interrupt their education or routine. The mother of Ida and Lillie DeGaw, in beseeching Elizabeth Blair Lee to let her daughters visit over the Fourth of July, pledged that she would not "interfere with school nor nothing else."<sup>47</sup> On occasion, the managers barred certain family members from seeing the children, typically because they felt they had

---

<sup>45</sup> Containers 44 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>46</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>47</sup> LC DeGaw to Elizabeth Blair Lee, Box 228, Folder 4, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box and Folder Number; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

misused the privilege in the past. Leona, John Harrison, and Harry Miller were admitted to the institution by their aunt, Mrs. Caleb Fowler, in 1879. In January 1880, after the managers twice denied Fowler's request to remove Leona from the institution, the child's aunt took her without permission. The next month Fowler returned, along with two male companions, to talk about visiting John and Harry, who were still in the asylum. The managers denied her request, noting that Fowler had "upon past occasions had every privilege granted her and [had] grossly abused these privileges."<sup>48</sup>

The managers' rules for visitation generally grew stricter as the century progressed, an aberration in the dominant trend of nineteenth-century orphan asylums' visitation policies. According to Timothy Hacsí in *Second Home*, most orphanages loosened their regulations concerning family interactions towards the end of the century, though there were exceptions. The Washington City Orphan Asylum was one of these exceptions. Some institutions began with relaxed policies, such as the Boston Female Asylum, but adapted their rules not too long after their opening. The Washington City Orphan Asylum likely took decades, most of the century even, to begin severely restricting visitation policies.<sup>49</sup>

In their founding "Laws for the Regulation of the Asylum," the managers made no statement regarding family and friends visiting the institution; perhaps they did not consider a policy necessary, as they intended their asylum primarily for full orphans rather than ones with living parents who would wish to see their children. At least by 1860, the managers had created regulations regarding people coming to the institution, putting a note on the door saying "visitors are admitted on Thursday from 10 AM to 4 PM." In 1873, they passed a resolution to tighten control on the frequency of people coming to the institution. They declared that the matron

---

<sup>48</sup> Containers 36 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>49</sup> Hacsí, *Second Home*, 128.

would adhere to the designated visitors days, and that “no child shall be allowed . . . [to] see visitors at any other time, except by permission of one of the Managers.” The managers did not easily grant special visiting circumstances in the last few decades of the century. Mrs. Kidwell, who was hospitalized at the time her children Arthur and Ida entered the institution in May 1880, requested in July to be allowed to visit at times other than the predetermined time due to her health. The managers denied her request. In May 1880 the managers decided that one of them must be present on the appointed visitors’ day, now termed “Friends Day,” and that the hours would be restricted to 10 AM to 2 PM. Five years later, in 1885, they decreed that people wanting to visit the asylum needed a “pass” which could be acquired from one of the managers. In 1886, they agreed to distribute “tickets” that would allow family to come to the institution once every three months.<sup>50</sup>

The managers’ growing restrictions on visitations could have stemmed from a few different sources. The number of children grew and facilitating the visitation of dozens of children, especially under the supervision of just a few employees, likely necessitated the implementation of regulations and procedure. It also seems likely that incidents occurred during visits that prompted the asylum to be more discriminating. The managers decided in 1880 to have some of their members present at the asylum for “Friends Day” after managers Emma H. Gilman and Mary G. Temple reported that having attended one recently, their presence “demonstrated the wisdom of having a Committee on duty.” Records do not elaborate on what transpired, but it was grave enough that the managers decided to limit the visitation hours as well. Six years later, when they decided to allow people to come only once every three months and only with a pass, they also agreed to put a sign outside the institution stating that they would

---

<sup>50</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

not allow in any “drinking person.” The specificity of the exclusion suggests they had experienced problems recently with intoxicated guests.<sup>51</sup>

On occasion, the managers allowed children to visit friends and family. As with those who came to the institution, they wanted close control over whom the children visited. In June 1873, when they decided visitors should only come on days or at times allowed by the managers, they agreed that children should only leave with the managers’ permission. Mary Wright was permitted to visit Mrs. Frederick Seward, a friend of her mother’s in May 1877. Eva McKee and Lizzie Webel visited Genie McKee, a former asylum resident who had been placed with a Mrs. Wood in July 1883. That same month they allowed Augusta Williams to visit her aunt. In December 1876, they denied Betty Lockett’s request to spend one Sunday a month at Mrs. Rittenhouse’s in Georgetown; Rittenhouse had removed Jane Lockett, Betty’s sister, in an indenture the previous year. What swayed the decision of the managers in each of these cases is unclear. Perhaps they declined Lockett’s wish because she wanted to go repeatedly, rather than just once, and on the Sabbath.<sup>52</sup>

### **Behavior**

The children in the institution did not always behave perfectly. They acted out, disobeyed, and disregarded the institution’s rules and procedures. The primary view into the children’s behavior is that of the matrons and teachers, heard mostly through the managers’ minutes. The managers generally learned about the children’s misbehavior from their employees’

---

<sup>51</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Byron Sunderland, *A Sketch of the Life of Dr. William Gunton, Born at Aylsham, Norfolk, England, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1791* (Washington: Joseph L. Pearson, Printer, 1878) 33-43; U.S. Census Bureau. 1870 Census of Population, Washington County, (accessed September 26, 2016), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>

<sup>52</sup> Containers 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

reports and made record of it at their meetings. They also might notice an issue when visiting the asylum. The managers created clear guidelines for punishing children upon opening the institution in 1815; how often the managers and employees followed these is less clear. It seems, rather, that their response to the children's misbehavior varied, usually predicated on the specific situation.<sup>53</sup>

American society in the first half of the nineteenth century condoned corporal punishment for children, as long as parents did not deliver "clearly abusive punishment" which inflicted "serious or permanent bodily or mental injury." Parents employed tools such as whips and rods to correct their children. Teachers, as acting parents, legally could administer discipline. Managers and matrons of orphan asylums, as the children's legal supervisors, likewise had the power to use corporal punishment. Orphanages employed corporal punishment throughout the nineteenth century. This was especially the case with males as society considered boys in greater need of physical correction than girls. Americans believed that girls possessed feminine sensibilities that too harsh punishment could damage. Orphan asylums gradually shifted in the final decades of the century to relying on other methods, such as incentives for proper behavior.<sup>54</sup>

Corporal punishment was not the primary or preferred method of discipline at the Washington City Orphan Asylum. Few cases of corporal punishment appear in the record, and the official protocol for punishment did not explicitly call for physical treatment. The managers both chastised and defended the matrons and teachers for their use of corporal punishment, the determining factor seeming to be the severity of the punishment. They also removed children from indentures where the physical treatment was deemed harsh. The managers outlined in their

---

<sup>53</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>54</sup> Myra C. Glenn, *Campaigns Against Corporal Punishment: Prisoners, Sailors, Women, and Children in Antebellum America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 3, 10; Hacsí, *Second Home*, 156.

“Laws for the Regulation of the Asylum” a defined protocol for punishing children. As they only accepted girls at the time, all of the rules are somewhat gendered, and could have been a reason the managers did not create protocols for whipping. Specific acts of disobedience merited particular punishments; the governess could choose the punishment for all other crimes.<sup>55</sup>

As seen in the “Laws for Regulation,” the institution relied more heavily upon isolation and shame than traditional corporal punishment; it blended psychological and minor corporal correction. For instance, a girl that arrived at school “with dirty hands, face, or nails” would have to remain behind for an additional thirty minutes after everyone else left, a punishment meant to separate the child from her peers.<sup>56</sup> Any child that hit another child would have their hands tied and would stand alone in a room for hours at a time. The punishment for lying was spending the afternoon with her mouth bound with a piece of black silk. Stealing resulted in a child having her hands tied in a black silk bag during the afternoon session of school. The punishment for a girl convicted “of disobedience to the Governess, of quarreling with her companions, of negligence in her lessons or work, of the sin of bad language, or any other fault except those particularly specified” would include receiving only bread and water at however many mealtimes the governess and teachers deemed suitable. The child in question would eat alone at a black table in the corner. If any child persisted with her crime, even after her punishment, she would then receive the same punishment in front of the Board of Managers at their monthly meeting.<sup>57</sup>

The rules instructed the governesses of the asylum to maintain a record of the children’s indiscretions. This record, posted outside the governess’ room, would make the children’s sins known to the rest of the institution. Once every three months, the governess would discipline the

---

<sup>55</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>56</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

child with the most demerits, choosing the punishment according to her discretion. At the yearly meeting, the managers would bring the child with the most marks against her before the asylum society and their subscribers. The child would wear a placard reading “Bad.”<sup>58</sup>

It is telling that the ultimate punishment for children, as the managers planned it, came in the form of having their disobedience presented to the Board of Managers and the asylum’s subscribers. These children should not fear a whip or a rod but rather the condemnation of the people managing and supporting the orphanage. The tools used in punishing children show the importance the managers placed on shame. Forcing a child to wear a sign that read “Bad” was not a physical form of punishment—it was emotional and psychological. The use of the color black is particularly significant as the color carried the association of darkness and sin; the managers associated the color in many cases with the part of the body that led the child to sin (black tie for the mouth, black bag for the hands).<sup>59</sup>

Asylum records do not record actual instances of these particular punishments being used. That is not to say they never were. Since the managers recorded all instances of misbehavior available in the historical record, it is possible the matrons and teachers enacted these punishments without informing the managers. The essence of the punishments—the use of shame—remained at least partially intact, as the matrons and teachers brought children before the managers to be chastised, which also kept the managers apprised of asylum affairs. As with many aspects of their philosophy and guidelines for the asylum, the rules for punishment changed over time. When the managers published an updated constitution in 1878, including “Rules for the Regulation of the Asylum,” their sole instructions concerning the punishment of children were that no employee but the matron could enact punishments and that “Theft, lying,

---

<sup>58</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.; Michel Pastoureau, *Black: The History of a Color* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 52.

quarreling, willful mischief, idleness, disobedience, or impertinence to the Matron or teacher, must never be suffered to go unpunished.” In 1870, the managers decided that rather than depriving children of their breakfast, they should find another suitable punishment for misbehavior. In 1881, the board agreed that they should set aside a room and make it “secure against escape,” where the matron Jeanette B. Wright “could place unruly children”—the means of punishment was different, but the tool of isolation was the same.<sup>60</sup>

Given the longevity of the orphanage and the number of children who lived within its walls, the specific cases of children misbehaving while still at the institution are surprisingly few; approximately thirty children’s names appear in the record from 1815 to 1890. These, of course, are simply the incidents that came to the managers’ attention, and there were some cases where they did not record the child’s name. Matrons and teachers likely only reported the cases they believed the most severe. There were also instances when rather than indicting one or a couple of specific children, the matron or teacher reported general misbehavior. In February 1854, for example, they stated that they had no complaints about the girls, but the boys were “very discouraging.”<sup>61</sup>

The ages of the children whose bad conduct entered the records mirror the hesitancy the managers showed in accepting children above a certain age. Of the children that misbehaved whose ages are recorded, most were between ten and fourteen years old. A few were seven to nine years old. Some were fifteen or older. The asylum consistently saw the greatest behavior issues with its older children. In 1869, the managers decided there was pressing need “for fourteen of the largest boys” to leave the institution, as they “demand[ed] a larger sphere of action.” The managers were even willing to consider advertising to find places for them. It is

---

<sup>60</sup> Containers 32, 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>61</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

possible that the managers did not view the misbehavior of younger children as great a threat because of their size or their influence. In 1863 Miss Cobourn, the teacher, complained that a couple of the older girls had been defiant and disrespectful. Cobourn believed they were “setting a bad example to the younger children.” Matron Jeanette B. Wright argued for having a child removed from the institution in 1892, one of her reasons being fear that the child would persuade the other children to follow in her misguided footsteps.<sup>62</sup>

The consistency of the ages of children punished also might have reflected the managers’ philosophies about childhood, and what was appropriate behavior at different ages. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Americans increasingly shed the pre-modern view of children as little adults and began to view childhood as a period of innocence that required formation and protection. The concept of “adolescence” did not appear until the twentieth century.<sup>63</sup> The ages of the children frequently called before the managers and even removed from the institution for their crimes were the same ages at which the managers allowed children to be placed in indentures. If the managers believed children were old enough to leave the institution, labor, and learn a trade, it is likely they also thought they were old enough to have their misbehavior treated more harshly.<sup>64</sup>

The managers often did not specify what the children did, but simply made a statement about bad behavior or misconduct. Occasionally, though, they included the child’s crimes in their records. Sophia Erskine was expelled from the asylum in 1831 for stealing from the orphanage and illicitly purchasing dry goods under manager Elizabeth Brown’s name. The managers’

---

<sup>62</sup> Container 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Jeanette B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee, March 23, 1892.

<sup>63</sup> Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>64</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

minutes do not mention what charge brought Eliza Lucas, Margaret Seating, and Francis Howard before them in January 1858, but manager Susan R. Coxe elaborated in a letter to Elizabeth Blair Lee. The three children had gone to stores on Christmas Eve asking for Christmas gifts. The managers did not express their reason for objecting, though it was likely because it reflected poorly on the institution to have them soliciting for goods.<sup>65</sup>

The severity of the managers' responses varied, possibly based on the nature and frequency of misbehavior as well as the child's situation. In some instances they scolded a child and let them stay in the institution. Fanny Webster came before the board in June 1856 for misbehavior and again in February 1857. Though Webster was "exceedingly stubborn [and] refused to make any concessions or promises," at the second of these meetings the managers kept her in the institution and hoped her behavior would improve in the future. In severe cases the managers had the child leave, either with a family or to an indenture. Shortly after their Christmas adventure, the managers secured indenture contracts for Eliza Lucas, Margaret Seating, and Francis Howard.<sup>66</sup> Teacher Margaret Wannall told the board in May 1856 that Amelia Weber's "conduct was so outrageous" that they should remove her from the asylum. The managers took steps to have her brother find the child another place, which he did within the following month. The managers instructed Mrs. Bergman, who had placed two boys and two girls in the asylum, to remove her sons Conrad and William Bergman in May 1861, "as they were getting too old and troublesome for the Matron to manage." Mrs. Bergman obliged and removed them that month. The board told the father of Mary Frances Lucas in 1882 to take her

---

<sup>65</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Susan R. Coxe to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Francis Howard does not appear in admission records, and the managers' minutes refer to her as "Francis Howard," but Coxe's letter refers to "Francis Hooper."

<sup>66</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Susan R. Coxe to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

or they would place her in a service position. Lucas' crime was "not giv[ing] satisfaction to the Board of Managers." Mr. Lucas subsequently removed all three of his children from the institution. On at least one occasion, the managers kept a child they otherwise would have sent away with family, but the family circumstances would not allow it. A child was caught stealing in 1890, but as the mother was mentally ill, the board agreed to retain him until his mother could take him.<sup>67</sup>

In 1870, the Reform School of the District of Columbia began housing its first residents and influenced the Washington City Orphan Asylum's treatment of ill-behaved boys for decades to come. The Reform School was founded to help "any boy under sixteen years of age who [was] destitute of a suitable home and an adequate means of obtaining an honest living, or [was] in danger of being brought up, or [was] being brought up, to lead an idle or vicious life." Though its mission resembled that of the Washington City Orphan Asylum, the two institutions served differing functions. The Reform School targeted what Washington society considered an especially at risk demographic. Boys could be sent to the school by the courts, families, friends, or guardians.<sup>68</sup> The Washington City Orphan Asylum began using the Reform School as a sieve, separating out the boys they considered the most troublesome through the Reform School. They believed the institution would provide the boys with the necessary level of discipline. The first boy sent to the Reform School was James Nalley in March 1873. They sent or threatened to send at least ten boys to the Reform School between 1873 and 1890.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Container 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>68</sup> Charles Moore, compiler. *Joint Select Committee to Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia: Part I—Hearings; Statements; Reports From Cities; Suggestions for a Board of Charities*, 55<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1897 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1897), 153-5.

<sup>69</sup> Container 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

One of the most common examples of misbehavior was running away. The managers held interesting and conflicting ideas concerning runaways. In some cases they allowed them to come back, and even sought to have them return; in others they appear to have made no efforts to find them, and in others they denied their return. After Christopher Tenant ran away in 1859, after having been in the institution only a month, the managers refused to let his mother return him. The managers likewise agreed Frederick Gass's brother should take him in 1866 after the eight-year-old absconded during the night. However, after Mary Moreland ran away in 1882, her sister brought her to the asylum again, and the managers agreed to let her stay. They noted the child's contriteness and willingness to wear the asylum's clothing, something that she previously had refused. They also took back Addie Leach who ran away in 1882. Mary Susan Mitchell, who entered the asylum in 1882 at the age of twelve, ran away more than once, which means the asylum had given her a second chance.<sup>70</sup>

Some children, such as John William Allenger who entered the asylum in 1882 at the age of nine, left the institution and did not return; the managers, if they knew what happened to them, did not record it. In other cases the managers had more information. Edgar Anderson ran away and obtained a job. Anderson was admitted to the asylum at age four in 1855, along with his brother Albert, by their brother. He previously had caused problems, and in May 1861 the managers wrote the brother who relinquished him to find somewhere for Anderson to go or they would. Mary Shreve ran away in 1884. The managers discovered she was with her grandparents, who were informed that if Mary did not return, they would also relinquish the other two Shreve children to their grandparents. Either the grandparents returned Mary, or the managers did not make good on their threats, as Lillian and Samuel Shreve continue to appear in asylum records. As with children who misbehaved, the managers might threaten the parents with further action if

---

<sup>70</sup> Container 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

the child continued to run away. After Thomas Leach absconded in 1881, the managers informed his mother that if it happened again they would send him to the Reform School.<sup>71</sup>

Determining why children ran away or acted out while in the institution is in part an exercise in speculation. The children did not explicitly explain themselves, but based on the details surrounding these cases, some conclusions can be drawn. On one hand, they were children. Children misbehave. On the other, rebellion may have been a way for the children to assert their independence, especially in a regimented environment that they generally were admitted to without consultation. Sophia Erskine, Eliza Lucas, Margaret Seating, and Frances Howard wanted material goods they did not have within the asylum. They all used suspect means to procure what they wanted. Their actions may also have been in part for the thrill of doing something against the rules, of acting outside of the confines of the institution. Children refusing to eat their corn bread, wear their aprons, or do their work could have been simple opposition to doing any of those things; it also could have been defiance for the sake of defiance. Mary Moreland ran away from the orphanage at least in part because she did not want to wear the required uniform. Faced with choosing to wear clothes that she abhorred or taking a risk that could mean freedom of sorts, she opted for the latter. Others ran away to positions they thought would be better. Edgar Anderson fled and found a job. Mary Shreve ran away to family members, as surely others considered doing over the course of the century. Their illicit departure likely stemmed from homesickness or loneliness. Without materials written in the child's own hand, it is hard to state more conclusively.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> This possibly could have been Thomas' brother William Leach instead. The record simply states Mrs. Leach's "little boy." Given that they called him her "little" boy I determined they most likely meant her younger son; Container 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>72</sup> Container 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

Children earned rewards and praise in the institution as well as criticism. Often if the managers praised a child it was for accomplishments in their school or housework. The managers frequently observed the children and commented on their improvement. Occasionally they gave awards for the children's schoolwork and housework. The prizes included medals, books, and garments or material for garments. For example, in 1869 the managers gave Martha Elmore material to make an apron when her shirt was selected as the best of the top six chosen by the teacher.<sup>73</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The children of the Washington City Orphan Asylum lived experiences similar to other institutionalized orphans and dependent children in the nineteenth century. Their clothes, diet, forms of punishment, and level of interaction with family outside of the orphanage's walls might have been slightly different, but the regimentation persisted. Their lives were ordered according to the worldviews of the people who ran the institution. Shifting mentalities could result in changing policies that might mean that children in the 1850s could frequently see their parents and other relatives, but asylum residents in the 1880s could not. Within the structured life within the orphan asylum, children at times found ways to assert their own will, make their own decisions, particularly through misbehavior and expressions about educational desires. Children perhaps had even more opportunities to voice their wishes and concerns when it came to their lives beyond the asylum, when they prepared to leave.

---

<sup>73</sup> Container 36 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

## **CHAPTER THREE: CITIZENS**

### **Introduction**

The Washington City Orphan Asylum, though at times considered a “home” by the people who ran it, was not meant to be a permanent residence for its children. The managers expected the children to leave, hopefully in an indenture or an adoption, and definitely once they became of age. Indentures and adoptions were a significant part of the asylum’s management. People from the District of Columbia, neighboring Maryland and Virginia, and even across the country took children to labor and learn a trade, become a family member, or a blend of the two. As with the admissions process and the care of the children, the asylum’s community played a role in children’s placements, as people provided references, took multiple children, and brought their family and friends to remove children. All the parties involved in a child’s indenture or adoption—the managers, the people removing a child, and the child—had expectations for what the placement would look like. Indentures, adoptions, and job placement upon aging out of the asylum were one of the ways that children could make their own voices heard and to a degree determine their future. Indentures and adoptions could play a large role in separating biological families, and for that reason, as well as others such as abuse, some placements came to a premature end. The children who grew up in the institution experienced varying levels of personal and professional success as adults. Some maintained relationships with the institution, volunteering their help, using the asylum as a resource for information, as a source of employment, and even as a home for their own children.

### **Indentures and Adoptions**

The managers intended from the institution’s founding for the children to leave before reaching adulthood. The asylum’s constitution stated that, “As soon as the age and acquirements

of the children shall, in the opinion of the Board of Direction, render them capable of earning their living, they must be bound out to some reputable persons, or families, for such object and in such manner as the Board shall approve.” The primary purpose was to have the children learn a trade, such as farming or housekeeping, which could translate into a sustainable living once the child reached adulthood.<sup>1</sup> The apprenticeship system used to care for and train poor youth, and not just those in orphanages, stemmed from European practices, and was common until the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> While this was the foremost reason for creating indentures for the asylum’s children, they also served two other purposes, ones that the managers may not have realized initially—they created space in the institution to admit more children and they removed the older children, the population most at risk to misbehave. The managers even came to use indentures as a means to remove rebellious children from the institution. As with other aspects of their management and their philosophy, the treatment of indentures changed over time, shifts likely rooted in experience as well as larger trends in society.<sup>3</sup>

As the century progressed, the managers began placing more children in adoptions, a shift that more or less mirrored changes in other American orphanages.<sup>4</sup> The line between an indenture and an adoption was not always clear. Though a child placed out for adoption might still work, they generally enjoyed a higher status within the family with a more long-term philosophy applied to their placement. Labor was also not the main reason for their placement. The managers decided in 1868, following the case of Carrie Bliss, to alter the contract forms

---

<sup>1</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Wallis Herndon and John E. Murray, eds., *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprentice System in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Containers 32 and 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy A. Hacsí. *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 137.

regarding indentures and adoptions. The managers learned that Bliss, who had been adopted by Carey Guyenne of Illinois in 1859, had been returned to her biological mother by her adoptive family without the managers' approval. The managers resolved to inquire into the child's transfer but also determined that in future adoption cases, instead of using the word "housekeeper" on the child's indenture form, the form "should be written as a son or daughter or member of the family." Despite this resolution, the managers continued to use "housekeeper," "farmer," or other occupational terms in the forms rather than specifying the placement was an adoption rather than an indenture. As early as 1877 the asylum began using a separate form for adoptions from indentures, though they still used indenture forms in some cases that their minutes recognized as an adoption. At times in their records, the managers used both terms to describe a placement. Regardless of the gray area, there were distinctions between indentures and adoptions, both in the position of the child and the characteristics the managers used to determine the suitability of a case. The differences meant that for children it was almost a matter of chance as to whether they were placed in a labor contract or adopted as a son or daughter.<sup>5</sup>

### **Characteristics of Placements**

One of the main differences between children adopted and indentured was age. Adoption cases had a far greater age range. The managers were willing for applicants wishing to adopt to remove a child of any age, likely because the family intended to treat the child as one of their own. Most of the children that were indentured were nine-years-old or older and so had, in the managers' eyes, reached the age at which they could reasonably leave the institution and learn a trade or occupation. The managers became somewhat stricter about the age of children placed out in indentures as the century progressed, as well as the educational level they should have

---

<sup>5</sup> Containers 34, 36, 41, 43, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

attained. In 1877, they resolved that children should be fourteen-years-old before leaving and know how to write, read, and perform basic arithmetic. They provided that in special cases the board could allow a child to leave earlier. An adapted constitution printed in 1878 included the educational requirement about reading and writing, but did not include arithmetic and made no mention of the children's age. If the managers' philosophy about restricting age remained, they continued to find cause for exception, as they indentured several children after 1877 that were younger than fourteen-years-old.<sup>6</sup>

Children were typically indentured for specific occupations, though they might fulfill several tasks once placed. The most common job for boys was farming and for girls housekeeping. A few boys were placed to learn a craft. William Leaton Kerr, who entered the institution in 1832, lived first with a Mr. Chester, a shoemaker, and then with a Mr. Todd, a hatter. Thirteen-year-old John Forrest went to live with Nelson Potter in Daysville, Virginia in 1882 to learn basket making. Potter also was a farmer, so it is likely Forrest assisted with the farm work as well. Several boys were indentured as carpenters. Girls likewise might be indentured to learn a more specific trade. Elizabeth Kemp left with Miss Hodson in 1847 to learn dressmaking. Her sister Susan Kemp was placed the next year with Mrs. Williams to learn mantua making.<sup>7</sup>

The managers had certain positions in which they did not want the children placed. In their 1877 resolution they specified jobs they would not let children do. They agreed that girls should not be placed in an indenture in a boarding house and boys and girls alike should not be placed in a tavern or a restaurant. They particularly emphasized that boys not leave as house servants and girls not be placed as a nurse to other children. The managers did not explicitly state

---

<sup>6</sup> Containers 32, 34, 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>7</sup> Containers 34, 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

their aversion to these occupations. Taverns had long been associated with vice and boarding houses likewise frequently hosted large groups of raucous men, the exact kind of environment from which managers wished to keep children away. The managers might have believed that a boy placed as a house servant or a girl as a nurse would not be adequate career training. They also might have considered it too much responsibility for any of the girls to be charged with caring for other children.<sup>8</sup>

The Washington City Orphan Asylum possibly had a wider geographic range for placements than other orphanages. John E. Murray in his work on the Charleston Orphan House discusses applicants coming from outside of the city to gain apprentices, but the people he mentions were still from South Carolina.<sup>9</sup> In her work on Progressive era institutions in Baltimore, Maryland, Nurith Zmora notes that the Dolan Home, which was Irish Catholic, exclusively allowed children to go only to Catholic families in Maryland.<sup>10</sup> Many children of the Washington City Orphan Asylum were indentured to people living in Washington and other areas within the District of Columbia, such as Georgetown, but as many left the District for their indentures. Given the small size of Washington and its neighboring cities, it was likely necessary for some children to leave the District for their indentures, especially as the city grew and many of the boys left to learn farming. It is also likely that for some of the people coming to the institution to request children the Washington City Orphan Asylum was their closest option. In 1888, the managers had lawyer Edward Redmayne consult on the legality of the board indenturing children outside of the District of Columbia. The specific case was that of Elizabeth

---

<sup>8</sup> Containers 32, 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Richard Stott, *Jolly Fellows: Male Milieus in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 7-13.

<sup>9</sup> John E. Murray, *The Charleston Orphan House: Children's Lives in the First Public Orphanage in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 154-155.

<sup>10</sup> Nurith Zmora, *Orphanages Reconsidered: Child Care Institutions in Progressive Era Baltimore* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 113.

Barr, whom they wished to send to Pennsylvania. Though Barr did not end up going to Pennsylvania, it was not because of legal issues. Redmayne argued that the institution's incorporation granted them the authority to act as they saw fit in apprenticing the children with no interference from their parents.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the children who left the District of Columbia stayed relatively close to the capital. Neighboring Maryland and Virginia were popular locations for indentures, particularly the areas bordering Washington. Fairfax County, Virginia, which lay to the west of Washington, hosted many children, as did Fairfax County's northwest neighbor, Loudoun County. Montgomery County, Maryland, directly north of the District of Columbia, was the home to over thirty children placed in indentures. Prince George's County, Maryland—Washington's neighbor to the east—was another common location for indentures. The managers likely did not consider these places far from Washington and the institution; Elizabeth Blair Lee, who served as first directress for over fifty years, was herself a part-time resident of Montgomery County.<sup>12</sup>

Some children were placed in indentures and adoptions farther away than the area surrounding the District of Columbia. The managers allowed families to take children to destinations along the East Coast, including Connecticut, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, New York, and Delaware, and to the interior United States to states like Louisiana, Ohio, Illinois, and Utah. The managers sometimes expressed their reservations about making such distant placements. Elizabeth Blair Lee wrote her husband Samuel Phillips Lee in February 1861 about children she had sent to the "far west" saying, "I felt reluctant about it—but the hard times makes

---

<sup>11</sup> Containers 3, 34, 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>12</sup> Containers 34, 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Virginia Laas, ed. *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee* (University of Illinois Press, 1999), 3.

me cautious about keeping them when we can make any other sure provision for them . . . .”<sup>13</sup>

The board rejected a Mrs. Ewing’s request for a girl in May 1869 because Boston was “too far from their supervision to send a child.” These opinions seem to have been temporary, or their concerns frequently were quelled, as they continued in the future to place children with families distant from the District of Columbia.<sup>14</sup>

In some ways, the Washington City Orphan Asylum was alone in relocating its children to broad geographic destinations, but in others it was not. While other nineteenth-century institutions that placed children directly from the orphanage typically did not place them outside of the asylum’s state, a practice rose in the mid-nineteenth century of relocating children to the West. Social reform leaders such as Charles Loring Brace and his Children’s Aid Society advocated moving dependent children out of overcrowded cities in the east, using trains to do so. Reformers believed this would lessen the burden on eastern cities, settle children in healthier, agricultural environments where they could have better childhoods, and provide western farms with much needed labor. Marilyn Irvin Holt notes in her work *The Orphan Trains: Placing Out in America* that locations once considered to be the west, like Indiana and Illinois, began sending their own children to other areas like the Northwest towards the end of the century, at the same time that they continued to receive children from the east.<sup>15</sup>

Though the Washington City Orphan Asylum shared some of the geographic diversity of the orphan trains, as well as the spirit of placing children in good homes, they differed in what caused them to place children in homes far from the institution. The Washington orphanage first placed children in out-of-state indentures in 1829—sending Martha and Mary Mace to Black

---

<sup>13</sup> As quoted in Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Containers 34, 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>15</sup> Marilyn Irvin Holt, *The Orphan Trains: Placing Out in America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 4.

Rock, New York—decades before the orphan trains came into full usage. The managers of the Washington City Orphan Asylum, rather than intentionally sending children to distant, less-settled locations more likely took advantage of the opportunities to place children as they came. They did not have lofty goals for settling the west or lessening their urban population, possibly because Washington did not industrialize like other cities, but rather focused on finding the best available home for the children in their institution. Given the characteristics of Washington—the small size of the District of Columbia and the number of people coming to the city for temporary, often political reasons—at times the homes that presented themselves were as far as Arkansas or Minnesota.<sup>16</sup>

The managers were generally willing for children to go with people who were single or married. It was more evident when they apprenticed a child to a single woman since the English language differentiates between single and married women, and the managers did not necessarily note the men's marital statuses. They would let single women take boys or girls; it is not clear if they allowed the same for men, though it is likely they did. The only case in which they objected to an application because of the marital status and gender make up of the family was in 1868, when Mrs. Turner asked for two girls and a boy, intending for “the boy to be brought up as a protector to the household.” The managers denied the request, “as the family were all ladies.” They perhaps worried the boy would not receive proper life training in such an environment.<sup>17</sup>

The indenture form for taking children from the institution included specific responsibilities of the signing party, who paid one dollar for the privilege of having a child indentured to them. They were to instruct the child in the agreed upon occupation. They also

---

<sup>16</sup> Container 34, 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878* (Princeton University Press, 1962), 35-37, 157, 191-192, 263-264, 314-315, 331, 356.

<sup>17</sup> Containers 34, 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

pledged to feed, clothe, and house the child, provide them with medical care when they were sick, and teach or have them taught “the elementary parts of the English language and education, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic.” Girls generally were bound until they were eighteen and boys until twenty-one, when they were considered “of age.” Once the child had grown, the person to whom they were indentured were to supply them with “a good suit of wearing apparel” and a predetermined amount of money, generally around fifty dollars, though sometimes less. These requirements reflected the apprenticeship contracts long used in colonial America and the United States. The language within adoption forms, beginning in 1877, differed from indenture forms in that they listed fewer specifics but included the spirit of a deeper commitment. People agreeing to adopt a child pledged to care for the child as if they were their own. They were barred from transferring the child to another household in an indenture. They also promised to “advance and settle [the child] in life according as circumstance may admit.”<sup>18</sup>

### **The Community in Indentures and Adoptions**

The institution’s broader network often aided in the indenture and adoption process. The act of taking children from the institution and promising to feed, clothe, house, and educate them was a communal one, even if the person taking a child did not always uphold that agreement as well as they should have. The stories of people who removed children reveal an even deeper interconnected community. At times the people who removed children were closely connected to the institution. For example, James George Naylor, who built the asylum’s new building at 14<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Containers 41 and 43, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Herndon and Murray, eds., *Children Bound to Labor*, 1.

and S beginning in 1865, removed fourteen-year-old Richard Evans in 1865 to work as a carpenter.<sup>19</sup>

Community members provided references for indenture and adoption applications just as they did for admissions. The managers did not record that references were given in every case, but some records indicate that the managers not only wanted recommendations but required them from people they knew themselves. A person writing to endorse George Lowrie in 1875 indicated as much when they stated, “I am informed that the rules of your institution require that persons so applying shall be vouched for as to Character etc. by some other person or persons known to you.” Two years later when Daniel M. Searles of Manassas, Virginia applied for a boy the managers requested for him to provide a new reference, as the one he used from Manassas was unfamiliar to the board. He did so, and the managers agreed to let him adopt James Hall. As these records are later in the century, it is possible the managers grew more stringent as time passed.<sup>20</sup>

Some of the letters the managers received were direct and concise in stating the person deserved to take a child; others elaborated on the qualities that prepared the applicant to care for and educate a young charge. The letters often struck on the themes of the applicant’s worthy character, financial security, and their want of a child. In recommending Mr. and Mrs. Bates Jones of Washington to take a child in 1883, James C. Dulin stated “If I was an orphan I would consider myself fortunate in being made an inmate of their household.” The managers let the Jones family adopt sixteen-month-old Willis Reese. George Peter assured the board in his 1888 letter recommending Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Banks that “If I had the disposal of an orphan I know

---

<sup>19</sup> Containers 17, 34, 36, 41, and 44 records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>20</sup> Containers 34, 36, 41, 42, 43, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

of no place or family I would prefer entrusting her with than Mr. & Mrs. Bank.” Records are not clear as to whether the managers granted the Banks’ application.<sup>21</sup>

Sometimes those that recommended others had themselves taken a child in an adoption or an indenture. Zadock Talbert, after taking John Newman, recommended Thomas B. Benson in 1871 to adopt Alice Nalley, to which the managers agreed. Sarah LeFevre of Fairfax, Virginia took Robert Felton in September 1880. The following April she recommended George Dimsey and the managers granted him Eddie Webel. Lucy Garrett wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee recommending J. Heagy to take a boy from the institution in January 1893. Garrett had removed John Russell from the asylum previously, and concluded her letter in wishing that Heagy might “find as good a boy as John Russell has proved to be.”<sup>22</sup>

In some cases, families took more than one child from the institution. Some, like Dabney O. Schackelford, took several children at once. Schackelford, a resident of Charlottesville, Virginia, asked the board for two boys in June 1874 and was granted Willie Jackson and Edward Ratrie. Schackelford wanted the children “to assist on his farm [and] to be treated as members of the family . . . .” Others, such as Frances Dickens, took one child and later asked for another. Dickens, a single woman who lived in Fairfax County, Virginia, took Evelina Snyder in October 1870, intending for the child to help with the household chores as well as serve as a companion. Two years later in May 1873, while Snyder was still in her house, Dickens asked for Nellie Donovan, to which the managers agreed.<sup>23</sup>

At times, extended members of families would apply, simultaneously or consecutively, for children from the institution. Perhaps one of the most extensive examples of this was the

---

<sup>21</sup> Containers 36, 41, 42, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Containers 36, 41, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

family comprising the Drinkards, Washingtons, and Berrys. Dr. William B. Drinkard served as one of the asylum's doctors beginning in 1870, specializing in treating the children's eyes and ears. In 1872, Drinkard's parents, William R. Drinkard and Mary F. Drinkard asked the institution for a child. William R. Drinkard wrote Mary Wannall, the institution's matron, for not only himself and his wife but also for one Mrs. A. I. Pemberton who lived in King George County, Virginia. Drinkard included a reference to his son, Dr. William Drinkard, whom he noted was an "acquaintance" of Wannall's. It is not clear if the managers gave either Pemberton or the Drinkards a child.<sup>24</sup>

Dr. William B. Drinkard died in 1877, but the family continued their relationship through requesting children. In May 1889, Marion Drinkard requested two boys from the asylum. She was married to Thomas E. Drinkard, the son of William R. Drinkard and brother of the late Dr. William B. Drinkard. The managers let her take James Andrew Speanburg and Willie Anderson to live with her family in Prince George's County, Maryland. The next year, in June, Marion Drinkard returned to request another boy, but the board informed her that there were not any over the age of ten. The following month, the managers recorded that Mrs. Drinkard wanted to take Eddie Green when he was of age to leave the institution. They did not note which Mrs. Drinkard made the request—William and Thomas Drinkard had three brothers, Robert, Waverley, and Charles, and their mother might have still been living as well. It was most likely Marion Drinkard, as she had been at the asylum the month before. Green ended up leaving the institution the next year with someone else.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Container 42 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>25</sup> Container 36, 41, 42, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Matrimonial," *Alexandria gazette*. (Alexandria, D.C.), 10 April 1875. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85025007/1875-04-10/ed-1/seq-3/>>; "Buildings Dedicated," *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 28 Feb. 1903. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1903-02-28/ed-1/seq-10/>> U.S. Census Bureau. 1860 Census

In December 1890, Marion Drinkard again came to the institution and the managers agreed to let her adopt Charles Donohue. Records suggest that while Donohue was adopted, Speanburg and Anderson had just been indentured to the Drinkards; why they indentured the first two children but adopted the third is unclear. At the same time, Carrie Washington, the single sister of Marion Drinkard, requested to adopt a child, the managers granting her Nettie Cook. Two years later in May 1892, the board indentured Charles Russell to Roberta Berry, another single sister of Marion Drinkard's. She came with Thomas E. Drinkard's recommendation. He also signed the indenture form with Berry. In July 1892, Marion Drinkard wrote the board to recommend her cousin, Mrs. Hove, who wished to take a child. In her letter, Drinkard gave the managers an update on Charlie Donohue, Charlie Russell, and Andrew Speanburg, stating, "I am sure you like to hear of the welfare of all the children." Several years passed before the family came to the asylum to request children.<sup>26</sup>

In July 1897, Mrs. Drinkard appeared before the board to request a boy for her sister, who was unable to come herself. Though the managers did not specify, it was likely Marion Drinkard asking for Carrie Washington—the board told her they did not have any children to put out at the moment but the following November they allowed Washington to adopt Cereal Pelow, Marion Drinkard signing the form. Pelow stayed with Washington until at least 1910, when he was twenty-years-old. At some point, Washington also removed Charlie Ganner. In June 1899,

---

of Population, the City of Washington, District of Columbia (accessed January 29, 2017), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>

<sup>26</sup> Container 36, 41, 42, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

Marion Drinkard removed Montgomery Scott. From 1870 to 1899, the family removed or asked to take at least ten children.<sup>27</sup>

People within the Washington City Orphan Asylum's community played many important roles in placing children in homes—taking children, taking multiple children, inspiring their family members to take children, serving as references for people to take children, referring people after they had already taken children. The complex and diverse nature of these roles speaks to the importance of the asylum's network and community; it was in part through community involvement that the institution was able to find homes for children.

### **Declined Indentures and Adoptions**

The managers did not always approve applications for indentures or adoptions, often because they felt the placement violated one of their rules or because they did not have any suitable children. In several cases, people applied to have children perform jobs that the managers did not believe appropriate. The managers denied placing girls in nursing positions on multiple occasions. They also turned people away because no child was old enough to leave the institution in a placement, according to the managers' standards or the requests of the people making an application. They would not let Mrs. Galloway take a girl in 1857, partly because they had none old enough, but also because they did not wish to send a child to a boarding house. At times the managers believed it was better for the children to stay in the institution. They denied Mrs. Riley's request for one boy for herself and another for her sister, Mrs. Brown, in 1876, though she had satisfactory references, because the children in question were showing progress in school and the Riley's store, where she wished for the boy she took to work, sold "ardent

---

<sup>27</sup> Container 36, 41, 42, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; U.S. Census Bureau. 1910 Census of Population, King George County, Virginia, Potomac Magisterial District, (accessed January 29, 2017), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>

spirits.” They also declined D.B. Sherrod in 1877, though he was a “worthy Christian gentleman,” because he was blind and his main intention for taking a boy was to have someone assist him in his daily activities as well as read and write for him. The managers declined as Sherrod “could not advance the interests of the boy.”<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes the managers rejected an indenture or adoption application because the child performed some role within the institution, and the managers did not believe they could do without the child’s contribution. In the 1860s and early 1870s in particular, a period when the asylum especially depended on the children’s labor, the managers declined several applications for older girls, because they were needed in the orphanage. The refusal of these applications indicates the prioritization within the managers’ philosophy. As in their treatment of other areas in running the institution, like illness, they placed the well-being of the institution as a whole over that of individual children. While they might generally believe it best for the children to leave to learn a life skill, if the asylum needed the children, then they would not let them go.<sup>29</sup>

### **Expectations of People Taking Children**

As the managers had criteria for the people who removed children in indentures and adoptions, the people who requested children had their own expectations. Mrs. Leslie informed the managers in 1888 that she desired “an apparently good looking child” who was “also bright.” Some applicants made specifications about the age of child they wanted. Several, especially those forming indenture contracts, wanted older children. In the case of Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Langhorne of Maysville, Kentucky, who adopted Pauline Redding in 1867, they wanted “a little girl not over two years.” Redding was almost three-years-old, but the couple agreed to take her.

---

<sup>28</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>29</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

Their request of a younger child was likely because they intended to adopt her, and might have thought they could have greater control over the formation of her character and ensure greater emotional separation from her family if they took a younger child.<sup>30</sup>

Some people who came to the asylum could not find a suitable child. For instance, R.S. Lacey, a patent agent and Washington resident, came to the asylum in April 1886 and did not find any who fit his requirements. He wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee a few days later to detail specifically what he required: a boy to serve as “an assistant rather than a hewer of wood and a drawer of water.” Since Lacey was trusting the child with much responsibility he wanted, “as an essential qualification, a clear head, untrammelled in any wise by bad habits.” The chosen boy, Lacey asserted, would have good opportunity for growth and financial advancement, and he believed his record as an employer showed as much. Lacey concluded, “While I am perfectly willing to use my best efforts to assist you in fitting a ward for future usefulness, yet I cannot undertake such duty with one who by his own volition interposes a bar to higher skill and trustworthiness.” According to Lacey’s assessment, none of the boys of the Washington City Orphan Asylum met his standards.<sup>31</sup>

### **Terminated Indentures and Adoptions**

Several of the children who left the institution in indentures and adoptions ended up returning. Their indentures ended for a variety of reasons. Sarah Hinton returned to the asylum after George Wheeler, whom she had lived with for a year, died in May 1843. Some of the people who took children were dissatisfied with the children’s performance, or found their

---

<sup>30</sup> Containers 34, 36, 41, 42, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>31</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; R.S. Lacey to Elizabeth Blair Lee, April 9, 1886, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 226, Folder 9; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

personalities conflicted. Rebecca Dunlop returned after four months with Mrs. John C. Smith in 1861, as Smith found the child “did not suit her.” George Dinsey returned Henry Hutchinson in August 1884, after having taken the child the previous May and “finding the boy deficient in capacity and [that he] could not be taught a trade.” The managers gave him Charles Schultz instead. Some children had medical maladies that prompted their return. John Lovelace was returned by Joseph T. Harnsberger in 1888 after having lived with him on his farm in William County, Virginia for just a month as Lovelace had “trouble with his eyes.” Harnsberger requested another child, and the board granted him Robert Patterson. The managers found another home for Lovelace the next month.<sup>32</sup>

The turnover of indentures meant that some children lived in several different homes. The combination of their biological home or homes, the institution, and their indenture contracts or adoption placements resulted in a childhood spent in transition. Rosa Paddy was another such example. After her father admitted her to the institution, she left in September 1873 with the family of John H. Simpson, residents of Loudoun County, Virginia. After living with them for a year-and-a-half, Paddy returned to the institution at Simpson’s request in early 1875. She stayed at the asylum for a few months until the managers placed her with Mrs. E.J. Hall, who lived in Brookville, Maryland, in May 1875. A child no more than fifteen-years-old, her life had been a pattern of family home, institution, indenture placement, institution, indenture placement.<sup>33</sup>

In a few cases the managers explicitly denied letting people in an indenture return a child to the institution. These instances occurred after the Civil War, a chronology that suggests that their mentality shifted over time. They usually informed the person inquiring that the matter was no longer under their control or that it was against the rules for them to receive the child back.

---

<sup>32</sup> Containers 34, 36, 41, and 44 records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>33</sup> Containers 36, 41, and 44 records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

Some of their rationale behind their denials is revealed in the 1869 case of Josephine Sturgis, who had been sent to Dover, Delaware. Faced with the prospect of Sturgis possibly returning to the asylum after Mrs. Chancellor Bates decided against taking the child, the managers tasked one of their members, Mrs. Brown, with finding Sturgis another home, preferably in Dover. In their minutes they noted, “the return of children in to the asylum after having been out in the world, beyond the wholesome influence of the Institution, is generally productive of evil,” a statement that reveals the managers’ conflicting ideology. They believed the homes where they sent children would be good for the children, yet they worried about readmitting children who had left into the institution for fear that their potentially-corrupted character would have a negative impact on the other children. As with other aspects of their management, such as the use of the child’s labor, they prioritized the institution first. They also revealed an unstable confidence in one of the major components of their management.<sup>34</sup>

Instead of having children returned to the institution, sometimes the managers suggested transferring them to a different household, as in Sturgis’s case. Elizabeth Jane Hibbs, admitted in 1832 at the age of two, went to live with Margaret Lennox in November 1833. In January 1834 the managers agreed that Hibbs could live with Miss Greaves, if their investigation showed it to be a good placement. When Mrs. Ponder started experiencing problems with Pauline Lichtenberger in 1876, particularly the child’s negative sway over Ponder’s son, the managers said she could not return the child but could find her another home.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

## Mistreatment in Indentures

One of the circumstances under which the managers were almost sure to bring a child back to the institution was if there was evidence of abuse. Some children left the institution to live with families who proved unworthy or incapable of caring for them. The abuse of children in their indentures and adoptions came in many forms—physical, deprivation of food and clothing, violations of labor contracts, overburdening with work, and harm that the managers did not detail even in personal letters. How many children were mistreated by people entrusted with their protection and provision is not definitively known; the managers only recorded the cases that came to their attention. The managers' knowledge of mistreatment often resulted from the child writing the board, running away from their indenture, or the child's relatives or friends informing the board. Given the courage, resolve, and opportunity it would take for a child in an abusive situation to speak up or even leave, it is not unreasonable to believe that the number was greater than that represented by managerial records, especially since most instances were conveyed to the managers rather than discovered by them. One example of a child who endured abuse in an indenture, of which the managers most likely remained unaware, was Vernon Swearinger. After entering the institution in 1889 at the age of six along with two sisters, he and his sister Sarah went to live with the family of George Turner in Port Conway, Virginia in 1895. Swearinger reported to the institution in 1901 that he had run away from the Turners due to mistreatment, and on coming back to Washington found brief employment in the house of a doctor, and was trying to get into the army. No record indicates that before that point the managers knew of his mistreatment. Often, when the managers learned of abuse, they sought to verify the child's statement, rather than totally trusting their testimony.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Container 36 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Mary L. Squires to Blair Lee, July 10, 1901, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 408, Folder 8; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

The managers did not resolve until 1877 to check on the children in their indentures. Sixty-two years passed without established protocol to confirm that children placed with relative strangers were not being abused or neglected. The managers' failure to do so previously coincided with a generally underdeveloped societal knowledge and treatment of children in abusive situations.<sup>37</sup> In 1903 the managers altered their indenture form, at the suggestion of Blair Lee representing the Board of Trustees, to include a clause concerning the asylum retrieving a child in case of abuse or dereliction of contract. Lee's letter followed the case of a boy named James Oliver Scott. The asylum wished to recall Scott from his placement with Henry Selby in Derwood, Maryland, following reports of mistreatment in the indenture. Selby replied with a letter dated July 22, 1902 stating that Scott's condition within his home had been maliciously misrepresented. Selby's resistance to the institution's will likely prompted Lee's recommendation to change the form. The managers also agreed to Lee's suggestion to look in on the children periodically, a resolution that suggests that their 1877 form was not followed as strictly as intended.<sup>38</sup>

In January 1864, the orphanage had to remove two children from a placement. First Directress Elizabeth Blair Lee wrote about the incident to her husband, Samuel Phillips Lee, but did not provide the children's or the family's names. The family who had them had "treated them with cruelty." Lee commented that "the girl is a great beauty & I hope we have rescued her in time to save her . . . ." Lee did not elaborate on the crimes committed against the children, but

---

<sup>37</sup> LeRoy Ashby in his book *Engangered Children: Dependency, Neglect, and Abuse in American History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 56-59 talks about the 1874 case of Mary Ellen Connolly altering the treatment of child abuse. In pleading Connolly's case of abuse at the hands of her foster parents, her advocates had to rely on the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals as no similar organizations against child abuse existed. After Connolly's case, the number of organizations to help abused children grew rapidly.

<sup>38</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Henry E. Selby, letter, July 22, 1902, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 408, Folder 5; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

they were severe enough for Lee to worry about the girl's future, which suggests severe physical and possibly sexual abuse. Lee herself and Ann Washington, one of the other managers, had placed the children with the family. Washington felt a considerable amount of stress concerning their treatment, according to Lee, and inspected the situation earnestly.<sup>39</sup>

Another pair of the asylum's children, Nancy Hughes and Snowden Jarboe, went to live with the family of George Calvert in Prince George's County, Maryland in 1864. Hughes, who was twelve-years-old, was indentured as a housekeeper and Jarboe, fourteen-years-old, as a gardener. Nancy and her brother George Hughes had previously left the asylum to live with Mrs. Mankin, a friend of their mother's, in 1861, but did not stay with her long as the workload in her home was more than anticipated. Hughes and Jarboe lived with the Calverts for several years. In March 1868, the managers learned that George Calvert had died and his wife planned to place the children in other homes. The managers agreed to write her and instruct her to return the children to the asylum. Hughes at least returned within the next few months, and Elizabeth Blair Lee received a letter from Mrs. Calvert regarding the child. The managers again decided to tell Calvert that Hughes would stay with them, considering George Calvert's death, as well as the abuse that Hughes endured while living with the family. At some point, the exact time of which they did not record, Jarboe returned as well. It is unclear if he also experienced mistreatment in the Calvert household.<sup>40</sup>

A couple months after returning to the asylum, Nancy Hughes, then fifteen-years-old, went to live with Mrs. Reynolds. She stayed almost a year, at which point she left, informing the family through a note that she went to visit friends. Mrs. Reynolds later learned that Hughes had gone to live with her mother. Snowden Jarboe went to live with Mr. Randolph. He wrote to

---

<sup>39</sup> As quoted in Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 337.

<sup>40</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

manager Elizabeth Mullikin in May 1868 describing the work he was doing, and requesting to live somewhere where he could learn a skill. The managers agreed to ask Randolph to return him, but it does not appear that happened. Jarboe returned to the institution in March 1869. The managers agreed that due to Randolph's treatment of the nineteen-year-old, who was "entirely destitute of clothing" and had been subjected to hard labor with no sartorial or financial compensation, they would not reimburse Randolph the expenses for returning Jarboe to the city.<sup>41</sup>

The managers indentured another pair of non-related children, Nettie Sturgis and James Dean, in 1864 to Edmund Townsend of Bladensburg, Maryland. Like Hughes and Jarboe, Sturgis and Dean stayed in their indenture for several years. In May 1869, the asylum's matron Mary Wannall informed the board that Dean had sent her a letter from Philadelphia, where the children had relocated with Townsend. The contents of the letter caused the board to agree to send Wannall to retrieve the two children. Wannall successfully returned them to the institution, the board noting in their minutes that Townsend had violated their indenture contracts and mistreated them, going so far as to refer to Wannall's journey to get them as a "rescue."<sup>42</sup>

Several children responded to abuse in their placements by running away, an action that resulted in the managers learning of their mistreatment. Henry Newman ran away from William Shaw's farm in Montgomery County, Maryland twice after being placed there in December 1870. After the second instance, he returned to the orphanage in April 1871 where he informed the board that he had been mistreated. The managers, after verifying his statement, agreed that he should not return to Shaw. Thirteen-year-old Oden Thorpe went to live with C.H. Spear in

---

<sup>41</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Elizabeth H. Mullikin" Find A Grave, (Accessed January 31, 2017), <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=154583241&ref=acom>.

<sup>42</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

Fairfax, Virginia in August 1881. Four months later in December 1881, a police officer found the boy coming back into Washington, having run away from Spear's, and returned him to the asylum. Spear had required Thorpe to work in the snow and had not given him shoes to wear while doing so. Charles Gelrich likewise ran away from an abusive placement with B.T. Swartz. Gelrich had lived with Swartz since 1878. Elizabeth Blair Lee, who had recommended Swartz to take a different child in 1871, told her fellow board members in January 1880 that Gelrich had left Swartz's home. Initially the board decided to send Gelrich back to his contractual home, at least for the time being. After learning of the crimes committed against him, they agreed to place him elsewhere temporarily while they looked for a more permanent settlement. Swartz had failed to fulfill certain parts of the indenture contract, having him work in the home rather than on the farm, and had hit the sixteen-year-old in the head "without provocation."<sup>43</sup>

At times the children's families and friends were the ones who reported abuse to the asylum. Rozier Snyder went to live with Pauline Bergfeld in Montgomery County, Maryland in October 1876 at the age of twelve. Three years later, in January 1880, Snyder's guardian, Mr. Volk, asked the board to terminate the boy's indenture due to mistreatment, particularly his "suffering for the want of proper clothing and other necessaries of life." Elizabeth Blair Lee substantiated Volk's claims with her own observations, and the board wrote to Bergfeld to have the child returned. The same month the board indentured Snyder to Bergfeld, they allowed the family of J.G. Garland to adopt siblings Harry and Minnie DeCover, ages eleven and eight. The following February, the board convened in a special meeting to discuss claims against Mrs. Garland. The DeCover's aunt, Mrs. Cohen, came before the managers to share what she knew of

---

<sup>43</sup> Containers 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

the children's treatment. They agreed to investigate further and the next month in March 1877 decided to remove the children from the Garland's home.<sup>44</sup>

### **Biological Families in Indentures and Adoptions**

As the story of the DeCovers and their aunt Mrs. Cohen shows, biological families sometimes remained in contact with children even in their placements. The presence of a child's biological family could complicate indenture and adoption cases. Many children were placed out with no objection from their parents or other family members, likely because the managers did not typically consult them, but in some instances the tension between the two worlds proved problematic and even heartbreaking. In legally relinquishing the child to the institution, the family gave the managers the right to place the child out without the family's approval. In few cases did the managers consult the parents or guardian as to the child's placement, and in these cases there appear to have been special circumstances, though the managers did not always make plain what they were. Likely it was just an agreement with the parent to consult before placing the child out. The managers required the mother to agree before they would place out Margaret Patterson in 1845. Bridget Lynch placed her three-year-old son Thomas Lynch in the institution in 1843, paying money to keep him there. Thomas Lynch remained until 1854, when the managers informed his mother, now Bridget Shulky, that since she would not allow them to place him out, she needed to take him from the orphanage since he was of the age to leave. She agreed, and removed her eleven-year-old son. The managers reported that Lynch was a "remarkably good boy" and "they felt much regret at parting and the child was very unwilling to

---

<sup>44</sup> Containers 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

leave.” In a few cases, such as that of Mary Wright in 1878 and Allie Swearingen in 1889, the parents agreed to their daughters’ adoption.<sup>45</sup>

At times parents or other family members attempted to stay in contact with their children once they had been placed out, often to the frustration of the family who had taken their child. Four-year-old Ida Chaney was adopted by the DeLongs of Montgomery County, Maryland in January 1875. By June 1875, the DeLongs returned to the asylum, complaining that Chaney’s mother had been interfering so much that they wished another child in Chaney’s place. The board agreed, and placed Lizzie Webel with the DeLongs. Mary Florence asked the board to accept her eight-year-old orphaned niece Elizabeth “Lizzie” Walker in January 1867, to which they agreed. The managers later denied separate requests from Florence and Walker’s brother John Walker to remove the child in 1868. In September 1870, they allowed Amanda J. Bell of Montgomery County, Maryland to take Walker. Bell intended for the child to serve as a companion as well as do some household work, “and pledged herself to treat her as one of the family in all respects.” In January and August of the next year, Mary Florence came to the institution demanding to know the location of her niece. The managers refused to share that information with her, arguing “that she neglected the child when at the Asylum and from the knowledge that Mrs. Florence’s character and manners would make her a very detrimental connection for the child in her present good home.” By January 1872 Florence had learned Walker’s location, though not from the managers, and caused “trouble” to the extent that Bell requested to exchange Walker for a different child.<sup>46</sup>

In some cases, parents returned to the institution to find their child had been placed out. Often these parents had a different understanding than the managers as to the terms of their

---

<sup>45</sup> Containers 34, 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

child's admission in the institution, and were upset to learn of their child's departure. Lizzie Gilbert entered the institution in July 1875 at her father's request. In October 1876, the asylum allowed Dr. Robert and Elizabeth Charles of Rushford, New York to adopt the eight-year-old girl. Two months later, in December, Lizzie Gilbert's mother Julia Gilbert had her sister and mother inform the managers of her disapproval of her daughter being placed out for adoption. The board, "consulted the best interest of Lizzie in the case, and saw no reason to regret it." Jeannie McDowell's father Robert McDowell placed her in the institution in November 1887 when she was six-months-old. Her mother was dead and her father was too blind to work. Mr. and Mrs. Bunting, who lived in Washington, desired to adopt a child and in February 1889 the managers agreed to let them take McDowell, who was almost two-years-old. In July 1890, Robert McDowell returned to ask for his daughter and learned she had been adopted.<sup>47</sup>

Indentures and adoptions could not only widen the gulf between a child and their parents, but could also create one between them and their siblings. It was common for the indenture process to separate siblings. Most of the children that entered the institution with a sibling, and left in an indenture or adoption placement, did so alone. At times they left with another child that was not their sibling. The managers' records in the few cases where siblings remained together indicate that while they considered it fortunate when siblings were placed together, it was not their priority in most cases. They focused instead on placing children in homes that seemed suitable, and did not wait for people who were willing to take multiple children. In only one specific case was it otherwise, that of Susan and George McDonald. The managers noted that they could not separate the children when Mrs. Shepherd made application for Susan in 1856. The adoption process was delayed as the board waited for Shepherd to make her decision about

---

<sup>47</sup> Containers 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; U.S. Census Bureau. 1880 Census of Population, Rushford, Allegany County, New York, (accessed December 18, 2015), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>

taking George as well. Despite their statement, it appears the Shepherds may have just removed Susan, as an entry in the managers' minutes from the following year mentioned just Susan in connection to the Shepherds. Why the managers could not separate the McDonalds, when they separated so many other siblings, is unclear. It is possible that such was a condition of the children's admission to the institution.<sup>48</sup>

In one case at least, the managers tried to reunite separated siblings. Six-year-old Alice Graham entered the institution in June 1861. Her half-brother Howard Paul was already a resident. It was unclear who brought him or when he was admitted. Graham was brought by Mr. and Mrs. Circleton, a couple who found themselves unable to honor their commitment to raise the orphan. The managers considered a few different placements for the child before finally sending her with Mrs. Roach, who had lost her two daughters. Roach intended Graham specifically to be a sister to her two sons. In May 1869, the managers decided to see if Roach wanted to take Paul as well, since she already had his half-sister. The managers' motives may not have been entirely based in bringing the brother and sister back together; they waited six years to suggest Roach take Paul too. When they made the suggestion, Paul was fourteen-years-old, around the age at which the managers began to be anxious to have boys out of the institution. The reunion apparently did not happen, or if it did it did not last, as in October of that year the managers sent Paul to an indenture in Scranton, Pennsylvania.<sup>49</sup>

Typically if siblings remained together in an indenture or an adoption, it was because the people taking them wanted to take both of them. In all of these cases there were only two siblings. These instances also came towards the end of the century, when more and more people wanted to adopt rather than have indentures. The managers agreed to let the family of T.F.

---

<sup>48</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Williams of Red Bluff, Georgia adopt Cranston and Nellie Laurie in 1890. The placement did not work out, at least for Cranston, who was sent back to his mother in 1894. Martha Blincole, a single woman living in Loudoun County, Virginia, adopted Margaret Fronick in January 1891.<sup>50</sup> A few months later in May 1891, the managers agreed to let Blincole take Fronick's brother John. Dr. N.S. Tebbs of Daysville, Virginia removed Harry and George Gill in 1894, intending to instruct them in farming.<sup>51</sup>

In one case, the applicant wished to take both children, but the managers decided differently for the benefit of the children. Dr. William H. Headley applied for the Spriggs children, Starkie and Maggie, in March 1882, stating that he had promised their father he would care for them. The Spriggs children had entered the institution eleven years earlier, admitted by their father. Their father had requested to remove them in 1877, but the managers declined. The managers decided, in regards to Headley's application, to have Starkie remain in the institution for another year and Maggie until she was eighteen. Thirteen-year-old Starkie Spriggs left to live with Headley in Northumberland County on the Virginia coast in March 1883. Maggie Spriggs remained in the asylum, where she excelled in school and learned dressmaking.<sup>52</sup>

The Heinault children were reunited in their indentures when Fanny Gray Register, whose parents had Amelia Heinault, requested to take Willie Heinault. Amelia Heinault went to live with the family of George E. Lowrie in Prince George's County, Maryland in March 1875. The next year in April, Register, who also lived in Prince George's County, took Amelia's brother Willie. The managers noted in Willie's adoption that they agreed to the placement

---

<sup>50</sup> "Blincole" was an especially difficult name to read in the asylum records, and therefore is an educated guess.

<sup>51</sup> Containers 36, 41, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>52</sup> Containers 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

because the Registers' was "so desirable as a home" and also "because of the desire of the children to be together."<sup>53</sup>

Several siblings indicated their desire to be together again. Zadok Talbert, who took John Newman in an indenture, wrote the managers in June 1871 that he intended to bring the child by the institution to visit when possible, stating "[he] is anxious to see his brother & sister." William W. Rose, who had never been a resident of the institution himself, wrote in 1883 looking for his sister Lillie Rose, who had entered in 1870 at her father's request. Rose wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee, "Would you please inform me of the whereabouts of my sister Lillie Rose Indentured to Mrs. W. Griffith I have not herd from her for 7 years and am very anxious to hear form her." He included a status update on his life, that he had married, and reiterated his great desire to see her at the conclusion of his letter. Lillie Rose had lived with the Griffiths for a period, but had since been transferred to another home.<sup>54</sup>

The Martin brothers—Harry, William, and Frank—entered the institution in 1880. Harry Martin, the oldest, left the asylum first in 1883 to live with A.M. Gatewood, a Washington resident, to learn to make cabinets. The managers reported that he ran away from Gatewood's in 1885. William Martin, the middle brother, left in 1886 to live with A.E. Burch, also in Washington, to learn photography. Frank Martin, the youngest, left in October 1889 to live with Mary Nelson in Maryland, who adopted him along with Rebecca Burrows. Frank's placement prompted Harry Martin to speak with Eleanor Sowers, a member of the Board of Managers, in December 1889, proclaiming his distress over his brother's placement. Martin presented a letter testifying that his employer was willing to have Frank Martin with him. William Martin worked

---

<sup>53</sup> Containers 36, 41, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>54</sup> Containers 36, 41, 42, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; William W. Rose to Elizabeth Blair Lee, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

at the same employer as well, and having Frank would mean all three brothers would be together again after six years of separation. Sowers wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee about the case, stating that “[Harry] says he is able, willing, and anxious to do for him and that Mrs. Harkness always promised him he should be notified whenever the boy was to be put out.” Sowers seemed to share Martin’s distress, and informed Lee that she told him she “would do all in [her] power to let him have his brother.” She also lamented the managers not having knowledge of his request beforehand; Maria L. Harkness, the manager Martin said had made vows of eventual reunion for the brothers, had died the year before, and perhaps had not communicated her pledge to the rest of the board before her death. Martin had called twice at the Lee’s house to discuss the matter, but did not find her. Records do not indicate if the three Martin brothers ever reunited.<sup>55</sup>

Though perhaps some siblings never reunited, others were able to during their adulthoods. The Spriggs children, whom the managers separated when they allowed Starkie Spriggs to leave with Dr. William Headley but kept Maggie Spriggs in the institution, even lived together, at least for a period. Maggie Spriggs married Joseph A. Harvey and they had a daughter named Gertrude Harvey. Starkie Spriggs lived with the Harveys in 1910, when he was forty years old and his sister was thirty-eight. The brothers-in-law worked together at a hotel.<sup>56</sup>

### **Children’s Agency and Experiences**

Several children expressed their views on where they would like to go when leaving the institution. Louisa Lusby, who had some difficulty finding a lasting indenture, wrote the Board

---

<sup>55</sup> Containers 36, 41, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Eleanor M. Sowers to Elizabeth Blair Lee, December 7, 1889; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228, Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 1910 Census of Population, the City of Washington, District of Columbia (accessed January 29, 2017), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>

of Managers in February 1881 about leaving the institution. She clarified what she told manager Mrs. Marshall Brown as to her desires, stating she would go with a gentleman or a lady but did not prefer a gentleman as the managers thought. She wrote, “I shall have to go out some time and work and I would rather go now than wait till I get older. I am thirteen years old and I will be fourteen the twenty first of January.” Two years later in August 1883, after Lusby had returned from a failed indenture, she wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee about her position. She referred to Lee and matron Jeanette B. Wright’s opinion of her, stating, “As you say I am so much trouble in the house, and are not at all industrious, I should think it would be a relief to you, & Mrs. Wright, to have me go with my Sister.” She expressed her desire to go with her sister, but also her wish to be with moral people, and how she would not go with her sister and be near her mother if the managers did not think it was advisable given her family’s character.<sup>57</sup>

In some indenture cases at least, the managers consulted and listened to the children concerning their wishes. The children may not have had much say on being placed in the institution, but they could determine to a certain extent where they went upon leaving. The managers often decided for or against an indenture application with the child’s desire as a significant part of their reasoning. The Ewings, who lived in Washington at the time but planned to eventually return to their home in Boston, requested to take a girl in 1866. They came with the recommendation of one of the managers, Barbara Head. The managers selected two girls that would suit the Ewings, who had requested no child over ten years old. Neither one of the children wanted to leave with the Ewings. The managers “would not compel them to go with strangers” and did not place either child with the family. The managers stated in 1857 that Mary Reaves could go with Reverend Drale if she wanted to. Reaves agreed to the placement. Though

---

<sup>57</sup> Containers 36, 41, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Louisa Lusby, letter, February 28, 1881, Box 228, Folder 2; Louisa Lusby to Elizabeth Blair Lee, August 18, 1883, Box 226, Folder 9.

Susan McDonald eventually went to live with the Shepherd family, who were in Washington temporarily but lived permanently in Indiana, she initially stated her opposition to going in 1856, at which point the Shepherds picked a different child. In 1880, Mary Chapman of Upper Marlboro, Maryland requested to have fourteen-year-old Janette Hatcher placed with her. The managers agreed, noting Hatcher's wish to go with Chapman.<sup>58</sup>

In one case, a child went to an indenture, and expressing his dissatisfaction with it after just a short period was allowed to return. George Franklin Barrett went to live with Robert Peter in Maryland in November 1871. A few days later he came back, having decided he was not suited for a life in the country. The following January when someone requested a boy to live in King George County, Virginia, the managers selected Barrett. The managers more often let children come back from placements where they experienced abuse; to let them return from indentures they simply did not like was probably less common.<sup>59</sup>

For other children, expressing their wishes meant determining their course as they neared aging out of the asylum. Ellen Pope entered the institution in 1847 at one-and-a-half years old, remaining until 1861. At that time, the managers, believing her of age, allowed her to choose where she would like to go upon leaving. Pope wanted a future in millinery, so the managers arranged for her to live with Miss Thompson and to learn the trade. Ambrosia Goddard in 1873 also expressed a desire to learn how to sew, this time dresses rather than hats, so the managers arranged for her to live with Mrs. Forrest. She would go for six months, receiving no wages, and the managers would let her live at the asylum during the duration.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Containers 36, 44, 41, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>59</sup> Containers 36, 41, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>60</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

The children had a variety of experiences in their adoptions and indentures. Some children endured mistreatment. Others may have been unhappy regardless of their treatment. Some children ran away though the record does not indicate abuse. Other children had more enjoyable experiences, at least according to managerial records and the children's correspondence. When the father of Anne Florence Ford protested her adoption in 1877 and requested her return to him, the managers, noted that, "letters had been received from both Annie and Mrs [Thompson] in which they expressed great affection for each other." As such, the managers decided to allow the child to remain in her new home. Marcellus Bowman, who entered the institution in 1887, was adopted by Mrs. F.M. Nelson of Pomonkey, Maryland in May 1890 at the age of ten. He wrote a letter directed to his mother but sent to the asylum in July 1890 in which he described his new home. The entirety of the letter reads, "I hope you are well. I am well. I like my new home very much. I can ride horseback and ride often. I had a birthday cake 4th July. I send my love to you and sisters and brothers."<sup>61</sup>

Not all the children who left the institution before adulthood did so in an indenture or an adoption. Though the same conditions often brought children to the Washington City Orphan Asylum, some children entered under better financial circumstances. They received money from parents, family members, or other circumstances, which could better prepare them for adulthood. At times the managers invested the money for the child to receive once grown, such as Lavinia Tucker who lived in the institution in the early 1870s. Other times the children used the funds for educational advancement outside the asylum. In February 1879, the managers decided to send Helen Fitzpatrick to boarding school at Burkittsville Seminary, headed by Reverend J.H. Turner, in Burkittsville, Maryland, "as she had the means of defraying expenses." In July 1879,

---

<sup>61</sup> Containers 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Mark Bowman to his mother, July 1890, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228, Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

the managers decided against sending Fitzpatrick's sister, Susie, to school, as she did not wish to go. At some point, Susie Fitzpatrick did go to a school headed by Rebecca Powell in Alexandria. In 1880 the managers used the money left to Lillie Redinger to send her to a small school for girls called The Cedars in Georgetown. The heads of these schools, at least Lillie Redinger's and Susie Fitzpatrick's, stayed in contact with and sought advice from the Board of Managers as to the girls' care.<sup>62</sup>

### Outcomes

The course of the children's lives once they left the institution, their indentures, or their adoption placements and reached adulthood is difficult to determine. The managers generally did not track the outcomes of their residents. Their knowledge instead came largely from the children reporting back about their families, their jobs, and the overall circumstances of their lives. Many, if not most, of the children disappear in the historical record, which does not allow for the creation of statistics or even trends for the children's outcomes. The data instead comes in the form of individual stories, stories that are illuminating despite their scarcity. Some of the children that left the institution went on to have great personal and professional success; others ended up on paths that the asylum sought to prevent.

Edmonia Gates entered the Washington City Orphan Asylum in February 1849 at the approximate age of three years old, along with her brother Alonzo, who was a year older than she. Their father admitted them. Gates had a difficult time in the institution. Her father and her

---

<sup>62</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Annual Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1878," (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), 501; A.J. Brown to Elizabeth Blair Lee, August 17, 1880, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224, Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; B.L. Earle to Elizabeth Blair Lee, September 30, 1880, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228, Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Rebecca C. Powell to Elizabeth Blair Lee, September 2, 1883; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 227, Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

married sister both requested to remove her at different points. The managers denied her father's request, believing his house unsuitable for the child, and though they granted her sister's request, it does not appear Gates stayed with her long term, if she left at all. The managers tried to place Gates in a "School for Idiots" in May 1860, but were unsuccessful. She was briefly indentured to Mrs. Davis in August 1860, but Davis terminated the placement even before the contract was complete. In October 1860, the managers resolved to try to place Gates in the almshouse, since the insane asylum would not take her. Gates disappears in the official record at that point—the managers do not record if she moved to the almshouse. In the 1860s, Washington newspapers reported several arrests for Edmonia Gates for vagrancy and prostitution.<sup>63</sup> The earliest of these arrests occurred in May 1863, with at least five more in the next two years. Given the time of the arrests and the peculiarity of Gates' name, it is likely that the woman who was repeatedly fined or sent to the workhouse for prostitution and vagrancy was the three-year-old that the Washington City Orphan Asylum admitted February 1849. If so, she was fourteen years old at the time of her first arrest.<sup>64</sup>

Other children found greater stability and personal accomplishment in their adult lives.

Pauline Senf entered the institution in March 1876 at the age of three, along with her six-year-old

---

<sup>63</sup> Helen J. Self notes in her book *Prostitution, Women, and Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 37 that the term "vagrancy" often included prostitution. Though Self focuses on England, it is reasonable to believe that similar happened in the United States. As such, Gates's arrests for "vagrancy" could have also been for prostitution.

<sup>64</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Metropolitan Police Reports," *Daily national Republican* (Washington, D.C.), 26 May 1863. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053570/1863-05-26/ed-1/seq-2/>>; "Police Reports," *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 28 May 1863. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1863-05-28/ed-1/seq-1/>>; "Metropolitan Police Reports," *Daily national Republican*. (Washington, D.C.), 06 June 1863. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053570/1863-06-06/ed-1/seq-2/>>; "Police Reports," *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 11 July 1863. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1863-07-11/ed-1/seq-4/>>; "Police Reports," *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 17 Feb. 1864. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1864-02-17/ed-1/seq-2/>>; "Police Reports," *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 03 Feb. 1865. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1865-02-03/ed-1/seq-4/>>

brother Willie. Census records hint that though the two were likely born in the United States, their parents were German immigrants. Their mother was dead and their father, Louis Senf, was a “hopeless drunkard.” Reverend Gust L. Reitz of the German Lutheran Church facilitated the children’s admission, though Louis Senf signed the relinquishment papers. Pauline was only in the asylum for half a year, as in September 1876 James and Elizabeth Aston requested to adopt her. James Aston was a postmaster in Ohio, and came with recommendations from people in the Post Office. After investigating, the managers agreed in October to let the Astons have Senf. The Astons kept the child’s first name but changed her last name to theirs. She became Pauline Aston in future records.<sup>65</sup>

The Astons took their newly adopted daughter back to New Richmond, Ohio with them. Not long after, James Aston died of kidney failure, after which his wife assumed his job. The household consisted of mother and daughter and a twenty-two-year-old housekeeper named Nettie Farley, at least for a little. The two Astons became somewhat nomadic, moving to Minnesota and then to Oklahoma Territory by 1890. While living in Oklahoma, Pauline Aston married Frederick Hawley, a Presbyterian minister. They had two sons, Herrick born in 1896 and Frederick, Jr. born in 1898. Elizabeth Aston lived with them at least while they were in Oklahoma City. The four Hawleys eventually moved to Illinois and then to Parkville, Missouri, where Frederick Hawley became the president of Park College, now Park University, in 1915.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Containers 34 and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>66</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 1880 Census of Population, Ohio Township, Clement County, Ohio (accessed December 11, 2015), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>; U.S. Census Bureau. Persons Who Died during the Year ending May 31, 1880, Ohio Township, Clement County, Ohio, (accessed December 11, 2015), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>; U.S. Census Bureau. 1900 Census of Population, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (accessed December 11, 2015), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>; U.S. Census Bureau. 1910 Census of Population, Bloomington City, Bloomington County, Illinois (accessed December 11, 2015), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>; U.S. Census Bureau. 1920 Census of Population, Parkville City, Platte County, Missouri (accessed December 11, 2015), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>; U.S. Census Bureau. 1930 Census of Population, Parkville City, Platte County, Missouri (accessed December 11, 2015), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>; U.S. Census Bureau. 1940 Census of Population, Parkville City, Platte County, Missouri (accessed December 11, 2015),

Records do not indicate Pauline Aston Hawley's happiness in her life post-Washington City Orphan Asylum. As far as levels of physical and material comfort, she did well, especially comparatively speaking. In her married life, at least, she never worked outside the home, her family owned their home, and her husband had a successful career. If an orphanage were to open in Parkville, Missouri, Pauline Hawley would be the exact social demographic to help manage it. Her adopted mother Elizabeth Aston living with the Hawley family, at least for a brief period, indicating that mother and daughter maintained some sort of bond.

One of the institution's greatest success stories was James Edward West. West entered the asylum in 1882 at the age of five at his widowed mother's request; she died not long after in Providence Hospital from consumption. While at the orphanage he suffered from a malady in his leg, one that resulted in hospitalization and likely prevented him from leaving in an indenture placement. West attended public schools and then the Business College. He became a leader within the institution and a great supporter of the younger children's learning. He left the institution in 1896 at the age of twenty upon the managers' insistence and against his wishes. The managers agreed to offer him twenty-five dollars a month for his support for a period of six months.<sup>67</sup>

Upon leaving the asylum, West worked for a while in a bicycle shop, while also tutoring for extra income, and then as a clerical worker. He attended law school and graduated in 1900. He held a variety of jobs and positions in his adulthood, most of them having the common theme of helping children. He participated in the YMCA and worked for the Washington Playground Association. He became passionate about fair criminal proceedings for juvenile offenders, and

---

<http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>; Minnesota, Territorial and State Censuses, City of Minneapolis, County of Hennepin, 1885 (accessed December 11, 2015) <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>; The Territorial Census of Oklahoma. 1890. <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>.

<sup>67</sup> Containers 36 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

was almost appointed as judge to a newly created juvenile court in the District of Columbia. His recommendation for the post came from his new acquaintance, President Theodore Roosevelt, whom he met through the Washington Playground Association. He was hired at the women's magazine the *Delineator* and headed the "Child-Rescue Campaign" portion of the publication, which focused on the welfare of dependent children. He was secretary of the National Child-Rescue League and, along with *Delineator* editor Theodore Dreiser, encouraged Roosevelt to host a national conference discussing the position of dependent American children. The president agreed, and the White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children was held in January 1909, with West serving as the conference's secretary and a member of the resolutions committee. In 1911, West became the first chief executive of the newly formed Boy Scouts of America, a position he held until 1943, when he became the organization's first Chief Scout, a role created for him.<sup>68</sup>

West likely had a complicated relationship with the Washington City Orphan Asylum, one in which he clashed with the asylum's management but also expressed a level of gratitude for the home's role in his life. He also maintained a desire to stay connected to the institution as well as provide his own help to it. Matthew A. Crenson in his brief summary of West's life in *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System* describes several moments of conflict between West and the asylum's managers and employees, many of which do not reflect well on the institution. Chuck Willis' *Boy Scouts of America: A Centennial History* takes an even harsher stance, using the word "dismal" to describe the asylum in its connection to West.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Containers 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Matthew A. Crenson, *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 7-17.

<sup>69</sup> Chuck Willis, *Boy Scouts of America: A Centennial History* (New York: DK Publishing, 2013), 41.

West certainly was upset to leave the institution in November 1896, and aired his grievances to Board of Trustee member Blair Lee. Though West was frustrated with the institution's matron and the Board of Managers in general, he perhaps did not think poorly of them all. In his letter to Lee he spoke highly of Elizabeth Blair Lee, adding as a postscript, "Again I want to say, that I sincerely believe that if your mother was able to be around like she was years ago, things would not be in the present state at the Home—she took an interest in every thing." Despite the acrimonious parting, West remained in contact with the institution. The January after he left he wrote the board suggesting he supply some form of amusement for the children, a proposal the managers decided against. A few years later, in November 1899, a laudatory newspaper article was published about West, after which he wrote the Board of Managers to apologize that the article did not mention his connection to the asylum, and give them recognition for their role in his life. He invited the board to his graduation from law school. They sent him an inkstand as a gift. Correspondence continued for the next couple of years between him and the Board of Managers. Once West became a more established citizen of Washington, he began to assist the asylum, such as in 1907 when he communicated with Blair Lee in helping former resident Vernon Swearinger find personal information.<sup>70</sup>

An apt summary of West's feelings towards the institution can likely be found in a letter he sent to Blair Lee regarding asylum business in July 1920, at which point West was already working for the Boy Scouts. Though no longer a Washington resident, he maintained an active interest in the institution, writing:

If I am eligible to serve on the Board of Trustees I would be happy to do so as a contribution to the institution, for it did so much for me, and for the welfare of the other

---

<sup>70</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; James E. West to Blair Lee, July 11, 1907, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 408, Folder 5; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; James E. West to Blair Lee, October 31, 1896; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 408, Folder 6; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

children. I could quite easily arrange to be in Washington from time to time and would be glad to make available to the Orphan's Home the benefit of my experience and definite interest in Orphan children.

West expressed a level of gratitude towards the institution, not only for himself but also for other children, but at the same time he hinted a wish to make improvements. He suggested that he, a former orphan and current child activist, might be able to offer counsel on how to improve the situation of the asylum's children.<sup>71</sup>

### **Job References**

Several of the asylum's former residents remained in contact with the institution, to an extent, in their adulthoods. In a few cases, they wrote to inform the managers of their place in life and their well-being. At other times they made greater use of the institution as a form of support. Some former children turned to the orphanage for much needed personal information. Eveline Snyder, who entered the institution in 1866 at age seven and was bound to Frances Dickens of Fairfax County Virginia at the age of ten, wrote to the asylum in 1879 requesting information concerning her baptism. She was going through the process of confirmation, and needed to know the location of her baptism and the minister who performed it.<sup>72</sup>

Former residents also received job recommendations from members of the asylum, for themselves and members of their families. Elizabeth Blair Lee wrote a letter on behalf of John Watson in 1877. Watson had left the institution in 1868 to live with Samuel Scott in Clarksburg, Maryland. Lee testified to his worth, calling him "honest, industrious & intelligent" and stating

---

<sup>71</sup> James E. West to Blair Lee, July 10, 1920, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 408, Folder 5; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>72</sup> Container 36, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Letter from E. Snyder to Elizabeth Blair Lee; March 23, 1879; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

that Watson was unemployed, and hoping to earn money by selling his art. Susie Hazel, whose maiden name was Burch, wrote to Blair Lee in 1910 to ask his assistance in helping find her husband a job. Hazel had entered the institution in 1865 at the age of six. She had lived in a few different indentures, including with Mrs. Reynolds, the dressmaker for Elizabeth Blair Lee. She explained her history with the institution, telling Lee that she remembered him from her time in the asylum, though she did not expect him to remember her. Her husband, who was currently out of work, was trained as a painter, and neither of them knew anyone of “influence,” so Hazel decided to write Lee and ask his assistance. There is no record of Lee’s reply.<sup>73</sup>

These former residents’ actions indicate that they turned to the asylum as a source of support. Whether they did so because they wished to, because they had strong emotional ties to the institution as well, or because of a dearth of alternative options, is unclear. Whatever the motivation for their actions, the asylum performed a role that might otherwise have been fulfilled by family. Not knowing personal information, former residents turned to the institution. Rather than making connections through biological family members to help obtain employment they used the orphanage as their network. The managers, trustees, and employees showed at least a little interest in the well-being of their former charges in helping them. The letters they wrote, in not only providing personal information but also speaking to the person’s character, indicated the managers and trustees’ familiarity with at least some of the asylum’s charges. Elizabeth Blair Lee wrote in her letter for John Watson that he “had won from the Board of Managers an abiding & kind interest,” a sentiment that conveys that the managers did not bestow the favor of a recommendation on all of their former children, but perhaps only the ones they felt truly worthy.

---

<sup>73</sup> Containers 36, 41, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Letter by Elizabeth Blair Lee; February 3, 1877; Box 228, Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Letter from Susie Hazel to Blair Lee; June 2, 1910; Box 408 and Folder 5; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

### Former Residents Employed at the Institution

In looking for a job, some grown residents looked to the asylum itself for employment, a trend shared by many other nineteenth-century orphanages.<sup>74</sup> Most of these were women who earned their pay helping in the schoolroom. Caroline Lilly was one of the asylum's earliest children, entering at the age of three in 1820. The Board decided to employ Lilly, who had never left the asylum for an indenture, in 1834 as a teacher. They agreed to pay her \$6 for her first quarter, with the possibility of a raise. Rebecca McManning came of age in 1863, but remained as a teacher for several years. In 1869, the managers noted her usefulness in the Primary Department, rewarded McManning with a \$50 a year raise, and instructed the main teacher to provide her with further training.<sup>75</sup>

Some former residents did not immediately find employment at the institution, but returned to do so after leaving. Cornelia McMann was placed in the asylum in 1856 by the Board at the Female Orphan Asylum at Georgetown. Her age at admission was not recorded, nor the year she left, but upon leaving she married and lived for a while in Baltimore. McMannin returned in 1862, informing the asylum that her husband had deserted her. The asylum agreed to let her stay and employ her as a teacher, a job she held for several years. It appears likewise that Mary Elizabeth Dughart left the institution when she came of age in 1866, and was married within eighteen months. She returned to the orphanage soon thereafter in 1868, and was employed in the schoolroom. No record indicates the outcome of her marriage, and under what circumstances she returned to the asylum.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Hacsí, *Second Home*, 85.

<sup>75</sup> Container 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

That Caroline Lilly and Rebecca McManning stayed rather than leaving when they came of age speaks to their opinion of the institution; if they did not hold it in high regard, they at least thought enough of it to stay, or they saw no other avenue for opportunity beyond its walls. In the cases of Cornelia McMann and Mary Elizabeth Dughart, their decision to return to the orphanage to seek support, especially in a time of distress, speaks to the nature of their relationship with the institution. Whereas other nineteenth century Americans facing similar problems might turn to family, these children turned to the people who had provided support of some kind during their formative years. It is also possible that they acted out of desperation, out of the knowledge that they had nowhere else to turn. These cases also indicate the willingness of the board to continue assisting the children after they reached maturity, not only through letters of recommendation, but also with the use of the asylum's own funds.<sup>77</sup>

### **Children of Former Residents Admitted to the Institution**

For a few families, residency in the institution spanned generations as former residents' children entered the asylum. In some cases, it was the former resident that admitted their children. Mary Elizabeth Hinton entered the orphanage in 1836 at the age of six, along with her two younger sisters Sarah Ann and Dulcinea West. Their mother was a paralytic. Several years later, in 1859, Mary Elizabeth Hinton, now a widow with the last name of Hughes, wrote the Board of Managers informing them she was sick with consumption and wished to place her children in the asylum. She was living at Cumberland, Maryland, a place with no institution for dependent children. The board agreed to accept her children, bypassing the investigative procedures they often enacted to ensure the merit of a family's case. She requested that the managers admit them under her maiden name. Snowden Jarboe likewise admitted his children to

---

<sup>77</sup> Container 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

the institution. Jarboe entered the institution in 1859 at the age of nine, along with his brother Columbus Jarboe, aged seven. Their father relinquished them. Records do not indicate when Jarboe left the institution following the termination of his two abusive indenture placements. In 1885 Jarboe entered his own sons, nine-year-old Frederick Clinton and seven-year-old Thomas Henry.<sup>78</sup>

Charlotte and Rosa Hamill entered the orphanage in December 1877 not at the request of their parents but of a community member, Margaret Washington. Their mother, whom records do not name, had lived at the institution. She had recently died, and the managers believed the situation “so urgent that the vote was unanimous for receiving the children.” Their father, Wesley Hamill, relinquished them. It is not clear who admitted four-year-old Henry, two-year-old Benjamin, and infant James Robinson in June 1883. Their mother was Ambrosia Goddard Robinson, who had lived in the asylum a decade before along with her sister Maria. She is one of the children missing from the admissions book, but based on the conditions of her apprenticeship in 1873 it is likely she was of age, so eighteen-years-old, at the time. In 1878, she served as a reference for Mrs. Arnold, who wished to take her sister from the institution. The managers recorded her name as Ambrosia Goddard, so it is likely she was not married yet. Six months following the three boys’ admission, Mrs. Francis Robinson, Ambrosia Goddard Robinson’s mother-in-law, asked the board to let her take Henry and Benjamin, to which the board agreed. James Robinson was only seven-months-old, possibly the reason his grandmother did not ask to take him as well.<sup>79</sup>

Prior association with the institution did not necessarily secure the managers’ approval of an application. They denied the request of Josephine Fugett Johnson to admit her children in

---

<sup>78</sup> Container 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>79</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

December 1881. She had come to live in the institution at the age nine in 1853, placed there by her uncle Reverend Fugett. Her father removed her from the institution in 1857. The managers do not indicate what circumstances brought her to place her children in the asylum, nor why they denied her request. Some of the factors that induced them to deny cases in general, such as the status of the parents, could have swayed their decision.<sup>80</sup>

The cases of the Hintons, Jarboes, Hamills, Goddards, and Johnsons are enlightening in several ways. Mary Elizabeth Hinton, Snowden Jarboe, and Josephine Fugett Johnson chose to admit, or asked to admit, their children to an institution where they had once lived, a decision that signified trust, desperation, or most likely a mixture of the two. Of course, any parent admitting their children to any institution does so with at least a little faith. Hinton, Jarboe, and Johnson, however, had first hand experience with the asylum. They knew how the children were treated, disciplined, fed, educated, as well as the system of placing children out. They thought enough of the orphanage to send their children there or were desperate enough that they were willing to have it be an option.

Hinton and Jarboe also turned to the asylum though they both had biological family members. Hinton had two younger sisters, and Jarboe had a younger brother. Aunts and uncles often took in children in cases of need in the nineteenth century. In both Jarboe and Hinton's cases, it is possible that they lost contact with their siblings as their lives diverged on different paths from the orphanage. Hinton's sisters were both in and out of the asylum due to the changing conditions of their indentures. Columbus Jarboe left the institution in 1861 to live with the Hanlands in Montgomery County, Maryland, and no record indicates that he ever returned. It is also possible that Sarah Hinton, Dulcinea Hinton, and Columbus Jarboe all were unable or unwilling to care for their niece or nephews for one reason or another, or that Mary Elizabeth

---

<sup>80</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

Hinton and Snowden Jarboe had preferred placing their children with the Washington City Orphan Asylum. In a way, the orphanage served as a stand-in family member. Rather than having parents or siblings fill this role, Jarboe and Hinton both turned to those that played a part in raising them, the people of the orphanage. Some of the members of the board even overlapped between their tenure and that of their children.<sup>81</sup>

All of these stories hint at a persisting cycle between generations. The conditions that facilitated the children's admission had not changed once they reached adulthood. For Snowden Jarboe and Mary Elizabeth Hinton the similarities between them and their parents are almost eerie; Hinton, like her mother, was too ill to care for her children and Jarboe admitted his sons, just as his own father had relinquished him and his brother. Former residents asking for the institution to care for their children showed places where the asylum's training for the children failed. The managers wanted something better for the children than the circumstances that brought them to the institution, but some former residents, perhaps many, found themselves in the same position as the generation before.

### **Conclusion**

The managers shaped the children's education in the institution and placed them in indentures and adoptions with the intention of forming them into productive, self-sufficient members of society. Most of the children grew up to become part of society, though not necessarily of Washington—if they were the type of citizens the managers desired is a harder question, one with varied answers. Just as there were diverse experiences in indenture and adoption placements, children led diverse lives once becoming adults, ones that ranged from prostitution to serving as the head of a new and fast growing national organization. For some

---

<sup>81</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

children, their adulthoods constituted a continued relationship with the institution where they spent at least a part of their childhood, asking the people who ran it for assistance in ways that included employment, job references, and accepting their own children.

## PART II: REFORMERS

### CHAPTER FOUR: MANAGERS AND TRUSTEES

#### Introduction

From its beginning, the asylum was meant to be an organization under women's control. The Board of Managers, composed of society women from middle- and upper-class families, headed the asylum. They did work that beginning at the turn of the twentieth-century American society would entrust more and more to professionals such as social workers.<sup>1</sup> These women decided which families' children were admitted, determined who could remove a child from the asylum, purchased goods for the institution, chose the children's curriculum and daily routine, and managed the employees. They affected the lives of hundreds of children and their families. Like many other charitable women during the nineteenth century, they set up their asylum like a business, with a constitution laying out rules for governance and procedure.<sup>2</sup>

To fulfill certain financial and legal needs, such as investing money in stocks, the institution required a male Board of Trustees. This board frequently consisted of area ministers, businessmen, and relatives of the asylum's managers. The United States Congress created the Board of Trustees at the time of the institution's incorporation in 1828. Though the managers deferred to the trustees in some areas, the institution's governance remained mostly in their own hands. Occasionally, disagreements as to the best way to run the orphanage, and the division and authority of the leaders' power caused tension both within the Board of Managers and with the Board of Trustees. Despite the presence of the Board of Trustees, the managers fulfilled some of

---

<sup>1</sup> Nurith Zmora, *Orphanages Reconsidered: Child Care Institutions in Progressive Era Baltimore*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 15; Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston 1880-1960* (New York: Viking, 1988), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 48.

the legal and financial duties of the institution, such as witnessing the relinquishment of children and acting as trustee for the children's money.

The managers in working for the asylum found fulfillment and opportunities to perform tasks that might otherwise be unavailable to them, given their gender and social class. They managed money and attended to outbreaks of epidemic diseases. They used the social networks from their everyday lives as a part of the community of the District of Columbia to facilitate the admission and departures of the institution's children. The women also developed varying relationships with the children, some personal and others less so.

### **Managers**

Many orphanages that opened in the early-nineteenth century, particularly Protestant ones, did so under the direction of women, mostly middle- and upper-class women.<sup>3</sup> As a whole, Washington City Orphan Asylum's Board of Managers possibly included more upper-class women than other orphanages.<sup>4</sup> It also had more women connected to national politics, rather than just state or local politics as many other women involved in antebellum benevolence.<sup>5</sup> Over the course of the nineteenth century, as with many other orphan asylums, women remained in charge at the Washington City Orphan Asylum, with men serving a subsidiary role.

One hundred and seventy women joined the Board of Managers from 1815 to 1890. The demographic of the women remained constant as the century progressed. In many ways they reflected what was important to the asylum as well as the type of women able, in terms of time

---

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Hacsí, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 76-88.

<sup>4</sup> Though Timothy Hacsí states that many orphanages in the antebellum era were founded by middle-class women, another orphanage that had a large number of upper-class founders was New York's Colored Orphan Asylum, as discussed in William Seraile's *Angels of Mercy: White Women and the History of New York's Colored Orphan Asylum* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 52-53.

and personal finances, to serve, as the asylum cost both energy and money in the form of a subscription. All of the women were white. Their husbands' occupations ranged from hatter to the President of the United States.<sup>6</sup> They were members of Washington churches, a reflection of the institution's desire to have pious women serving as well as the religious motivation behind the orphanage. The board members occasionally were related to one another. It was not uncommon for the women to be politically well connected. Seven of the women who served were married to a Washington mayor; there were only eighteen mayors during the Washington City Orphan Asylum's existence. Some were Washington natives; others were not. The ones who moved to Washington often did so because of their father's or husband's political career. The managers generally were educated, at least with the ability to read and write, and some had formal schooling. Some were well-traveled, having lived in places such as Paris and North Africa. The lengths of their terms varied, though generally women served for longer as the century progressed.<sup>7</sup>

### **Founding the Asylum**

The idea for the orphanage originated with Marcia Burnes Van Ness.<sup>8</sup> Van Ness was born into a Scottish planter family that owned a significant portion of the land on which they built the United States capital in the late eighteenth century. The capital's relocation from Philadelphia to Washington ushered Marcia Burnes into elite society. She formed a fast friendship with future

---

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Gilliss Todd was married to a hatter; Dolley Madison and Elizabeth Monroe were married to presidents.

<sup>7</sup> Container 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; U.S. Census Bureau. 1860 Census of Population, Washington County, (accessed September 26, 2016), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Allgor, "'Queen Dolley' Saves Washington City," *Washington History* 12, (Spring/Summer 2000): 68, under "Coming into the City: Essays on Early Washington D.C. Commemorating the Bicentennial of the Federal Government's Arrival in 1800," <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40073433> (accessed September 22, 2011). 68.

First Lady Dolley Madison based on shared connections and similar personalities. Marcia Burnes married John Peter Van Ness in May 1802. Van Ness was a congressman from New York at the time of their marriage, but soon left to become a member of the Washington militia, where he eventually achieved the rank of general. He also served as Washington's mayor from 1830 to 1834. He was one of the original members of the Board of Trustees. When Marcia Van Ness died in 1832, Congress adjourned for a day out of respect and admiration, an honor that they had never bestowed on a woman before.<sup>9</sup> Her obituary in the newspaper commended her as an incredibly generous and genuine woman, and closely connected her to the orphanage.<sup>10</sup>

The other three most frequently given credit in asylum histories as co-founders are Dolley Madison, Margaret Bayard Smith, and Elizabeth Riley Brown.<sup>11</sup> Madison was married to President James Madison and was an immensely popular First Lady. She served as a hostess not only during her husband's term but also in his predecessor Thomas Jefferson's. She was an expert hostess, using her social graces not only to entertain but also to transcend political divisions through her parties, an important talent, especially during the politically contentious War of 1812.<sup>12</sup> After the British burned the Presidential Mansion in 1814, Madison lived in and hosted from the Octagon House, the home of close friend Ann Ogle Tayloe. Tayloe was the daughter of Maryland governor Benjamin Ogle and her husband was Virginian Colonel John Tayloe III, a staunch Federalist and political opponent of James Madison. Their friendship was a

---

<sup>9</sup> Frances Carpenter Huntington, "The Heiress of Washington City: Marcia Burnes Van Ness," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 69/70, no. 47 (1969/1970) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40067706> (accessed October 24, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> "From the Philadelphia Inquirer. A Benefactress," *Salem Gazette*, September, 21, 1832. <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center, Manuscript Division; Frances Carpenter Huntington, "The Heiress of Washington City: Marcia Burnes Van Ness, 1782-1832," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* Vol. 69/70 (1969/1970), 96.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Allgor, *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 5-7, 43, 290.

testament to Dolley Madison's ability to cross political boundaries. Ann Tayloe also became a member of the orphanage's Board of Managers after the asylum's founding and one of her sons, Benjamin Ogle Tayloe, became an active member of the Board of Trustees as an adult.<sup>13</sup>

Of the original founders, Elizabeth Riley Brown served the board the longest, from 1815 to her death in 1852. She was married to Reverend Obadiah B. Brown of the First Baptist Church, who was a member of the Board of Trustees.<sup>14</sup> The final member of the organizing group was possibly Margaret Bayard Smith, though she is not mentioned as frequently as the other three in asylum histories. If she was not a founder, she was at least an original member of the Board of Managers and its first secretary.<sup>15</sup> Smith was the daughter of Colonel John Bayard who served in the American Revolution. In 1800, she moved to Washington, shortly after marrying her second cousin Samuel Harrison Smith. She was a frequently published writer, her works appearing in *Lady's Book*, the *National Intelligencer*, and the *Southern Literary Messenger*. As was not uncommon, especially for women, Smith occasionally published under a pseudonym.<sup>16</sup> Samuel Harrison Smith established the *National Intelligencer* the year that the couple arrived in Washington, a newspaper largely tied to the federal government that became one of the most trusted in the antebellum period. The men who took over the *National Intelligencer* from Smith, Joseph Gales and William Winston Seaton, who were brothers-in-law,

---

<sup>13</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Winslow Marston Watson, *In Memoriam: Benjamin Ogle Tayloe* (Washington: Philadelphia, Sherman & Co., Printers, 1872), 1; Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 328.

<sup>14</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Guide to the Obadiah Bruen Brown Family Papers, 1807-1941," Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University, <https://library.gwu.edu/ead/ms2253.xml>; Charles Moore, compiler and editor. *Joint Select Committee To Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia: Part II—Report*, 55<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1898, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898), 107, 110.

<sup>15</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*, v-viii; William E. Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), vii-ix.

both had wives, Sarah Gales and Sarah Seaton, who joined the asylum's board.<sup>17</sup> Smith also had a successful career in banking. Margaret Bayard Smith served for a year before resigning. After the end of her tenure, she did not completely disappear from the asylum's history, publishing "What is Gentility?" in 1827, a moral treatise that she sold at a fair supporting the orphanage.<sup>18</sup>

In founding the asylum, these four women invited others in their social class in Washington to join their endeavor. An article in the *National Intelligencer*, announcing the first official meeting of the society in October 1815 stated: "The Ladies of the county of Washington and neighborhood are requested to meet at the Hall of the House of Representatives, this day, at 11 o'clock, A.M. for the purpose of joining an association to provide an Asylum for destitute Orphans."<sup>19</sup>

American society considered the act of caring for the poor a particularly suitable occupation for women. After the War for American Independence, the image of the Republican woman emerged in the American psyche. A Republican woman devoted herself to virtue, to raising model citizens, and to providing good companionship to the men in her life. One of the greatest elements of Republicanism was patriotism. For women this manifested itself not in physically taking up arms, but in fighting other enemies of the nation, such as poverty. In the 1790s and early 1800s women founded and managed several charitable organizations along the Eastern seaboard.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer*, vii, 87-88; Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>18</sup> Container 31, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>19</sup> "Orphans' Asylum," *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 10, 1815, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (September 15, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 11-12, 110-111.

Articles published about the Washington City Orphan Asylum, particularly in its early years, affirmed the Board of Managers in their feminine charity. An announcement advertising the orphanage read, “a nobler object cannot engage the sympathy of our females.”<sup>21</sup> Another article argued that the women running the orphanage “doubtless know of how much more value is an approving conscience, than wealth and honors.—May such, and none but such, be elevated in society to claim the attention and imitation of others.”<sup>22</sup> When Marcia Van Ness died, her obituary read “Woman should always be an object of respect and regard, but when to the loveliness of her nature she adds all the ennobling qualities of virtue and disinterested benevolence, she bears the closest resemblance to the celestial that may be conceived.”<sup>23</sup> Popular opinion hailed these women’s undertaking as an aptly feminine and republican cause.

The general view of women as virtuous and benevolent beings continued into the antebellum period, as women participated in reform and charitable acts that society viewed as particularly suitable for their gender.<sup>24</sup> This ideology, however, was tempered by a concern over women taking on responsibilities in their benevolent work generally considered unfeminine, such as petitioning for corporation status. Most communities generally overcame this trepidation, due in large part to the feminine role in caring for children, as well as the need for their charity; in several cases, women-led organizations filled social gaps in caring for the poor and orphaned.<sup>25</sup>

The Washington City Orphan Asylum did not encounter protestations concerning the women’s

---

<sup>21</sup> "Orphans' Asylum," *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 10, 1815.

<sup>22</sup> “Extract from the Constitution,” *Concord Observer*, January 18, 1819, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> “From the Philadelphia Inquirer. A Benefactress,” *Salem Gazette*, September, 21, 1832.

<sup>24</sup> Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women in Antebellum Reform* (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2000), ix.

<sup>25</sup> Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 48-53; Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984), 195-205.

actions, at least not to the level that issues are found in the written record. This might have been because in their process of petitioning for incorporation, they had men acting on their behalf, and their incorporation included the creation of a male Board of Trustees.<sup>26</sup>

### **Managing the Asylum**

For the purposes of governing the asylum its founders approved a two-and-a-half page constitution at the first meeting. The document set up the methods under which the society would assign leadership and allocate responsibilities. As there was no Board of Trustees in 1815, the constitution did not specify their responsibilities. The asylum society held a meeting every year on the second Tuesday of October, most commonly at a local church.<sup>27</sup> The members of the Board of Managers, the children of the asylum, and the governess would all attend and they invited the men and women who pledged subscriptions to the orphanage to attend as well. At each yearly meeting, those present elected four officers and nine managers, the offices consisting of first directress, second directress, treasurer, and secretary. The first directress, in essence the president of the society, received the duty to “preside at all meetings, both of the Society and the [Managers]—preserve order—state questions for discussion, and declare the decision.” In the event of a tie, she would have the deciding vote, and she could call special meetings if the board felt it necessary. She was to take “active superintendance of [the asylum’s] general welfare” rather than be a nominal head with no real responsibility.

Dolley Madison was the institution’s original first directress. She was not as actively involved as future first directresses. She attended meetings within the first few months of the asylum’s opening. Beginning in 1816, her attendance dwindled; she was only present at one

---

<sup>26</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>27</sup> They later moved the month of the annual meeting to January in 1836.

meeting in 1816 and one in 1817.<sup>28</sup> The last meeting Madison attended was March 5, 1817, a day only too fitting as it was the day after the next United States' president, James Monroe's inauguration.<sup>29</sup> During Madison's absences, Marcia Van Ness filled in as first directress. Van Ness officially assumed the position in 1818, and became one of the most active and important first directresses in the institution's history. Rarely in the course of her service did she miss a meeting, and she often led the asylum's committees. She kept this position for most of her service on the Board, which concluded with her death in 1832.<sup>30</sup>

Most of the women who served as first directress did so for extended periods; only nine women served as first directress during the institution's first ninety years. Some of their tenures lasted for decades. Clara Baldwin Bomford was elected to the position in 1833, which she held until she resigned the board in 1841. She was born in New Haven, Connecticut, the daughter of Michael, a blacksmith, and Theodora Baldwin. Her brothers were all college-educated. Abraham Baldwin, her half-brother, helped write the United States Constitution and served in both chambers of the United States Congress. Her brother Henry Baldwin served as a United States Supreme Court justice. While staying with family in Washington she met Colonel George Bomford. The two settled in the capital, where George Bomford engaged in local business and Clara Bomford cultivated her love for plants in the family garden, raised her children and stepchildren, and became close friends with such people as Dolley Madison and Margaret Bayard Smith. The family saw financial difficulties as a result of the Panic of 1837, as well as George Bomford's investment choices. They resorted to selling not only their property but

---

<sup>28</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>29</sup> Noel B. Gerson, *The Velvet Glove* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1975), 230-231.

<sup>30</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

Clara's jewelry as well.<sup>31</sup> It is quite possible that Clara Bomford, while serving as the asylum's first directress, felt some of the same financial pressures experienced by families admitting children to the institution.

Wilhelmina Potts Hawley, who joined the board in 1832, held the asylum's head position from 1841 to 1858, when she resigned due to ill health. She was married to William Hawley, minister at St. John's Parish, an Episcopal church, and a member of the asylum's Board of Trustees. Wilhemina Hawley often served as a witness to marriages performed by her husband, including marriages between African Americans, some of who were slaves. Many of these ceremonies were performed in the Hawley's house.<sup>32</sup>

Van Ness and Hawley had both acted as second directress before becoming first directress. The second directress was a vice president of sorts, fulfilling the duties of the first directress if she were absent or otherwise indisposed.<sup>33</sup> Ann Matilda Lee Washington acted the longest as second directress, doing so for twenty years. She joined the board in 1843, serving until her death in 1881. She was the daughter of Richard Bland Lee and Elizabeth Collins Lee. Her mother was on the board previously. Washington was married to surgeon Bailey Washington. At the time of her death, the managers recorded in their minutes that "even in old age the vigor and decision of her advice was only equaled by her loving kindness towards the children."<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Nancy Simons Peterson, "Guarded Pasts: The Lives and Offspring of Colonel George and Clara (Baldwin) Bomford," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 86, (December 1998), 283-305. <http://www.bgc certification.org/skillbuilders/narrativegenealogyngsqstyle.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Containers 34 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "St. John's Church: Free and Enslaved African Americans Married & Baptized at the President's Parish," the White House Historical Organization. <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/st-johns-church>

<sup>33</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>34</sup> Containers 34 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Virginia Laas, ed. *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee* (University of Illinois Press, 1999), 134. "Society Notes,"

The secretary and treasurer of the society both held a considerable amount of the tangible responsibility. The secretary was charged with record keeping, particularly procedural and financial records. She let concerned parties know about the meetings and took down the meetings' minutes. She also had a significant role in handling the institution's finances as she maintained a list of the contributors, collected money to be transferred to the treasurer, and reported the collection of money to the rest of the society at meetings. The secretary position had the greatest number of women cycle through. One of the longer serving secretaries was Matilda E. Van Ness, Marcia Van Ness's niece, who was one of the rare single members of the board.<sup>35</sup>

The treasurer was responsible for managing the money, allocating it as necessary, and supervising the governess's expenditures. Like the secretary, the treasurer was required to report to the rest of the asylum at their meetings. Two women acted as treasurer for most of the century. Ann Smith, another single member of the Board of Managers, joined the board in 1832 and was treasurer for most of her tenure with the institution, which lasted until 1861.<sup>36</sup> Mary Gunton Temple stepped into the position in 1862 and remained until 1896 when she resigned as a manager. She was treasurer for most of her time with asylum, elected to the role the year after she joined. Temple was the daughter of William Gunton, the president of the Bank of Washington. She married Edward Temple in 1862, the vice president of the Bank of Washington, who was also an active member of the Board of Trustees.<sup>37</sup> When she died in 1896,

---

*Evening Star*, Washington, D.C., Dec. 22, 1881. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1881-12-22/ed-1/seq-2/>>

<sup>35</sup> Containers 2, 32, 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>36</sup> Containers 34 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>37</sup> Byron Sunderland, *A Sketch of the Life of Dr. William Gunton, Born at Aylsham, Norfolk, England, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1791* (Washington: Joseph L. Pearson, Printer, 1878), 33-43; Containers 44 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

she left the orphanage \$10,000.<sup>38</sup> Her daughter Mary Temple took her place on the board at her resignation both as manager and treasurer.<sup>39</sup>

The managers of the institution gathered on a monthly basis, generally at the institution, though they might meet at one of the women's homes under extenuating circumstances, such as illness in the asylum. They also committed to take turns visiting the asylum every week so as "to inspect [its] situation, and to examine the progress of the Orphans in their education, as well as to observe the general conduct of the Governess." The crafters of the asylum's constitution allowed for future adaptations, concluding the document with, "This Plan may hereafter be altered or amended, as the experience of the Society, or the future circumstances of the Institution, may render advisable." This foresight proved necessary as the asylum eventually changed fundamental policies.<sup>40</sup>

Over time the managers added to their rules of order, as well as expanded the managers' responsibilities. The changes came about likely because of both the expansion of the orphanage, and the increased amount of responsibility that accompanied this growth, as well as the acquired knowledge in how to run an institution. A constitution printed in 1878 revealed more guidelines for meetings, such as fines for absences, the process for motions and voting, and the number required at a meeting to consist of a quorum. The altered constitution likely made official changes that the Board of Managers had made gradually since the creation of the original constitution. It also outlined the committees, consisting of Purchasing, Admission, Binding, and School. These committees received specific instructions on their duties and responsibilities. For

---

<sup>38</sup> "Charities Remembered in Will of Mrs. Temple," *Evening Star*, Washington, District of Columbia, February 18, 1896, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/146228913>.

<sup>39</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>40</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

instance, they could act without approval in cases of immediate necessity, but for rule changes they needed board sanction. The number of visitation times for the committees increased to at least three times a week, with the stipulation that they try to attend each meal once during the week.<sup>41</sup>

The first directress was given more power concerning calling and supervising meetings as well as assignments to committees. She was also an automatic member of the Binding and Receiving Committees, which made choices about children entering and leaving the institution. The secretary received the added responsibility of keeping record of all of the orphanage's children. Such an addition shows the experience accrued over the span of sixty-three years. The managers, at least by 1878, had learned the necessity of officially keeping track of the children who entered and exited the institution and defining it as a responsibility of the asylum. Just the year before, the managers had resolved that the corresponding secretary should keep a record of the children in indentures, should correspond with them, and notify the families they lived with of their responsibilities as the child neared the termination of their indenture.<sup>42</sup> In addition to adding the position of corresponding secretary, which they created in 1874, they also added an assistant secretary in 1889, an assistant treasurer in 1877, and a register in 1885.<sup>43</sup>

### **Joining and Leaving the Board of Managers**

More often than having managers externally elected, as the asylum's constitution stipulated, the women chose replacements as women left the board, and had their choices affirmed at the annual meeting. They often also selected the officers at a private meeting

---

<sup>41</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>42</sup> Containers 32 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>43</sup> Containers 44 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

following the annual meeting, rather than at the annual meeting as the constitution stipulated. The managers selected replacements for several different reasons. Typically they were women within their social circle. They sometimes chose daughters to replace mothers. Occasionally they wanted a member from a certain congregation or denomination. Elizabeth Blair Lee, the wife of a naval officer, expressed in June 1864 her desire to have an army wife to replace Mary G. Harris, wife of Marine Commandant John Harris. Lee believed the board needed a member representing the army, especially as several of the children came from army and navy families.<sup>44</sup>

The most common reasons for a woman to leave the board, especially towards the end of the century, were duty to home life, illness, or death. It was not uncommon for the board to decline a manager's resignation, or at least ask her to reconsider. The managers revealed some of their philosophy behind refusing resignations when Maria T. Gillis tried to do so in March 1867, stating "so useful and efficient a member should remain in the harness while life endures." Many of the managers attempting to resign agreed to stay, but in some cases they had to firmly insist on their resignations being accepted before the managers conceded. The managers were more understanding of some reasons for leaving than others. Virginia Zeilin attempted to resign twice before the board finally agreed in February 1877.<sup>45</sup>

### **Activism as Fulfillment**

In a world where their social class and standing was defined by their father's and husband's occupations, service to the institution could not only be a charitable, and perhaps expected act for women of their position, but an opportunity to do something outside of their home, to have some form of external power or fulfillment. This was not an experience unique to

---

<sup>44</sup> Container 31, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Laas, ed. *Wartime Washington*, 386-387.

<sup>45</sup> Containers 37, 41, 44 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

the women of Washington and the board of the Washington City Orphan Asylum. As other scholars such as Suzanne Lebsack in her foundational work *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* have outlined, many other middle-class and upper-class American women explored charity as an opportunity for power at the turn of the eighteenth century and into the antebellum period. Increased educational opportunities, as well as growing free time created due to economic changes, prompted and allowed women to engage in benevolent activities that brought them to organize, petition governments, and manage financial accounts.<sup>46</sup>

The correspondence of longtime First Directress Elizabeth Blair Lee lends insight into how the service to the Washington City Orphan Asylum benefited its managers personally. Lee joined the Board of Managers in 1852. In 1862 she became the first directress, a role that she held until her death in 1906.<sup>47</sup> Like Marcia Van Ness before her, Lee became one of the most important women involved with the institution, largely through occupying its head position for almost half a century. Lee was from Kentucky originally and attended Madame Adele Sigoigne's school in Philadelphia. During her youth, her family, headed by father Frances Preston Blair, relocated to Washington where he could participate more fully in Jacksonian politics, running the Jacksonian newspaper the *Globe* and serving in Andrew Jackson's famous "Kitchen Cabinet." Lee grew up as a favorite of Andrew Jackson's while he served in the presidency. In joining the family in the capital, Lee developed a strong social life, one that included close relationships with the nation's leaders. She became one of Jackson's favorites; he even gave her his wife Rachel Jackson's wedding band before he died. Lee was smart, opinionated, and had a strong sense of humor that she often applied to the dramatics of the board, at least in letters to her

---

<sup>46</sup> Suzanne Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984), 202-205.

<sup>47</sup> Containers 32 and 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

husband, Admiral Samuel Phillips Lee. When the couple married in 1843, Elizabeth Blair Lee vowed to write her husband a letter every day they were separated, which she did faithfully throughout his military career, which included his service in the Union navy during the Civil War. Her letters to her husband grant valuable perspective into the workings and details of the orphan asylum. Through Elizabeth Blair Lee's father, the Lees lived alternately in Silver Spring, Maryland, six miles north of the White House, and in a house on Pennsylvania Avenue, next to her brother's home and across the street from the White House.<sup>48</sup> The couple had one son, Frances Preston Blair Lee, most commonly called Blair, who served on the Board of Trustees as an adult.<sup>49</sup>

Elizabeth Blair Lee wrote her husband describing the asylum as a place of solace during the Civil War and the couple's prolonged separation.<sup>50</sup> The letter that perhaps best encapsulates Lee's position was written February 7, 1865, two months before the war's end. In it she reveals a self-deprecating sense of humor mixed with recognition for the hard work she exhibited as first directress, along with a feeling of the good she gleaned from the institution:

You see I want those who come after me to have an easier time -- like most people who lay up to make their children idlers But I love this work for all the good it has done others & to me -- I took it, to get rid of myself -- when pining unto sickness for my husband [torn page] gave me work for head, heart & hands -- & a refuge ever ready for me when my life was too lonesome to be happy -- & no matter how much faith one has we must do something for others to be happy So you see all my charity is after all selfishness.<sup>51</sup>

In serving as first directress, Lee believed that "occupation [was] happiness" and that the board functioned better and the women were more at peace when they were all given tasks and

---

<sup>48</sup> Laas, ed., *Wartime Washington*, 1-8; "Home Was Opened Hundred Years Ago," *Evening Star*, October 17, 1915, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1915-10-17/ed-1/seq-3.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>50</sup> Virginia Laas touches on Lee's philosophy about her service to the institution on page three of her introduction to *Wartime Washington*.

<sup>51</sup> Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 474.

the work was distributed evenly.<sup>52</sup> The work at the orphan asylum made Lee feel useful, and perhaps that she had life experience, such as medical and administrative, she would not have gained otherwise. When speaking with a family friend, Sarah Grier Beck, about the woman's impending departure to serve as a nurse in the Union army, Lee shared her own knowledge gleaned from illnesses at the orphanage. She bragged to her husband about the doctor's commendation of the board's recent performance during a small pox outbreak in the institution.<sup>53</sup> She also detailed the managers' practice of making purchases, never doing so on credit, and always reporting back to the board on expenditures. Lee also took pleasure in the asylum's school, writing on March 1, 1864, "Tomorrow there is a public examination of the School of which I am very proud—it is that which took me out in this bad weather . . . ."<sup>54</sup> For Lee at least, the board was more than just a charitable obligation, but a form of comfort and an opportunity for fulfillment through work.

### Trustees

For the actions the managers were not able to socially or legally fulfill, they relied on the Board of Trustees. The trustees' typical duties included managing and selling the asylum's property, conducting many of the repairs, managing its funds, and investing the money in stocks. The relationship between the trustees and the managers was somewhat nuanced. The managers were the original and arguably the primary board of the asylum, and controlled most of its decisions, particularly those concerning the children. The trustees generally did not involve

---

<sup>52</sup>Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 228.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 240; "Sarah Rose Grier Beck," Find a Grave, February 19, 2006, <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=13395097&ref=acom>; Eugene G. Stackhouse, *Germantown in the Civil War* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2010), 108; Robert E. Wright, *Pennsylvania State Reports vol. XLVI Comprising Cases Adjudged in the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, Vol. X Containing Cases Decided in May and November Terms, 1863, and January Term, 1864* (Philadelphia: Kay & Brother, 1865), 527-534.

<sup>54</sup> Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 354.

themselves in the affairs of the children, though at times they might work with the Board of Managers on cases of admission and placement. During some cases in the 1850s, Reverend J.W. French of the Board of Trustees helped them draft the indenture documents.<sup>55</sup> They might also consult on legal disputes. Blair Lee consulted Elizabeth Blair Lee on a custody case while on a trip to St. Louis in 1890.<sup>56</sup> Though the trustees conducted most of the institution's repairs, the managers often suggested what needed to be done. At the same time, the trustees objected to certain purchases, particularly large ones because of the expense, which the managers desired. In May 1888, for instance, the trustees declined to buy a washing machine.<sup>57</sup>

The managers generally deferred to the men connected to the asylum in some areas, even men who were not trustees. They asked reverends to host and conduct the annual meeting. On one occasion, a minister broached a topic in his address at the annual meeting that reflected the difficult area between the men and the women of the asylum. Mr. Leonard in 1884 suggested in his speech that the managers instruct the children in life skills and prepare them to work after leaving the asylum. The women informed him that such was already being done, at least to the degree that it was feasible; they could have added that they had done so for decades.<sup>58</sup>

The size of the Board of Trustees was smaller than the Board of Managers, and therefore fewer men served over the course of the nineteenth century than women. No official mechanism existed for selecting trustees; it appears that the Board of Trustees chose most of them. On at least one occasion, the managers suggested a trustee to the board. They selected Blair Lee, and Mary G. Temple received the task of informing her husband Edward Temple of the Board of

---

<sup>55</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>56</sup> Blair Lee to Elizabeth Blair Lee, May 31, 1890; Box 272, Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>57</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

Managers' wishes. Often there were personal relationships between the trustees and the managers, a factor that could benefit or complicate the interactions between the two boards. As seen with the Van Nesses, the Hawleys, the Browns, the Tayloes, the Temples, and the Lees, members of the Board of Trustees frequently were related to members of the Board of Managers; they were perhaps related more often than they were not. Board of Trustees member William B. Todd was married to manager Elizabeth Gilliss Todd and trustee James Larned was married to manager Ann Larned.<sup>59</sup> Sophia Towson, who served as secretary and treasurer, was married to Major General Nathan Towson of the United States Army, who was on the Board of Trustees.<sup>60</sup>

Elizabeth B. Laurie was married to James B. Laurie, who was the reverend at the Presbyterian Church on F Street. Reverend Laurie frequently hosted asylum events like the annual meetings. Elizabeth Laurie joined the Board of Managers in 1817, and served until her death in 1849. She acted briefly as treasurer and for almost a decade as second directress.<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Laurie's son from her first marriage, Dr. James C. Hall, joined the Board of Trustees in 1868. At his death, he left \$50,000 to the institution, an endowment that he requested be named after his mother. The Laurie Fund allowed the institution to make additions to their buildings.<sup>62</sup>

Long time manager Maria L. Harkness was married to trustee John C. Harkness. She joined the board in January 1864 and remained a manager until her death in 1888.<sup>63</sup> They were active members of the McKendree Methodist Episcopal Church, which John C. Harkness helped

---

<sup>59</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45 records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Elizabeth Gillis Todd," Find a Grave, October 26, 2009, <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=43568863>.

<sup>60</sup> "Obituary," *The Republic*, Washington, D.C., August 3, 1852, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014434/1852-08-03/ed-1/seq-3/>>

<sup>61</sup> Containers 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>62</sup> *Joint Select Committee to Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*, 84, 113-114.

<sup>63</sup> Containers 44 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

found. Maria Harkness worked with the Sunday school, focusing particularly on the church's infants. She also donated her time to the Children's Hospital.<sup>64</sup> John C. Harkness was a carpenter and measurer, as well as engaged in local politics.<sup>65</sup> In addition to serving on the Board of Trustees, he was also the architect on the asylum's building constructed in 1865. The couple had two children, Estella Gartrell and Elizabeth Johnson, the latter of whom joined the Board of Managers in 1888 to replace her recently deceased mother.<sup>66</sup>

Though many of the trustees were related to women on the Board of Managers, some were not. A couple of the most active trustees were not related to managers. One of these was Reverend J.W. French, who was the minister at the Epiphany church. Phineas D. Gurley was also a member and a Presbyterian minister. William W. Corcoran, who in addition to serving on the Board of Trustees and having the children over to his house at least once, also donated the land in 1865 for the new asylum that Harkness designed.<sup>67</sup>

### Asylum Drama

All was not always peaceful within the institution. At times, the asylum experienced significant tension within and between its two boards. When this happened, members typically

---

<sup>64</sup> "Death of Mrs. John C. Harkness," *Evening Star*, Washington, D.C., November 30, 1888, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/145453979>.

<sup>65</sup> "Death of Mr. John C. Harkness After a Long Sickness," *National Republican*, Washington, D.C., August 30, 1886, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/71056347>.

<sup>66</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; U.S. Census Bureau. 1880 Census of Population, Washington County, (accessed September 26, 2016), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>

<sup>67</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45 records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Lorenzo D. Johnson, *The Churches and Pastors of Washington, D.C.; Together With Five Hundred Topics of Sermons, Delivered in 1855 and '6. To Which is Added, a List of All the Church-Edifices, and Their Localities* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1857), 101; *Joint Select Committee to Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*, 112 has him at New York Avenue Presbyterian; Johnson, *The Churches and Pastors of Washington, D.C.*, 19, has him at F Street Presbyterian; *Joint Select Committee to Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*, 111-114.

found themselves in divided camps. One conflict that challenged the institution centered on James Harrell, a minister who came to the asylum to teach the children. What began as a disagreement about religious instruction quickly evolved into a gendered dispute about authority and the relationship between the Board of Managers and the Board of Trustees.

Harrell was associated with the Protestant Episcopal Church in Washington, and had the distinction of being a missionary to the city of Washington, particularly the poor.<sup>68</sup> How long he taught at the Washington City Orphan Asylum is unclear. The managers first recorded their dissatisfaction with his teaching in November 1856. Particularly, a large portion of them did not like Harrell's philosophy concerning the Bible, and his arguments as to its "insufficiency . . . for religious instruction." As an asylum represented by many Protestant denominations, the managers believed "the peculiar doctrines of different churches were not to be taught" and the Bible was to be the sole source of instruction to the children. The issue was considered seriously enough that "the majority of the managers were altogether opposed to Mr. Harrell's coming as a missionary and maintained that the Orphan Asylum was not a part of his missionary field." Later on in their interactions with Harrell, a few of the managers began to side with Harrell, causing a split among their group.<sup>69</sup>

The managers were not able to discuss the matter with Harrell until January 1857. Between their December and January meetings, Harrell was elected the Board of Trustees' secretary, a position that would soon, though not immediately, complicate his relationship with the Board of Managers. Conversation proceeded cordially between the managers and Harrell. He agreed to teach what the other ministers agreed upon, and was willing to change if he strayed off

---

<sup>68</sup> James H. Harrell, "Missions to the Poor," *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 05, 1857, <http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/>

<sup>69</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

the accepted doctrine again in the future. The meeting ended in amity between him the managers.<sup>70</sup>

The peace did not last. Harrell came to the managers' meeting on March 3, 1857 with some business to attend to with Treasurer Ann Smith, after which he asked to speak with secretary Susan Coxe in private. Coxe followed him into another room where Harrell asked her to redact some items that had been recorded in the managers' minutes. Though the managers did not specify in the record of the altercation, Harrell likely wanted notes concerning him and his previous conversations with the managers removed. Coxe stated that the board had verified her recordkeeping and that she would erase nothing. After continued arguing, Coxe told Harrell that he could bring his case before the board, which he did, his "demeanor . . . most unbecoming." Coxe informed Harrell that the Board of Trustees did not have authority to "interfere" with the Board of Managers. Harrell suggested they bring the rest of the Board of Trustees in to confer on the separation of the two boards, to which the managers agreed.<sup>71</sup>

Between the two meetings, Susan R. Coxe and the other managers who opposed Harrell prepared their arguments; as Coxe stated to Elizabeth Blair Lee about the meeting "I think we shall go fully armed." Coxe had her lawyer husband draft a legal opinion concerning the distinctive nature of the two boards and pass it on to others to affirm his decision.<sup>72</sup> In it, Richard S. Coxe argued that the charter written at the institution's incorporation in 1828 created two distinct boards, which did not "have the shadow of authority to interfere with the other." Coxe referred to the inciting incident with Harrell when he stated the managers could "prescribe or

---

<sup>70</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Susan R. Coxe to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

forbid any form or kind of instruction to the children . . . .”<sup>73</sup> Manager Anne Henderson, who, along with her husband General Archibald Henderson, agreed with Coxe’s conclusion, suggested that they keep the document a secret before the meeting and then suggest a vote concerning Harrell immediately after. At Susan Coxe’s request, Elizabeth Blair Lee had her brother, Judge Montgomery Blair, examine and sign the document as well.<sup>74</sup>

In challenging the assertions of Harrell, and his right as a member of the Board of Trustees to interfere with the Board of Managers, Susan Coxe, Elizabeth Blair Lee, Anne Henderson, and all the other women who aligned with them made an important stand for their authority within the institution. Their battle was gendered, even if the managers did not realize as much. The Board of Managers stayed within their realm of acceptable activity, relying on the male members of the asylum to fulfill the necessary financial and legal obligations. They did not believe, however, their position to be subservient to the men on the Board of the Trustees. A man who challenged their authority within the asylum, as some saw it, needed to go. Given the overall position of women in nineteenth-century America, though, the managers still had to turn to other men in their lives, those who were professional practitioners of the law, to confirm their rights.

Coxe presented the legal opinion when the boards gathered on April 1857. The document was not as immediately persuasive as she might have hoped; rather, a discussion occurred as to whether the present Board of Trustees existed under the purview of the charter. Richard S. Coxe himself pointed out in his written argument the fallacy in the charter’s naming specific men to the board, and not creating a mechanism to elect future members. Anne Henderson, who was

---

<sup>73</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>74</sup> Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; David M. Habben, “Anne Marie Cazenove Henderson,” Find a Grave, June 12, 2010, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=53575523&ref=acom>

absent from the meeting, sent a note expressing her frustrations with Harrell's actions and proposing a resolution. The contents of the resolution were not recorded, and as the trustees and a few of the managers aligned with Harrell objected to it, it did not pass. Elizabeth Blair Lee also gave her opinion on the matter, which highlighted the disregard Harrell had shown to the Board of Managers.<sup>75</sup>

What happened with James Harrell after this point is unclear. Unfortunately, especially for Susan R. Coxe, he continued to be a part of asylum affairs at least to a certain degree, though likely was not involved at the same level. Coxe wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee several months later about the annual meeting in January 1858, which Lee had not attended. The meeting was held at Second Presbyterian Church, where Reverend J.R. Eckhard, one of the manager's husbands, was the minister. Coxe, in what she sarcastically termed an "unpardonable offense" asked George D. Cummins, the reverend from her own Episcopalian church, Trinity Church, to read the report. Others viewed this action as incredibly rude to Eckhard, as they had expected he, as host, would be the one to read the report.<sup>76</sup>

Coxe was terribly distraught as a result of the whole interaction, likely in part because of the embarrassment she endured, especially in front of her own minister, but also because of the general climate of the Board of Managers. In describing the meeting to Lee, Coxe laid out the factions within the managers: most of the board was on her side, specifically Mrs. W.J. Hodge, Mrs. W.P. Johnson, and Mrs. Shubrick; she was unsure of the position of Wihelmina Hawley, Ann Smith, and Ann Washington; Margaret Stone and Mrs. Eckhard were against her. Coxe referred to those opposed to her as the "Harrell influence," noting that they wanted Stone to be

---

<sup>75</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>76</sup> Susan R. Coxe to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Johnson, *The Churches and Pastors of Washington, D.C.*, 15, 57; Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

first directress and Eckhard second directress. Coxe stated her indifference to having the position, preferring to remain secretary, but she believed it crucial “to keep Harrell out.” Ann Washington had informed her that his supporters were “trying to get him back.” The managers chose Coxe as their first directress, and for the first and last time in the managers’ minutes, the secretary divulged the vote count for the officer positions, with Coxe edging Stone out for the position.<sup>77</sup>

Almost a year later, Harrell’s name once again surfaced within the dramatics of the Board of Managers. Mrs. Eckhard, who had served as second directress under Coxe for the past year, intended to resign as she was leaving Washington. Coxe wanted Elizabeth Blair Lee to fill the position, as she did not believe Ann Washington would do so, and she did not want Maria T. Gillis to be elected. Coxe was certain that “it would be a torment” to have Gillis in the position, as her fellow manager had “so little judgment and [was] all Harrell.”<sup>78</sup>

The next major source of drama once again centered on Susan R. Coxe, but this time with a woman elected most likely after the Harrell problems had subsided. Mary Wickliffe Merrick joined the board in 1859. She was originally from Kentucky, the daughter of Charles Anderson Wickliffe and Margaret Crepps Wickliffe. Her father was governor of Kentucky, United States Post Master General, and a United States congressman. She was educated, along with her four sisters, at a school run by Julia A. Tevis in Shelbyville, Kentucky.<sup>79</sup> She married William Matthews Merrick, who held several positions during their marriage including District Court

---

<sup>77</sup> S. R. Coxe to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>78</sup> Susan R. Coxe to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>79</sup> Jennie C. Morton, “Governor Charles A. Wickliffe, With Portrait Taken by G.C.D., and Picture of Wickland,” *Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society*, 2, no. 6, (9, 1904): 17-21, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23366340>.

judge, lawyer, law professor at Columbian College (now George Washington University), congressman from Maryland, and justice on the District of Columbia's Supreme Court.<sup>80</sup> The Merricks lived in Washington until 1863, when they moved to Maryland. Mary Merrick, like Elizabeth Blair Lee, traveled in from Maryland to serve on the board.<sup>81</sup> She held the positions of secretary and second directress during the nineteenth century, and first directress from 1906 to 1916, replacing Lee.<sup>82</sup>

In March 1862, drama surfaced between Coxe and Merrick, a conflict that resulted in Coxe's resignation. The specific details are vague, and the story is presented through only one perspective, Elizabeth Blair Lee's. Lee wrote her husband as events unfolded, presenting a drolly sympathetic slant towards Coxe. The root of the problem was the position of first directress, which Coxe had, and, according to Lee, Merrick wanted. Lee wrote to her husband, "if you were here I fancy I could make you laugh with me—Mrs. M has all her powers at work for the place now held by Mrs. C . . . ."<sup>83</sup> Coxe counted as her ally Mrs. Rice, and possibly Lee, who stated, "I of course shall not aid & abet her as Mrs Cs much the most fit person & has been now 20 yrs devoted to the work."<sup>84</sup>

As days passed, the situation grew worse, and Lee feared that Coxe would quit. Coxe did resign, and Lee learned from Mary G. Harris at church that Lee had been unanimously elected first directress. Lee lamented the course of events, visiting Coxe to ensure there was no discord between the two of them, and describing her new position as a "burden" in a letter to her

---

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan W. White, "'Sweltering with Treason': The Civil War Trials of William Matthew Merrick," Prologue, Summer 2007, vol. 39, no. 2. <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2007/summer/merrick.html>

<sup>81</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee' August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1863; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 77, Folder 1; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>82</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>83</sup> Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 120.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-120.

husband.<sup>85</sup> Despite how Coxe may have felt about specific managers, or the board as a whole, she continued to give money to the institution in following years.<sup>86</sup> Lee worked to establish her authority in the next weeks, and eventually found, as discussed above, at least some enjoyment in the post she held for nearly fifty years. She also became much better friends with Mary W. Merrick, though their conflicts were not wholly at an end, as further explored in chapter eight.<sup>87</sup>

### **Network**

As the stories of the asylum's drama and the managers' biographies show, the world of Washington could be a small place. The managers and trustees not only had relationships with each other, but with the people they were serving, too. The children of the institution entered and left through several different groups of people making requests. Most frequently, families brought their children to the institution and individuals approached the board about having a child placed with them. Sometimes other members of the community applied to the board to have a child admitted, such as reverends and police officers. At times, though, the managers themselves represented members of the community in the various steps of the orphanage's process. This included serving as a reference for a family making a request, but also applying on behalf of a family. Such indicates that the managers did not inhabit a distinct and separate sphere from the families who came to their institution, but rather that they belonged to a larger and interconnected community.

On more than one occasion the managers applied to have a child admitted. These requests were almost always honored, likely because of the respect and trust that came with being a

---

<sup>85</sup> Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 122-123, 127.

<sup>86</sup> Containers 12, 34, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>87</sup> Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 138, 143-144.

member of the board. The managers even noted when they accepted six-year-old Mary Ann McDermott in October 1832 that “The representation in this case by [Sophia] Towson be deemed sufficient.” Henrietta M. Andrews asked the board to take Ann Flinn in 1827. Andrews also served as the witness to the mother Ann Flinn’s relinquishment of her daughter. Matilda E. Van Ness asked the board to accept John McCoy in 1833, which they agreed to. McCoy was physically handicapped, and his care would have necessitated extra labor. Anne Henderson requested that six-year-old Hannah Hutchinson be admitted in October 1843. The child’s father was deceased and the mother had deserted her. Mrs. William Bradley and Susan R. Coxe applied for the admission of Mary Ann Tracy, whose mother was living, in August 1852. Emma Smoot passed along Mrs. Morgan’s application to place three children in the institution in 1866, their mother Mrs. Stahl having been abandoned by their father. Alberta and Katie Stahl were accepted. Adelaide J. Brown brought the case of Johnny Piles in November 1872, the brother of Robert Piles who was already a resident in the institution. Barbara Head asked the institution to take the McKee children in May 1877. Mrs. Stamp, their aunt who lived in Maryland, brought nine-year-old Sarah Eva and ten-year-old Mary Imogene the next month. A Washington resident named Mrs. Robey further endorsed them. Head later requested the board accept the two Bush children. James and Tallula Bush entered the institution in 1881.<sup>88</sup> Head and Mrs. J.W. Maury both alerted the board to the “destitute” Worthington children, Susan and Contee, whom the asylum admitted in February 1876. The mother of ten-year-old Annie Phillips applied to L.S. Lamb in February 1892, who passed the request along to the board. Mrs. Phillips reportedly had heart disease.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Their last name is alternately spelled “Boush.” James’s name is abbreviated to “Jas” in admission records; “James” is an educated guess.

<sup>89</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Charles Moore, compiler. *Joint Select Committee to Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia: Part I—Hearings; Statements; Reports From Cities; Suggestions for a Board of Charities*, 55<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1897 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1897), 108.

On a couple of occasions, a former manager presented a case to the board. Sarah Seaton, who had recently ceased serving as a manager, brought three-year-old Eliza Bryan in December 1820. A woman associated with the child named Mrs. Carr pledged to pay \$30 a year for Bryan's care. Seaton was so confident of the child's acceptance that she had acquired Carr's signature committing to provide the funds. The managers resolved to accept Eliza Brien at the next meeting in February 1821, most likely the child Seaton applied for. Martha Cutts, who had served as a manager ten years prior, informed the institution of William Taylor in February 1872. Taylor was four-years-old and had lived at the Children's Hospital since his father left him there eight months before. Taylor's mother was deceased. It is unclear whether the managers admitted Taylor.<sup>90</sup>

Managers also served as references for families, rather than applying on behalf of a child or family.<sup>91</sup> Sargent Robinson relinquished orphans Clara and Mary Elizabeth Dughart to the institution in January 1858, Anne Henderson endorsing the children to the board. The managers recorded the children came from the marine barracks. Robinson, their guardian, promised to pay for their care. It is possible that Henderson knew and represented the Dugharts and Robinson because of her husband's position in the military. Elizabeth Mullikin endorsed Mrs. Kenly to admit her orphaned grandson Kenly McCann in 1870, "having known her well and favorably for many years." Adelaide J. Brown, along with Ann Tome advocated for Susan Evans to admit her seven-year-old son George Evans in February 1877. Evans was unable to work due to abscesses on her hands, and hoped to reclaim her son once she was able to work again. Maria L. Harkness, along with another woman named Mrs. Cornish, recommended Mrs. Davis in April 1877 to

---

<sup>90</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 316.

<sup>91</sup> The language in the manager's minutes does not always clearly delineate between instances when the managers served as a reference and when they made applications for a family. The importance of the managers' relationship with the community in general, however, still carries in either case.

admit her two sons George and Edward Davis. The boys' father was also living but "deranged." George and Edward were two of five children, the rest of whom remained with the Davis family.<sup>92</sup> Harkness also served as a reference for Mrs. Gartrell in August 1877 who wished to admit seven-year-old Eliza Gartrell and six-year-old John Morris Gartrell. The Gartrell's case was perhaps a unique one, as it is possible they were related to Harkness by marriage. Harkness's daughter's married name was Gartrell. While Eliza and John were not the children of Estella M. Gartrell, and therefore Harkness's grandchildren, it is possible they belonged to the same Gartrell family.<sup>93</sup>

Managers also provided references, or even submitted applications, for people who wanted to have the asylum's children placed with them, particularly in an indenture. Frances Dandridge Lear made the application for Miss Hodson, a dressmaker, to take a child in October 1847. The managers selected Elizabeth Kemp to fulfill the request. Elizabeth Blair Lee recommended B. T. Swartz to take thirteen-year-old William Windsor in June 1871 with the intention of teaching him farming. Swartz was a resident of Montgomery County, Maryland, the same county as Lee's home of Silver Spring. Lee possibly knew Swartz because of their close proximity. She certainly knew Mr. Wilson, who the board let take William Walker Harrison in 1856 on Lee's recommendation; Wilson lived on the farm next to the Lees. Mrs. Marshall Brown presented the application of Reverend Buck to take a child in 1871, as Brown lived close to Buck and could testify to the merit of his home. The board agreed to send Rhoda Ratrie. Mrs. J.W. Burrows of Bladenburg, Maryland applied in 1874, with the reference of Emma H. Gilman, to take a girl from the institution. The board selected Julia Hessian. Virginia Zeilin, whose husband Jacob Zeilin was a general in the Marines, facilitated the placement of several children in the

---

<sup>92</sup> Container 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid; U.S. Census Bureau. 1880 Census of Population, Washington County, (accessed September 26, 2016), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>

marines—Frederick Gahn in 1869, William Westford in 1871, and Henry Newman in 1873 as a musician. Mary G. Temple served as a reference for Eliza and Benjamin Barton, who wanted to adopt four-year-old orphan Willie Maher in 1878. The managers deferred the decision to let the Bartons take him until the next month. The Bartons were further endorsed by Reverend Dunnidely from their hometown of Alexandria. The board agreed to let Maher go with the family. Temple also recommended C.M. Koones to take thirteen-year-old Susan Buckley in 1881. The position proved short-lived, as Koones requested to transfer Buckley as she and the child frequently fought. Maria L. Harkness recommended William C. Petty to the asylum in November 1879, who wished to have a boy to teach farming and “be brought up as a member of his family.” The asylum selected Willie Burroughs. Catharine C. Gideon recommended Mrs. Pywell to take Burroughs’ brother Arthur in 1882, Gideon knowing Mr. Pywell’s father. William B. Windsor’s application to take Frank Cahill into his family as a farmer came with, among other recommendations, the endorsement of Harkness, Maria T. Gillis, and Adelaide J. Brown.<sup>94</sup>

In order for the managers to act as a reference or introduce an application for a child’s admission or removal, they had to be familiar with the family making the request. The managers likely either knew these families personally, or heard about their request through other members of their community. Unfortunately, much of the behind-the-scenes discussion of references and applications is not in the historical record. It is possible families approached and introduced themselves to the managers with the specific intention of discussing a child’s place within the asylum. Given the managers’ concentration on the worthiness of a case they likely would have

---

<sup>94</sup> Containers 34, 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Catharine C. Gideon to Elizabeth Blair Lee, July 10, 1886; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 4; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; “Death of Gen. Zeilin,” *The United States Army and Navy Journal, and Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces*, 18 (New York 1880-1881), 314-315.

had to know enough about the family's situation and feel comfortable recommending them in order to so.

The managers further relied on their community to provide information they were unable to obtain, as least in one particular case. The board decided in 1873 not to allow a man to remove his nieces due to a letter from an unnamed friend of Elizabeth Gilliss Todd's. The uncle of Wihelmina and Myra Henault, who lived in Boston, requested in March 1873 for the children to come live with him. He had as his reference Charles Sumner, senator from Massachusetts. The managers appointed Todd and Mary W. Merrick to investigate. After Todd received word from a friend living in Boston as to the condition of the household, the managers resolved not to let the uncle have his nieces. His home, as described by Todd's friend, did not meet their standards.<sup>95</sup>

At times, the managers did not wait for people to approach the board or the managers personally to request a child, but rather sought people to take particular children. In doing so, they turned to their network of people in the District of Columbia and surrounding areas. Particularly, the board turned to Elizabeth Blair Lee to find homes for the children. The managers usually took these steps under particular circumstances. In the case of Eliza Lucas, the managers most likely wished to have her placed out due to bad behavior. Lucas was reported to the board for as much in January 1858.<sup>96</sup> She went the next month to live with a Mrs. Larned, whom Susan R. Coxe believed, "a very nice person."<sup>97</sup> The indenture did not last, however, and Lucas returned to the institution a month later. The board asked Elizabeth Blair Lee to find another home for the fifteen-year-old. Lucas was placed with Mrs. Talbot in April 1858.<sup>98</sup> Coxe

---

<sup>95</sup> Containers 34 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>96</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>97</sup> Susan R. Coxe to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

commented to Lee on the proximity of the child to the latter manager, stating, “I am thankful you have a place in the country under your own eyes.”<sup>99</sup> Lee also found a home for Kate Nalley in March 1876. Nalley previously had lived with Mrs. George Robinson in Clarksburg, Maryland. After living with the family for almost three years, Nalley returned to the institution in April 1874. Though they did not specify, the managers believed Nalley had “good reasons” for returning. They considered sending her to live with Mrs. Turner of Falls Church, Virginia, whom Elizabeth Mullikin and Maria Harkness both endorsed, a few months later in July, but decided against it. Lee finally found a home for the seventeen-year-old in 1876.<sup>100</sup>

### **Children Placed in Indentures with Managers**

The managers of the Washington City Orphan Asylum did not typically have the institution’s children placed with them. There were two cases, however, where they did. One of the earliest children admitted to the institution was Elizabeth Gardner. Betsey Gardner, as the asylum records refer to her, entered the orphanage in 1816 at age ten. The board decided she should live with Frances Dandridge Lear, though they did not record when they made that decision. Lear had joined the board in 1817. She was the niece of Martha Washington, the former First Lady of the United States, and married Tobias Lear, who served as George Washington’s personal secretary during his presidency. Shortly after marrying in 1802, the couple traveled to the Barbary Coast in North Africa, where Tobias Lear served as a consul. The couple did not return to the United States until 1813. Frances Dandridge Lear attended her first

---

<sup>98</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>99</sup> Susan R. Coxe to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>100</sup> Containers 36, 41, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

meeting for the asylum in February 1817, four months after Tobias Lear committed suicide. Lear acted briefly as both first and second directress. She resigned in 1850 and died in 1856.<sup>101</sup>

Regrettably, records do not indicate how long Gardner lived with Lear, or how old she was at the time of the indenture. She does not appear in Lear's last will and testament.<sup>102</sup>

The second case was in 1875 when the board agreed to let Willie Richter live with Elizabeth Blair Lee's family in Silver Spring. Richter previously had been indentured in 1872 at the age of twelve to Daniel Bates, who was to teach him how to make clocks. In October 1875, Richter returned to the asylum from Bates' house in Philadelphia, testifying to mistreatment in his indenture. The board informed Bates that Richter would not return to him. In the same meeting when the managers discussed Richter's return, Lee "kindly offered him a home at her country residence." Though records do not specify, Richter was most likely placed in a labor contract like other children. He remained with the Lees for two years. In November 1877, Lee informed the board that Richter, with sufficient money and clothing, left, as the seventeen-year-old wished to look for work rather than wait for the money due him at the end of his indenture.<sup>103</sup>

Lee later received a letter from Richter, offering an apology for the conditions under which he left her home: "You will be surprised to hear once more from one who I suppose you have forgotten entirely now . . . but I have ever kept in mind your kindness to me which at one time was not duly appreciated. I am sorry to say." Richter hinted at some discord between himself and others that prompted his premature departure, possibly referring to other people employed in the Lee home. His letter was not solely apologetic as his primary purpose was to

---

<sup>101</sup> Ray Brighton. *The Checkered Career of Tobias Lear* (Portsmouth Marine Society, 1985), 193-197, 310, 332; Containers 34 and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>102</sup> Containers 34 and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Frances D. Lear will June 13, 1856, *Probate Records (District of Columbia), 1801-1930, District of Columbia. Register of Wills*.

<sup>103</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 41, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

discern whether there was any money still owed to him, as he found himself in circumstances where he needed help. He concluded his letter with a reference to Lee's family, "I hope this will find you the Admiral and Blair all well." There is no record if, or how, Lee replied.<sup>104</sup>

### **Managers' Legal and Financial Power**

In order to admit children to the institution, witness relinquishments, and bind children out or place them in adoptions, the managers needed the legal authority to do so. Nineteenth-century American society did not readily grant mothers legal authority over their children. Following the War of Independence, courts began to focus more on a child's needs in custody disputes, a mentality that might grant mothers more power over their children than previously. When parents remained together, the father's control remained superior.<sup>105</sup> This mentality extended to the Board of Managers. Yet the board maintained legal authority over the children living in the asylum, and in some cases, had the children bound to them or served as trustee for their finances. The legal instrument that allowed the women to do so was the asylum's incorporation, which rendered them separate legal and legitimate entities, whereas their husbands otherwise covered their own civic identities. Lori D. Ginzberg in *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* explains the legal powers given women through the creation of incorporated charities,

Corporate status circumvented married women's formal legal disabilities at the discretion of the state legislature by creating a legal 'person' who was, for all practical purposes, not female . . . The married women who became the officers of corporations received concrete, and often surprisingly broad, powers that were theoretically restricted to male or unmarried female citizens.

---

<sup>104</sup> William Richter to Elizabeth Blair Lee; February 18, 1880; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 227 and Folder 5; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>105</sup> Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 234-236.

Ginzberg goes on to use as her example corporations that were granted legal authority over children.<sup>106</sup>

The women serving on the Washington City Orphan Asylum's Board of Managers, like other nineteenth-century reformers, had legal authority over other people's children that they did not have over their own. As incorporation did not happen until 1828, for the first twelve years of the orphanage's history, the managers acted with an authority they most likely did not legally possess. In 1816, the managers resolved to have all the institution's children bound to Marcia Van Ness, a measure likely meant to cover some of the legal grey area. Once incorporated the legal board was actually comprised of the male Board of Trustees. The admission, relinquishment, binding, and adoption of children was in the asylum's practice conducted almost entirely by the Board of Managers and not the Board of Trustees. The women of the institution, the Board of the Managers as well as the women they hired to be the head of the asylum's daily activities and supervision, frequently witnessed the relinquishment of children to the institution in addition to having them bound to them.<sup>107</sup>

The women, though separated from the investment of money, still maintained a considerable amount of control over the institution's finances. The men by no means dominated the institution's monetary resources. On the contrary, on one occasion, J.W. French, secretary of the Board of Trustees, wrote to the asylum's bank concerning the bank's refusal to give Charlotte Luce, treasurer of the Board of Managers, \$300 when the asylum needed it. French supported the Board of Managers rights to withdraw money, stating, "[The Board of Managers] have power, and their declaration has always been deemed sufficient authority . . . when as now there is no want of funds it is enough that the Ladies . . . declare that they need this money to pay their

---

<sup>106</sup> Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 50.

<sup>107</sup> Containers 32 and 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

bills.” French did note that the Board of Trustees supervised and managed the Board of Managers’ use of the asylum’s funds, but the Board of Managers maintained a certain amount of control.<sup>108</sup> They collected money and generally delegated where and how to spend it.<sup>109</sup> They even wrote checks on behalf of the institution.<sup>110</sup>

On occasion, the managers assumed a greater legal responsibility in a child’s financial life. Maria Harkness was charged with investing the money coming into the institution for Lavinia Tucker in September 1870. The trustees might also be put in charge of a child’s money, such as R.K. Elliot who managed Willie Maher’s property. Lillie Redinger, who lived in the asylum in 1870s and 1880s, had money given to her from an unnamed source. Adelaide J. Brown assumed the trusteeship of Redinger’s money.<sup>111</sup> Brown joined the board in 1860 and served as secretary from 1876 to 1881. Her service was punctuated by trips to California to visit family. Despite the distance, Brown was frequently kept apprised of asylum business, particularly through correspondence with Elizabeth Blair Lee.<sup>112</sup> Brown grew close to Redinger, and consulted Lee frequently on the child’s finances and future. While in Los Angeles in 1878, Brown wrote to Lee asking about Redinger out of all the other children, “And Lille Redinger, how is she getting on in her music, her studies, and her every day life? Please remember me affectionately to Mrs. Wright Miss Charles, to Lillie, and to any of the children who may speak

---

<sup>108</sup> Container 16, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>109</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>110</sup> Container 16, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>111</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>112</sup> A. J. Brown to Elizabeth Blair Lee; November 28, 1878; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; A. J. Brown to Elizabeth Blair Lee; August 17, 1880; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

of me.”<sup>113</sup> The orphanage agreed to send Redinger to a school using the money entrusted to her, and Brown took her to visit the school in August 1880.<sup>114</sup> Around the same time, the trusteeship of Redinger was transferred to Lee for unspecified reasons, though it was possibly Brown’s frequent trips to the other side of the continent.<sup>115</sup>

Brown stayed apprised of Redinger’s position though, consulting Lee in the management of the account. She even corresponded with Redinger after the child left the asylum for school. Lee and Brown worried about Redinger as the child wished to leave the school in August 1881 to find employment. Brown advised Lee about how to treat Redinger’s money given the current circumstances, commenting, “As to the money in your hands . . . I should think as you have it invested in Government Bonds, the best thing would be to retain it for the present, at least until Lillie is of age . . . so that in any event our child may have something to fall back upon, should her scheme for proving herself self sustaining, turn out a total failure.” Brown further confessed to Lee, “I know the trust is burdensome, for I endured it for many years, and yet it seems to me the better course to pursue.”<sup>116</sup> In their care of Redinger’s finances, Brown and Lee enacted financial planning they likely did not conduct for their own families, and Brown, at least, exhibited some acumen on the topic.

---

<sup>113</sup> A. J. Brown to Elizabeth Blair Lee; November 28, 1878; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>114</sup> A. J. Brown to Elizabeth Blair Lee; August 17, 1880; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>115</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>116</sup> A. J. Brown to Elizabeth Blair Lee; August 18, 1881; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

## Managers and Children

The closeness between Adelaide J. Brown and Lillie Redinger was not the norm, but it was not an extreme exception either. There is not enough quantitative evidence to allow a generalized statement about the relationships between the managers and the children of the asylum. Some managers likely were closer to some children than to others, as indicated when Brown specified for Lee to say hello to Redinger and other children whom might talk about her. Little snippets reveal moments in which the managers acted in a way indicating a bond between them and a child. Elizabeth Blair Lee became the godmother to the child of one of the asylum's former girls in May 1863 and attended the wedding of another in June 1864.<sup>117</sup> During at least one meeting, in February 1869, the managers received letters from the institution's children.<sup>118</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee also received a few letters from children who had left the institution, such as Bertha Stahl and John Newman.<sup>119</sup> Often when former residents contacted someone from the institution it was because they needed something, such as a job reference or personal information, but occasionally the children wanted to keep in touch.<sup>120</sup>

The managers wanted a connection with the children, if not individualistically then as a whole, and if not a bond then at least an association. At the board's bequest the children of the orphanage frequently attended the funerals of managers. They attended Marcia Van Ness' funeral in September 1832, which newspapers noted in Van Ness' obituaries.<sup>121</sup> One observer

---

<sup>117</sup> Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 265-266, 386-387.

<sup>118</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>119</sup> John Newman to Elizabeth Blair Lee; October 19, 1880; Box 227 and Folder 1; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Container 3, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>120</sup> E. Snyder to Elizabeth Blair Lee; March 23, 1879; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Susie Hazel to Blair Lee; June 2, 1910; Box 408 and Folder 5; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

stated that the children lined the gate before the burial site, separated into two columns through which attendants of the funeral passed. The orphans also covered Marcia Van Ness' body "with branches of the weeping willow."<sup>122</sup> The managers decided the children would accompany the managers and the matron of the institution to Ann L. Jones' funeral in 1835 and Ann Larned's in 1837 and wear a "badge of mourning" for thirty days following each.<sup>123</sup> They also attended Elizabeth B. Laurie's funeral in 1849, Maria T. Gillis' in 1871, and Elizabeth Blair Lee's in 1906.<sup>124</sup> Nathan Towson even provided money for the managers to buy ribbons for the children to wear to his wife Sophia Towson's funeral in 1852.<sup>125</sup> The children did not attend Ann Washington's funeral in 1882 since the weather prevented them from doing so; the managers believed Washington would not have wanted the children put at risk. In 1881, the managers made the practice more official, resolving that the children should attend the funeral of any woman who served on the board.<sup>126</sup> This decision could have stemmed from genuine affection between the individual managers and the children, but it also could have been simply a tribute to the manager, or even a performance on the board's part—proof of their charitable natures.

---

<sup>121</sup> "From the Philadelphia Inquirer. A Benefactress," *Salem Gazette*, Salem, Mass., September, 21, 1832.

<sup>122</sup> Allen C. Clark, *The Life and Letters of Dolly Madison* (Washington, D.C.: Press of W.F. Roberts Co., 1914), 257.

<sup>123</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>124</sup> Containers 34 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Last Tribute Paid," *Evening Star*, Washington, D.C., September 15, 1906. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1906-09-15/ed-1/seq-2/>>

<sup>125</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>126</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

## **Conclusion**

In founding and managing the asylum, the women of the Board of Managers engaged in a charitable movement born of patriotic spirit during the Early Republic and grew during the antebellum era. This movement was encouraged in part by religious fervor as well as opportunities created by changing economic conditions and increased education. With their roots firmly planted early in the century, the asylum continued throughout the 1800s with relatively few changes to the structure and demographic makeup of the management. All the women of the asylum society belonged to more or less the same social group. To perform functions not socially permissible to women, particularly the legal and financial aspects of the institution, the Board of Managers relied on an all male Board of Trustees. At times cooperation between and within the boards turned into conflict, disagreement that was at times gendered and often showed individual members' ambition. The managers continued to perform some of the legal and financial duties of the asylum, likely finding a level of personal fulfillment in the work they did for the institution. This included witnessing relinquishments and binding children out for labor. Some of these indentures and admissions were facilitated by the managers' connections in the District of Columbia area.

## CHAPTER 5: WORKERS

### Intro

As the managers and trustees did not live at the institution and provide the daily instruction, supervision, and all around care of the children, they needed other people to do so. They hired mostly women to fill a variety of positions. The number of people employed, and the diversity of their jobs, increased as the size of the institution grew. The orphanage hired matrons, teachers, assistant matrons, assistant teachers, cooks, laundresses, seamstresses, nurses, servants, and janitors. The women who worked at the asylum formed relationships with the managers, trustees, and each other, ones in which they commiserated, colluded, and argued. At times, when the workers and managers disagreed, their discord bled over into the public sphere, the dramas of the asylum appearing in the city's newspapers. The workers likewise developed connections with the asylum's children, relationships that, especially when damaged, could involve the managers and trustees as well.

The managers understood the importance of their employees in the success of the asylum, even describing the role of the matron using language about motherhood. They reflected this attitude in their defense of their workers to external criticism and their treatment of vacations and leaves of absence. At times they also let the women bring their own children into the orphanage, a complicated action compared to the institution's philosophy concerning children and their parents. The matrons, placed in a position of power, were generally willing to act as they saw fit and express their opinions about the home in which they worked and typically lived. They did so within boundaries, however. Though the managers defended the workers they trusted and valued, took steps to ensure their well-being, and even spoke fondly of some of them, they prioritized the functionality and success of their institution above all else.

## Positions

The head of the household was the governess, matron, or superintendent; the term changed over the course of the nineteenth century, most likely a reflection of the changes of language in broader society and the responsibilities of the position.<sup>1</sup> Records generally refer to the women in charge as “governess” from 1815 until approximately 1830, “matron” from around 1830 to the 1880s and 1890s, and “superintendent” after that. The matron supervised the children and the asylum as a whole, disciplining and rewarding children as needed. In later years, at least, the matron was allowed to hire, fire, and manage the vacations of other employees. When the matron was considered a “governess” she was in charge of the education as well, as the institution did not hire its first teacher until 1830.<sup>2</sup>

Teachers typically occupied the position of authority underneath the matron. The role of matron was usually held by married or widowed women, though single women occasionally held the position. The inverse was true of the teacher, who was typically a single woman. These women were always white, and the asylum never hired men to these posts, though men instructed the children in the Sabbath School and occasionally performed manual labor. When the asylum lacked either a matron or a teacher, they searched for a new one, and hired temporary people for the interim. The other positions, those typically belonging to the service sector of the economy, made life at the asylum easier for its residents, and generally meant the children did less work of that nature. At times, the managers let these positions go and had the children fill

---

<sup>1</sup> In the Progressive Era Baltimore orphanages Nurith Zmora examines in her book *Orphanages Reconsidered: Child Care Institutions in Progressive Era Baltimore* (1994) the term used to describe the head of the institution was “superintendent,” and “matron” referred to a different position, a language shift that is, in part, consistent with the Washington City Orphan Asylum. As “matron” was the term used for the longest period, it is the term used when speaking generally about the role.

<sup>2</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

these duties, such as January 1861 when they fired the cook and seamstress and used the older girls as labor.<sup>3</sup>

The standard length of service for the matrons and the teachers ranged between a couple of months to a couple of years. These women's reasons for leaving varied. Some, such as Mrs. Wolten, who acted as matron from February to November 1858, and Elizabeth Koonen, who served as teacher from January to October 1870, cited declining health as the cause for their resignations; Koonen recommended Mrs. Brown to replace her, and the managers hired Brown on Koonen's recommendation. Some left for better employment opportunities, such as E.A. Bohle, who resigned her position of matron in 1861 to open a school in Virginia.<sup>4</sup> Several simply did not fit with the institution, either according to their own assessment or the managers'. A few women stayed with the asylum for the better part of a decade. The women who served the longest included matrons Mary Wannall at fourteen years, Harriet J. Wright at seven years, and Jeanette B. Wright at fourteen years. Jeanette B. Wright and Wannall both died while serving in their positions, and Harriet J. Wright was let go because of her health.<sup>5</sup>

### **Expectations**

The managers expected the matrons and teachers of the orphanage to embody specific abilities and characteristics. The institution's founding guidelines stated that, "The Governess must be a woman of pious character . . . She shall engage to be faithful, tender, and unremitting

---

<sup>3</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Wm. H. Boyd, *Boyd's Directory of Washington, Georgetown, and Alexandria, Together with a Compendium of Their Governments, Institutions and Trades* (Washington, DC, 1871), 176; Wm. H. Boyd, *Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia, Together with a Compendium of its Governments, Institutions and Trades, to Which is Added a Complete List of Physicians and Nurses* (Washington, D.C., 1875), 550.

<sup>4</sup> Susan R. Coxe to Elizabeth Blair Lee; August 27; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>5</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

in the care of the Children committed to her superintendence . . . .” The children’s education was to be moral as well as vocational. As such, the daily leader of the home should exhibit virtuous traits that the managers wanted passed along to the children. The list of attributes also included practical expectations, such as that the governess be “capable of teaching to read and sew . . . follow the directions and obey the regulations enjoined her . . . and render an accurate account of her expenditures at the Asylum to the Treasurer.”<sup>6</sup> These requirements speak to the class and educational level of the women the asylum sought to employ. The details on specific women’s family backgrounds are sparse. Some, especially the matrons and teachers, seem to have been middle class. Charles P. Wannall, the elder brother of matron Mary Wannall and teacher Margaret Wannall, worked as a clerk in the United States Treasury Department, owned property, and could afford a live-in servant.<sup>7</sup> The managers considered hiring Miss McCormick who was the daughter of an Episcopal minister. Jeanette B. Wright’s son Dr. J. Buddington Wright was a dentist and provided the institution with his services.<sup>8</sup> Amelia R. Charles, one of the teachers, was the sister of the Sabbath School teacher, R.A. Charles.<sup>9</sup> The requirements of the workers indicate that some level of education was necessary for the matrons and teachers. They had to be able to read, write, sew, and also keep track of a budget and expenses. The list of expectations also included a tenet that would be pivotal to the relationship between worker and employer—the matrons must follow the orders of the managers.

---

<sup>6</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 1860 Census of Population, Washington, D.C. (accessed August 1, 2016), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com>

<sup>8</sup> Susan R. Coxe to Elizabeth Blair Lee; August 27; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; *Joint Select Committee to Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*, 55<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>d</sup> sess., 1898, 108.

<sup>9</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

The duties, responsibilities, and at times burdens of the women who worked at the asylum extended beyond the managers' prescribed list. They were not simply responsible for the education, health, care, and overall well-being of children, they were responsible for the education, health, care, and overall well-being of upwards of a 110 children at a time. The children's ages ranged from newborn to seventeen years old, ages that constituted an array of needs as well as problems. The children misbehaved, ran away, and contracted serious, life-threatening illnesses. The workers had to manage the production of food, the cleanliness of the home, and help identify when managers should consider calling a doctor in the face of illnesses that could turn out to be typhoid, smallpox, or the measles. The matrons supervised many of the repairs done at the asylum, and attested to the managers and trustees that they had been done fairly and effectively. Matron Louisa Latimer did as much in December 1851, as did R.M. Bigelow during her tenure, and Mary Wannall on multiple occasions. The matrons occasionally traveled with children on their way to or from indentures, particularly ones outside the District of Columbia. Mary Wannall went with Howard Paul to his indenture in Scranton, Pennsylvania in October 1869 and with Paulina Lindenberger to hers in Wilmington, Delaware in April 1871. She also ventured to Philadelphia to retrieve James Dean and Nettie Sturgis from their placement that proved abusive in May 1869.<sup>10</sup>

The matrons especially, but likely also the teachers and possibly even the cooks, seamstresses, and nurses also served as the asylum's gatekeepers. They held responsibility for not only the children's safety but their physical presence in the asylum. As with the managers, they assumed roles that would later be given to professionally trained social workers.<sup>11</sup> They

---

<sup>10</sup> Containers 16, 17 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>11</sup> Nurith Zmora, *Orphanages Reconsidered: Child Care Institutions in Progressive Era Baltimore* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 7-8, 14; Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls:*

delivered disappointing news to people who wished to take children, or already had children in their care. The managers instructed Mary Wannall in January 1872 to inform Mr. Windsor that they no longer had any authority over Frank Cahill, and he could not return him to the institution. The workers dealt with parents and relatives demanding to see or remove their children, situations that undoubtedly proved tense and required resolve and ingenuity on the workers' part. On at least one occasion, a father appeared at the institution intoxicated and made threats to matron Jeanette B. Wright, the severity of which made her believe a policeman should be placed at the door. At times the workers failed at their gatekeeping responsibility, and parents and relatives took children away without approval. One such example occurred in February 1861, when the mother and uncle of Mary Bowen came to visit the institution and while the mother distracted E.A. Bohle, the matron, the uncle left with Mary.<sup>12</sup>

In 1885, the managers decided that the safety of the children necessitated a position dedicated specifically to that purpose and began having a guard stationed at the asylum at night. On at least one occasion, the asylum's guard proved necessary. At 1:45 AM on September 11, 1891, a man broke into the asylum through a window and went into the girls' dormitory. He covered one girl's mouth and told her not to scream. The girls' shrieks alerted Special Officer Prather, who was in the boiler room and immediately ran up to their dormitory on the third floor. By the time Prather reached the girls' room, the man was escaping down the staircase. Prather could not catch him and not having his pistol was unable to stop him. The man left his coat behind, which contained information that allowed the police to identify him as Hammond Piepenbriug. Piepenbriug claimed that he had been robbed on 7<sup>th</sup> street by two men who took his

---

*Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 37.

<sup>12</sup> Jeanette B. to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 4; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

coat. Despite his protestation, Piepenbriug was arrested, and Officer Prather identified him as a man that he had seen hanging around the asylum in recent weeks.<sup>13</sup>

The asylum often hired matrons and teachers for a trial period. Mrs. Campbell was hired as matron for a three-month period in October 1822, Mrs. McKinnon for three months in December 1822, Miss McDuell as teacher for three months in August 1830, Mrs. Bennett as matron for one quarter in 1837, and Miss Seely as matron for one month in November 1861, all with the possibility of extensions. The board of managers wanted to confirm that the matron or teacher would measure up before they made a full and lengthy commitment. They also tried to hire from a pool of women that they knew or came with recommendations from friends of the women of the society. Miss Moore, the first official matron of the asylum, came on the suggestion of Elizabeth Brown, a member of the board. Reverend Mr. Rozzell suggested Maria Thompson act as teacher in 1829.<sup>14</sup> The Misses Titcomb, a pair of sisters, traveled all the way from Newburyport, Massachusetts upon recommendation in 1834, one to serve as matron and one to be the teacher.<sup>15</sup> In January 1834 a committee consisting of Clara Bomford, Elizabeth B. Laurie, and Sophia Towson assembled “to enquire [into]...the character and qualifications of Mrs. Parker as a teacher and if the result [proved] favourable engage her for three months.”<sup>16</sup> Susan R. Coxe was asked in July 1857 to consult Reverend Mr. Grammer about Mrs. Armstrong,

---

<sup>13</sup> Containers 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; “Broke Into the Girls’ Dormitory,” *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 12 Sept. 1891. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1891-09-12/ed-1/seq-6/>>

<sup>14</sup> Containers 34 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>15</sup> Container 11, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>16</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

an applicant for the position of matron. The managers preferred not to hire a woman with whom they had no familiarity or assurance of her moral fortitude.<sup>17</sup>

Though the managers often sought recommendations for their hires, on occasion they advertised in the newspaper to fill a position. This may have not been their favored method of securing employees, as matron Jeanette B. Wright states, “if I do not hear of some one this week I shall advertize, yet I do very much hate to do that.”<sup>18</sup> This may have been a distaste solely belonging to Wright, or one that the asylum developed over time. Yet the infrequency with which they advertised, and the circumstances under which they did so, particularly for the matron, suggests it was not the preferred method. The first instance in which they advertised was in July 1822 when they found the current governess had mismanaged money. The pressing need to find a replacement may not have allowed the time to consult people within their social circle. When hiring a matron in October 1837, they already had reviewed some people before they “determined to advertise for a proper person.” They advertised in February 1858 after denying the temporary matron Mrs. Heald’s application to stay. They also advertised for a teacher in September 1839 and August 1865.<sup>19</sup>

### **Performance**

Most of the matrons and teachers appear to have measured up to expectations. The board of managers often examined the children and once a year the rest of the orphan society did so as well at the annual meeting. They judged the matron in part by the improvement, health, and

---

<sup>17</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>18</sup> J.B.W. to Elizabeth Blair Lee; May 23, 1892, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>19</sup> Containers 34 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

behavior of the children.<sup>20</sup> The managers used the children's educational growth as their standard of judgment for the asylum's teachers. As they remarked about Mrs. Cobourn in March 1865, "Our teacher proves her valuable services by the progress in her scholars." Cobourn, who taught at the institution from May 1862 to July 1865, frequently pleased the managers. When she resigned, "the Secretary was directed to write and thank [her] for her devoted attention to her charges and also express to her the sincere regard the Board of Managers [felt] in parting with her."<sup>21</sup> Mollie Cornell, Cobourn's successor, was likewise loved by the managers, who noted her "great patience and perseverance," especially in working with a large number of younger children. As with Cobourn they believed "the progress made during the year by a large proportion of the scholars was . . . extremely creditable to Miss Cornell." On occasion, the managers showed their appreciation for the workers' good performance through a small gift or bonus. They gave the teacher Margaret Wannall a small gift, valuing no more than \$5, "for her kindness and care of the children, when ill with the measles." They gave the same to Cornelia McMannin. In 1872 the managers felt Cornelia McMannin had worked especially hard following the death of matron Mary Wannall, and voted to grant her \$100.<sup>22</sup>

The managers, not surprisingly, had some of the highest praise to give to the women who stayed with the institution the longest. Manager Adelaide J. Brown wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee in August 1880 referring to Harriet J. Wright as "dear, good faithful Miss Wright. . . ."<sup>23</sup> The

---

<sup>20</sup> "Religious Summary," *Boston Recorder*, November 8, 1823, <http://www.proquest.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/> (accessed March 31, 2011); "Female Orphan Asylum," *City of Washington Gazette*, November 9, 1818. <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Mrs. Cobourn is also referred to as "Miss Cobourn" in records.

<sup>22</sup> Containers 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Wm. H. Boyd, *Boyd's Directory of Washington and Georgetown, Together with a Compendium of Their Government, Institutions and Trades* (Washington, D.C., 1868), 47.

<sup>23</sup> A.J. Brown to Elizabeth Blair Lee; August 17, 1880, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

managers lauded Mary Wannall and Jeanette B. Wright as well. Upon each woman's death, the managers expressed their great sense of loss. In the days before Wannall's death, they referred to her as "one who was endeared to them by the association of many years, and the mutual sympathies, born of love too, and labor in the same cause."<sup>24</sup> Upon Wright's death in 1895, the secretary recorded a lengthy tribute to the matron in the minutes of the managers' meeting, including, "Mrs. Wright . . . [came] to us at a time when we sorely needed her wonderful tact and ability and faithfully did she do her work! The Board of Managers will feel most keenly the loss of her sympathy and prompt cooperation in the care of the 'orphan and the destitute.'" Her loss, as the daily leader of the institution, was one that felt "well nigh irreparable."<sup>25</sup>

At times, the managers found themselves in the position of defending the actions and authority of their employees to criticism. In 1867, Frances Burns, whose children Mary Lizzie Burns and James Samuel Burns had entered the institution a year and a half earlier in February 1866, complained that Mary Wannall had mistreated her children. The managers, upon investigating, asserted that the matron had justly punished ten-year-old Mary Burns, who had committed an unspecified "very dirty and disgusting piece of mischief." The managers further stated that the children were under the matron's control, and needed to obey her edicts. They wanted to ensure their workers treated the children well, and that "cruelty or unkind treatment was never exercised towards the orphan children." In the case of Wannall, however, they affirmed that in a "Christian woman such as the present Matron they [had] a suitable person to discharge the troublesome duties connected with such an Institution."<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Containers 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>25</sup> Containers 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>26</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

The managers' relationship with some of their employees soured. This happened for a variety of reasons, including failure to follow directions, mismanagement of money, and mistreatment of children. Miss Brawley quit the post of governess and her "resignation [was] accepted with much disapprobation and regret for the ungracious spirit in which it was offered."<sup>27</sup> The managers also eagerly accepted Carrie Heflebower's resignation in 1860, as the woman had failed "to carry out their instructions."<sup>28</sup> A governess who mismanaged funds was a cause for great alarm and grounds for termination. In July 1822, the minutes of the board's meeting revealed that the current governess had "in hand four dollars of the last months appropriation," a line which was followed by the resolution "to advertise immediately for a suitable person to take charge of this institution, the first of October next." Evidently, the acting matron had overspent the money allowed her, or perhaps even pocketed it for personal use.<sup>29</sup> Other workers the managers simply decided were unsuited for their tasks, such as Miss Gilbert, who was hired as matron in November 1872 and informed January in 1873 that the managers believed her "not calculated for the duties of Matron in the Institution."<sup>30</sup>

### **Workers, Managers, and Trustees**

The relationship between managers and workers, the workers themselves, and the workers and the members of the Board of Trustees varied depending on the people. In some cases, the managers formed deep bonds of mutual respect with some of the people working at the

---

<sup>27</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>28</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; William H. Boyd, *Boyd's Washington and Georgetown Directory Containing a Business Directory of Washington, Georgetown, and Alexandria, Congressional and Department Directory, and an Appendix of Much Useful Information* (Washington, D.C.: Taylor and Maury, 1860).

<sup>29</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>30</sup> Containers 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

asylum, particularly the matrons. In others, there was tension, particularly in situations that ended in either the worker's resignation or termination. In some cases, certain managers sided with certain workers, while others sided with others. Workers got along with each other and they fought with each other. Workers clashed with trustees while also working with them. All of this is perhaps an understandable result of several opinionated, passionate, and possibly egotistical people endeavoring to create a home as best they saw fit.

Likely the best examples of closeness between managers and workers were the relationships that Elizabeth Blair Lee formed with Mary Wannall, Harriet J. Wright, and Jeanette B. Wright, particularly Wannall and the latter Wright. Lee served as first directress for much of Wannall's tenure and all of the two Wrights. She likely was close with each of them due to her position. Much of their correspondence with them related to business, especially when Lee was unable to attend a meeting from her home in Silver Springs, Maryland, but the letters also contained personal material, and revealed a deeper relationship than strictly professional. Wannall wrote Lee in September 1862, consoling her on the death of her niece, and later assured her that God would not allow the Confederate troops to enter Washington.<sup>31</sup> She felt close enough to Lee to comment on another manager's condition in November 1866, writing of Mary Wickliffe Merrick, "she is looking well but has lost all her beautiful hair and of course it spoils her beautiful face."<sup>32</sup> Through the recommendation of Lee's father, Francis Preston Blair, Wannall's niece got a job in the Treasury Department, for which Wannall thanked both profusely.<sup>33</sup> Lee wrote to her husband in June 1863 about Wannall saying "she is really the best

---

<sup>31</sup> M.A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee; September 16, 1862; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>32</sup> M.A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee; November 7, 1866; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

friend I have in Washington” and “she is the hardest worked person I know except yourself.”<sup>34</sup> Lee spoke fondly of Wannall to Harriet J. Wright during Wright’s tenure, as well of Wright herself.<sup>35</sup> Jeanette B. Wright wrote Lee a lengthy condolence letter when Lee’s brother died in August 1883. She empathized about the loss she felt at her own brother’s death.<sup>36</sup> Wright also spoke frequently of her family, particularly her daughter Marion, and wrote Lee updates while she was away caring for Marion.<sup>37</sup>

Through Lee’s and Wannall’s letters we can also see some of the tension within the leadership of the institution. The timeline of Wannall’s employment in the institution is complicated, as she filled different roles, left or took leaves of absence and then returned, and threatened to resign on at least one occasion without actually doing so. She also had a sister, Margaret Wannall, who worked there as well, and the records frequently refer simply to “Miss Wannall.” Mary Wannall was possibly associated with the institution as early as 1830, and the managers considered hiring her and her sister in 1842. She served as teacher most likely from 1850 to 1852, and then transitioned in 1853 to matron. In January 1857, Wannall wished to leave for health reasons. The managers desired that she remain and resolved to hire an assistant, especially as many of the older girls in the asylum had left, leaving a gap in the orphanage’s labor pool. Wannall stayed until July 1857, at which point she declared that her health would not

---

<sup>33</sup> M.A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>34</sup> As quoted in Virginia Jeans Laas, ed., *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 272.

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to Mrs. Wright; August 27, 1881; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>36</sup> Jeanette B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee; August 2, 1883; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>37</sup> J. B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee; May 3, 1886; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Jeanette B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee; September 22, 1884; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

improve if she continued in her role, and departed. Though records, such as later histories written by asylum employees, suggest that it might have been a leave of absence, the managers' minutes and Wannall's own letters make it sound as though she officially resigned. She was rehired in March 1859, and in 1860 took another leave of absence due to her health, and the 1860 United States Census lists her as living with her brother. Wannall served as matron again from 1862 to her death in 1872.

Records hint that before Wannall left the institution in 1857 there was discord between the matron and certain members of the Board of Managers. In February 1855, Wannall offered her resignation, not because of health, but because of tensions with the board. The managers did not consider her grievances legitimate, as the source seemed to be Wannall having to obey the board's orders. Wannall stated she always believed she acted according to their wishes, or at least not in defiance of them. The meeting ended with the managers stating their overall pleasure with Wannall and the matron withdrawing her resignation.<sup>38</sup> The tensions continued, and Wannall wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee in December 1855, "as I think any private conversation between you and myself is viewed rather in a treasonable light—on meeting days—I think it best to avoid the same and send you a few thoughts on paper." Lines had not only been drawn between Wannall and the board, but within the board as well.<sup>39</sup>

Wannall was not the only worker the managers disagreed about. One woman employed as matron during Wannall's time away from the asylum was Miss Kepler, who worked at the institution for six months before being let go in January 1858. The managers felt she could not handle the physical demands of the job. The board faced some disagreement over the timeline of Kepler's departure. Susan R. Coxe, the board's secretary, wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee that she

---

<sup>38</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>39</sup> M.A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee; December 1, 1855; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

found the children in a disgraceful state upon visiting. Coxe herself had ordered water heated and supervised the cleaning of over fifty children, commenting “such filth and such underclothes I never saw.” A faction of the managers, likely led by Mrs. Gillis, wanted to keep Kepler until the next month. Coxe commented “I will continue for a time but to have all my pleasure and peace destroyed by Mrs. G and that set.”<sup>40</sup> Coxe had preexisting issues with Gillis, but disagreement over the matron exacerbated them.

Coxe was not the only person who saw problems with the institution during Wannall’s absence; the former matron also had many things to say about the state of the orphanage. Wannall confided in Lee in February 1858 the horrors she witnessed on a recent visit. The smell in the schoolroom “was more offensive than what [she had] inhaled in visiting Alms houses among the sick” and the look of the children, though well fed, was “sufficient to fill any heart with sorrow.” Wannall referred to her own tenure, reflecting “While I stood there and beheld the labor of four years thrown to the winds . . . I felt more than sad and wished for Herculean strength that I might take hold and right things once more.” She also contended that these offenses would not have been permitted under her tenure. She concluded “I think I shall visit the Asylum no more for it makes me gloomy for days,” a promise that she did not keep.<sup>41</sup>

Wannall again visited the asylum (multiple times) and remained alarmed for its condition in her absence. Without mincing words, she declared in June 1858 that the kindest thing she could “say concerning the Wretch who [was] placed over those helpless children is that she should be tarred and feathered put upon a rail and rode out of the precincts of the City.” In this

---

<sup>40</sup> Susan R. Coxe to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library

<sup>41</sup> M.A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee; February 25, 1858; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; The handwriting on this letter leaves room for interpretation on the year. Given the appearance of the date, the context of the letter, and the chronology of the story, I’ve determined it to be 1858.

letter she possibly referred to the current matron, Mrs. Wolton. She informed Lee that she was not alone in her belief that things had declined since she left, and that board members, Washington citizens, and Dr. Palmer, one of the physicians associated with the institution, had all approached her about returning. Wannall hinted at larger tensions at the institution when she declared that she would not return as long as two particular women, whom she did not name, remained on the board. She also stated, with a hint of mirth, that Dr. Palmer had lectured the board at their most recent meeting about the need for Wannall to return. Wannall also had written to the Board of Managers as a whole in December 1857, the contents of which remain a mystery. As the letter was “highly disapproved of,” it was quite possibly along the same lines as the one to Lee.<sup>42</sup>

The issue of the asylum’s condition during Wannall’s absence did not remain an internal affair, as her reference to the citizens of Washington suggests. The previous October, a newspaper article appeared in *The American*, a Washington newspaper, in which a person naming themselves only as “a friend of the orphan” asked specifically why the institution had allowed such a state of decline since Wannall left. They accused the orphanage of letting children roam the street unsupervised, truant from school, handle coal for people in the city, and generally live in state of uncleanliness. They also inquired “whose fault it is that the above evils exist, whether it is the fault of the managers or the matron.” Wannall was possibly connected to the newspaper article; if not, she agreed with it.<sup>43</sup> Wannall quite possibly referred to it when she mentioned a newspaper article in her June 1858 letter to Lee as “more than true.”<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> M.A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee; June 29, 1858; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>43</sup> *The American*. (Washington D.C.), 28 Oct. 1857. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014015/1857-10-28/ed-1/seq-3/>>

Tensions between people working at and managing the asylum again entered the public sphere briefly in 1868, when the managers learned that some unfavorable stories about the institution had come from their teacher, Lucilla Mason. The managers agreed in December that Elizabeth Mullikin and Louisa Brown would speak to Mason. The next month, she tendered her resignation, which the board accepted. No record indicates the contents of Mason's stories.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the biggest conflict between the asylum and someone who had worked there, at least of the ones made public, occurred in early 1881. In March, Mary S. Cowen, a former asylum employee, published in Washington newspapers several serious accusations against the institution, particularly matron Harriet J. Wright. Cowen was employed briefly in the institution's nursery from February 1 to February 15. The *Evening Star* published Cowen's claims on March 9, which included that the children, whose present number was greater than one hundred, were malnourished, physically abused, lived in a frigid building, slept in objectionable beds, and had their hair pulled out. Someone from the *Evening Star* visited the asylum before the publication of the article, and observed many of the same things the managers and trustees contended over the next weeks—that the accusations were either baseless or came with explanations.<sup>46</sup>

The day following publication, the managers discussed the issue at a meeting and drafted a letter in defense of Wright, as well as their own practices. They intended its publication for the *Evening Star* and the other newspaper that broadcasted Cowen's claims, the *Washington Post*.

---

<sup>44</sup> M.A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee; June 29, 1858; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>45</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; William H. Boyd, *Boyd's Directory of Washington and Georgetown, Together with a Compendium of Their Government, Institutions and Trades* (Washington, D.C., 1869), 48.

<sup>46</sup> "Washington City Orphan Asylum: Charges Against the Matron and What is Said in her Defence," *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 09 March 1881. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1881-03-09/ed-1/seq-4/>>

The managers declared their habit of visiting the institution every week so they could ensure and attest to its condition. They averred that the cleanliness of the institution, the health of its children, and the few number of deaths disproved Cowen's accusations. The managers included a quote from their 1877 annual report, "The Matron, Mrs. Wright, has been indefatigable in her efforts to promote not only the physical good and development of the large family of orphans under her care, but has labored also most conscientiously for the enhancement of their moral and spiritual interests." The managers also recorded a note of support from one of the asylum's physicians, Charles E. Hagner, who stated "Mrs Wright has been untiring in her efforts and I have never seen better nursing in any private family. Several patients have recovered where her unselfish care and nursing alone could have produced so favorable a result."<sup>47</sup>

Though quick to defend Wright, the trustees and the managers still launched a formal investigation. Two other women joined Cowen in her accusations during the course of the inquiry. Mrs. Speak claimed that she visited the Cross children, Frank and Fanny, and Fanny told her that she had been beaten on her back, and requested Mrs. Speak take her out of the asylum. Mrs. Staples, whose daughters Emily Staples and Laura Staples had lived in the asylum since 1874, also joined Cowen in her criticism, but offered no specific evidence. According to the newspaper transcript, Cowen said that "she had no malice against the people [at the institution], but considered it her duty to make the condition of affairs public."<sup>48</sup>

Several other people attested to the good living conditions of the institution. These included First Directress Elizabeth Blair Lee, neighbor Carrie Browning, the Sunday School

---

<sup>47</sup> As quoted in the managers' minutes, Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>48</sup> "District Brevities," *National Republican*. (Washington, D.C.), 11 March 1881. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053573/1881-03-11/ed-1/seq-4/>> ; "District Brevities," *National Republican*. (Washington, D.C.), 14 March 1881. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053573/1881-03-14/ed-1/seq-4/>> "Washington City Orphan Asylum," *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 16 March 1881. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1881-03-16/ed-1/seq-4/>>

teachers R.A. Charles and J.E. Kellogg, the teacher Amelia R. Charles, H.B. Colton, a neighbor and carpenter who had worked at the institution, the cook Francis Tyler, current resident Sophia Oerich, and former resident Nettie Brown. All agreed the asylum's children were well fed, clothed, treated, and generally cared for. The trustees reported that the asylum had briefly endured colder temperatures due to a broken furnace. The matron had whipped Lucinda Streeks for misbehavior, but such a punishment was used sparingly. Wright argued "that the switching was slighter than she would have inflicted upon one of her own children."<sup>49</sup> Lee agreed with her that punishment of children was a necessary part of the asylum's protocol. The trustees found other claims about the harsh treatment of the children were not witnessed by Cowen or the other accusers, but rather things they heard about. The trustees discounted them. Lee stated that when Cowen worked at the institution, the nursery had a noxious odor and experienced pandemonium among Cowen's young charges. Cowen towards the end of the investigation stated that she would not have gone to the newspapers if a certain member of the Board of Managers, whose name the newspaper did not reveal, had been nicer to her. If treated differently, she would not have spoken out. The trustees took this as proof that Cowen's testimony was false. In their report, the trustees referred to the asylum's good reputation in saying "they need not here refer to the well established confidence it enjoys among the good people in the community," hoping to undo some of the damage done by Cowen's accusations.<sup>50</sup> At the conclusion of the investigation, Mrs. Staples removed her children from the institution.

---

<sup>49</sup> As quoted in *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 05 April 1881. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1881-04-05/ed-1/seq-4/>>.

<sup>50</sup> "Washington City Orphan Asylum: The Investigation Over," *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 17 March 1881. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1881-03-17/ed-1/seq-4/>>; "The Orphan Asylum Investigation: The Charges of Cruelty—They Are Not Sustained—Report of the Committee of Investigation," *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 05 April 1881. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1881-04-05/ed-1/seq-4/>>; Wm. H. Boyd, *Boyd's Directory of*

Whether the accusations Cowen, Staples, and Speak made against the institution had more veracity than the trustees and managers acknowledged remains a mystery. The *Evening Star*, after visiting the institution before publishing the initial accusation, seemed content to accept the appearance of the current residents, and the continued attachment of former children, some of who were employed at the institution, as evidence of its functionality and acceptability. Either way, one of the asylum's former employees, though briefly employed, took her grievances with the orphanage, particularly its Board of Managers, and made them a public issue, a persisting issue for institution in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

### **Authority and Agency**

The matrons operated from a relative position of power, one derived not only from their roles as the head of the household, but from their proximity to its daily issues. They garnered further authority from the managers entrusting them with small responsibilities in which they could make decisions without consulting the board.<sup>51</sup> The Board of Trustees signified their trust in Jeanette B. Wright when they consulted her regarding the best use of money left by trustee Dr. James C. Hall.<sup>52</sup> The workers could exert this agency as long as they stayed under the authority of the Board of Managers and Board of Trustees. Some actions they took on their own. Other ideas they proposed and waited for the managers' blessing. Given their position of relative authority, as well as likely from their relationships with the managers and trustees, the workers generally were willing to speak their minds to the institution's managers and trustees.

---

*the District of Columbia, Together with a Compendium of its Governments, Institutions and Trades, to Which is Added a Complete Business Directory and a Congressional Directory* (Washington, D.C., 1880), 664.

<sup>51</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>52</sup> Minutes, trustees' meetings, January 12, 1881, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 408 and Folder 10; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

The matrons made suggestions or took action in several areas, such as improvements to the asylum's physical building. In September 1855, Mary Wannall sought Elizabeth Blair Lee's approval to supervise putting gas under the house, but also informed the first directress that she had ordered more beds as some of the children were having to sleep on the floor. Also, when asked by a patron of the institution what the asylum required, she took the liberty of requesting iron bedframes.<sup>53</sup> Wannall's wishes for the institution's new building in 1866 met conflict with the Board of Trustees. The matron wanted a porch and handrails for the children's safety. The trustees, focused on expenses as she saw it, resisted these measures, believing them unnecessary costs. Wannall remarked on the actions of the trustees to Lee, saying "There is several things necessary to be done for comfort which I intend to have executed, for the Trustees will not, the handrail you ordered for the fourth story they refused to have put up but thinking it really necessary I had it done."<sup>54</sup> Wannall even paid for it.<sup>55</sup> The matron offered her opinion on the trustees' attitude, "These gentlemen have their pleasant homes, and care little how hard I labor or how little comfort any of us have."<sup>56</sup> She likely could speak about the trustees in this manner because of her relationship with Lee; she possibly could act against the trustees' will since she had the managers' backing. Jeanette B. Wright also offered her opinions about the physical needs of the institution. In 1890, Blair Lee passed the message along to his mother that Wright had

---

<sup>53</sup> Mrs. M. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee; September 14, 1855; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>54</sup> M. A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee; November 7, 1866; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Letter from E.H. Mullikin records it as the third floor.

<sup>55</sup> E.H. Mullikin to Elizabeth Blair Lee, October 15, 1866, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>56</sup> M.A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee; September 20, 1866; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; M. A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee; October 2, 1866; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

things she wanted done at the asylum, Lee guessing that it was some new toilets.<sup>57</sup> Wright also spoke to Elizabeth Blair Lee about the need for radiators in the home, as rooms such as the chapel were too cold, and stated that she had ordered a new sink for Lee's plumber to install.<sup>58</sup>

The matrons also proposed curriculum and recreation for the children. In May 1886, Jeanette B. Wright floated the idea of founding a program to help the children learn agricultural skills.<sup>59</sup> In October 1886 she hired a dressmaker to teach the trade.<sup>60</sup> She suggested in June 1891 that the asylum bring in a woman who had been giving history lectures to other women in Washington. Wright proposed that the lecturer come twice a week at the cost of \$1 per week to teach American history as well as the history of the relationship between Britain and the United States.<sup>61</sup> She also suggested that the institution try to arrange a picnic on the grounds' of the Soldiers' Home for the children's entertainment, and asked Elizabeth Blair Lee to use her influence to see if the venture was possible.<sup>62</sup>

The matrons offered recommendations and occasionally took action concerning the children. In many cases they navigated the extent of their authority under the purview of the board. R.M. Bigelow, during her tenure, requested clarification concerning permissions allowed to Nettie Sturgis. Sturgis told the matron that the managers allowed her "to go out every day." Bigelow believed the child should stay for Sabbath School and then to go pray at the YMCA

---

<sup>57</sup> Blair Lee to Elizabeth Blair Lee; March 31, 1890; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 272 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>58</sup> Jeanette B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 4; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library

<sup>59</sup> Jeanette B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee; May 3, 1886; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>60</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>61</sup> J. B. W. to Elizabeth Blair Lee; June 11, 1891; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>62</sup> Lillie P. Bailey to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 4; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

with the other girls. Bigelow remarked to Elizabeth Blair Lee, “I think it will not have a good influence upon the other girls if she is to go and come when she pleases and if this is to be so I’d rather she would stay among her ‘friends’.” Bigelow needed “to know . . . how far my authority extends.”<sup>63</sup> In November 1886, Wright proposed traveling herself with five children they were moving to an institution in Philadelphia and asked Lee, “What do you say to my plan? Let me know,” which was a common way for Wright to end her letters to Lee.<sup>64</sup> Wright urged Lee in 1892 to allow her to send a child to the House of the Good Shepherd, a reform home for girls. Annie Gannon had been causing trouble in the asylum, so much so that Wright believed she needed to be removed at once as her influence was corrupting others.<sup>65</sup> The board normally decided cases of removal. Wright alluded to her place of power, though, when she suggested that she and Lee, “as President of the Board and . . . head of the house” had the authority to act in a case of necessity, concluding her plea with “we have done so you know before.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, in 1886, Wright had been part of a committee consisting of managers Elizabeth Blair Lee and Mary Wickliffe Merrick that had authority to act according to their judgment in sending Andrew Jenkins and Charles Graff to the reform school.<sup>67</sup>

As Wright hinted, the managers decided about admitting and placing out children, though the matrons might act in certain situations. Wright wrote Lee in August 1887 about a man who

---

<sup>63</sup> R.M. Bigelow to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 4; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>64</sup> J.B.W. to Elizabeth Blair Lee; November 12, 1886; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 6; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>65</sup> The handwriting of this letter leaves the last name open to interpretation. It is possible this child could be Annie Sanders.

<sup>66</sup> J. B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee; March 22, 1892; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. J. B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee; March 23, 1892; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>67</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

wanted to place his child in the institution, informing the manager that the man had lost his job and needed to leave Washington to find work. His wife was also ill. Wright told him they would admit the child if he provided proof of his claims. She acknowledged her actions were outside of the normal bounds, “I suppose I am acting as under my order which in an extreme case to receive a homeless [child] . . . .”<sup>68</sup> At other points Wright expressed her opinions more assuredly. When Millie Ann Bergess, mother of Lillie May Bergess and Albert Cleveland Bergess, requested to readmit her children to the institution, Wright told the mother they could not accept her infant, born after Bergess removed Lillie and Albert, because the child was illegitimate. Wright also told Bergess that she would not be allowed to visit her children, declaring later to Lee, “Mrs. [Bergess] was always troublesome, and I should insist upon her not coming here.”<sup>69</sup>

Workers might also endorse people to take children from the institution. Elizabeth Kooner, the teacher, made an application in September 1870 for Thomas H. Beall of Beltsville, Maryland to take Henry Meredith. Beall also had the recommendation of Reverend Ernest, and after delaying the decision briefly, the managers permitted him to take Meredith. Amelia R. Charles recommended Dr. and Mrs. Charles of New York to take Lizzie Gilbert in October 1876, to which the managers agreed. (There was no clearly established familial relationship between the Charles family and the institution’s teacher).

The institution’s employees also spoke out concerning their position and treatment within the asylum, as is evident from Mary Wannall’s previously cited letters; the matron was not opposed to speaking ill of the Board of Managers or the Board of Trustees. Kate Corbin,

---

<sup>68</sup> J. B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee; August 5, 1887; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>69</sup> J.B.W. to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 4; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. The managers also recorded in July 1890 that Wright discharged Mary Nugent from the institution; it is unclear if Wright did so with or without discussing the issue with the managers; Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

employed as an assistant in the nursery, also complained of her situation to Elizabeth Blair Lee, stating that her wages did not do more than cover her expenses, as her hours prevented her from doing her own sewing, requiring her to pay someone else to do it.<sup>70</sup> Other managers were more conciliatory in their speech to the board. Harriet J. Wright wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee in 1879, “You all have been patient and born with my many many imperfections for which I pray you will be blessed” and later thanked the board profusely upon their granting her a vacation in 1881. Wright may have been genuine in her statements; she might also have known the benefit of using flattering language with her employers.<sup>71</sup>

### **Vacations and Leaves of Absence**

The asylum had no clearly established protocol for employees to take vacations or leaves of absence. It appears they generally granted vacations to their matrons and teachers once a year or as needed, especially as the century progressed. Vacations typically lasted a month. Mary Wannall asked for five weeks in September 1856 to go see friends, to which the managers assented. Miss Cobourn requested a month in July 1863 rather than the two weeks the managers previously had given her, offering to forego her salary in exchange. The managers agreed to a month with full compensation.<sup>72</sup> Jeanette B. Wright’s correspondence frequently refers to the vacations of Anne Lawson and Amelia R. Charles.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Kate Corbin to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 4; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>71</sup> H. J. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee, March 1879; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>72</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>73</sup> J. B. W. to Elizabeth Blair Lee; 1887; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Jeanette B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee;

The managers also granted leaves of absence for family circumstances or health. When teacher Amelia R. Charles's mother died in December 1875 the managers offered their condolences and agreed to adjourn school until the beginning of January. When Mary Wannall traveled with Howard Paul to his indenture in October 1869, the managers instructed her to take several weeks off in connection with the trip to help her recover her health. In the year before Harriet J. Wright was asked to step down, the board gave her more than one leave of absence due to her health. In January 1881 they gave her \$500 and requested she take off an unspecified amount of time, simply saying "some weeks, or months." Though not necessarily the norm, the managers on at least once occasion paid for the health care bills of one of their matrons. During Mary Wannall's final sickness in 1872 they hired several doctors to attend to her in her illness. The Board also agreed to pay the costs of her impending funeral and burial.<sup>74</sup>

In their communications about the matrons' health, the managers conveyed an awareness of the women's essentialness to the asylum, coupled with concern over the women's well being. In a letter Adelaide J. Brown wrote fellow manager Elizabeth Blair Lee in November 1878 while Brown was in Los Angeles, California, she asked Lee to send her regards to Harriet J. Wright and Amelia R. Charles. Brown specifically inquired of Wright's health and workload, stating, "Is Mrs. Wright better? Have you been able to find a good nurse, and a capable cook? Her life is too precious to us, to be placed in jeopardy as it has been, by such overtaxation."<sup>75</sup> In their January 1881 letter informing Wright they wished her to rest to rejuvenate her strength they stated "the Board of Lady Managers have seen with unfeigned regret for sometime past that you were very

---

May 27, 1890; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>74</sup> Containers 44 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>75</sup> A.J. Brown to Elizabeth Blair Lee; November 28, 1878; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

much overworked in your zeal and devotion to your duties. . . .” They believed for “the future prosperity of this Orphan’s Home, that the Board should do all in their power to continue [her] usefulness in this Institution . . . .” Later that year, when the managers decided to again instruct Wright to take a break, they wrote her that “you should leave the City, awhile, to recuperate, that [the Board] may not be deprived of your invaluable services.”<sup>76</sup>

In expressing their fear and concern for the health of certain matrons, the managers revealed another important part of their philosophy—that the woman serving as matron fulfilled the role of mother to the children. In requesting Harriet J. Wright take a vacation and affirming the matron of her importance, the managers wrote “But you are as a Mother, to the Orphans far more invaluable to the Institution, than in an industrial & economical, point of view.” They argued furthermore that “it is due to you from the Board as the Mother of these children” to receive a break.<sup>77</sup> This mentality may not have applied to every matron. It was a term used explicitly only with Wright. The managers may have only seen Wright fulfilling the role of “mother,” or it may have been a mentality that developed over time with the growth of the institution and the longer tenures of the matrons.

The managers wanted their workers to be healthy, for their own sake, but also for their position within the asylum. When health became too big a factor, as with Wright, the managers explored other options.<sup>78</sup> One member of the board, most likely Elizabeth Blair Lee, wrote a letter to Mrs. Brown about the condition of the matron, probably Wright, who Lee believed was “broken down in body” and whose “nervous system [was] so impaired as to make her unfit for her duties.” The matron had been sick in the past, and Lee feared that previous troubles were just

---

<sup>76</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>77</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>78</sup> Containers 44 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

a foretaste of issues to come. The managers requested the matron to resign more than once, finally insisting she leave. Lee commented, “I will for one never consent to her resuming her present duties.”<sup>79</sup> The managers’ minutes recorded much more bittersweet feelings about Wright leaving, saying her departure was “felt by each lady as a personal loss,” though, they noted, “the welfare of the Asylum must be primary consideration of the Board. . . .” The managers placed the functionality of the institution above all else, and would not maintain a worker who could not fulfill her responsibilities.<sup>80</sup>

### **Workers and Children**

The managers may have viewed the matron as a “mother” to the children, but that did not mean the children felt similarly. The workers had similarly mixed relationships with the children of the institution as they did with the managers and trustees. Some formed positive bonds. Laura Hinton, who was indentured to Dr. T.M. Franklin in 1871, referred to Mary Wannall as “Dear Miss Wannall,” indicating fond memories of the former matron who supervised her.<sup>81</sup> Wannall told Elizabeth Blair Lee that Hinton possessed a “gay sprightly disposition,” when she recommended indenturing Hinton to a family that did not end up taking her.<sup>82</sup> B.C. Earle, the head of the school where Lillie Redinger lived following her time in the asylum, told Lee that Redinger likely would love to celebrate the holidays with Harriet J. Wright.<sup>83</sup> While away taking

---

<sup>79</sup> Letter to Mrs. Brown; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 4; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>80</sup> Containers 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>81</sup> Container 3, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>82</sup> M.A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee; November 7, 1866; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>83</sup> B.C. Earle to Elizabeth Blair Lee; October 21, 1880; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

care of her daughter in Binghamton, New York, Jeanette B. Wright wrote Lee that, among other things, she received a “nice well written letter” from Lillie Baily, one of the institution’s children. Wright gushed, “I feel proud of the older girls in ‘Our Home’ and feel . . . they will make useful women, they are now very companionable to me.” Wright also wrote generally about the children of the asylum, and her feelings on their position in the world, “I often think of the poor little waifs, which have been brought to our doors, for whom no one cares, and wonder how any human heart can be . . . against such helplessness . . . .”<sup>84</sup>

Other relationships between the workers and the children were not as affectionate. The matrons might move to have children placed in indentures, other institutions, or simply instructed to leave the asylum if they felt the children no longer belonged in the institution. In some cases, the children turned to the managers when they felt mistreated by the workers. The managers were a higher authority than the asylum’s workers. There was the case of Carrie Rempp, who entered the institution in 1878 at the age of four, and went to live with the institution’s former nurse Mrs. White in 1883. Rempp wrote Lee in November 1883, describing her lack of success in her indenture, due to eye problems, and wished to live somewhere else as a nurse. She also spoke in detail about her treatment by Jeanette B. Wright. Rempp regretted that Wright ordered her out of the asylum “the only home [Rempp] knew of.” She referred to Wright as “unkind” and wondered why Wright’s own children were allowed to stay at the orphanage, while she was forced to go prematurely before she had an established place to live. Rempp’s brother also was sick, and unable to work and provide for her. Rempp lamented that Wright “misrepresented [her] to the board of managers” and argued that “if [she] didn’t do well [she] ment well.” Rempp finished her letter with a plea that Lee would help her as soon as she could.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> J. B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee; May 3, 1886; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

## Workers and their Own Children

On occasion, the managers allowed women who worked in the asylum to bring their children with them. In some cases, the children were treated almost as an afterthought to the mother's employment, the mother being the focus of the records. One of the earliest governesses, Mrs. Campbell, was allowed to bring her daughter when she was hired in October 1822, agreeing to clothe the child and pay \$25 a year for her stay in the institution. Campbell's child did not appear in the admission records, and no other record reveals information about her except that she was under the age of ten. Mrs. Stone, who provisionally replaced Mrs. Campbell when she became ill less than a month later, likewise was allowed to bring a twelve-year-old child until the managers determined the permanency of Mrs. Stone's position. The managers did not include the child in their admissions records, nor even state whether the child was Mrs. Stone's son or daughter.<sup>86</sup>

Other children entered the institution more officially, appearing in the admissions' records, and usually their mother was not required to pay for their maintenance. The asylum hired Mary Ann Winn, a widow, to work as a cook in May 1858, agreeing to pay her \$4 a month as well as accept her daughter, 22-month-old Nancy. The situation proved short lived, as they left in July 1858. At the same time they hired Winn, the managers also hired Mrs. Holtzman as the nurse, promising to pay her \$3 a month and accepting her eight-year-old son James Albert Holtzman. Like Winn, she was not required to pay any money and she later left with her son. Mrs. Fountain, hired as a washwoman in February 1860, brought her three daughters, Josephine, Henrietta, and Elizabeth. Mrs. Fountain admitted two of her three daughters in February, and

---

<sup>85</sup> Containers 36 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Carrie Rempp to Elizabeth Blair Lee; November 3, 1883; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 227 and Folder 5; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>86</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

asked admission for the third in March. Fountain placed Josephine and Elizabeth with Mrs. Duvall and Mrs. Makall in Georgetown in 1864. Five years later, the managers asked Fountain to find a home for Henrietta “as early as possible.” The urgency of their request they left unexplained, though it likely was due to bad behavior or lack of space in the asylum.<sup>87</sup> The managers hired Mrs. Massey, who was English, as a seamstress in April 1860, paying her \$8 a month and accepting her daughter into the institution. They did not require her to relinquish her child. Mrs. Barber was hired as a nurse in August 1860 at \$6 a month, the asylum admitting her seven-year-old daughter Alice, who previously had been in the asylum. They left the following September. Mrs. Barnes, “who [had] been an inmate of the house for two weeks” requested in February 1877 that her twin seven-year-old sons Arthur and Archie Barnes be allowed to live in the house for a brief period. Though not definitely, Mrs. Barnes was likely employed at the institution in some manner. The orphanage hired Mrs. Evans, who was introduced to the institution by Dr. Latimer, and accepted one of her children in May 1882. The other child, who was “deficient,” was sent to St. Elizabeth’s. The managers hired the mother of two-month-old Louisa White in March 1882, her mother relinquishing her to the institution. However, when matron Jeanette B. Wright later fired White’s mother, the woman was informed she would have to take her child with her.<sup>88</sup>

For one mother, employment in the institution was a result of her application to admit her children, rather than the inverse. Kate Corbin, who came in May 1873 with references from several members of the Washington community including Reverend Andrew Robey and Dr. J.C. Montagu, asked to admit eight-year-old Ella Corbin and six-year-old Montagu Corbin. Rather than just taking her children, the asylum went a step further and hired her, recording in their

---

<sup>87</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>88</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

minutes, “Mrs. Corbin is a destitute widow, and needing an assistant in the nursery, the Board decided to employ her there and take her children also.” Records do not indicate how long the Corbins stayed, though they mentioned that in June 1877 the managers denied her request to take her children to visit relatives, as it was against the rules.<sup>89</sup>

Something similar perhaps happened for a mother referred to the institution by Officer Wilson in September 1890. The mother had been abandoned by the father, and the family was entirely without financial support. Jeanette B. Wright knew that Elizabeth Blair Lee was looking for someone to do her own laundry. Wright proposed accepting the boy and girl in the institution and sending the mother to Lee’s home. The “good looking strong” woman was eager to be in Lee’s employ, and believed she would enjoy relocating to Lee’s country house in Silver Spring, Maryland. The family came with Wilson’s commendation. Lee possibly agreed to this proposal, or a similar suggestion for a different case, as a woman Mary E. Redden wrote Lee referring to both the dresses she made for Lee and making a visit to the asylum with other family members.<sup>90</sup>

The managers not only accepted the workers’ children, but on at least one occasion other relatives as well. Mary Wannall applied in June 1855 to have her niece Emma Wannall, a “motherless child,” live at the institution. The managers agreed, though, unlike other cases in which workers did not pay for their children, the matron paid \$60 a year for her niece.<sup>91</sup> They did not always affirm workers’ requests concerning their children. A woman named Mrs. Kirkland applied to become the teacher in September 1858, as well as to admit her child into the asylum. The managers did not grant either request, not stating their reason for declining. When Mrs.

---

<sup>89</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>90</sup> Mary E. Redden to Elizabeth Blair Lee; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 4; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>91</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

Elmore, whose position was not recorded, left in November 1867, she asked to take Mary, her adopted daughter, with her. The Board declined, thinking it better for the child for her to stay in the institution.

The instances in which the asylum hired mothers or other relatives and admitted their children was common enough that at their September 1883 meeting, the managers “decided that in all cases, where parents employed in the Asylum have their children with them they must be properly relinquished.”<sup>92</sup> In 1865, the washerwoman, cook, and nurse all had children in the institution. The managers noted as much when they increased the three women’s wages to \$7 a month. The frequency with which the managers hired women with children hints at a desire to not help just the children, but their mothers as well. Cases such as Kate Corbin’s and Elizabeth Blair Lee’s laundress show instances in which the managers saw the opportunity to not only care for the children, but employ the parent, too. More commonly the managers found a suitable employee and the care of her children followed as a natural result. Though the managers may have taken opportunities to aid a whole family, it is not evident that they sought such opportunities. To the contrary, Jeanette B. Wright told Elizabeth Blair Lee in her fruitless search for a woman do the laundry, “I may be forced to take a woman and her children, which means trouble as you know for some time at least.”<sup>93</sup> Time may have shown that there were problems with having women and their children both in the asylum. The passage of the 1883 resolution that mothers must relinquish their children, and the brief employment periods of some of these women, suggest that there could be struggles concerning authority. The managers did not explicitly state their expectations for women with children in the institution, likely because it was

---

<sup>92</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>93</sup> J. B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee; May 23, 1892; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

not their original plan. Yet their language often placed the matron at the head of the household. More tellingly, they referred to her as the children's "mother," a position and role that might create conflict if a child's *actual* mother was in the home, too.

In the case of mothers as workers, the Washington City Orphan Asylum defied its normal philosophy concerning parents and children. Like other asylums they let children return to parents when suitable, but while in the institution wanted close control of the children. Yet at the same time, they allowed workers to be near their children *within* the institution on a daily basis. Such an action problematized their desire to have authority over the children and their interactions with their parents. Not only did these parents stay near their own children, but they were in close proximity to the asylum's other children as well. Considering their desire to employ moral, upstanding women in the institution, this action also shows that they did not believe all the parents unworthy of their aid beyond helping their children. There were many cases in which their aid and sympathy extended beyond the parents to include their children, and manifested in employment as well as admission for their children. The practice of letting parents of children in the institution work in the asylum was perhaps a unique manifestation of the philanthropic impulse for the Washington City Orphan Asylum, as other scholarly works on orphanages do not mention similar practices.<sup>94</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The women who worked at the asylum were essential to ensuring its everyday functionality. They cooked for the children, taught them the skills the boards felt necessary for life beyond the asylum, treated them when they were sick, and punished them when they

---

<sup>94</sup> Timothy A. Hacsí, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) 58-59, 128-129; Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

misbehaved. The managers and trustees understood as much, and sought to hire people that would educate, supervise, and care for the children according to their standards. In the course of their service to the institution, the employees, particularly the matrons and teachers, formed relationships with the managers and the trustees. Some of these relationships were deep and encouraging; others ended in public scandal. They also formed relationships with the children, some of which were affectionate and lasting. Others were tried by conflicting desires and struggles for authority. Living, learning, and growing in the same space could result in matrons and teachers punishing children for misbehavior and children reaching out to the managers and rectify their mistreatment. The managers and trustees cared for their employees in the form of vacations and leaves of absence, as well as defending the workers against criticism. They went so far as to allow some women to bring their children with them into the institution, blurring lines between mother and worker. The matrons in particular, came to use their place within the orphanage to express their opinions and enact their agency. They did so within confines, and if the managers determined a worker would not obey instructions, or was not healthy enough to fulfill her duties, the worker would not be allowed to stay. The boards prioritized the institution above all else, and would choose it over the workers when necessary.

## **PART III: ASYLUM**

### **Chapter Six: Institution**

#### **Introduction**

The Washington City Orphan Asylum was, at its simplest, an institution that housed hundreds of people. The asylum's physical space shaped the everyday lives of hundreds of children as well as the adults who cared for them. The buildings had the potential to offer protection and safety, but could also make lives miserable, and even harm health. The asylum needed outside support to provide and maintain this physical space, to put furnishings in the rooms, stock the pantry with food, and conduct repairs, of which there were many. Support came from the institution's vast network. These people supplied money, goods, services, knowledge, and time to ensure the orphanage's functionality. Ministers and churches of the District of Columbia were a significant part of this network. The importance of their involvement, as well as the strong Protestant sentiment that created a complicated relationship with Catholic applicants and institutions, elicits another meaning of "institution" which proved integral to the asylum—the institution of religion.

#### **Buildings**

Finding a suitable physical dwelling for the orphanage was a high priority when the asylum society formed in 1815. The location of the asylum changed six times over the course of the nineteenth century, as the size of both the city and the orphanage grew.<sup>1</sup> The constitution of the asylum society called for the women on the Board of Managers to find a suitable house. A committee of three women, Mrs. Brackenridge, Mrs. McGowan, and Mrs. Chalmers, formed at

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Moore, compiler and editor. *Joint Select Committee To Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia: Part II—Report, 55<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1898*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898), 111.

the October 31, 1815 meeting to locate a residence for the orphanage. They reported a little over a week later that they had secured a house on 10<sup>th</sup> Street West owned by Mr. Woodworth at \$120 per year. The number of orphans, all girls, was approximately ten, and did not require a large residence.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Woodworth's house proved temporary, and as the number of children grew the orphanage moved to a provisional building constructed by Henry Smith on land that Marcia Van Ness provided without charge. The asylum then moved to a rented building on 7<sup>th</sup> Street, between H Street and I Street, in 1822.<sup>3</sup> Five years later, the Board of Managers decided to relocate the orphanage and collected donations to pay for a new building. John Van Ness donated property for the new institution on H Street North between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> streets West, a portion of which was the land Marcia Van Ness lent to the asylum a few years earlier.<sup>4</sup> The asylum engaged architect Charles Bulfinch to design the institution. They held an elaborate dedication ceremony on August 11, 1828, which took place at Reverend Dr. James Laurie's church before moving to the site of the future building to lay the cornerstone. The Board of Managers resolved to advertise the event in the newspaper and invite "the Rev[erend] clergy, Subscribers, Foreign Ministers, Officers of the Gen. Government, the Mayor, Corporate bodies, and officers of the Corporation of the City of Washington and citizens". The asylum hired Smith and Pritcher to construct the edifice, with the agreement that the managers would pay them \$550 ninety days

---

<sup>2</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid; *Joint Select Committee To Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*, 109.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Elliot, *Historical sketches of the ten miles square forming the District of Columbia: with a picture of Washington, describing objects of general ...* Washington, (1830): 310-321, *Sabin Americana*. Gale, Cengage Learning (Accessed 14 July 2016).

after the building's completion. The project finished in the summer of 1829.<sup>5</sup> The asylum's building, constructed with a portico and surrounding brick wall, was placed on a sizeable tract of land.<sup>6</sup> The building remained much as it was until 1856, when the increased number of children in the institution necessitated constructing an additional building.<sup>7</sup>

The managers and trustees again decided to make additions to the institution in 1864, possibly because of added pressures to the asylum and the city nearing the end of the Civil War.<sup>8</sup> They agreed, in addition to increasing their calls to the citizens of Washington, to have a fair specifically for raising money for the building. In 1865, their plans shifted from adding to the existing institution to relocating and constructing a new building on "55,350 superficial feet" of land donated by William W. Corcoran, at 14<sup>th</sup> and S Street. In planning for construction, the orphanage looked at other institutions to glean useful ideas. Trustee John C. Harkness, who also served as the architect for the project, visited public orphanages in Philadelphia and New York, writing to the managers that he had several concepts to implement at their own institution. Construction under contractor James G. Naylor began the summer of 1865 and concluded the following year.<sup>9</sup>

The Washington City Orphan Asylum was not, however, the first organization to inhabit the newly constructed building. The State Department, planning to tear down their own headquarters to construct an extension to the Treasury Department, rented the asylum's new building on a two-year contract, with a possible extension of two more years. They agreed to pay

---

<sup>5</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>6</sup> Elliot, *Historical sketches of the ten miles square forming the District of Columbia*, 310-312.

<sup>7</sup> Container 11, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>8</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; *Joint Select Committee To Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*, 111.

<sup>9</sup> Containers 17 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

rent of \$15,000 per year.<sup>10</sup> Some of the managers and the matron Mary Wannall visited the newly constructed building as it transitioned to the State Department, Elizabeth Mullikin commenting on the fine carpet, furnishing, and how it did not resemble an orphanage. She wrote to fellow manager Elizabeth Blair Lee, “I hope to live to see our dear orphans in the house when they will have plenty of room and good playground.”<sup>11</sup> Mary Wannall added that she found Secretary of State William Seward in his new office in the building.<sup>12</sup> The asylum in turn rented a house belonging to Alfred Lee in Douglas Row on I Street for \$2,400 a year, which they referred to as the “Lee House.” They began the process of moving in September 1866, as well as making improvements such as new carpeting, new mattresses, the construction of a porch, and the addition of handrails.<sup>13</sup> The asylum’s temporary house was next to the home of General Ulysses S. Grant.<sup>14</sup> Wannall wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee on October 2, 1866 that she had “not had a peep at Mrs. Grant as yet.”<sup>15</sup> Over the course of their being neighbors, the Grants showed the orphans “many kind attentions.”<sup>16</sup> Though intending to be in the asylum’s building for only a

---

<sup>10</sup> Container 17, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; *The National Republican*. (Washington City [D.C.]), 02 Nov. 1866. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053571/1866-11-02/ed-1/seq-2/>; *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, September 3, 1866. Newspaper Archive Academic Library Edition. <http://access.newspaperarchive.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/>

<sup>11</sup> E.H. Mullikin to Elizabeth Blair Lee, August 14, 1886, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>12</sup> M. A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee, October 2, 1866, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>13</sup> Container 17, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>14</sup> *The National Republican*. (Washington City [D.C.]), 03 Sept. 1866. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053571/1866-09-03/ed-1/seq-3/>>

<sup>15</sup> M. A. Wannall to Elizabeth Blair Lee, October 2, 1866, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>16</sup> *Joint Select Committee To Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*, 111.

few years, the State Department stayed almost a decade, not relinquishing the building until 1875.<sup>17</sup>

The orphanage reported several problems that necessitated additional work before it was ready, finally, for occupation. Particularly, they felt that the State Department had not properly cared for the building, such as the floors, and had made alterations that did not suit a home for dozens of children. In their lengthy correspondence with Secretary of State Hamilton Fish, seeking recompense for damages as well as one month's unpaid rent, the trustees argued "that in the ordinary transactions of house letting scarcely a landlord could be found who would willingly receive the premise of a Responsible Tenant who had subjected his property to such abuse." The trustees went so far as to enlist outside parties to assess the state of the building. Fish argued against the State Department's fault, while noting that the initial transfer of the property occurred before his administration. He later stated that the State Department did not have sufficient funds, focusing particularly on the missing rent, and the asylum should approach Congress for compensation. It is not clear who eventually approached Congress, but Fish informed the orphanage in July 1876 that Congress had added an amendment to accommodate the missing expense.<sup>18</sup> Once occupied, the 14<sup>th</sup> Street location remained the asylum's home until 1927, the asylum constructing an addition in 1881.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Container 17, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; *The national Republican*. Nov. 2, 1866. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053571/1866-11-02/ed-1/seq-2/>>;

<sup>18</sup> Container 17, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>19</sup> Containers 45 and 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

## Space

The managers and trustees had particular designs for each room in the institution. How the managers apportioned the asylum's space communicated their intentions and priorities for the institution. The Lee House and the home on 14<sup>th</sup> Street were both four-storied, including the basement. The asylum in those properties as well as the house on H Street utilized the basement levels, typically making that the location for the dining hall, kitchen, laundry, pantry, storeroom, and playrooms. The basement in the H Street home, at least, had windows. In the upper levels they had dormitories, at least one schoolroom, and a room for the matron. The Lee House and the 14<sup>th</sup> St residence also had a library, at least one nursery, and a chapel located on the upper floors. It is possible the H Street location had these rooms as well.<sup>20</sup>

The institution was largely divided by gender, as the boys and girls had not only separate bathrooms, but separate playrooms as well. At times they separated according to age as well, not only separating the youngest children into a nursery, but the "large girls" and the "little girls" into different sewing rooms. These segregations were likely meant to prevent altercations. The managers created a space for learning, first with schoolrooms under the guidance of the teacher, and then later, with the addition to the 14<sup>th</sup> Street property in 1882, of a library for the older children, "under strict regulations." The asylum devoted a place to religion as well with their chapel, which was used by the Sunday school teachers. The matrons, at least, argued for the children to have a place for play and recreation. While in the process of constructing a porch to the H Street home in 1851, Louisa Latimer wrote to trustee William W. Corcoran to convey her dissatisfaction with the current plans, as the porch had initially been designed as a space for the children to play when the weather or conditions of the yard prevented them from playing there. The currently proposed steps, Latimer argued, posed a threat to the children's safety, and with all

---

<sup>20</sup> Container 17, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

of Latimer's tasks she could not provide the supervision needed. In considering the suitability of an addition to the 14<sup>th</sup> Street property, proposed by the State Department, trustee John C. Harkness noted that the addition could provide a large room for the children's play, which was something the matron in particular advocated. The managers and trustees recognized the need for the matron to have her own space, and provided with her own room. In the H Street property at least, the matron had a tub in her room. The teacher had a private room as well. The managers likewise had a place to gather and conduct their meetings. In 1881, they decided to purchase a new carpet for their room, and give the old one to Jeanette Wright, the matron. They also agreed, "to provide a lounge . . . for her comfort."<sup>21</sup>

As the century progressed technologically, the asylum advanced as well. An anonymous person donated an icebox in September 1852. In 1887, Congress passed an act in the District of Columbia, requiring buildings taller than fifty feet to construct fire escapes and install lights and alarms. District building inspector Thomas Enstrusle determined that the asylum building was forty-four feet, but he and fire chief Joseph Parris strongly recommended they follow the protocol anyway. The asylum, which had had fire alarms installed in 1885, followed their suggestion, and began building fire escapes and standpipes in 1887.<sup>22</sup>

### **Cemeteries**

The managers and trustees of the asylum created a space for the children not only in life but in death. At the base of this action was a dark but practical assumption that some of the children would die before becoming of age. They did not explicitly state in every case, of which there were approximately fifty, that the asylum was caring for the child's funeral and burial

---

<sup>21</sup> Containers 17 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>22</sup> Containers 17, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

arrangements, but they did so enough to indicate it was their practice. When eleven-year-old Martha Phillips died in 1845, the asylum spent \$10 for her funeral arrangements. They paid for John Lucas's in 1854 as well, and thanked Mr. Harvey in 1858 for paying William Eisenberger's expenses. The managers also paid for the burial of at least one child who had been placed in an indenture. Eliza Kirk's body was brought back to the asylum, seemingly to the managers' surprise, and they resolved to inquire into the circumstances of her death. Despite the fact that she technically was no longer under their care, the asylum paid for her burial.<sup>23</sup>

In May 1870, the managers appointed Elizabeth Blair Lee, Mrs. Marshall Brown, and Virginia Zeilin to obtain a parcel of land at the Rock Creek Cemetery for the orphanage, most likely without compensation from the orphanage. In 1872, the Graceland Cemetery informed the asylum that they would give them land to use and offered them the opportunity to pick the portion before opening it to the general population. One of the children buried there was Willie Stahl, who died of tetanus in 1877.<sup>24</sup>

### **Maintenance and Repairs**

Like any building, and especially one that housed so many people, the asylum needed maintenance and repairs. The monthly expenditures included payments to people to whitewash, sweep the chimney, and saw wood. Repairs included fixing the water pump, repairing the fence,

---

<sup>23</sup> Containers 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>24</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; A. J. Brown to Elizabeth Blair Lee, May 20, 1873, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 2; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Virginia Jeans Laas, ed., *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, (1999), 469.

and patches to the roof. On occasion, those performing the repairs and maintenance tasks donated their services, but normally the asylum paid to have them done.<sup>25</sup>

One of the most significant problems the asylum faced was plumbing, which resulted in health issues. The institution relied on outhouses until the 1850s or 1860s when they transitioned to water closets. Though a more modern system of plumbing, the managers and residents encountered significant issues, particularly in the 14<sup>th</sup> Street home during the 1880s. In 1882, the asylum invited Dr. George Byrd Harrison to make a health assessment of the home. Among the problems Harrison listed was the situation of the water closets, particularly because they opened into the nursery. Harrison argued their location as a “source of Contamination,” noting that “during the last month a case of severe illness has occurred, amongst the nursery children, of a type strongly suggesting defective aeration as a factor in its development. . . .” The asylum needed a carpenter to remedy the issue, and to ensure they were not simply deodorizing but sanitizing. Harrison also commended the managers on their existing efforts “to secure a full supply of water,” which he believed “a matter of paramount importance to the health of the Institution.”<sup>26</sup>

Though the managers, trustees, and workers endeavored to remedy the plumbing situation, they did not secure lasting solutions. A few years later, in 1886, the asylum’s plumbing once again presented an issue, particularly the harmful air that affected workers and children alike, which he believed resulted in several cases of diphtheria. George Byrd Harrison recommended that the asylum conduct an “immediate & thorough investigation” by professionals. William Paul Gerhard, a civil engineer from New York City, investigated in February 1886 and pointed out several necessary repairs. The asylum had terra-cotta pipes under

---

<sup>25</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>26</sup> Containers 44 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

the floors, which Gerhard argued were prone to breaking and allowing sewage to seep under the house, thus defeating their purpose. Instead, they created a “hot-bed of disease,” as had happened at the Washington City Orphan Asylum. The floors in the basement were rotting through at places, and Gerhard speculated that during storms, the street sewer filled to the point where some of the refuse flowed back under the floor of the asylum. Given how many of the rooms in the basement were in frequent use—the kitchen, the pantry, the dining rooms, and the boys’ playroom—the workers and the children were exposed to the noxious fumes. Gerhard also noted that the upper floors, except when windows could be opened, drew their air supply from the basement, spreading the problem.<sup>27</sup>

The plumbing needed major repairs, especially the water closets, even some of the work done a few years earlier. The water closets’ placement in the nursery, Gerhard believed, “was very objectionable and should have been condemned years ago.” The outdoor water closets likewise needed updating. Gerhard made strongly urged recommendations for ways to remedy the dilapidated plumbing, noting in his report that he “endeavored to restrict [himself] to the consideration of essential requirements only, leaving out everything which, although desirable, would not appear absolutely necessary.”<sup>28</sup> The summer of 1886, the orphanage temporarily relocated to Ingleside, a home in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood of Washington, possibly so the managers and trustees could fix the problem without inflicting further problems on its occupants. Matron Jeanette B. Wright visited the 14<sup>th</sup> Street location in August, along with Joseph Burden who was conducting the repairs. Wright noted that while she had not felt ill in five weeks at Ingleside, an hour standing in the 14<sup>th</sup> Street basement left her with “furious diarrhea & nausea.” She wrote to Elizabeth Blair Lee, instructing her to not go in the basement,

---

<sup>27</sup> Container 17, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

“You will hear of the condition of the pipes, no wonder we had bad smells & were all sick!”<sup>29</sup> By the time Burden had concluded his work in November, the asylum had spent \$18,435.10, an expense that, when adjusted for inflation, would equal around \$450,000 at the beginning of the twenty-first century.<sup>30</sup> Despite all the expense, trouble, and work, the plumbing issues persisted. Wright wrote Lee in September 1888, informing her that she had a plumber check the traps, as fumes from the sewer were leaking in and that several people were sick, including one child who had just recovered from diphtheria.<sup>31</sup>

### **Financial Difficulties**

The plumbing repairs of the 1880s may have been a particularly large expense for the institution, but it was certainly not the only time they faced financial troubles. Ondina E. González, in her essay on orphans in eighteenth-century Havana, Cuba, well characterized the financial situation of orphanages when she said, “it was one thing to open a home [for orphans] and quite another to ensure that it had the requisite resources for continuous operation.”<sup>32</sup> Though the asylum society employed several different methods of raising funds to feed, clothe, house, and educate the children, the institution, from the very beginning, experienced problems in raising enough money; this problem persisted throughout the nineteenth century.

---

<sup>29</sup> J. B. W. to Elizabeth Blair Lee, August 14, 1886, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 6, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>30</sup> Container 17, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Inflation rate figured using 1913 and 2016 as the comparative years. [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

<sup>31</sup> J. B. W. to Elizabeth Blair Lee, September 26, 1888, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>32</sup> Ondina E. Gonzalez and Bianca Premo, eds, *Raising an Empire: Children in Early Modern Iberia and Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 142.

In January 1842, the institution noted in the minutes of their meeting that the expenses for 1841 amounted to \$1305.26, whereas the donations received only equaled \$1301.82. The asylum possessed no funds for the upcoming year. They expressed their sincere “hope that the hearts which have hitherto been callous may respond to the orphan’s call.”<sup>33</sup> During the 1850s particularly, the asylum frequently had to make repairs to land in their possession, due to the collection of water and the resulting health risk.<sup>34</sup> In 1851, the institution took out two loans from Arthur Middleton, the Van Ness’s son-in-law, one for \$300 to be paid back in five years with interest, and another for \$299.50 to be paid back in two years with interest. Elizabeth Blair Lee, acting first directress, at one point recorded that the institution was \$1034.26 in debt. She commented that, “it takes a great deal to feed and clothe our 110 children.”<sup>35</sup> Financial difficulties were the impetus for the asylum’s 1863 concert, particularly, “the enhanced prices of all commodities requisite for the Institution.”<sup>36</sup>

Financial difficulties threatened to effect the institution’s treatment of its children. In February 1853, trustees Reverend J.W. French and Mr. Stone attended the managers’ monthly meeting to discuss the institution’s debt, currently at \$1,000. The trustees brought up the practices of foreign institutions they had visited, believing their standards should be implemented at the Washington City Orphan Asylum. Stone emphasized the need to keep the orphanage’s children in the asylum, “making them serviceable” to the institution rather than placing them in positions. Though proposed, the managers do not appear to have followed his suggestion. At other times, they took steps that directly affected the children. In 1858, the asylum began

---

<sup>33</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>34</sup> Container 23, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>35</sup> Container 16, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Frances Carpenter Huntington, “The Heiress of Washington City: Marcia Burnes Van Ness, 1782-1832” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 69/70 no. 47 (1969/1970): 98. JSTOR. (accessed October 24, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

replacing milk with tea for the older children in order to alleviate some of the financial burden, “noting the apparent forgetfulness and indifference of so many” in regard to the care of poor orphan children.<sup>37</sup>

### **Finances**

Though plagued with financial difficulties, the asylum always found a way to stay open. This owed mostly to the network of people and organizations created by the Board of Managers and Board of Trustees. The asylum society employed several different means for raising money for the institution. Primarily, it relied on monetary donations and subscriptions from the members of the asylum society and the citizens of Washington. A few members of the society made particularly large donations, such as the Van Nesses and Corcoran. Dr. James C. Hall left a large sum of money in his will to the orphanage as well as the Children’s Hospital.<sup>38</sup> The orphanage also received goods, some of which came from the women who served within the society, but also from their subscribers or people seemingly unconnected with the institution. Donated goods ranged from shoes to livestock to cabbage to bottles of wine. In 1824, Captain Wadsworth gave the asylum three cords of wood. Commodore Isaac Hull bequeathed a church pew at St. John’s Church in 1835. The asylum rented out the pew and made a profit. A four-year-old girl gave a scarf that she made to the asylum in July 1840. The children of Grace Church in Montgomery County, Maryland gave a blanket they made in 1880. S. Fowler and Company gave bowls, plates, and mugs amounting to \$5 in January 1859.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>38</sup> *Joint Select Committee To Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*, 113.

<sup>39</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

On occasion, people made monetary donations with specific intentions for the money. Holidays, such as Christmas and Thanksgiving, drew several donations. At Christmas 1858 the asylum received candy, cakes, stockings, apples, a china tea set, a turkey, and forty loaves of bread from various sources. At Christmas 1862 they received nuts, raisins, turkeys, hams, cakes, ice cream, pies, candy, oranges, apples, and toys. In 1859 W. Shields gave twenty dollars for Thanksgiving dinner. At certain points in the asylum's history people also donated money for the construction of a building for the asylum, such as in 1855 when a friend of the institution pledged \$200 should they decide to build a new dining room for the children.

Other people made donations with money earned from particular situations, such as the painter John Vanderlyn who in 1824 donated \$30, "the proceeds of one day exhibition of his painting."<sup>40</sup> They also earned the profits from Mr. West's circus on March 16, 1821.<sup>41</sup> The Ladies of the Navy Yard gave the asylum \$5.75 in 1824, the money left over after they had gathered a collection for and purchased "colours for a Military company." They received \$28 from the Stone Cutters' Ball in January 1856. General Barnard gave \$50 as a "birth day gift" in June 1864. Richie Stone and Jennie Stone likewise gave \$5 each in October 1865, the managers recording it as their "annual birthday offering." Like the Ladies of the Navy Yard and the Stone Cutters, people made donations through organized groups as well as on an individual basis. Commander John Rogers and the officers of the USS *North Carolina* together gave \$158.50 and a piece of Russia sheeting, a type of linen fabric. In November 1821, the asylum received \$7 from "the jury of the Circuit Court." Students at Columbian College gave \$18 in August 1825.

---

<sup>40</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>41</sup> "Circus," *City of Washington Gazette*, March 14, 1821, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011).

The Fraternity of Masons gave \$112 in 1840. The Young Men's Christian Association were among those to give candy during Christmas 1858.<sup>42</sup>

The Board of Managers also organized fairs to raise money. The first of these took place in February 1827, lasting two days. Postmaster General John McLean granted them the use of the General Post Office for the occasion. The fair included the sale of goods made by members of the board, a performance by the Marine Band lent by Colonel Henderson, and the patronage of Speaker of the House Andrew Stevenson. They held another fair in December 1859, the proceeds of which amounted to \$4,600.14. Several groups hosted tables, particularly churches and fraternal orders. The 1859 fair also hosted the Marine Band. A fair held in 1864 brought in \$13,080.01. Dr. Smith's Sabbath School held another fair in 1868. The asylum held concerts as well. The managers recruited entertainers to play without compensation at a concert in 1863. The asylum also hosted a two-night open house at their new asylum on 14<sup>th</sup> St. in May 1876, the first night featuring the asylum's children in "a concert and gymnastic exercise" and the second the Joe Jefferson Dramatic Club. They charged 25 cents a ticket the first night and 50 cents the second. The two evenings resulted in \$874.20 for the asylum.<sup>43</sup>

Beyond donations and subscriptions, the asylum also invested in the stock market. Following the asylum's incorporation, the Board of Trustees began investing a portion of their money in stocks. A significant number of the bonds purchased were in the Washington Corporation. The Board of Trustees put \$250 towards a California War Bond and purchased two Michigan Central Railroad bonds at \$1,000 each. The interest on these bonds went to the institution. Reverend William Hawley, a member of the board, handed approximately \$21 in

---

<sup>42</sup> Containers 34 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Russia sheeting, n." OED Online. January 2012. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (Accessed January 2, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> Containers 31, 32, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 65.

investment earnings on the Corporation stock to the Board of Manager's treasurer A.C. Smith in 1842 and \$37.02 in 1845.<sup>44</sup>

## **Religion**

Washington ministers and churches were a crucial part of the asylum's support network. As the inclusion of a chapel in the asylum's floor plan suggests, religion was an important part of the Washington City Orphan Asylum. Religion was integral to the reform movement of the nineteenth century, as many of those seeking to change society believed Christianity was the means and reason for doing so.<sup>45</sup> Many of the orphanages in the nineteenth century were private institutions founded on religious belief, divided according to Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. For most of the people managing these institutions, having children of their religious persuasion grow up according to their faith was of paramount importance. A few Protestant orphanages associated with a particular denomination, such as Episcopalian or Presbyterian. Other asylums maintained ties with multiple different denominations.<sup>46</sup> The Washington City Orphan Asylum fell into the last of these categories, working with numerous churches including Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Episcopalian. Christian faith permeated every aspect of the asylum. As with many other reformers, the women managing the asylum saw the tenets of Christianity as one of the most important reasons for establishing a home for orphaned children, as well as the guiding force of their mission. Susan R. Coxe reflected this mentality when she wrote fellow manager Elizabeth Blair Lee, "we need constant prayer to direct us in our path of

---

<sup>44</sup> Container 14, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>45</sup> Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), xiii-xv.

<sup>46</sup> Timothy A. Hacsí, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 19, 59.

duties.” It also led them to teach Christian doctrine to the children in the asylum, enlist the help of ministers and churches, and express faith in God during hardship.<sup>47</sup>

The meetings typically began with a reading from the Bible, and often the children performed a hymn for the managers. Examples of passages read at these meetings include Psalms 90 and 103, both of which focus on the power of God and His forgiveness of sin, the second chapter of Matthew, which told the story of the wise men and Jesus’s escape from King Herod after his birth, and the twelfth chapter of Romans, which instructed on humility and living peacefully as a community.<sup>48</sup>

The Board of Managers both invited and welcomed the involvement of ministers in the institution. At the first meeting on October 10, 1815, E. B. Caldwell, a local lawyer, opened with a prayer and Reverend Hunter closed with a prayer. The asylum held its yearly meeting at a church, most commonly in the first four decades at the Presbyterian Church on F Street. The church’s minister, Reverend Dr. James Laurie, often led the group in prayer at the opening of the meeting and other ministers delivered a brief sermon or closed the meeting in prayer. The children usually sang a hymn. Often more than one minister attended the yearly meetings, and these ministers usually did not belong to the same congregation, or even the same denomination.<sup>49</sup> Reverend William Hawley served as minister of St. John’s Episcopal Church, Reverend Obadiah B. Brown as minister at the Washington First Baptist Church, and Reverend J.G. Butler at St. Paul’s English Lutheran Church.<sup>50</sup> Several ministers also served on the Board

---

<sup>47</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; S. R. Coxe to Elizabeth Blair Lee, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 14; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>48</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Psalms 90 and 103, Matthew 2, Romans 12 (King James Version).

<sup>49</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

of Trustees, such as Hawley, who acted as secretary, and Treasurer Reverend J. W. French, rector at the Church of the Epiphany, an Episcopal Church.<sup>51</sup> The managers also invited the Washington clergy to be present for the cornerstone ceremony for their new building in 1829. They resolved in October 1824 to invite clergy to visit every quarter, to “open the meeting by prayer and such advice, and counsel, as the occasion may suggest.” They typically rotated which minister they invited to the institution. In June 1833, the Managers even opened the institution to visits from Washington’s clergymen as frequently as they should wish to stop by. The ministers involved with the institution on occasion attended the meetings of the Board of Managers, where they offered a prayer at the opening of the meeting and delivered a sermon to the board and the children.<sup>52</sup>

As with the non-clergyman who served on the Board of Trustees, many of the ministers involved with the asylum had wives whom were members on the Board of Managers. William Hawley’s wife Wilhelmina Potts Hawley remained involved with the institution from 1832 until 1858, acting as a manager, second directress, and finally first directress. Reverend John Breckenridge of the Fourth Presbyterian Church was married to one of the asylum’s founding managers. Reverend James Laurie’s wife Elizabeth Laurie served as a manager, treasurer, and second directress. Reverend Eckhardt of the Second Presbyterian Church was married to a manager. The asylum valued women of Christian faith as managers. To an extent, the institution

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid; Rev. John C. Hillhouse, Jr., “Obadiah B. Brown: A Neglected, Forgotten Baptist Hero” (address, Annual Directors Meeting of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, Deland, Florida, May, 1993); Lorenzo D. Johnson, *The Churches and Pastors of Washington, D.C.; Together with Five Hundred Topics of Sermons, Delivered in 1855 and ‘6. To Which is Added, A List of All the Church-Edifices, and Their Localities* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1857), 16.

<sup>51</sup> Containers 32 and 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>52</sup> One example is Reverend Hawley, who attended the meeting on November 4, 1828. Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

even sought to balance the representation on the board. When Reverend J.C. Smith's wife resigned in 1850, the board requested him to nominate a woman from his church to replace her.<sup>53</sup>

The Board of Managers often turned to these ministers and their churches when the asylum faced especially dire financial difficulties. Upon the discovery at the annual meeting in 1849 that the institution possessed insufficient money, the managers "resolved to request the clergy in the District to advocate the orphan's cause & to make at their convenience collections in their respective churches for the Asylum." The asylum received donations from many congregations throughout the city, many of which had ministers actively involved in the institution. Other churches did not have as close a connection, but still gave money, such as the German Lutheran Church, Christ Church, and the Unitarian Church.<sup>54</sup>

The managers likely already knew these clergymen because they were members of their congregations. Yet the weight the managers placed on their faith in God's calling and mission was another likely reason they sought help from these congregations and clergyman. Churches were supposed to heed God's command to care for orphans. When the managers felt the strain of inadequate donations, they called on the citizens of Washington's sense of Christian duty, stating in the minutes, "May the lofty remember that the 'quality of mercy' becomes 'The throned Monarch better than his crown.'"<sup>55</sup> Sermons preached on behalf of the institution reflected similar beliefs. Reverend George W. Samson, pastor of the E Street Baptist Church, delivered a sermon in February 1854 that was later published. The sermon, titled "A Discourse on the Law of Humanity to the Destitute and Dependent" was given on behalf of the orphanage. Samson focused on the biblical figure of Job as an example of devout benevolence who cared for the

---

<sup>53</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>54</sup> Containers 34 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>55</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

orphan and the widow—an example that Washington society should follow. Samson went as far as to say that “in every age God means such shall be found in every community, to give those who love Him the privilege of acting as parents to them for Him.”<sup>56</sup>

In times of financial distress, the managers also expressed their belief in God’s faithfulness to their task. They wove this assurance into the asylum’s constitution, writing, “it is true liberal subscriptions and donations will be wanting for the support of . . . destitute innocents, but trusting in Him, who is the Orphan's help and pleading with the benevolent of Washington, [we] cannot plead in vain.” They reiterated this belief in July 1834, when the board debated the financial feasibility of hiring teachers for the institution, “Yet, trusting in the God of the Orphan for aid, and beleiving the Institution will be greatly benefitted by the change—they [were] induced to take the step.”<sup>57</sup>

### **Catholic Tensions**

While the managers held steadfastly to their Protestant Christianity, they presented a conflicted position towards Catholicism, one that neither consistently refused nor accepted Catholic children, one that clashed with as well as collaborated with the District’s Catholic institutions. The managers and the families of the Washington City Orphan Asylum to an extent mirrored the fraught relationship between Catholics and Protestants in larger American society. Anti-Catholic sentiment was prevalent among nineteenth-century Protestant Americans, a feeling that had a long history in the United States but intensified with increased immigration of Irish

---

<sup>56</sup> G.W. Samson, *A Discourse of the Law of Humanity to the Destitute and Dependent: Delivered in Behalf of the Washington City Orphan Asylum, February 12, 1854*, by G.W. Samson, Pastor of the E. Street Baptist Church (Washington: Printed By H. Polkinhorn, 1854).

<sup>57</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

and German Catholics in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup> Though Catholicism was more likely to deter the managers from placing a child with a family than it was to keep them from admitting a child, the consideration of religion in placements varied. The most consistent thread in the managers' treatment of Catholicism was that they considered it in deciding cases. How great a determinant it was depended largely on other aspects of the child's and family's situation, as well as the managers' judgment. At times the difference in religion convinced them against a family. Others, it was disregarded, or at least accepted. Religion likewise was of great importance to the families admitting and removing children. The difference between Catholic and Protestant could not only sway the managers' decisions, but create conflict between the managers and the institution's families.

Generally, if a Catholic family admitted a child or children to the institution they did so with the understanding that their children would be raised Protestant, the managers recording this willingness in their minutes. Kate Raines, a widow, admitted her children, nine-year-old John and six-year-old Joseph, in February 1880, agreeing to have them raised Protestant in the institution. Maud Lee Lockett, eleven years, and Carrie M. Lockett, ten years, also entered the orphanage after their Catholic father Samuel Lockett agreed to relinquish the children to the asylum. The Locketts' mother had been sick for over a year at the time of their admission and died eight days after the sisters entered the institution.<sup>59</sup>

Occasionally the parents' agreement to let the children be raised Protestant did not hold. The ensuing conflict was likely a significant reason for the managers' reluctance to admit Catholic children in certain cases. Before accepting James, Edward, and John Burns in 1853, the managers instructed their mother to first apply to a Catholic orphanage. Mrs. Burns admitted her

---

<sup>58</sup> Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers*, 41-44.

<sup>59</sup> Containers 36, 38, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; U.S. Census Bureau. 1880 Census of Population, Washington, D.C. (accessed January 13, 2016), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>

sons to the Washington City Orphan Asylum, but later came and repeatedly applied to withdraw them at the urging of her priest, a request that was denied the first time and postponed the second.<sup>60</sup> The desires of Burns's priest reflected the attitude of the antebellum Catholic Church, and the desire to have Catholic children raised Catholic, as well as their own increased effort to be a social presence among the Catholic community.<sup>61</sup> The managers recorded the mother's reluctance, commenting that the priest had been unwilling to help Burns during her initial time of need.<sup>62</sup> Annie Gallatti admitted her son James in April 1859. Though she was Catholic, her late husband was Protestant and she had sworn to him that she would raise their son Protestant. In June 1860, Gallatti intercepted her son while he was at church and took him home with her. Betty Murray likewise disappeared with her family after living in the orphanage for a period of time. In 1869, Murray went to her half-sister's to visit her brother, who was ill, and did not return. When First Directress Elizabeth Blair Lee investigated, she could not find Murray, but spoke with some of her relatives who informed Lee that, as Catholics, the Protestant asylum was not suitable for their family. The Board resolved that Lee would continue the search for Murray, joined by matron Mary Wannall, and the police if needed. The managers do not record ever locating Murray, though a month later they declined a request, submitted in part by Murray's sister, for the child to be placed with a family.<sup>63</sup>

On several occasions, the managers declined to admit a child from a Catholic family. The family's religion did not always prove the deciding factor. In several instances there was another reason for refusing admittance as well, one that might have been more important than religion.

---

<sup>60</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>61</sup> Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers*, 43-44.

<sup>62</sup> Container 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>63</sup> Container 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

The family's Catholicism, however, was important enough for the managers to mention it in their records. Eliza Lehrman from Virginia applied to admit a ten-year-old boy and eleven-year-old girl in May 1859, but the managers "declined the case as the children were too old." Before recording their decision, the secretary noted that Lehrman was a "Romanist," and the managers had been known to make exceptions for age in the past. Their minutes in October 1858 recorded their decision to not accept a Roman Catholic woman's child, with no further information about the family's situation. A woman named Mrs. Graham likewise wanted to admit her two children in April 1861, but the managers declined, stating that Graham was "very poor but a Roman Catholic & husband living, she did not come within our rules." The asylum's stance is further evinced in a letter Jeanette B. Wright wrote to Elizabeth Blair Lee about a possible child for admission in 1887; in advocating for the child, Wright informed Lee that the child was Protestant, as well as a destitute orphan. These cases indicate that, though the managers never explicitly stated a rule to exclude Catholics, a family's religion could sway the managers to decline, especially when combined with another factor such as there being two living parents.<sup>64</sup>

The managers were similarly inconsistent about letting children leave with Catholic family members, though in general terms they were willing to do so. Like admissions, their decision could depend on other factors. In May 1873, they declined letting Julia Hessian go with her sister Mrs. Williams because she and her husband were Catholic and also had a baby that needed a nurse, a position that the managers were unwilling to have the children fill. The sisters' cousin, who was with Williams, was apparently "disgust[ed]" by the managers' decision. In several other cases they let the children leave with Catholic family members. Widower John L. Jones admitted his children six-year-old Catherine and four-year-old George in 1857. Less than a

---

<sup>64</sup> Container 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; J.B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee, August 5, 1887, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

year later, Jones asked to remove his children so he could place them with someone who was Catholic. The managers assented the next month. Edwin Eckels lived in the asylum for eight years, having entered at the age of five in April 1873, before his aunt, Mrs. Toomes, asked in August 1881 to remove him to live with his Catholic mother Margaret A. Eckels. The managers agreed to this request as well, as they did Mrs. Lyons's in November 1880 to remove her four children, the minutes noting that Lyons was a "R. Catholic & desire[d] her children to be." Eighteen-month-old Charlie Stumph entered the asylum in 1884, his Protestant mother relinquishing him. Four years later, Pauline Stumph had converted to Catholicism and wished to remove her son from the institution, which she requested to do in December 1888 and again in January 1889. At the second of these meetings, the managers decided that the child's father must approve the decision for him to leave. The managers finally agreed to let him leave in September 1889.<sup>65</sup>

While the managers might let a child return to their family despite their religion, they seemed less willing to place one in a Catholic institution or in an indenture with a Catholic family. Elizabeth Bevans's godmother applied in February 1833, three years after the child's admittance to the institution, to remove her and place her in St. Vincent's. The timing of this likely came because St. Vincent's asylum for girls opened the previous year. The managers declined her request. When they declined Mrs. Attridge's application for a child in July 1853 they recorded that her "being a Romanist was a sufficient reason." In 1879, Mr. and Mrs. Smith requested to have a child to assist in their tobacco store. The managers refused, citing Mr. Smith's Catholicism as the reason. In one case, the matron Jeanette B. Wright wrote to Elizabeth Blair Lee about Thomas J. Young who wanted to take Lawrence Lorrell. Lorrell previously had been indentured to Margaret Vogl, but returned to the asylum. Wright argued that the position

---

<sup>65</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

was a good one, and that Lorrell wanted to go. She also added her belief that “the Catholic woman can have no influence” on Lorrell given his age. It is not clear who Wright was referring to, possibly Young’s wife or someone else in his social circle. Regardless, Wright believed that as Lorrell was older, eleven-years-old, he was less likely to be diverted from his religious beliefs.<sup>66</sup>

The managers maintained a complicated relationship with the city’s Catholic orphanages. On more than one occasion, the institutions almost seemed in competition with one another, as parents and family members wished their child or children to be moved from one to the other. Amanda Smith admitted two of her children, daughters Irene and Sevilla, in 1866. In July 1867, Smith applied to remove her son from the Catholic institution, most likely St. Joseph’s, and place him in the Washington City Orphan Asylum so as to have all her children together. The managers denied transferring the child. Seven-year-old Alice Jackson’s mother applied to have her admitted in December 1868, which the managers agreed to in January 1869. Mrs. Jackson returned in March 1869 to request that the asylum receive her son, five-year-old William, as well. He was currently in St. Joseph’s Catholic Asylum, and according to Mrs. Jackson her son was “badly treated, and indifferently fed.” She also found it too difficult to pay the fee that the Catholic institution required. The managers agreed to her request. Four-year-old Carrie Remp, whose mother was in the St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, transferred from St. Ann’s, where she had been almost her entire life, to the Washington City Orphan Asylum in 1878 at her father Charles Remp’s request. He was a Protestant, and wished his daughter to be as well.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Containers 34, 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; Jeanette B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee, 1886, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 6; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>67</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

It seems that in general, however, that the Protestant and Catholic asylums respected each other's place in the city's social structure. Trustees James C. Hall and Edward Temple even visited St. Vincent's Orphan Asylum in 1875 and wrote a glowing report of the institution's condition, maintenance, and leadership, arguing the benefits of the Catholic institution's hierarchal management.<sup>68</sup> Decades before, the Washington City Orphan Asylum had acknowledged the need for Catholic institutions. On Tuesday October 11, 1825, a "Citizen" anonymously published a piece in the Washington newspaper *National Intelligencer* praising the Washington City Orphan Asylum and critiquing the idea of opening another institution, lest it detract support and attention from the existing orphanage. The editors of the newspaper added a note at the bottom stating, "If a particular religious persuasion desires to erect another Asylum or Seminary under its own direction, so much the better: there cannot be too much of *such* public charity: and we cannot see that these institutions can at all conflict with each other."<sup>69</sup> The writer of this editorial note was likely either William Winston Seaton or Joseph Gales, Jr. who were the editors of the newspaper and micromanaged its material.<sup>70</sup> They both maintained close ties with the Washington City Orphan Asylum, their wives Sarah Seaton and Sarah Gales serving on the Board of Managers. In the editor's view, the asylums could not be in competition, as they served two different demographics.

First Directress Elizabeth Blair Lee, decades later, echoed this respect for the Catholic asylums, as well as the division between them, when she wrote matron Jeannette Wright in August 1881 about attending the funeral of friend George Riggs and seeing Catholic children and

---

<sup>68</sup> Container 12, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>69</sup> "Washington Female Orphan Asylum," *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 11, 1825. <http://infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (Accessed April 2, 2011).

<sup>70</sup> William E. Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), vii-viii.

matrons at the service. Lee stated, “The Catholic Church was nearly filled with the Orphans of that sect & the sisters who take care of them these stout hearty women & the great number of them about one to every 10 orphans showed that all the loving care & kindness was not absorbed by the children & that those who ministered to them were ever most tenderly provided for.” Lee identifies the Catholic group as other in calling them “that sect,” but also affirms the attention given to the children by the sisters, and in turn the treatment of the sisters by those providing for the institution.<sup>71</sup>

The philosophy of the people running the orphanage seemed to be, in general terms, that Protestant should serve Protestant and Catholic should help Catholic. Rather than aiming to convert Catholic children, the asylum sought to keep children within their appropriate groups. In cases that were better suited for the Catholic institution or perhaps did not meet the Washington City Orphan Asylum’s guidelines, particularly in cases that had issues of legitimacy, the Protestant institution even sent children to the Catholic asylums. In February 1862, the asylum found two infants left on their doorstep. The matron took them in temporarily, and the managers decided to see if the Roman Catholic Asylum, most likely St. Ann’s, would accept them. The Catholic institution accepted the two children immediately.<sup>72</sup> Matron Jeanette B. Wright later wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee about a family that wanted to readmit its children, stating that the youngest one “not being legitimate . . . must go to the Foundling’s Asylum,” possibly referring to St. Ann’s.<sup>73</sup> The managers also referred the mother of James, Edward, and John Burns to a Catholic institution first, possibly because she was Catholic, as later shown by her relationship

---

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to Mrs. Wright, August 27, 1881, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>72</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>73</sup> J. B. W. to Elizabeth Blair Lee, undated, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 4; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

with her priest. However, once a child was in the Washington City Orphan Asylum, the managers were reluctant to have them leave to a Catholic institution or household, unless they were returning to their own families, and even then the managers might hesitate.

No case likely illustrates this desire for order according to religion as much as that of the Goddard and Newman families. Benjamin Goddard admitted his two daughters, Mary Ambrosia and Maria Dolorse, in April 1867. Goddard returned the next month with three other men and an affidavit from John H. Goddard, a Justice of the Peace, stating that he had been “deceived and seduced into the parting with [his] children.” Goddard said he had wished to have them there for only a few days and operated under the belief that he could remove them when he wished. Goddard desired to place them in a Catholic asylum instead. Mrs. Maury and Elizabeth Kooner swore to the contrary, that he had signed their relinquishment form, with full knowledge of its meaning, in the presence of witnesses.<sup>74</sup>

The managers agreed to let the children go to a Catholic institution as long as they were “well treated” and “kept from the influence of their drunken and worthless father.” They also included another condition, that James Newman, whose siblings were already in the asylum, be taken out of the Infant Asylum and brought to the Washington City Orphan Asylum instead. Their mother was a Scotch Presbyterian and sick in St. Elizabeth’s Hospital. The managers stated that Mrs. Gorman, a neighbor of their mother, had taken the child “fraudulently” to the Infant Asylum, probably meaning the Catholic St. Ann’s as no other home for infants existed in Washington until 1887. If the Infant Asylum transferred James Newman to their care, they would let the Goddard children leave to the Catholic institution. On May 13, 1867, John H. Goddard followed his previous signed affidavit with a letter stating his belief that it was best to not take any further action towards removing the Goddard children. As the Justice of the Peace stated, as

---

<sup>74</sup> Containers 36, 37, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

Benjamin Goddard was “their father it [was] for him to abide his own contract.” Ambrosia and Maria Goddard remained at the asylum. No record indicates that James Newman ever left the Infant Asylum to join his siblings at the Washington City Orphan Asylum.<sup>75</sup>

The managers initially showed reluctance to Goddard’s request to remove his children and place them in a Catholic institution, those involved with the case insisting that the children had been relinquished to the Washington City Orphan Asylum. Contrasting their desire to keep the Goddard children, was their wish to retrieve a Protestant child who was, in their eyes, wrongfully living in a Catholic asylum. They were willing for the Goddard children, who were likely born into a Catholic family, to move to a Catholic institution, if it was a step towards restoring the order between Catholic and Protestant. This desire pushed them to suggest what was, in essence, a child swap—Catholic for Protestant.

As the managers considered other factors in cases involving Catholicism, some families likely faced other issues in deciding where to place their children besides that of religion. Some Catholic families were willing to have their children live in a Protestant institution, possibly out of desperation. The managers recorded that in at least one admission application that the mother was very poor. It is also possible that the Catholic families who entered children into the Washington City Orphan Asylum were not devout enough for the denomination of the institution to affect their decision to place their children there. These families might have prioritized treatment of their children over religious education. In the case of William Jackson, at least, his mother believed he would be better fed and generally cared for at the Protestant institution. Some might have wanted to keep their children together, likely another consideration of Mrs. Jackson in moving her son to the same institution as his sister. In the case of those such as Mrs. Burns, it

---

<sup>75</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; *Joint Select Committee To Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*, 104.

is possible they applied first to the Catholic asylums, or simply the Catholic community, and turned to the Protestant institution when these avenues proved fruitless.

In all, the number of cases involving Catholic families or Catholic institutions was small. Nevertheless, these cases are significant in revealing how the people involved with the Washington City Orphan Asylum ordered their world. For the managers and matrons, it was a sentiment that appears to have varied little over the course of the century, despite the increasing Catholic immigration to the United States in the decades before the Civil War, and general growing anti-Catholic sentiment. This could have stemmed from the fact that the managers and trustees were not members of the working class, and thus did not have their livelihoods challenged by the influx of Catholic workers. They may have also sensed the potential complications of admitting a Catholic child into the institution, and the possibility of families changing their minds. Managers and families alike generally believed that children should remain among those of their religious persuasion. This counters what has been argued about the greater impetus of the nineteenth-century pre-Civil War reform movement, and to some degree Protestant orphanages as well, during which Protestants recognized Catholics among those that needed evangelizing, and the Catholics felt similarly about Protestants.<sup>76</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The story of the Washington City Orphan Asylum was not just the people who lived and worked within its walls, but the walls themselves, which had the profound ability to shape their lives. The managers and trustees designed the orphanage according to how they ordered their world, apportioning space based on gender, age, and utility. They also were shaped by the power

---

<sup>76</sup> Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers*, 42-44; Hacsí, *Second Home*, 56; It also contrasts Julie Miller's discussion of New York City in *Abandoned: Foundlings in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (New York University Press, 2008) 11, in which she discusses the competition between Protestant and Catholic foundling asylums for resources, noting that the political climate of New York contributed to the competition.

of religion, which influenced who was involved with the institution, who the managers and trustees turned to in times of trouble, and how they interacted with certain applicants for admissions, removals, and indentures. Undergirding the managers' and trustees' efforts to keep the asylum open, and its children properly housed, fed, clothed, and educated, was a network of supporters. People in Washington and elsewhere provided money, land, goods, and time to ensure the asylum's effectiveness. Those running the institution believed this was a responsibility of the citizens a Washington, a part of their important connection to the city.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CITY

### Introduction

No social institution develops within a vacuum. All form an interdependent relationship with the community they serve. Institutions typically provide a crucial social service, while also relying on the support of society. An institution's environment works as a shaping force on its policies, finances, effectiveness, and longevity. They in turn often end up influencing their city as well. The institution's managers and the city's leaders, such as politicians and religious leaders, converse on issues such as funding. The people social institutions serve eventually become a part of larger society, entering the labor force, having children, and occasionally even becoming civic leaders themselves. The Washington City Orphan Asylum was no exception. The orphanage was inextricably tied to the development of the city. Many of the forces that shook the city resulted in the loss of life and worsening economic conditions, and therefore the creation of orphans and dependent children. The asylum's origin was linked to one of the biggest traumas the city ever faced, destruction by the British during the War of 1812. The city's urban environment, including epidemics, played a pivotal role in the asylum's evolution. The orphanage's managers and trustees appealed to the local government and the city's inhabitants for aid. In doing so, they implicitly and at times explicitly commented on the responsibility of social welfare, and whose job they believed it was to care for dependent children. In their appeal for aid, they grounded their arguments not only in the duty of Washington citizens, but also the threat these children posed to the city if left unattended. At the same time, the asylum formed an extensive network, one that included not just Washington citizens but other institutions in the city as well. This network was pivotal in working towards the twin goals of caring for the children and preventing their delinquency.

## The War of 1812 and the Asylum's Beginning

The Washington City Orphan Asylum was linked to the history of the District of Columbia before it admitted a single child. The same people and factors that influenced the city of Washington also shaped the orphanage. The soil on which Washingtonians constructed the city and the asylum linked them in a shared story and familial connection. Six hundred acres of the land that became the nation's capital belonged to the Burnes family in the late-eighteenth century. Scottish farmer David Burnes and his family, wife Ann Wightt Burnes and children John and Marcia Burnes, lived in a cottage north of the Potomac River. They lived modestly but contentedly, growing corn and tobacco. When the fledgling United States government settled on the Potomac as the spot for the national capital, the Burnes' farm was among those occupying desired land. The negotiations between government leaders and Burnes became part of Washington lore, stories highlighting his determined resistance to offers to buy his land. George Washington eventually spoke with Burnes directly to convince him to sell, later referring to the Scottish farmer as "obstinate."<sup>1</sup> Burnes eventually consented, and his family transitioned from modest planters to one of the wealthiest families in the new city. Burnes' name was on the first deed registered in the District of Columbia. Marcia Burnes, just a child at the time of the sale, witnessed her family's land develop into a city. John Burnes died while studying law in Baltimore, followed by David Burnes in 1799 and Ann Burnes in 1807, leaving Marcia Burnes, then married to John Van Ness, her family's wealth, over a million dollars, at the age of twenty-five. The Van Nesses used their wealth to become two of the city's foremost philanthropists.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Susan L. Klaus, "'Some of the Smartest Folks Here': The Van Nesses and Community Building in Early Washington," *Washington History* Vol. 3, No. 2 (Fall/Winter, 1991/1992), 24. Published by: Historical Society of Washington, D.C. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40073039>.

<sup>2</sup> Frances Carpenter Huntington, "The Heiress of Washington City: Marcia Burnes Van Ness, 1782-1832" *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 69/70 no. 47 (1969/1970): 81-82. JSTOR. (accessed October 24, 2011);

Just as Marcia Van Ness's family provided land in 1791 for the city of Washington and the capital of the nation to call home, so Marcia Van Ness, along with her husband John Peter Van Ness, gave land to the Washington City Orphan Asylum on which to build its first permanent home in 1817. The asylum remained on this land until the Civil War.<sup>3</sup> They also gave the land next to the asylum in 1830 for the orphanage to plant mulberry trees and have silk worms, a popular capitalist venture at the time.<sup>4</sup> They believed the silk worms would provide the orphans with useful activity that would make money for the institution.<sup>5</sup> The Van Ness' had their family mausoleum constructed close to the asylum. They became so connected to the orphanage that a person doing construction in 1849 referred to the institution as the "Van Ness Orphan Asylum."<sup>6</sup>

The selection of Washington as the capital of the United States created the circumstances that brought about the need and desire to build an orphan asylum. During the War of 1812, the British attacked the city for not only strategic purposes but also morale. They destroyed many buildings that crippled the ability of the American government to function, and damaged American spirit due to the symbolic importance of the capital. After the war, Americans rebuilt the city, though not without contest. In 1814, Congress debated whether the capital should remain in Washington, some members arguing for a temporary move to another city. Several, especially northerners, argued the country would be better served in having the capital in New

---

Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Klaus, "Some of the Smartest Folks Here."

<sup>3</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>4</sup> Klaus, "Some of the Smartest Folks Here," 30.

<sup>5</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>6</sup> Klaus, "Some of the Smartest Folks Here," 44, Huntington, "Heiress of Washington," 99-100, "The Rambler Writes of Historic Grant Place," *Evening star*. Washington, D.C., 13 Oct. 1918. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1918-10-13/ed-1/seq-45/>>, Container 17, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

York or Philadelphia. They cited Washington's destruction, and therefore inability to function as the capital. Debating the capital's location dredged up the same sectional tensions that brought the capital to Washington in the first place. Northerners and southerners each believed a certain amount of power resided in the capital's geographic location. The House of Representatives debated related issues such as the mandates of the United States Constitution, the difficulty of defending Washington militarily, and the message conveyed to the world in relocating the capital. Many Washingtonians feared, though, that the move would prove permanent, spelling economic disaster for the city. They had invested in the construction of the city, ventures which would fail if the capital took with it the business of politics. In the end, the capital remained in Washington, a decision helped by the city's association with George Washington. The rebuilding process was additionally aided by positive post-war fervor that swept through the country following General Andrew Jackson's victory in New Orleans shortly thereafter. Congress saw the benefit of rebuilding the capital rather than forsaking the land chosen by America's first and beloved president.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the debate concerning the capital's location, Washington had several strong and influential advocates. First Lady Dolley Madison, for one, strove to keep the capital in Washington. She had worked during her husband's administration as well as during Thomas Jefferson's to create a Washington political and social culture suitable to a capital, all of which would be lost if it moved to Philadelphia. She and other local elites knew that the relocation of the capital would be financially disastrous for the Washington economy. Men such as John Van Ness and Richard Lee stepped up to aid in the erection of public structures, finance the militia,

---

<sup>7</sup> Thomas J. Campanella and Lawrence J. Vale, eds., *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101-108.

and make it fiscally feasible for the government to begin rebuilding in Washington.<sup>8</sup> The editors of the *Daily National Intelligencer* printed several articles arguing for the city of Washington as the location for the capital, stating that to relocate would be “a treacherous breach of the faith of the nation.”<sup>9</sup>

Several of these who fought diligently for the city of Washington also helped establish the Washington City Orphan Asylum. Dolley Madison and her elite friends spearheaded the project; it possibly coincided with a commission—including John Van Ness and Richard Bland Lee—that President James Madison tasked with constructing public buildings in March 1815. John Van Ness and Richard Bland Lee assisted with the asylum as well and were married to women on the Board of Managers. Marcia Van Ness was most likely the person who thought of the idea for the asylum.<sup>10</sup> Samuel Harrison Smith founded *The Daily National Intelligencer*, which was publicly supportive of the city of Washington, and then turned it over to William Winston Seaton and Joseph Gales, Jr. All three had wives on the Washington City Orphan Asylum’s Board of Managers; Seaton and Gales even published the asylum’s documents.<sup>11</sup> In 1829, when the asylum was ready to construct its permanent residence on the land provided by the Van Nesses, the board hired Charles Bulfinch, the final architect used for the construction of the United States Capitol.<sup>12</sup> All these were passionate about the city of Washington and its survival. The women who decided to open the orphanage did so because of the War of 1812 and

---

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Allgor, “Queen Dolley’ Saves Washington City,” *Washington History* 12, (Spring/Summer 2000): 67-68, under “Coming into the City: Essays on Early Washington D.C. Commemorating the Bicentennial of the Federal Government’s Arrival in 1800,” <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40073433> (accessed September 22, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> As quoted in Campanella, eds., *The Resilient City*, 101.

<sup>10</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.; William E. Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972) vii, 87-88.

<sup>12</sup> Campanella, eds., *The Resilient City*, 112.

to some degree maybe even saw it as a part of the effort to rebuild.<sup>13</sup> At one of their first meetings in October 1815 the managers “resolved unanimously that every article of furniture and clothing be procured in the City of Washington,” perhaps further effort to support the city’s attempts at regrowth.<sup>14</sup> The rest of the country remained aware of Washington’s efforts to rebuild, and news of the new orphan asylum traveled up the eastern seaboard. Newspaper articles appeared in Boston and other towns that detailed the progress made in Washington’s reconstruction. Several listed the creation of churches, schools, and the orphan asylum. They placed the orphanage within the framework of Washington’s rebuilding process.<sup>15</sup>

The relationship between the orphanage’s founding and the legacy of the War of 1812 became part of the institution’s historical memory. Most accounts written by people associated with the institution began with the War of 1812 and the need it created in the city for an institution for children. In 1885, decades after the orphanage’s creation, trustee John C. Harkness delivered a brief history of the home at an asylum event. His address began, “The sad results of the war of 1812 were not confined to the destruction of the public buildings, but left to the care and sympathy of the citizens a full share of the orphanage resulting largely therefrom.” Years after the orphanage’s opening, people continued to associate it with the capital’s destruction and the city’s need to recover. Harkness further connected the institution’s motivations to the sense of patriotism following the war, stating, “The proclamation of peace sent a thrill of joy through every household, and elicited the warmest sympathy for the fatherless children brought to public

---

<sup>13</sup> Allgor, “Queen Dolley,” 68.

<sup>14</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>15</sup> “City of Washington,” *Boston Gazette*, September 9, 1816. <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011); “City of Washington,” *Nantucket Gazette*, September 14, 1816 (accessed April 2, 2011); “Washington, Aug. 31,” *The Repertory*, September 5, 1816. <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011); “Washington-City, Aug. 31,” *Dedham Gazette*, September 13, 1816 (accessed April 2, 2011).

notice.” According to his narrative, victory was tied to the spirit that motivated Marcia Van Ness to be “moved by the frequent appeals to her charity” and decide, along with others, to open the orphanage.<sup>16</sup>

The correlation between the need of the city and the creation of the orphan asylum was likely not that direct, however. The managers who connected the institution to the War of 1812, claimed the war created the need for an asylum specifically for children. In a letter to the city, the managers described “the suffering of the poor . . . especially since the war, which ha[d] greatly increased the number of helpless Widows and unprotected Orphans.”<sup>17</sup> According to early nineteenth-century standards, any child that lost his or her father became an orphan, though people such as the managers of the Washington City Orphan Asylum still delineated between children with mothers and those that were truly full orphans. As with any war, the lost soldiers left behind widows and orphans who would be less able to care for themselves. The number of men lost in the War of 1812, though, especially distributed over several states, likely did not directly result in an overwhelming number of orphans in the District of Columbia. The founders of the institution likely created it based on the perceived need in the city. It is well understood that war leads to death, which leads to the creation of orphans. While this was the case with the War of 1812, it was not overwhelmingly so, and did not require the creation of a social institution to care specifically for war orphans.

Though there may not have been a substantial number of children orphaned due to War of 1812, there was still a need in Washington for a social institution centered on the care of children. The war, and more specifically the destruction to the capital city, left Washington in

---

<sup>16</sup> “Caring for Orphans: The Record of One of the Oldest Institutions in the City” *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 30 May 1885. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1885-05-30/ed-1/seq-2/>>

<sup>17</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

economic trouble. Many of the working class were unemployed, a condition that typically leaves families in need.<sup>18</sup> Such was a common story for many of the children that entered the Washington City Orphan Asylum over the course of the nineteenth century. The Washington City Orphan Asylum subsequently filled a real need in society, accepting increasing numbers of children as the century progressed, and most often ones who were not full orphans. The rebuilding process following the war brought even more laborers to the city whose children might end up in the asylum. As Washington grew, so likely did its need for social institutions to aid lower-class children, regardless of their parental status.

Whether the founders of the institution intended it to fulfill that particular demand, the one *really* created by the War of 1812, is another question. Susan L. Klaus, in her article on the Van Ness family, argues that though there were not many war orphans, the founders recognized the desolation the economic conditions of the city created.<sup>19</sup> The asylum's records suggest rather that the managers still prioritized accepting full orphans, and their acceptance of children based on poverty was a second choice. The managers wrote as their admission policy, "Admittance shall be granted in the first instance to female orphans deprived of both parents; but if a sufficient number of meritorious objects of that description cannot be found . . . the privilege of admission may be extended to any other children judged worthy of charitable provision . . ." <sup>20</sup> Within the managers' philosophy there appeared tiers of need. First and foremost were full orphans. If the asylum had resources leftover after providing for them, they would proceed to judge cases based on need and merit, likely showing preference to widows over families with living fathers.

---

<sup>18</sup> Klaus, "Some of the Smartest Folks Here," 33.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

The institution ended up serving a larger purpose. Parallel to the need conceptualized by Van Ness, her close friends, and other members of society was the actual need to help dependent children in the city in general. If the real plight for the lower class was not the casualties of war but the economic conditions the war created, then many children would have living parents. None of the first children admitted into the institution did so under the specific categorization of “orphan” and a couple even had living fathers.<sup>21</sup> It is possible that the managers understood the far-reaching effects of the city’s economic state, and the need plaguing not just the true orphan but children of all parental status, but still chose to prioritize the level of need. Yet the language in their constitution, and their subsequent preference for full orphans over half or non orphans as the century progressed indicates their mission was grounded in the narrative of orphanhood rather than the economic realities of dependent children.

### **Cholera Epidemic of 1832**

Though the managers operated from certain principles in regards to their acceptance of children, this philosophy was often molded by the environment of the city itself. The influx of workers following the War of 1812 created a substantial population living in less than desirable conditions. They were especially susceptible to urban diseases like cholera.<sup>22</sup> Cholera, a waterborne illness that attacks the body’s intestinal system, swept through the United States during the early 1830s, exacting high death tolls in several major cities. Though the cholera epidemic had a larger effect on cities like New York, it hit Washington, D.C., particularly its working-class population. Citizens of the United States and their ancestors were familiar with other widespread illnesses, such as yellow fever and smallpox, but the 1832 epidemic was the

---

<sup>21</sup> Containers 34 and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 335.

nation's first experience with cholera. It had only been a few decades before that a cholera epidemic occurred outside of Far East Asia.<sup>23</sup>

Inexperience with the disease meant ignorance about it, and doctors had much to learn about prevention as well as treatment. Some Americans thought that the rural makeup of the United States and the superior quality of American citizens, as they saw it, would lessen the epidemic's blow. The epidemic's pattern in Europe included devastation of its cities and relative neglect of the countryside. Americans believed that their cities were cleaner than those in Europe, and their citizens not as weak as the poor European workers. In the meanwhile, several major cities in the United States adapted their trade and immigration policies, blocking interaction with ports in Europe that they knew had cases of the epidemic. North America's greatest hope was the Atlantic Ocean, which they prayed would serve as a natural and stalwart barrier.<sup>24</sup>

Yet in June 1832, American fears were realized as cholera surfaced in Canada. Once the epidemic crossed the Atlantic it was only a matter of time before it came to the United States. The first case appeared in Montreal on June 6 and by June 14, the epidemic had reached the state of New York. Most likely, the cholera came to the United States the same way it reached Canada, with a ship coming from Europe, rather than traveling down from its northern neighbor. Either way, the epidemic could now travel along the Eastern seaboard and into the country's interior.<sup>25</sup> As the Washington City Lyceum stated in a report they issued on June 22, "The

---

<sup>23</sup> Charles Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 1, 13-40; Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878* (Princeton University Press, 1962), 135.

<sup>24</sup> Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*, 13-40.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

cholera may, and in all probability will, sooner or later, invade our city in common with other portions of the United States, we have no reason to doubt.”<sup>26</sup>

Cholera reached Washington within a matter of months, hitting the city especially hard in August and September. Newspapers such as *National Intelligencer* began reporting the daily number of reported cholera-related illnesses and deaths. They included statistics for not only Washington but for the rest of the country.<sup>27</sup> The Board of Health committed in September 1832 to deliver a weekly report to the city of the number of people that had newly contracted the disease or died.<sup>28</sup> The factors that several Americans hoped would lessen the impact of the cholera epidemic failed to do so. Water was an especially important factor, as it was through drinking, cooking, or washing food in contaminated water that people became infected. Among the newspaper reports were stories of people who ate some fruit or vegetable and died within days. The poorer population, who did not have access to better water supplies, was especially susceptible to the illness. They were less financially able to leave the city when people started to get sick, as members of the upper and middle classes tended to do. They also had less access to medical attention. Eventually the cholera epidemic affected the wealthier classes as well, but it struck the working class first and to a much greater degree.<sup>29</sup>

The cholera crisis served as a shaping force for the Washington City Orphan Asylum. The institution suffered financially and the managers found themselves making changes to the

---

<sup>26</sup> “Cholera: Report,” *Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald (1828-1833)*, July 27, 1832, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/americanperiodicals> (accessed June 6, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> “Cholera Record [from the National Intelligencer],” *Workingman’s Advocate (1830-1836)*, September 22, 1832, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/americanperiodicals> (accessed June 6, 2013); “Progress of the Cholera: Baltimore. Washington. Interesting Correspondence,” *Niles’ Weekly Register (1814-1837)*, September 15, 1832, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/americanperiodicals> (accessed June 7, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> “Board of Health. Washington City, August 31, 1832.,” *Norwich Courier*, September 5, 1832, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed June 6, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*, 55-65.

admissions policies, some of which were permanent. The high death rate among Washington's lower class meant that many children were left in a dependent situation. The Washington City Orphan Asylum was one of two orphan asylums in Washington. The other was the Catholic St. Ann's. There was also an orphan asylum in Georgetown. All three were female orphan asylums, though the Washington City Orphan Asylum had made a few exceptions and admitted boys. The Washington City Orphan Asylum was positioned, in a city that already had few asylums for children, to be the one with the greatest demand placed on it. As such, the managers found themselves letting in more children than they might have otherwise. Between the orphanage's opening in November 1815 and the summer of 1832, the asylum took in seventy-eight children. In September 1832, one of the worst months of the cholera epidemic for the District of Columbia, the asylum took in thirty children. In one month, they accepted approximately thirty-eight percent of the number of the past seventeen years combined.<sup>30</sup> Before the cholera epidemic, the orphanage had a population of eighteen. By October 8, 1833, their number had more than doubled to forty-nine.<sup>31</sup>

The asylum also saw a different demographic of the children they accepted. Normally the managers hesitated to accept infants and other children that required closer attention. Older children could be more self-sufficient, and in some cases even work to care for the other children, make goods for the asylum, and assist with the cooking and cleaning, which alleviated financial pressure. Caring for younger children meant that the orphanage had to hire more help,

---

<sup>30</sup> Container 36, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>31</sup> "Female Orphan Asylum of Washington: Report of the Board of Managers to the Society at the Annual Meeting, Oct. 8, 1833." *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 25, 1833; Some of these children had only stayed for a short while, due to some circumstance or another.

which occurred in 1832. The asylum took in several younger children, as well as children that were sick and needed nursing.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the most significant change to the admission policy was the acceptance of boys. In their original constitution, the founders stipulated that if the institution possessed sufficient funds, the Board of Managers could vote to accept boys as well as girls.<sup>33</sup> Before the fall of 1832, only six boys entered the institution, and these appear to have been under extenuating circumstances. George and James Perley entered the institution with their sisters Julianna and Sarah Frances in 1829; their situation proved temporary as their mother eventually took them back. James and Dennis O. Conner also came to the orphanage with their sister Mary Ann in 1829. They were the first boys the managers accepted, and it is probable that the managers did so because they had a sister or sisters entering the institution. One of the boys was a baby left at the asylum's doorstep, whom the asylum christened Samuel. He died before the managers could find him a more permanent home.<sup>34</sup> Allowing these boys to reside in the orphan asylum was a rare exception made out of necessity.

With the onset of the cholera epidemic, the number of boys accepted rose, almost equaling the number of girls. Fourteen of the thirty children admitted in 1832 were boys. Some of them entered the asylum with sisters.<sup>35</sup> In their annual report in October 1833, the asylum announced that they were changing admission policies to include boys as well as girls.<sup>36</sup> This policy remained for the rest of their history, generally admitting boys and girls in equal

---

<sup>32</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Female Orphan Asylum of Washington" *The Daily National Intelligencer*, October 25, 1833.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Container 36, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "Female Orphan Asylum of Washington" *The Daily National Intelligencer*, October 25, 1833).

numbers.<sup>37</sup> Though the epidemic was their catalyst for the official change, they did not view conditions created by the cholera epidemic as only affecting a small group of children for a limited amount of time. They witnessed the changes in the city and foresaw the continuing need of the capital's boys as well as girls.

The individual stories of some of these children show the ways that the city's rampant illness could necessitate a child's admission to the orphanage. The Wright siblings—Adelaide, age nine, Daniel, age seven, Charles, age three, and Laura, age seven months—entered the Washington City Orphan Asylum when their mother died of cholera. Their father, Daniel Wright, left them with the orphanage on September 18, 1832. He later died of cholera as well. Five-year-old twins James and Alexander Newell entered the institution following their father's death from cholera. Maria Gruver lost both of her parents to cholera, as had siblings Mary Jane, Priscilla, William, and Sarah Eliza Rawlins, ages seven, five, three, and one. These children lost both their financial and their domestic support.<sup>38</sup>

While the cholera epidemic accounted for the admission of many children due to the death of their parents, remarkably none of the children living in the institution died from the disease. It did, however, claim the life of one person very important to the institution—Marcia Van Ness, who died from cholera on September 9, 1832.<sup>39</sup> Future asylum members connected her death with her virtue and devotion to her cause. In his history of the orphanage John C. Harkness commented that Van Ness in the face of the epidemic “with courage and self-denial worthy of the proudest chaplet ever bestowed upon human merit, remained at her post of duty,

---

<sup>37</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>38</sup> Container 36, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>39</sup> Huntington, “Heiress of Washington,” 100; “From the Philadelphia Inquirer. A Benefactress,” *Salem Gazette*, September, 21, 1832. <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011).

and sought, to the utmost of her ability, to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and needy . . . .”<sup>40</sup>

Van Ness spent the last seventeen years of her life fostering an orphanage that was in turn shaped by the epidemic that resulted in her death.

The cholera epidemic greatly strained the institution’s finances. They had more children to care for and required more workers to do so. The asylum, however, had never been completely financially stable. Expenses frequently exceeded donations. The managers found themselves, on more than one occasion, concerned for the asylum’s future. The institution had fought for a permanent fund from its beginning, a battle that continued throughout its history. The early years of the institution laid the foundation for their philosophy about financial assistance, and the means used to appeal for it.

### **Aid from the City Government**

Immediately after the asylum’s founding it became clear that the orphanage needed assistance beyond the pledges of individual citizens. The institution required land for a permanent home, money, and status as a legal corporation. Women working in reform efforts in the antebellum era often turned to local and state governments for assistance. The women who did so frequently had personal relationships with politicians, due to their status in society, and they capitalized on their positions to advance their petitions for aid. They, as well as these politicians, often viewed their benevolent societies and asylums as filling a need in the city and alleviating pressure on the government.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 30 May 1885. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1885-05-30/ed-1/seq-2/>>

<sup>41</sup> Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth Century-United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 72-75.

The Washington City Orphan Asylum fit within this trend. At the first monthly meeting of the elected officers, in October 1815, the managers drafted a letter, written by Margaret Bayard Smith, in which they asked the Aldermen and Common Council of the City of Washington to aid them in their endeavor. The women requested that the Council help procure a physical residence for the asylum or that they grant monetary assistance. They argued that the city already delegated money to assisting the poor anyway, and by helping the orphan asylum, the council would lessen the strain of the destitute on the city. The board received an answer in December from James H. Blake, the mayor of Washington and the husband of one of the asylum's board members, Betty Holdsworth Blake. The council promised \$200 for 1816, disbursed quarterly, with hopes that similar funding would be available in the years to come. Blake's language conveyed that the city's inability to provide more assistance stemmed from the asylum's new and unproved status. If they were successful, the city might be able to supply more aid in the future.<sup>42</sup>

Seven years later, men representing the orphanage reintroduced the idea of acquiring a lasting fund for the orphanage at a city meeting. The Board of Managers had resolved in 1819 to seek the same, but either did not carry through or were unsuccessful. Those present at the 1822 meeting agreed to open an account at the "Book-Store of Messrs. Davis & Force" in which people could deposit money to support the institution. They also decided to ask the Board of Alderman and the Board of the Common Council to create a fund for a consistent yearly donation. In the annual report in which they addressed their request to the town meeting, the Board of Managers argued, as they did in 1815 when they previously sought the city's aid, that the city already allotted funds to helping the poor. Granting aid to the asylum was a logical choice as it had "the same objects precisely as the improved system of poor laws of the city,

---

<sup>42</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

namely, to convert to some use, or at least to harmless pursuits, the time and capacity [of the poor] which would otherwise be lost, or injurious to society.” Their report also declared that municipal support would set a good example for the citizens of Washington, who would then be more apt to donate. It would also reflect well upon the city.<sup>43</sup>

William Hawley, active member of the asylum society and one of their representatives at the town meeting, wrote the petition to the Alderman and Common Council on behalf of the committee at the town meeting. He argued many of the same points as the Board of Managers. He paid particular attention to the financial need of the asylum, as “experience has shewn that no institutions can long be maintained, with success at least, which depend for their support on extensive voluntary subscriptions.” Hawley argued that the orphanage’s financial situation grew grimmer, as it had suffered the loss of subscribers due to “death, insolvencies, honest poverty, and resignations.” Hawley anticipated that the city might claim that the almshouse created for the poor already served the asylum’s intended purpose. He argued “instead of [the Poor-House] affording [children] the advantages of the Asylum, it is a school for vice and indolence—not from any misconduct on the part of the Managers, but from the nature of the thing itself.” Hawley pleaded to the councilman to consider their “humanity” and to think of their own children. He also requested that “by [their] deference to the wishes of [their] constituents, unanimously expressed” they honor the request for aid. The members of the asylum were approaching the council as citizens of Washington. The city council was supposed to honor and fulfill the wishes of the people who elected them. It was not only a noble act, which would alleviate some of the pressure on the city government, but also a civic responsibility.<sup>44</sup> Despite

---

<sup>43</sup> William Hawley and Joseph Gales, Jr. "Washington Female Orphan Asylum." *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 10, 1823. <http://infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011).

<sup>44</sup> Thos. L. Noyes. "Washington Female Orphan Asylum." *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 20, 1823. <http://infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011).

these entreaties, the city rejected the orphanage's plea. In July 1823, the Board of Common Council voted on whether to grant the asylum \$200 per year, as it had done previously in 1815. The council voted to "postpone the bill indefinitely."<sup>45</sup> The city's involvement with the orphanage was not completely over, they gave another \$250 in 1826, but they did not supply the consistent fund the asylum desired.<sup>46</sup> The institution continued to seek funding elsewhere, and financial issues remained a persistent concern.

### **Citizens of Washington**

Though the asylum's managers and trustees made appeals for formal assistance from the city, their greatest support came from the citizens of Washington. The managers' and trustees' appeals for financial support reveal their beliefs about the responsibility of caring for dependent children. This philosophy was crucial to the institution's relationship with the city. Throughout the nineteenth century, the people running the orphanage maintained that the citizens of the District of Columbia were responsible for helping care for the city's orphaned and poor children. This was the same mentality that brought the Board for Managers to decline their members' resignations—a capable citizen was required to contribute to the community's overall welfare. As their rhetoric in their appeals to the Board of Alderman and Common Council reflect, the asylum's leaders believed that they were filling an essential role in society. Not only were they housing and feeding children that might otherwise increase the city's problems of vagrancy and crime, but they were educating and forming them into useful members of society. This was not a burden they should or could bear alone. They needed the financial support of the citizens of Washington.

---

<sup>45</sup> Thos. L. Noyes. "Washington Female Orphan Asylum." *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 20, 1823. <http://infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

The managers and trustees made several appeals for assistance through the city's newspapers. Many of these articles included direct correlations between the orphans' needs and the citizens' duties. These publications urged readers to consider their own children when thinking of the city's orphans as well as to reflect on their Christian obligation to act on the commands and example of Jesus Christ in helping those less fortunate. J.W. French, a reverend at the Epiphany church and a member of the Board of Trustees, drafted and published an appeal in *The Daily Union*, a Washington newspaper, on December 26, 1846 that provides an example of the asylum's appeals, and the mentality included therein. After simply stating that the asylum was appealing for funds, he stressed the connection between the orphan and the community, "The act of God which makes our children orphans makes society their parent. To that very parentage—to the community of this city, from which the earthly father was taken, and in which for protection a heavenly Father placed them—these our orphans now stretch out their hands, beneath wintry skies, asking for food, and warmth, and clothing." Providence had shifted the responsibility for these children from individual parents to the collective whole.

French believed the obligation of D.C. residents was apparent, stating, "It cannot be needful for us to present at full length all the claims of the orphan on the citizen. These are so obvious to all, and so appreciated by all, that enumeration seems diminution." Nevertheless, dependent children posed risks to the city at large. In recalling the earliest supporters of the institution, French specified the motivation of Washington residents in their concern for the children's, and therefore the city's, future: "The citizen remembered that orphans left to be trained by poverty, ignorance, and crime, became putrid centres of moral pestilence in the city where they grew." Washington's residents understood that "the early influences moulding the individuals . . . become for society blessings or disasters; . . . to neglect the young of one generation was to strew the next with the seeds of every evil . . ." The city had a vested interest

in the care of its youth. If they remained uncared for, they would develop into community problems. Therefore, the obligation fell on the citizens of Washington to provide aid to the institution that was ensuring the city's future safety.<sup>47</sup>

Pleas to the city's residents increased when the institution was in dire need of assistance. On October 8, 1833, the asylum published in *The Daily National Intelligencer* their annual report, which included an explanation of the problems the recent cholera epidemic created. They concluded with an additional plea for financial help. Sophia Towson, the secretary of the Board of Managers, explained that with the high number of deaths, especially concentrated among adults in the working class, "the Managers felt it to be their duty to throw open the doors of the Asylum and to invite applications for the admission of destitute orphans, without restriction or condition . . . ." As a result, the number of children in the asylum had doubled, greatly straining the institution's resources. The orphanage believed that "the citizens of Washington no doubt wish, and probably expect, that *all* destitute who have claims on th[e] community for protection, be taken into the Asylum and supported until otherwise provided for. . . ." Towson's article served as justification for the asylum's actions and decisions. She insisted that the asylum did not use its funds extravagantly. On the contrary, they neglected, due to a lack of support, some areas that they felt needed more attention, particularly the children's education. In fact, the asylum noted that according to the calculations of the previous year they could allot \$3 a month to each child, the lowest amount in the asylum's history. They beseeched "the generous citizens of Washington" to come to their aid, especially in light of such an urban disaster.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> *The Daily Union*. (Washington [D.C.]), 26 Dec. 1846. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82003410/1846-12-26/ed-1/seq-1/>>

<sup>48</sup> "Female Orphan Asylum of Washington: Report of the Board of Managers to the Society at the Annual Meeting, Oct. 8, 1833." *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 25, 1833. <http://infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011).

The managers and trustees did not just appeal to the public for money, but also for the creation of another institution specifically for boys. The managers often had problems with the boys they admitted, or resources limited the number of boys they could admit. Though, the institution permanently amended its admissions rules to include boys they often placed restrictions based on age. They discussed the need for a separate institution for boys in an article in *The Republic* on January 20, 1852, informing the public that the asylum currently had nineteen boys, and had to decline accepting many others due to age. Additionally, they believed in the merits of having an asylum for boys. The managers and trustees argued that boys turned away to the streets faced a potential life of vice and crime, for “the work of the Incendiary has in many instances been traced to children, the child soon becomes a man and what follows then—our Penitentiaries are filled; and the gallows has its victims.” As they had previously, the asylum connected the safety and the future of the city with the protection of its dependent children. The managers indicated that they knew a gentleman, who remained anonymous, willing to contribute \$2,000 to the purpose if the public would take up the mission of creating a separate institution.<sup>49</sup> St. Joseph’s Male Orphan Asylum was founded in 1854, seemingly an answer to the Washington City Orphan Asylum’s problem. They renewed their plea, however, for a male orphan asylum in 1861, most likely because St. Joseph’s was a Catholic institution. They urged the need for a separate institution as “they [found] it impossible, with their limited means of discipline, to govern or properly train boys over eleven or twelve years of age.”<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Container 2, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; “Local Matters: The Orphan,” *The Republic*. (Washington [D.C.]), 20 Jan. 1852. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014434/1852-01-20/ed-1/seq-3/>>

<sup>50</sup> “Local Matters: Protestant Orphan Asylum,” *The National Republican*. (Washington, D.C.), 16 April 1861. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014760/1861-04-16/ed-1/seq-3/>>

The relationship between the orphanage and the city was a reciprocal one. While the managers and trustees of the institution expected the citizens of Washington to do their duty in helping support the city's dependent children, they understood their responsibility to report to the public. The managers and trustees often announced their annual meeting in advance, with an open invitation to the public. The 1852 annual meeting included a welcome to "all persons interested in [the] institution."<sup>51</sup> They advertised the 1879 annual meeting with the statement that "The friends of orphans are cordially invited to be present, when it will be the duty of the Managers to give an account of the means entrusted to them for the benefit of this institution . . . ."<sup>52</sup> Just as it was the citizens of Washington's responsibility to help the institution care for the city's children, it was the managers' obligation to provide a report of how they used their funds. The asylum frequently published their reports from the annual meeting in the newspaper. These reports included information about their financial status, the number of children currently living in the asylum, the number admitted and departed, and the status of the children's education. They were honest about the number of children who had died the previous year, though at times doing so in a manner to absolve the institution of guilt. In the annual report for 1848, published in *The Daily Union* on January 18, 1849, they wrote "Their Heavenly Protector has blessed them with almost uninterrupted health. There has been but one death, that of a little girl, who was much out of health when received."<sup>53</sup> The institution's publication of their annual reports was likely a form of advertising. Assuring the public that the institution was fulfilling a crucial need in the community, and doing so efficiently and productively, could make the citizenry more likely to

---

<sup>51</sup> *The Republic*. (Washington [D.C.]), 12 Jan. 1852. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014434/1852-01-12/ed-1/seq-3/>>

<sup>52</sup> *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 13 Jan. 1879. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1879-01-13/ed-1/seq-1/>>

<sup>53</sup> "Report for the Washington City Orphan Asylum for 1848," *The Daily Union*. (Washington [D.C.]), 18 Jan. 1849. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82003410/1849-01-18/ed-1/seq-3/>>

contribute. The managers also recognized, at least once before 1890, that their foremost responsibility was to the District's children. In November 1887 they resolved that because of their scant financial resources that until May 1888 they would only take children from the District of Columbia, as well as none with living parents.<sup>54</sup>

### **Network of Support**

Another crucial aspect of the asylum's network was its relationship with the other area institutions and societies. This included the city's other orphan asylums and social institutions. The asylum's interaction with city institutions pivoted on the nature of their relationship. Some institutions served as a place for the asylum to send its children, particularly in cases of illness, misbehavior, or when a child exhibited exceptional potential. When the asylum was full, or if the child in question fit a particular demographic, the managers might recommend another institution instead of admitting the child into their own. The situation was often reversed, as well, as benevolent societies, churches, and other orphan asylums admitted children from their institution into the Washington City Orphan Asylum.

Several benevolent societies in the District of Columbia served as a bridge between families and the asylum, applying for the admission of children into the institution. Before the founding of the German Orphan Asylum, the German Benevolent Society asked the Washington City Orphan Asylum to take John Shaffer in 1862 and Wilhelmina and Myra Hercul in 1870. The asylum accepted the children of Mrs. Bannister, who was dying of tuberculosis in May 1848, and William Seabury in November 1849 at the request of the Benevolent Society of St. John's Parish. The orphanage even told aid societies of their willingness to accept children.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Container 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>55</sup> Containers 34 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

They informed the Female Relief Society in September 1832 “that orphans [would] as heretofore be received into th[e] Asylum until the house [was] filled.”<sup>56</sup> It is possible in this case that the managers passed along this message so the aid society would know of their readiness to help during the cholera epidemic. Organizations might even help with the cost of the children’s maintenance. Julia and Robert Kirby, who lived in the orphanage for three months in 1858, did so in part with help from the Odd Fellows Society. Charles and Caroline Rempt entered the asylum, ages five and seven, in 1862 with the support of the Oriental Lodge of Odd Fellows. They did so under the agreement that neither child would be placed out without the Society’s approval. The Society later helped support Charles Rempt when he went to an agricultural college and then Columbia College. The Mission School society was willing to help a poor and sick father support his three children in the asylum in 1859. Emma and Charlie Stewart were placed in the institution in 1871 by the Knights of Pythias, a society of which their father had been a member. The Bethany Mission Sunday School, part of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, placed Lizzie and Eddie Webel in the orphanage in 1874.<sup>57</sup> Towards the end of the century, police officers began helping admit children into the institution. The officers filled numerous roles, at times signing the relinquishments for the children at others supplying a reference for a parent’s application. At least one officer, Samuel Wilson, did so in conjunction with the Humane Society. The passage of a local act in 1885 allowed the Humane Society to interfere on behalf of mistreated children as well as animals. The organization sent children to the other D.C. institutions as well.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Containers 34 and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>57</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>58</sup> *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 06 Feb. 1892. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. Of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1892-02-06/ed-1/seq-11/>>; *Evening*

In one case the managers took a child at the request of the Government Hospital for the Insane. The hospital's superintendent wrote the managers in September 1876 to explain the situation of John Dreher, the one-year-old son of Elizabeth Dreher, who was a patient at the hospital. A German immigrant who had only lived in the District of Columbia for a year-and-a-half, her husband John M. Dreher, a carpenter, had abandoned her in March 1876. The hospital initially allowed her to keep her son with her in the institution "as she was kind and attentive to her child." Her condition deteriorated to the point where she could no longer care for him, so the superintendent asked the orphanage to take him, noting that the child seemed "a healthy, good-tempered child." The managers agreed.<sup>59</sup>

Other asylums also sent children to the Washington City Orphan Asylum, typically because they could not accept them into their own institution due to space or financial reasons. The New Boys Home admitted two brothers with the managers' permission in 1867. Mrs. Parke and Mrs. Alexander Ray entered two children from the Epiphany Church Home in December 1874. The Orphan Asylum of Alexandria, just across the Potomac River in Alexandria, Virginia, asked the asylum in the District of Columbia to take several children in 1882 as they were "not in a condition to take charge of th[e] children." The Alexandria institution applied with the intention of paying money for the children's support, just as a parent or guardian might. The Washington City Orphan Asylum accepted Ella Scott Moore and the four Green children, Rosie, Bertie, Mary, and Eddie.<sup>60</sup>

---

*star.* (Washington, D.C.), 09 Dec. 1893. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1893-12-09/ed-1/seq-9/>>; *Evening star.* (Washington, D.C.), 06 June 1894. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1894-06-06/ed-1/seq-6/>>.

<sup>59</sup> Containers 2 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>60</sup> Containers 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

By far the largest number of children came from the Female Orphan Asylum of Georgetown. It opened shortly after the institution in Washington, though the exact date of its founding is unknown. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Female Orphan Asylum of Georgetown transferred several children to live in the Washington City Orphan Asylum. The Georgetown orphanage typically paid the Washington City Orphan Asylum a maintenance fee. The Washington orphanage deferred to the Georgetown asylum when it came to major decisions concerning the children, such as their removal by family members or friends or their placement in indentures. The Georgetown asylum also removed children from the institution to place in indentures. They asked the Washington institution to take nine year old Cornelia McMann in 1848, and as her need was considered “urgent” the Board of Managers agreed at once. The managers of the Georgetown orphanage agreed to pay \$50 a year for her care. McMann lived in the institution for almost eight years until the Georgetown asylum placed her with a woman named Mrs. Williamson. The Georgetown institution placed ten year old Ann Virginia Firrell, a full orphan, with the Washington asylum in February 1859, paying \$60 a year.<sup>61</sup> In June 1862, when Mrs. Sanders asked for a girl to help with housework but also to be educated, the Washington asylum wrote to a member of the Georgetown asylum to see if they would permit Firrell to leave with Sanders. The Georgetown asylum consented. Five-year-old Annie E. Johnson, whose father died at the First Battle of Bull Run in the Civil War, entered the Washington orphanage in 1865, the Georgetown asylum paying \$150 a year and “having the privilege to place the child out.”<sup>62</sup> The practice of the Georgetown asylum placing children in the Washington institution became common enough that when Kate M. Billings from the Georgetown orphan asylum wrote to Elizabeth Blair Lee, first directress of the Washington City

---

<sup>61</sup> “Firrell” possibly also spelled “Ferrell” or “Firl”.

<sup>62</sup> Container 34, 36, and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

Orphan Asylum, in 1892 to request the admittance of a child, she stated, “I presume the amount to be paid for the maintenance and instruction is already established by precedent of this I have not been informed. Will be greatly obliged if you will let me know what we are accustomed to pay yearly for our Orphans in your Institution.” Though she was unaware of its particulars, Billings assumed the creation of a standard from decades of a relationship between the two.<sup>63</sup>

As the Washington City Orphan Asylum accepted children from other asylums, they also referred children to other institutions, often when they did not have room for additional children or did not believe the children fit within their guidelines. In 1876, Christina Langdon brought her two children, Willie, aged three years, and Bessie aged twenty months. Langdon’s husband had mistreated and subsequently abandoned her. The Board of Managers, though sympathetic, did not believe the children fit within their rules as both parents were living. They recommended that Langdon instead apply to the Foster Home, and perhaps pay some for their maintenance. They referred Eddie Clemson’s mother to the Labor Exchange in 1877. While the asylum accepted several children whose fathers served in the Civil War, the managers also referred a few children of soldiers to the newly founded Soldiers and Sailors Orphan Asylum.

The Washington City Orphan Asylum commonly used the Reform School to send boys that misbehaved. Though no girls were sent to the same reform school, girls also misbehaved and were removed from the institution, often sent to an area reformatory as well. In 1879, the managers resolved that girls living in indentures who had shown “absolute depravity” should be put in a place of reform by the person to whom they had been indentured. Ella Moore, approximately sixteen-years-old, was sent to the House of the Good Shepherd for stealing in 1885. In sending these children to the reform school, the asylum alleviated their institution of a

---

<sup>63</sup> Kate M. Billings to Elizabeth Blair Lee; September 7, 1892; Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228, Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

problem, one that could possibly corrupt or harm other children, but they also continued their service to the city of Washington. Rather than expel their charges onto the street, to beg, steal, and commit other crimes, they transferred them to another institution better suited to transform them into functioning members of society.<sup>64</sup>

The managers of the Washington City Orphan Asylum also sent children to other institutions for illness. Removing children for sickness frequently had the dual motivations of finding them appropriate help, but also ridding the asylum of the burden they presented. In the asylum's earlier years, before the growth in the number of District of Columbia social institutions, the managers had fewer options for places to send children. One such case was fourteen-year-old John McCoy, who was physically disabled. They transferred him to the overseers of the poor in 1845 after he had lived in the institution for years. The Board of Managers participated in the establishment of the Children's Hospital in 1870, after which the asylum sent several children to the hospital, as well as received children from there. One of the asylum's doctors, Dr. William B. Drinkard, suggested the inclusion of the orphanage's board in founding the hospital, and several members, including Elizabeth Blair Lee, Adelaide J. Brown, Virginia Zeilin, and Maria Harkness, joined the venture. One child who went to the Children's Hospital was Caroline Rempt, who went for treatment of her eyes in 1875. The managers later decided to send her and Clara Davis to the Blind Asylum. On one occasion, the managers sent three children to an institution outside of the District of Columbia, the Training School for Feeble Minded Children. In 1878, the asylum informed Mrs. Goss on how to have her two sons, George and Chase, entered in the Baltimore Blind Asylum.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Container 36 and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>65</sup> Containers 34, 36, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; *Joint Select Committee to Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*, compiled by Charles Moore,

In coordinating their efforts, the institutions and societies of Washington, D.C. and the surrounding areas worked to assure social balance within their community. If a benevolent society learned of a child in need, they would try to have the child housed in the orphan asylum. If one institution did not have room to take a particular child, they would refer them to another orphanage. Institutions like the Female Orphan Asylum of Georgetown would typically even pay for the child's maintenance. In one case the Georgetown asylum approached the Washington City Orphan Asylum to see if they had a child they wished to place in an indenture in answer to an application, as the Georgetown institution did not have one to place out.<sup>66</sup> If a child within an orphanage was particularly ill-behaved, and perhaps especially if that behavior was putting other children at risk, the reform school was especially suited to rehabilitate them. Children who were ill could go to an institution specially suited to care for them in their sickness. To a degree, the institutions even functioned to keep Washington segregated into demographic categories. Though this was not always the case, Catholic families were referred to the Catholic institutions and German families to the German orphan asylum. German families were even allowed under certain conditions to remove their children to place them in the German institution after it opened in 1876. Underlying all these decisions assuredly was a concern over money and space, and how to help the most children, especially those considered the most deserving of charity, at once. In forming a network, these institutions strengthened their ability to assist the city's lower class, but also to prevent the children from becoming a problem for the city and the citizens of the District of Columbia and its surrounding area.

---

Clerk of the Joint Committee, 55<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Doc. No 185, (Government Printing Office: Washington, 1897), 83.

<sup>66</sup> Container 42, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

## **Conclusion**

The Washington City Orphan Asylum was founded in a particular time and place. Its history was closely tied to Washington's history. The District of Columbia's first orphanage counted among its founders and supporters some of Washington's leading families. They labored for the asylum just as they did for the city. The orphanage was shaped by the destruction of the city that happened just a year before its founding. Other events that impacted Washington, such as the 1832 cholera epidemic, shaped the institution as well. As the managers worked to support the institution, they called upon the city government as well as Washington's citizens, believing the support of orphans to be part of civic duty. They also formed a network with the area's other social institutions, in large part for the reason they grounded in their pleas for funding, to shape dependent children to productive citizens rather than leave them to the forces of vice.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: NATION

### Introduction

The Washington City Orphan Asylum's location in the nation's capital profoundly shaped the orphanage, rendering its history as a social institution unique. The asylum's location determined who helped manage and finance the institution, who withdrew children, and to whom the orphanage turned for assistance. Studies of the other orphanages in the District of Columbia would likely show similar influences resulting from their location in the nation's capital, but even so there are a few ways in which the Washington City Orphan Asylum is distinctive. The people who ran the orphanage argued for its national position. Blair Lee, who served on the Board of Trustees at the turn of the nineteenth century and was a senator from Maryland said in his speech at the asylum's centennial event, "It is in reality a national orphans' home, and as it bears the name of the national city, so its history, being parallel and almost wholly contemporaneous with the history of the capital, is a national as well as a local history."<sup>1</sup> The orphanage petitioned Congress several times for assistance, an action that initiated, at least to a certain extent, a conversation in Congress about the federal government's role in social welfare. The petitions to Congress were made possible by the fact that the people who ran the orphanage tended to be politically connected, or like Lee, were politicians themselves.

The asylum also benefited from the executive branch of the federal government, and the managers and trustees worked to continue that connection as they shaped the institution's image and sought support. The asylum's national position directly affected the lives of some its children, as the managers placed orphans with politicians throughout the nineteenth century. For two children at least, the location of the institution in the nation's capital played a crucial role in

---

<sup>1</sup> "Home Was Opened Hundred Years Ago," Washington *Evening Star*, October 17, 1915, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1915-10-17/ed-1/seq-3.pdf> (Accessed December 15, 2015).

their admission. The asylum's political connections tended to transcend political and sectional boundaries, though there were moments when national issues, such as the Civil War, permeated the asylum walls and affected the institution's governance.

### **Incorporation and Land Grants**

Many groups of women who managed charities turned to local and state governments, using the political connections formed in their personal lives to garner support for their organization.<sup>2</sup> The women who managed the Washington City Orphan Asylum were no different. Not located within a state, the orphanage was ineligible for state government resources. The managers appealed to the city government for assistance, but also took their search for aid to the United States Congress. At the time of the institution's first application, this type of assistance to an asylum from the federal government was unprecedented. Congress had granted money to widows and orphans, particularly to men who served in the military. They had incorporated schools, libraries, and churches in the District of Columbia, but had never done so for an orphanage or any other type of asylum. They had also never received petitions from institutions of the kind.<sup>3</sup> After the orphanage's initial petition in 1816, which failed, Congress passed at least one other asylum's request for aid. In 1826, they granted the Kentucky Asylum for "teaching the deaf and dumb" plots of public land.<sup>4</sup> In the course of their fight for assistance, the Washington City Orphan Asylum, and two of the orphan asylums that opened soon after it, the Female Orphan Asylum of Georgetown and St. Vincent's Orphan Asylum, sparked several conversations

---

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen D. McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 38.

<sup>3</sup> To determine that no other institutions applied for or received aid, I conducted a search in the congressional records through the Library of Congress' American Memory website, using the key terms of "asylum," "orphan," and "incorporate."

<sup>4</sup> "An Act for the benefit of the incorporated Kentucky Asylum, for teaching the deaf and dumb," 19<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., (April 5, 1826), 339, <https://memory.loc.gov>.

in Congress over the propriety of the federal government becoming involved in the welfare of a social institution.

Weeks after opening, on November 29, 1815, a committee including Marcia Van Ness, Betty Holdsworth Blake, and Mrs. Brackenridge formed with the purpose of approaching members of Congress about incorporating the institution. They spoke with representatives and senators, armed with a petition and fifty copies of the asylum's constitution. The managers reaffirmed the committee at the next meeting on December 13, 1815 and decided that those selected would speak with John Forsyth, a Georgia Democratic-Republican in the House of Representatives, and Margaret Bayard Smith would approach Senator Jonathan Roberts, a Democratic-Republican from Pennsylvania. Why the managers chose these two men to represent them to Congress is not unclear. A likely motive was that both Forsyth and Roberts were Democratic-Republicans, whose head was First Lady Dolley Madison's husband James Madison. It is also possible that these women had personal relationships with Forsyth and Roberts. Forsyth, at least, was longtime friends with Margaret Bayard Smith and his wife later served as a trustee on the asylum's Board of Managers.<sup>5</sup>

In writing the petition to Congress, the Board highlighted the virtuosity and usefulness of their purpose as well as the success they had achieved so far. They stated that, "The Society has been organized, a house procured and several destitute female orphans, who might have been suffering all the miseries of want, . . . and exposed to Vice, are now comfortably situated under the protection and care of your Petitioners, and training, it is hoped, under the blessing of Providence to be useful members of Society." In stating their achievements to date, the Board hoped to convince Congress of the asylum's permanence and therefore worthiness as an

---

<sup>5</sup> Alvin Laroy Duckett, *John Forsyth: Political Tactician* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1962), 13; Container 11, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

investment. As they did in their pleas to the citizens of Washington, the Board also argued that the asylum benefited society as a whole, thus giving Congress reason to believe the institution a worthy cause to support. The language presented to Congress was flowery and complimentary, calling its members both “Honorable” and “enlightened.”<sup>6</sup>

The petition contained two requests. The first concerned issues of legality as well as making assurances for the asylum’s future. The Board of Managers asked that Congress pass “An Act to incorporate the Subscribers [of the asylum] for the purpose of enabling them to hold property and to receive the children, free from the future claims of their friends . . . and to enable the board . . . to bind out those whom they have rear’d and instructed, at a proper age and to suitable persons.” This act would give the asylum legal rights over the children in their care as well as secure their ability to pass along the asylum’s property. Their second request was that the government bequeath lands to the orphanage on which they could construct a building and that Congress help in erecting such a structure. This request came before benefactor John Van Ness donated land to the asylum for its permanent use.<sup>7</sup>

Forsyth and Roberts agreed to present the asylum’s petition and did so almost immediately, introducing the matter for consideration on December 18 of that year. The House of Representatives did not immediately discuss it, but the Senate assigned a committee consisting of Jonathan Roberts, Robert Henry Goldsborough, James Barbour, William Hunter, and John Williams to investigate the issue and make a recommendation. The Senate visited the bill again in March of the following year, reading it on the 11<sup>th</sup> and then again on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Roberts spoke in

---

<sup>6</sup> Holly C. Shulman, ed., “The Washington Orphan Asylum Society to Congress, 18 December 1815,” *The Papers of Dolley Madison, Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008), <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu> (accessed October 22, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Shulman, ed., “The Washington Orphan Asylum Society to Congress, 18 December 1815,” *The Papers of Dolley Madison, Digital Edition* .

favor of the institution before the vote whether to examine the bill a third time. Tied twelve to twelve, John Gaillard cast the deciding vote in favor of looking at the bill one more time, which they did on the following day.<sup>8</sup>

On the March 13, 1816 meeting of the Senate, more debate took place over the act of incorporating the asylum. Robert Goodloe Harper, a Federalist from Maryland, spoke against incorporation. Harper argued that though he believed in the virtuosity of the asylum and the respectability of the women running it, he saw incorporation as both outside the purview of the government and unnecessary—“a simple deed of trust” would suffice in allowing the institution to purchase and hold property. Roberts countered that without incorporation, the institution could not inherit the property given to it by individuals. The asylum needed to be a corporate body to protect its holdings. He also disputed Harper’s assertion that an act of incorporation was beyond the scope of government, arguing that states had done so previously, though it was perhaps an original concept to the District of Columbia. Roberts concluded that, “The charter would give no privilege nor sanction any abuse. It would enable the trustees of a praiseworthy institution to secure, in the most eligible and favorable manner, the application of such means as may be given by benevolent persons to the benevolent objects of the association, &c.” George Washington Campbell, a Democratic-Republican from Tennessee, also spoke in favor of incorporating the institution, though the *Annals of Congress* did not record his words.<sup>9</sup>

The bill fell short seventeen to sixteen. The bill to incorporate lacked one necessary vote.<sup>10</sup> Each senator had his own reasons for his vote. Holly Shulman, editor of the Dolley Madison papers, argues that Harper, in addition to the reasons he stated, in general lacked a

---

<sup>8</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 14<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1815: 29.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

trusting disposition towards both corporations and women.<sup>11</sup> For Jeremiah Mason, a Federalist from New Hampshire, the matter seemed more personal. He wrote to his wife three days after the vote, saying, “Mrs. Madison, with other high court dames, lately petitioned Congress for an act of incorporation for a Female Asylum, of which Mrs. M. was to be the presidentess. The Senate most ungallantly rejected the petition. Being among the rebels on this occasion, I expect to experience no more smiles at the palace.”<sup>12</sup> Mason’s statements reflect his disdain, as he sarcastically deemed the Senate’s actions “ungallant” and referred to the institution’s managers as “high court dames.” Other senators, such as Christopher Gore, were staunch members of the Federalist minority and likely did not want to vote for a project that had so much support from Democratic-Republicans.<sup>13</sup>

Though it may seem that political differences determined the vote, with Democratic-Republicans voting contrary to Federalists, a closer examination indicates otherwise. Though certainly more Democratic-Republicans voted for incorporation than Federalists (twelve Democratic-Republicans to four Federalists), the number of Democratic-Republicans voting against the resolution also outweighed the Federalist “Nays” (nine to eight). Some Democratic-Republicans likely possessed significant ideological reasons for voting “Nay.” Nathaniel Macon generally desired to limit the role of government, and possibly saw incorporation as government overreach.<sup>14</sup> Geography perhaps played an even smaller role, as senators from North, South,

---

<sup>11</sup> Holly C. Shulman, ed, “Editorial Note,” *The Papers of Dolley Madison, Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008), <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu> (accessed October 22, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Holly C. Shulman, ed, “Jeremiah Mason to Mary Means Mason, 16 March 1816,” *The Papers of Dolley Madison, Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008), <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu> (accessed October 22, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Shulman, ed., “Editorial Note,” *The Papers of Dolley Madison, Digital Edition*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

East, and West voted both for and against the act of incorporation.<sup>15</sup> The vote for incorporation of the asylum seems to have been, for the most part, determined by senators voting based on ideological values.<sup>16</sup> Shortly after the Senate negatively decided the question of incorporation, the House of Representatives answered it as well. On March 27, 1816, John Forsyth brought forward a resolution to incorporate the asylum and to grant them four lots of public land. The House voted on whether or not to continue discussing the resolution. The “Nays” won over the “yeas,” and the resolution died before the House of Representatives even fully discussed it.<sup>17</sup>

Yet that would not be the final chapter in the Washington City Orphan Asylum’s story of congressional incorporation. Twelve years later, on February 19, 1828, Senator John Eaton introduced an act to incorporate the orphan asylum. After referring the bill to the Committee on the District of Columbia, the Senate agreed to pass an act to incorporate not only the Washington City Orphan Asylum but the Female Orphan Asylum of Georgetown as well. The Georgetown asylum had petitioned for incorporation around the same time the Washington institution did. On May 24, 1828, the House confirmed the Senate’s decision.<sup>18</sup> It was in this act of Congress that the institution’s name was changed from the Female Orphan Asylum of Washington to the Washington City Orphan Asylum. The Board of Managers made a note in the minutes of their June 3, 1828 meeting to deliver special thanks to Eaton “for his successful and zealous effort in” attaining incorporation for the institution.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 14<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1815: 29; Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774—Present. <http://bioguide.congress.gov> (Accessed November 1, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Shulman, ed, “Editorial Note,” *The Papers of Dolley Madison, Digital Edition*.

<sup>17</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 14<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1815: 29.

<sup>18</sup> *Congressional Debates*, 20<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1828: 142, <http://congressional.proquest.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/>; *Congressional Debates*, 20<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1828: 48.

<sup>19</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

Among its most important directives, the act specifically addressed the creation of “a corporation and body politic in law” to be headed by William Hawley, John P. Van Ness, Nathan Towson, Obadiah B. Brown, and James Larned and their successors under the official name of “The Washington City Orphan Asylum.” It also allowed for the current governing body of female managers to continue in their method of selecting officers and running the institution. It allowed for the legal transference of all goods, land, and property owned by the newly created corporation, with the provision that “the clear annual property to be acquired . . . shall at no time exceed the sum of three thousand dollars.” The act affirmed the institution’s legal rights over the children left in their care, giving the asylum legal authority over the boys until they turned twenty-one and the girls until they turned eighteen. It explicitly decreed that the parents or guardians of the child forfeited their rights over the child when they relinquished the child to the institution.<sup>20</sup>

At least one of these congressional stipulations was important as the asylum faced issues that the Board of Trustees and Board of Managers solved by referring to the act of incorporation. Later that year the asylum encountered a problem with one of the children’s mothers, Margaret Warfield, who wanted to remove her daughter, Mary, from the institution. The asylum did not agree with the mother’s demand and opted to keep the child. The conflict required the use of outside legal counsel. Richard S. Coxe, a Washington lawyer, and husband of future Board of Managers member, Susan Coxe, gave his opinion on the situation. Coxe argued that, though Margaret Warfield placed her daughter in the orphanage in 1826, two years before the congressional act of incorporation, the act legalized all relinquishments of children to the institution. The asylum now possessed legal authority over the children, and the parents had no

---

<sup>20</sup> *Congressional Debates*, 20<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1828: 48.

right to interfere without the orphanage's permission. Coxe advised that the institution make a consistent policy of having the parents sign a relinquishment form when they gave their child to the asylum.<sup>21</sup>

Four years later, Congress passed an act that satisfied the asylum's initial 1816 request for property, though the asylum used this land not for their residence but instead for financing the institution. In February 1829, the session following incorporation, Eaton introduced another bill to grant the asylum land from the unsold properties belonging to the city, which was referred to committee, but never reached fruition. The Senate discussed a similar bill in 1830, which, again, did not become an act. The asylum's desire for land was finally fulfilled on July 14, 1832. Like the 1828 act, this did not apply to the Washington City Orphan Asylum alone, but to another local asylum as well. The other recipient of Congress' favor was the St. Vincent's Female Orphan Asylum. The act designated the Commissioner of the Public Buildings to select lots of land in Washington owned by the United States to give to each asylum, the total worth of the land for each amounting to ten thousand dollars. These lands were exempt from taxes for five years, unless the asylum corporation sold the land to an outside party before. The corporation had the right to use the land as they saw fit, as long as the proceeds always went to asylum. The 1832 act was contingent upon the act passed in 1828. The asylum could not possess property without first becoming a corporation. The language in the 1832 act conveys as much, as it constantly refers to the rights of the "Corporations" rather than the asylums themselves. For the Washington City Orphan Asylum, it would be the Board of Trustees, the men who embodied the asylum corporation, that would manage the land donated by Congress.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Container 12, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>22</sup> *Congressional Debates*, 20<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1829, 158, <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/hlawquery.html>; *Congressional Debates*, 21<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1830: 245, <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/hlawquery.html>; *Congressional Debates*, 22<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1832: 55.

The nature of the changes in Congress that allowed the Acts of 1828 and 1832 to pass, where the resolution of 1816 did not, can only be speculated. The 1816 vote in the Senate, though decisive, was not completely conclusive towards the Senate's position; the resolution to incorporate the Washington City Orphan Asylum only failed by one vote. However, given that the 1816 petition did not even become a resolution before its rejection in the House of Representatives, it is more likely that the 1816 petition did not align with the views of Congress.<sup>23</sup> The Congress of 1816 constituted a majority of Democratic-Republicans in the Senate and Republicans in the House. 1828 and 1832 saw a majority of Jacksonians in Congress. In 1816 and 1828, the asylum had at least one prominent advocate from the majority party.<sup>24</sup> Beyond the support of men that served in Congress, in 1816 the Washington City Orphan Asylum also had the support of Democratic-Republican President Madison and in 1828 the support of soon-to-be president General Andrew Jackson.<sup>25</sup> In every year that the asylum petition came before Congress, the orphanage possessed significant political influence.

The most plausible theory is that the real change occurred not primarily in Congress but in the nation as a whole. As David J. Rothman argues in his book *The Discovery of the Asylum*, the antebellum era of United States history witnessed the rise of the asylum, for orphans as well as for the insane, the criminal, and others who might become dependents of the state. Previously, in the colonial and revolutionary periods, care for orphans often fell to the child's family members or to other members of the community. Colonial philosophy viewed such poverty as an inherit feature of society, one that should elicit aid and benevolence, but did not

---

<sup>23</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 14<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1815: 29.

<sup>24</sup> *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774—Present*. <http://bioguide.congress.gov> (Accessed November 1, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2008), 319.

warrant societal reform to fix the root of the problem. During the nineteenth century the view changed, and as Rothman states, “The response in the Jacksonian period to the deviant and the dependent was first and foremost a vigorous attempt to promote the stability of the society at a moment when traditional ideas and practices appeared outmoded, constricted, and ineffective.”<sup>26</sup> Antebellum society increasingly believed in the need for different solutions to the problems of poverty, mental illness, and dependency.

The Washington City Orphan Asylum was, in terms of its founding date, ahead of its time. Though not the first orphanage founded in the United States, it preceded the wave of orphan asylums that appeared in the 1830s, the asylums that manifested this shifting view towards reform.<sup>27</sup> The Fourteenth Congress, which vetoed the asylum’s petition in 1816, also preceded this change in ideology. Perhaps by 1828, as the country began to adopt the asylum system, members of Congress shifted their views as well and began to see asylum incorporation as within their domain. Incorporating an asylum would assist in the United States’ journey towards becoming a stronger society with productive citizens, a matter of increasing concern in the antebellum period. By 1832, the concept of not only incorporating a home for dependent children, but giving it land as well, was pervasive enough to pass such an act. The simultaneous incorporation of the Female Orphan Asylum of Georgetown with the Washington City Orphan Asylum in 1828 and the donation of lands to St. Vincent’s in 1832 shows Congress’ willingness to pass legislation for such institutions.

By the end of the century, Congress had incorporated and granted land to many orphan asylums in the District of Columbia. St. Joseph’s Male Orphan Asylum, founded in 1854, was

---

<sup>26</sup> David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), xviii.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

incorporated in 1855 and received \$1,800 annually. St. Ann's Infant Asylum, founded in 1860, was incorporated in 1863 and received \$5,400. It sent its older children to St. Joseph's and St. Vincent's. The National Soldiers and Sailor's Orphan Home was founded and incorporated in 1866 and received several yearly appropriations. The Church Orphanage of St. John's Parish was founded around 1870 and incorporated in 1872. It received \$1,800 annually as well as property from Congress. St. Rose Industrial School, founded 1872, was incorporated in 1895, and also received congressional appropriations for land and buildings.<sup>28</sup> The increasing number of institutions receiving incorporations and appropriations might give the impression that congressional aid to asylums proceeded along a straight trajectory. Discussions within the House of Representatives in the 1840s showed rather that the issue of government and social welfare remained complicated.

### **Money from Lions**

In 1833, the Emperor of Morocco gave the United States a pair of Arabian horses and a lion. After a protracted discussion within and between the executive and the legislative branches of the federal government, Congress agreed to sell the Arabian horses and allow President Andrew Jackson to determine an appropriate recipient for the lion.<sup>29</sup> Shortly after the decision, Clara Bomford, First Directress of the Washington City Orphan Asylum, approached Jackson and requested he give the lion to the asylum, to which he agreed. Reportedly, Jackson "showed so much warmth and kindness in acceding to her request, . . . she was so overcome, that she burst

---

<sup>28</sup> Charles Moore, compiler and editor, *Joint Select Committee To Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia: Part II—Report*, 55<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1898, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898), 13-14.

<sup>29</sup> President, Message to the House of Representatives "Presents from the Emperor of Morocco," Jan. 6, 1834. ProQuest Congressional Serial Set Index; *Cong. Debates*, 23<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1835, vol. 11, pt. 1: 218-9.

into tears and seizing his hand, kissed it in the excess of her delight and gratitude.”<sup>30</sup> The government also included St. Vincent’s Orphan Asylum and the Female Orphan Asylum of Georgetown as recipients of the lion. The Washington City Orphan Asylum managed the sale, and the three orphanages split the \$3,350 proceeds.<sup>31</sup>

Jackson’s gift of the lion to the orphan asylums was simple. No records indicate that anyone protested the piece of federal property going to a social institution. The fight to determine the constitutionality of accepting the gifts, and then the proper means of disposing of them, had been so long, perhaps all involved were simply satisfied that the matter was settled. When the situation repeated in 1839, and the Emperor of Morocco gave the United States two lions at the same time the Imam of Muscat gave a pair of Arabian horses, the idea of giving the animals to the District of Columbia’s orphan asylum arose in the House of Representatives. Unlike the previous occasion, the matter of giving federal property to a social institution developed into a debate.

In May 1840, the House considered a resolution from the Senate to allow the president to sell the animals and place the proceeds in the United States Treasury, an action that had precedent with previous foreign gifts. The House’s Committee on Foreign Affairs introduced an amendment on June 9, 1840 to the Senate’s existing resolution, introduced by Francis Pickens, a Democrat from South Carolina. Rather than placing the proceeds from the sale in the treasury, they would distribute them among the orphan asylums of the District of Columbia. A similar idea had appeared in the Senate debate over the gifts before they settled on funding the Treasury. Senator Richard Young, a Democrat from Illinois suggested giving the animals to an institution, an idea that Ohio Democrat William Allen rejected in stating that it was “a new move in behalf

---

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society* (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1965), 367.

<sup>31</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

of individual associations.” Though Pickens did not mention the 1835 case until later, the House’s Committee on Foreign affairs most likely decided on this amendment because of President Andrew Jackson’s example. The debate that followed included many issues, predominately the constitutionality of accepting foreign gifts, but its spark was the propriety of giving the proceeds to social institutions.<sup>32</sup>

Not long into the discussion, David Petrikin, a Democrat from Pennsylvania, questioned the chosen recipients of the gifts. He at first inquired why the representatives should select institutions in the District of Columbia over others, but then questioned giving gifts to anyone. Petrikin believed they should “be just before generous.” The federal government did not have the funds to pay its own debts, and as such, the House of Representatives should pass the resolution as the Senate drafted it, with the funds going towards the treasury. Pickens countered Petrikin with the argument that it was simply a matter of choosing the most expedient method to find homes for the gifts. Deciding on social institutions, and orphanages within the broader category of charities, helped prevent future problems in transferring the gifts. Pickens and Petrikin continued grappling over the propriety of the Treasury as a recipient, until another representative interjected that they had strayed from the matter at hand, voting on the Committee on Foreign Affairs’ amendment. Just as the House was ready to read the bill a third time, John Quincy Adams interjected with his opposition to allowing the president to accept the gifts in the first place. He could not think of “any authority” which permitted them do so. If the representatives wished to give to the District’s charities, then they should do so out of their own funds.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 26<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1840, vol. 3: 433. House of Representatives, “Present from the Emperor of Morocco,” March 4, 1834, ProQuest Congressional Serial Set Index; *Cong. Globe*, 26<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1840, vol. 3: 454-5; Niles’ Register, June 6, 1840, vol. 58: 218.

<sup>33</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 26<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1840, vol. 3: 454-5.

Pickens and others continued to defend the constitutionality of accepting the gifts to a highly skeptical Adams. In addressing the choice of the orphanages as a recipient for the funds, Pickens called upon their humanity and their sense of Christian duty. After a long discussion, the amendment failed in a vote, as did a vote for a third reading of the Senate's resolution.<sup>34</sup> The next day, July 10, 1840, however, Nathan Clifford, a Democrat from Maine, introduced the Senate's resolution for reconsideration, a motion that passed by a wide margin.<sup>35</sup> Charles Naylor, a Whig from Pennsylvania, suggested that they also reconsider giving the proceeds to the city's orphanages. His motion to open the discussion again failed by five votes. In the end, the House agreed on Clifford's suggestion to make a minor language adjustment to the Senate resolution. After days of debate, the resolution passed with the Senate's original idea of allowing the president to sell the animals and place the funds in the Treasury.<sup>36</sup> At the beginning of the House's discussion, the amendment proposed by the Committee on Foreign Affairs to distribute the funds to the orphan asylums of the District of Columbia had substantial support, enough so to progress it to a third and final reading. Yet the amendment did not pass.<sup>37</sup> The exact reason is unclear, though it likely had to do with the objections of John Quincy Adams. The other representatives who changed their votes from "yea" to "nay" possibly came to agree with some of Adams' views, though his larger objection to the acceptance of the gifts did not sway the group as a whole. It is also possible that like Pickens, some of them tired of debating the issue, and rather than fight for the original amendment would rather let the Senate's version, or something close enough to it, pass.

---

<sup>34</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 26<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1840, vol. 3: 516-7.

<sup>35</sup> The debate also included an extensive discussion of procedure, with John Quincy Adams questioning whether Nathan Clifford and the House clerk violated protocol in not sending the resolution back to the Senate.

<sup>36</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 26<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1840, vol. 3: 519.

<sup>37</sup> *Cong. Globe*, 26<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1840, vol. 3: 454-5.

Congressional support to the Washington City Orphan Asylum did not end there, though. Congress again offered assistance in a peculiar form in 1868. On June 11, 1868, Elihu Washburne introduced a resolution to bequeath the iron railing from the old hall of the House of Representatives to the Washington City Orphan Asylum. With no recorded debate, the bill passed in the House on June 12, 1868 and then the Senate on June 19, 1868. Unlike the lion, which they sold for profit, the asylum installed the railing on their building.<sup>38</sup>

An interesting component of the institution's relationship with the United States government is the denial of the people running the institution of their receiving federal support. When the trustees wrote the House of Representatives in 1876 to seek compensation for repairs to the building the orphanage had rented to the State Department, the trustees included in at least a draft of their letter that "without special aid from the Government, [the asylum] mitigated the suffering of hapless childhood, many of whom were rendered orphans by the war." The idea of the Washington City Orphan Asylum as self-sufficient, at least in terms of governmental support, endured, as Clark Moore in a report he assembled for Congress on the status of charitable institutions in 1897 asserted the same. In their minds, for the orphanage likely did not qualify as receiving government assistance because, unlike so many of the institutions that came after it, it did not receive consistent support, even if it did receive it occasionally.<sup>39</sup>

### **Political Connections**

Part of the reason the asylum was able to have its cause advanced through Congress was because the political connections of the managers and the trustees. As already seen with Dolley

---

<sup>38</sup> Container 17, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>39</sup> Container 17, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Charles Moore, compiler, *Joint Select Committee to Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*, Clerk of the Joint Committee, 55<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Doc. No 185, (Government Printing Office: Washington, 1897), 115.

Madison and Blair Lee, several of the people who helped manage the asylum were politically connected. Even people who were not politicians maintained relationships with politicians. Several members of the Board of Trustees served as Chaplain to either the Senate or the House of Representatives, including James Laurie and Obadiah Bruen Brown before the asylum opened and John Brackenridge, John W. French, Phineas Gurley, and William Hawley after. Many members of the Board of Managers had husbands, fathers, and brothers that served in one of the three branches of the federal government. Clara Bomford possibly knew Andrew Jackson, and felt comfortable requesting he give the asylum the Moroccan lion in 1835, because Jackson had nominated her brother, Associate Justice Henry Baldwin, to the United States Supreme Court. Senator John M. Berrien spoke at the asylum's annual meeting in 1843 and Senator W.T. Willey and Representative James A. Garfield spoke at the meeting in 1867.<sup>40</sup>

President Andrew Jackson proved an important part of the orphanage's history, beyond granting the gift of the lion. Jackson was a patron of the asylum and visited it on occasion, at least once with Emily and John Donelson, his great niece and great nephew, and Rachel Jackson, the daughter of his adopted son, Andrew. Emily Donelson wrote of her great-uncle's affection for the children, stating "all orphans were objects of tender solicitude" to Jackson, who "was not the least zealous" among the orphanage's affluent benefactors.<sup>41</sup> Jackson even took several of the

---

<sup>40</sup> Containers 34, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "History of the Chaplaincy," <http://chaplain.house.gov/chaplaincy/history.html> (Accessed January 3, 2016); "Senate Chaplain," [http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Senate\\_Chaplain.htm#2](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Senate_Chaplain.htm#2) (Accessed October 23, 2016); Nancy Simons Peterson, "Guarded Pasts: The Lives and Offspring of Colonel George and Clara (Baldwin) Bomford," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 86, (December 1998), 283-305. <http://www.bcgcertification.org/skillbuilders/narrativegenealogyngsqstyle.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Emily Donelson Wilcox, *Christmas under three flags: being memories of holiday festivities in the White House with "Old Hickory," in the palace of H.R.H. Prince of Prussia, afterwards Emperor William I, and at the Alamo with the Alcalde's daughter* (Washington: Neale Co., 1900) <http://newfirstsearch.oclc.org/> (Accessed January 3, 2012), 24.

children in his family to visit the orphanage on Christmas Day, 1835.<sup>42</sup> He reportedly told his family during the drive to the orphanage, “the best way to secure happiness is to bestow it on others, and we’ll begin our holiday by remembering the little ones who have no mothers or fathers to brighten life for them.”<sup>43</sup> It is possible that Jackson’s concern for the children stemmed from his own life experiences, as his father died shortly before he was born and his mother died when he was fourteen years old.<sup>44</sup> Jackson brought presents to the children, who gathered in the reception area of the asylum to see him. Emily Donelson later wrote, “it was gratifying to see [the children’s] faces light up . . . and even more gratifying was it to note [Jackson’s] pleasure at their grateful surprise.” The children called him “General” and Jackson picked up one physically disabled boy, John McCoy, to give the child his toy.<sup>45</sup>

The American presidency continued to benefit the asylum after Jackson left office. The institution received proceeds from more than one inaugural ball in the nineteenth century. In 1837, following the celebration for Martin Van Buren, the Managers of the Inaugural Ball gave the orphanage \$700, \$500 of which they invested and \$200 of which they used to cover expenses. After William Henry Harrison’s inaugural ball in 1841, the institution received a share of \$2,000, the money split between the District of Columbia’s other orphanages. Following James K. Polk’s inauguration in 1845, the managers of the inaugural ball split the money left after expenses between the Washington City Orphan Asylum and St. Vincent’s Orphan Asylum, each receiving \$566.68. The managers also agreed to give unused tickets to the ball to the

---

<sup>42</sup> Wilcox, *Christmas under three flags*, 23.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.; Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2008), 8-13.

<sup>45</sup> Wilcox, *Christmas Under Three Flags*, 25; Containers 34 and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

Washington City Orphan Asylum. \$2,000 was likewise split after Zachary Taylor's inaugural ball in 1849, the Washington City Orphan Asylum receiving \$1,250. The organizers of presidential inaugural balls also invited the children of all the district's orphanages to come and observe the decorations for the ball. This took place in 1901 for William McKinley's inauguration, and a newspaper article in *The Evening Star* detailing the event claimed that it had been the practice for previous inaugural balls.<sup>46</sup>

A large part of the Washington City Orphan Asylum's political story was its effort to maintain the asylum's connection to important political figures, especially those in the executive branch. Coupled with this was the tendency of those outside the institution to associate it with particular political figures, especially Dolley Madison. The first lady was an immensely popular person before, during, and after her husband's presidency. Her social presence in Washington was aptly described with President Zachary Taylor's statement upon her death in 1849: "She will never be forgotten because she was truly our first lady for a half-century."<sup>47</sup> People associated the orphanage with Madison. An article circulated in several Northern newspapers two years after its opening, stating that "A female Orphan Asylum Institution ha[d] been established in *Washington*; of which the amiable and interesting Lady of the President [was] the

---

<sup>46</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Inauguration Ball Held at Carusi's Saloon," *The daily Madisonian*. (Washington City [i.e., Washington, D.C.]), March 19, 1845. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020074/1845-03-19/ed-1/seq-3/>>; "History of Balls on Inaugural Day," *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), Nov. 19, 1916. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1916-11-19/ed-1/seq-28/>>; "Success Achieved," *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), March 5, 1901. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1901-03-05/ed-1/seq-1/>>

<sup>47</sup> Paul F. Boller, Jr. *Presidential Wives: An Anecdotal History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 36.

first Directress.”<sup>48</sup> Jeremiah Mason, in his letter to his wife concerning the congressional debate over supporting the institution, focused on Madison’s association with the orphanage.<sup>49</sup>

When Dolley Madison vacated her office as first directress of the asylum in 1817, the attendants at the annual meeting on October 14 elected Elizabeth Monroe, the new first lady, to be the new first directress. Elizabeth Monroe was not present at this meeting. A committee of women, including Marcia Van Ness, visited the first lady and notified her that they had voted her as the first directress of the institution. This visit was the first that Elizabeth Monroe accepted as first lady.<sup>50</sup> She had never been to a meeting of the society before or had any other interaction with it, besides maybe knowing some of the women who served as officers. Her name does not appear in any of the earlier records of the asylum.<sup>51</sup> Monroe bore the title of first directress for a year, but only attended one meeting. Van Ness filled in as a pro tem first directress for the duration of Monroe’s service. When elections came around again in October 1818, the asylum elected Marcia Van Ness as first directress. The published proceedings of the meeting stated in regards to Marcia Van Ness’ election: “Mrs. Monroe, having intimated that she found it impracticable to pay the necessary attention to the duties of first directress, at the same time expressed the warmest interest for the prosperity of the Institution.”<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> “Interesting Facts,” *New-England Galaxy & Masonic Magazine*, October 31, 1817, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011) 19; “Orphan Asylum; Institution; Washington; Lady; President; Directress,” *Northern Whig*, November 4, 1817, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011), 20.

<sup>49</sup> “Jeremiah Mason to Mary Means Mason, 16 March 1816,” *The Papers of Dolley Madison, Digital Edition*.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 141.

<sup>51</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>52</sup> “Female Orphan Asylum,” *City of Washington Gazette*, November 9, 1818. <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu> (accessed April 2, 2011).

Monroe's true feelings towards the situation with the institution remain a mystery, as the majority of her personal papers have been lost.<sup>53</sup> Monroe was sickly and often fatigued, and in general was not an active first lady. Serving as the head of an orphan asylum society undoubtedly took a great deal of strength and energy. She was relatively reclusive and on the occasions she socialized, she preferred to do so at the White House. Participating in the asylum society would have required her to attend social events outside of her domain and given her office as the first directress, be largely responsible for leading the gatherings.<sup>54</sup> Being a part of the asylum was not only impractical, but also lay outside of her worldview as first lady.

The most important aspect of Elizabeth Monroe's involvement with the asylum, in relation to the asylum's cultivation of its image, is that she was chosen to serve as first directress. She had not attended a single meeting. Based on service to the institution, Marcia Van Ness seems a much more logical and natural choice. Though managerial records do not indicate the reason for Monroe's selection, the most plausible explanation is that she was the wife of the president. The women of the society likely meant the position as a good will gesture towards the new first lady, an opportunity for her to slip with moderate ease into the place of Dolley Madison. They could have also seen it as a legacy; a position tied to the office of the first lady and the presidency, in many ways both an honor and a responsibility.

Despite Dolley Madison's somewhat brief relationship with the Washington City Orphan Asylum, she remained a fixture in the institution's history. In 1887, the asylum secured her portrait. This painting was not the only of asylum members to receive a place of honor. Marcia Van Ness' portrait already hung in the asylum, as did James H. Blake's. The portrait was

---

<sup>53</sup> According to the First Ladies' Library, James Monroe destroyed all but six of Elizabeth Monroe's letters upon her death. First Ladies Library, "Manuscripts for: Elizabeth Monroe," <http://www.firstladies.org/bibliography/manuscripts.aspx?bioid=5> (accessed October 5, 2011).

<sup>54</sup> Sol Barzman, *The First Ladies*, (New York: Cowles Book Company, Inc., 1970), 38-47.

referred to as the Stuart painting, probably indicating Gilbert Stuart's portrait of Madison. Stuart had painted several prominent early politicians, including George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. The asylum held a large ceremony and party to unveil the painting. The painting was on loan, an exception made by the owner due to Madison's connection to the institution, given with the intent that a copy be made to become a permanent piece in the institution. News of the event, and Madison's painting, circulated throughout American newspapers, making it as far as Fort Worth, Texas and St. Paul, Minnesota.<sup>55</sup>

The women and men running the institution also frequently mentioned the former first lady in public addresses and news articles. J.W. French included that she helped found the institution in the asylum's 1846 appeal for money in *The Daily Union*. At the centennial celebration in 1915, Blair Lee delivered a brief speech on the asylum's history in which he mentioned Madison's service as the first president of the Board of Managers. Other women who were managers for much longer and much more involved, such as Marcia Van Ness, who served for almost two decades and donated land to the institution, went unrecognized. This speaks to the importance of Madison in the institution's narrative. People outside the asylum also continued to connect Madison to the asylum. The *Independent Woman*, the official magazine of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, published an article in 1955 that briefly mentioned the institution and Madison's role in its founding.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> "Dolly Madison Unveiled," *National Republican*. (Washington City (D.C.), March 24, 1887. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. (Accessed December 3, 2015), <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053573/1887-03-24/ed-1/seq-1/>; "Unveiled by Mrs. Cleveland," *Fort Worth daily gazette*. (Fort Worth, Tex.) March 24, 1887. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. (Accessed December 3, 2015) <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86064205/1887-03-24/ed-1/seq-1/>; "Dolly Madison's Portrait," *St. Paul daily globe*. (Saint Paul, Minn.), 24 March 1887. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. (Accessed December 3, 2015) <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059522/1887-03-24/ed-1/seq-1/>; Mrs. John Kunkel to Elizabeth Blair Lee, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1887, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 226 and Folder 8, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Efforts to actively involve the first lady, as well as the president, with the institution did not end with Elizabeth Monroe's brief and unfulfilled tenure as first directress. The association between the executive branch and the institution was likely never as strong as it was during the days of Dolley Madison and Andrew Jackson. President Andrew Johnson was invited to attend the ceremony to lay the cornerstone for the asylum's new building in 1865, but declined when duties prevented him from doing so. The executive branch was not wholly unrepresented, as Johnson's Secretary of Interior James Harlan attended and delivered a speech, one in which he played the true politician and spoke about foreign relations in the context of helping orphans. Frances Cleveland, wife of President Grover Cleveland, was given the honor of unveiling Madison's portrait at the 1887 event.<sup>57</sup> In 1926, Grace Coolidge, wife of President Calvin Coolidge, participated in a groundbreaking ceremony for the asylum's new building on Nebraska Avenue. In the managerial records concerning the event, someone wrote, "The affair was quite informal, the children singing very sweetly, and Mrs. Coolidge endearing herself to them by her charming manner and proving that the second of our Presidents' wives to be interested in the Home is a delightful successor to the first one, Mrs. James Madison." Even a hundred years later, the asylum remembered and wished to be associated with Dolley Madison.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> "Washington City Orphan Asylum," *The daily union*. (Washington [D.C.]), 26 Dec. 1846. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82003410/1846-12-26/ed-1/seq-1/>>; "Home Was Opened Hundred Years Ago," *Evening Star*, October 17, 1915, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1915-10-17/ed-1/seq-3.pdf>.; "This is a Religious Nation" Volume 34, No. 8, August 1955. It's the official magazine of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs.

<sup>57</sup> "Laying the Corner-Stone of the Washington City Orphan Asylum," *Daily national Republican*. (Washington, D.C.), July 14, 1865. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053570/1865-07-14/ed-1/seq-1/>>.

<sup>58</sup> Container 34, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

## Political Indentures

The Washington City Orphan Asylum counted the nation's politicians as its benefactors, its petitioners, its allies, and even its trustees. For some of the asylum's children, politicians fulfilled a final role: guardian. More than one politician at the federal level took a child from the institution to live with their family. Serving as the political center for the nation resulted in a somewhat transitory population for Washington. Senators and congressmen moved to town, often returning to their home states and districts after they fulfilled their time of civic service. Politicians shifted positions, moving from posts that stationed them in the District of Columbia, such as cabinet seats, to ones that relocated them elsewhere, such as governorships. Some of these politicians who took children experienced a change in office that resulted in a change in location, and when they moved they took the asylum's children with them.

In one of the rare occurrences where the asylum placed siblings together, General Peter Buell Porter and Letitia Breckinridge Grayson Porter took into their family the Mace sisters, Mary Ann and Martha, in February 1829. Peter Buell Porter occupied many public roles, aligning himself initially with the Democratic-Republican Party but later helping create the Whig Party along with friend Henry Clay. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1809 to 1813. He served in the militia during the War of 1812 and was elevated to the rank of major general. Returning to Congress following the war, he resigned in 1816 to become New York's Secretary of the State. At the time of his indenture of Mary Ann and Martha Mace, he was serving as John Quincy Adams's Secretary of War. A month after the asylum permitted the Mace sisters' removal, Porter left his cabinet position as Adams's presidency had come to an end. Sometime after that, the Porters moved to Black Rock, New York, the general's home since 1810. Sixteen-year-old Mary Ann and thirteen-year-old Martha traveled with them. Martha Mace, at least, appears to have stayed in the Black Rock area after leaving the Porters'

household. The 1860 Census of Buffalo, New York reported a forty-year-old domestic worker originally from Washington, D.C. named Martha Mace, living in the household of George Talbot, a Justice of the Peace.<sup>59</sup>

Thomas Lyon Hamer, a representative from Ohio, took more than one child from the orphanage. Hamer, a Democrat, joined Congress in 1833 and served until 1839. He was intimately connected to the Grant family, and as one of Ohio's congressmen wrote the letter recommending the family's son, Hiram Ulysses Grant, to enter West Point in 1839. Hamer filled out the recommendation erroneously, writing "Ulysses S. Grant" based on the young man's nickname and his mother's maiden name. The future general and president's name was thus changed permanently. Hamer later went on to serve as a brigadier general in the Mexican-American War, dying from an illness December 3, 1846. Grant wrote in his memoirs that if Hamer had lived, he believed he would have been elected president in 1852 instead of Franklin Pierce.<sup>60</sup>

Eliza Hicks was the first child that went to live with Hamer in March 1837. The managers recorded that Hamer, "a member of Congress from Ohio, [. . .] promised to bring her up well [and] attend to her education."<sup>61</sup> In April 1838, Hamer applied to take two more children from the institution, a boy and a girl. The managers agreed in July 1838 to let him take Edward

---

<sup>59</sup> Containers 34 and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the Peter B. Porter Papers in the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society," Buffalo and Erie County Historical, 1968, (Accessed September 15, 2015), <http://www.buffalohistory.org/docs/3bb4ff10-2e49-4316-9f3b-322c328f389f.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau. 1860 Census of Population, Erie County, (accessed January 13, 2016), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>

<sup>60</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 11-12. Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 24-25, 64-65; Carey S. Bliss, Harriet McLoone, Virginia Rust and David Mike Hamilton, "Intramuralia: Books and People," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Aug., 1977), pp. 373-380 (University of California Press) (Accessed September 15, 2015) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3817359>.

<sup>61</sup> Containers 34 and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

Towers, and possibly agreed to Matilda Luxon leaving as well, though records do not state conclusively. Hamer's term in Congress ended the next year in 1839. It is not clear whether the children left the city with Hamer upon the expiration of his service. The asylum does not record them reentering the institution, so it is probable. It is also possible that they came of age while in his service, though without birthdates for the children it cannot be determined. The managers list Hamer's residence as "Ohio," likely indicating that the children would soon travel to the politician's home state.<sup>62</sup>

In 1845, Christina McDonald Dodge, the wife of Governor Henry Dodge of Wisconsin, applied for and was granted permission to take Anne Gibson, a child who had lived in the orphanage since 1841. Henry Dodge, appointed by Andrew Jackson, had served as the first governor of the Wisconsin Territory, beginning his term in 1836 when the territory organized. From 1841 until April 1845 he represented the territory in Congress, after which he returned to the post of governor. As with the Porters, the Dodges took Anne Gibson from the orphanage approximately the same time the patriarch left his political office and the family subsequently departed to another region of the United States. The managers listed "Wisconsin" as the Dodge family's residence, meaning they knew that the Dodges were not permanent residents of the east coast. Given the timing of Gibson's departure from the orphanage, and Dodge's return to Wisconsin, she probably traveled with them. This is further affirmed by the fact that the orphanage did not receive Gibson back. Three years after returning to Wisconsin, Dodge was elected to the United States Senate by the newly formed state of Wisconsin. Records do not indicate if Gibson returned to the District of Columbia with the Dodges in 1848.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Containers 34 and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Bliss, McLoone, Rust and Hamilton, "Intramuralia: Books and People," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 373-380.

<sup>63</sup> *The Scotch-Irish in America: Proceedings and Addresses of the Fourth Congress, at Atlanta, GA., April 28 to May 1, 1892* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1892), 115; S.U.

Another child indentured to the family of a national politician was Louisa China. China was indentured to John A. and Mary S. Logan from Illinois in February 1861. Logan was a Democrat from Illinois serving in the House of Representatives. The Logans traveled to Washington from Benton, Illinois when Logan was elected to Congress in 1858. China, a full orphan, was approximately nine-years-old when she departed the orphanage. She left her sister Martina China behind, who was indentured just a month later. Logan resigned from his political position in August 1861 after the outbreak of the Civil War to enter the Union army. The Logans left Washington, and China almost certainly traveled with them to Illinois. She stayed with them for several years before Mary S. Logan wrote the asylum in July 1867, requesting that they allow her to transfer China's indenture to someone else. The Logan family had returned to Washington earlier that year upon Logan's reelection to Congress, this time as a Republican. Managerial records do not state why Logan wished to transfer China, or if the asylum granted her request.<sup>64</sup>

Mrs. James Harlan requested to take a child in July 1877. Her husband was the same Harlan who, when Secretary of Interior, delivered an address on behalf of the asylum in 1865.<sup>65</sup> He also served as a United States Senator from Iowa from 1855 to 1865 and 1867 to 1873.<sup>66</sup> The board noted that Mrs. Harlan was an "invalid" and spoke of "her home in the West," most likely meaning Iowa. Managers Adelaide J. Brown and Emma H. Gilman were appointed to investigate, and the managers decided to place fourteen-year-old Maria Goddard with the Harlans. Goddard stayed with the Harlans for only a week, because, though the family liked her,

---

Pinney, "Eulogy on Gen. Henry Dodge," 1868, Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, v. 5, 173, Wisconsin Historical Society, <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/edm/compoundobject/collection/whc/id/1220/show/946/rec/2>; Containers 34 and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>64</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Mary S. Logan (Mrs. John A. Logan), *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife, an Autobiography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916).

<sup>65</sup> Containers 32 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center.

<sup>66</sup> Robert C. Byrd, Wendy Wolff, ed., *The Senate 1789-1989 Historical Statistics 1789-1992* vol. 4, bicentennial edition, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993),107.

she was “slightly deaf.” They requested to take another girl, which the board “positively declined” quite possibly because the reason for and speed with which the Harlans brought back Goddard.<sup>67</sup>

As with Thomas Lyon Hamer, David Wyatt Aiken took more than one child from the home at separate times. A former Confederate colonel from South Carolina, Aiken served in the United States’ House of Representatives from 1877 to 1887. The first child to leave with Aiken was thirteen-year-old Louisa Lusby in March 1881. The occupation written on her indenture was “general housework.” The indenture proved problematic. Though the managers’ records do not include all the details, it appears that Aiken, rather than readmitting Lusby to the institution, arranged to have her transferred to Mr. Laws in South Carolina. Lusby returned to the asylum approximately a month after living with Mr. Laws. A year after taking Lusby, in April 1882, the board decided to place another thirteen-year-old, Lizzie Walter, with Aiken as well, also to learn housekeeping, though they deferred her placement until she finished that session of school. Walter lived with Aiken for at least four-and-a-half years. Aiken wrote Elizabeth Blair Lee in August 1886 about the conclusion of Walter’s indenture to ensure his obligations involved no more than paying her the agreed upon \$50 and releasing her from his household. Aiken assured Lee that Walter “ha[d] been almost entirely satisfactory” and was “in perfect health and ha[d] not been sick a day” during her apprenticeship. He believed Walter was anxious to go back to the District of Columbia, informing Lee that the child had been in contact with her mother for almost a year.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Containers 41 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>68</sup> “The David Wyatt Aiken Papers, 1849-1976,” University of South Carolina, (Accessed December 15, 2015), <http://library.sc.edu/digital/collections/aiken.html>; Containers, 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; D. Wyatt Aiken to Elizabeth Blair Lee, August 14, 1886, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 224 and Folder 1, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

A final political family that removed children from the orphanage was that of Willard and Annie Saulsbury. Saulsbury served as a United States Senator from Delaware from 1859 to 1871, until he lost in an election to his older brother, Eli Saulsbury. Their oldest brother, Gove Saulsbury, was also a candidate in the election. Saulsbury then served as the Chancellor of Delaware, the head of Delaware's Court of Chancery, from 1873 to 1892. The first child to live with the Saulsburys was Lucy Harding, who was indentured to them in 1866 at ten-years-old to learn housekeeping. Harding stayed with the family at least until she was 24, appearing under the categorization of "servant" in their household in the 1880 census. Annie Saulsbury was pleased enough with Harding to ask for another girl to help with the housekeeping in 1871. The asylum indentured twelve-year-old Maggie Newman to the family. She likewise appears as a servant in the family in the 1880 census, at the age of nineteen. The asylum recorded sending two other children, thirteen-year-old Maggie Tyler and fourteen-year-old Annie Goener, to live with "Mrs. Saulsbury in Delaware" in October 1881. Records do not specify that it was the family of Willard and Annie Saulsbury, though it is perhaps a logical conclusion. Another possibility is that the two girls went to live with the family of one of Willard Saulsbury's two brothers.<sup>69</sup>

One of the perplexing aspects of the Saulsburys' indenture of children from the asylum was Willard Saulsbury's known problem with alcohol. During a Senate filibuster in 1863, an intoxicated Saulsbury railed against President Abraham Lincoln, and when Vice President Hannibal Hamlin's demands for him to desist and sit down failed, Hamlin ordered the sergeant-at-arms to arrest him. Saulsbury responded by drawing his pistol and threatening to shoot the sergeant-at-arms. Saulsbury issued an apology a couple days later, and was allowed to keep his

---

<sup>69</sup> Richard A. Baker, *200 Notable Days: Senate Stories 1787 to 2002* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006), 77; Containers 36, 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Willard Saulsbury (1820-1892)," Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections, (Accessed January 15, 2016); U.S. Census Bureau. 1880 Census of Population, Kent County, (accessed January 13, 2016), <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>

seat. His alcoholism remained a problem, and is supposedly one of the reasons the Delaware electorate opted to send one of his brothers to Congress in 1871. No record indicates that the asylum was aware of Saulsbury's condition, but given the atmosphere of Washington, and the political connections of the people who ran the institution, it is likely they knew. Anecdotes of his public intoxication were printed in newspapers as far as San Antonio, Texas. Nevertheless, the asylum's managers agreed to indenture at least two children, and maybe more to the Saulsbury family. Alcohol was one of the factors that would induce the managers to remove children from families, and kept them from returning children to parents. If they knew about Saulsbury's condition, and still allowed the family to take children, that action would complicate the managers' views worthiness in relation to alcohol.<sup>70</sup>

As with most families that took children from the orphanage, these political families did so through an indenture and not an adoption. These orphans were not treated as biological children, performing the roles of true family members such as becoming heirs and part of the family's legacy. The level of personal affection between the children and the families that took them, except in the cases of Lizzie Walter and Lucy Harding, is unknown. Even in these particular cases, the asylum's records only indicate that the guardians were pleased with the children, but did not mention Walter's feelings towards the Aikens or Harding's towards the Saulsburys. Mary S. Logan wrote an autobiography, focused on her position as the wife of a soldier, including the time during which Louisa China lived with her family. Logan does not mention China, or even the Washington City Orphan Asylum. The absence of China in her life story indicates the place the indentured orphan had within the Logan household, one as servant rather than adopted daughter. Logan's desire to return China to the institution hints at discord

---

<sup>70</sup> "Expulsion of Senator Saulsbury," *Farmer's Cabinet* (Amherst, New Hampshire), February 2, 1863; "All in the Family," *San Antonio Express*, April 2, 1871.

between the child and the family, though her request may have stemmed from different circumstances. The other children are likewise absent from the records of the Porter, Dodge, Hamer, Aiken, and Saulsbury families, indicating that they did not become like children within the family. Martha Mace's appearance in the census records as an adult working as a domestic, and Lucy Harding and Maggie Newman as servants, further indicates that these children were treated along the lines of an indenture rather than an adoption.

### **National Admission**

For two children, the orphanage's location in the nation's capital played a crucial role in their admission. If the orphanage were not located in the same city as Congress, Helen and Susan Heloise Fitzpatrick would most likely not have lived there.<sup>71</sup> The two girls, approximately three and five years old, were traveling by wagon in Denton County, Texas in 1868 when members of the Kiowa tribe captured their family. Their parents were killed, and the girls lived with the Indians until Colonel J.H. Leavenworth, a United States Indian agent, secured their release. As Leavenworth could not locate any family members to take them, he decided to bring them to Washington with the intention of petitioning Congress for money for their support.<sup>72</sup>

While doing so, he placed them in the Washington City Orphan Asylum. His mission was successful, and Congress granted each girl \$2500 to be taken from the funds appropriated to the Kiowa. Congress also declared that United States money would be withheld from any tribe holding Americans as captives. As Congress believed the girls' names were unknown, they also

---

<sup>71</sup> The names under which the sisters appear in various records include: Malinda Alice and Susan Fitzpatrick, Matilda Alice and Susan Fitzpatrick, Ellen and Eloise Lincoln, Helen and Heloise Lincoln.

<sup>72</sup> Stan Hoig and W.S. Nye, *The Kiowas and the Legend of Kicking Bird*, (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 124; Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Joint Resolution for the Relief of Helen Lincoln and Heloise Lincoln, and for the Withholding of Moneys from Tribes of Indians holding American Captives," *US Statutes at Large* 41 (1870), 377.

changed their names to Helen and Heloise Lincoln. How the managers learned and assigned the name “Fitzpatrick” to the two girls is uncertain, though it is possible the girls, or Leavenworth, told them that was their last name. While Leavenworth meant the placement to be temporary, the children ended up staying in orphanage for years before Susie Fitzpatrick left for an indenture and Helen Fitzpatrick left for boarding school. The money from Congress was the reason the latter was able to attend Reverend J.H. Turner’s seminary school in Burkittsville, Maryland.<sup>73</sup>

### **Political Lines**

The orphanage’s political connections generally did not fall along political lines. In the beginning years, the asylum’s board included not only Dolley Madison, whose husband was a Democratic-Republican, but also her friend Ann Tayloe, who was married to John Tayloe III, a Federalist. Their son Benjamin Ogle Tayloe, who served as an asylum trustee, was associated with the Whig party in the 1840s and 1850s. The asylum benefited from Jackson and Van Buren, who were Democrats, and from Zachary Taylor who was a Whig. Louisa Catherine Adams, wife of Whig husband John Quincy Adams, who later served as president, was on the Board of Managers from 1819 to 1821. Even the politicians who took children from the orphanage represented a variety of political leanings. Peter Buell Porter was a Whig. Thomas Lyon Hamer and Henry Dodge were Democrats. John A. Logan and David Wyatt Aiken were both Democrats at the time they took children, but Logan served as a general in the Union army in the Civil War, and soon thereafter joined the Republican Party. Aiken took children from the orphanage after he served as a Confederate general.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> “Joint Resolution for the Relief of Helen Lincoln and Heloise Lincoln, and for the Withholding of Moneys from Tribes of Indians holding American Captives,” 377; “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1878,” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), 501.

Sometimes the conflicting interests represented in the asylum created tension. Likely no period of political discord was greater than during the Civil War, when the asylum straddled both sides of the conflict. The war affected most Americans, but in some ways the city of Washington was particularly situated to feel the effects of the war. Though some southern politicians left the national government as their states seceded from the Union, the Confederate interest remained represented by Washington citizens who held pro-secessionist tendencies. The divide between Union and Confederate permeated the Washington City Orphan Asylum, creating conflict between the managers as well as influencing their opinions about which children to accept and which to decline admission.

Perhaps the greatest conflict during the Civil War came between two members of the Board of Managers, Elizabeth Blair Lee and Mary Wickliffe Merrick. In some ways their relationship mirrored the difficulties found in the federal government, as President Abraham Lincoln's administration dealt with lingering Democrats appointed in earlier decades who harbored pro-Confederate feelings.<sup>75</sup> Lee was staunchly Unionist while Merrick retained pro-secessionist sentiments, but circumstances meant they both continued to serve on the board. Lee's husband was gone for the entirety of the war serving in the Union navy. Her brother, Francis Preston Blair, Jr., was a general in the Union army. Merrick was married to William M. Merrick, a United States Circuit Court judge whose pro-secessionist sympathies rankled the Lincoln administration and resulted in Secretary of State William H. Seward having him put temporarily under surveillance. Merrick's opposition eventually contributed to Lincoln

---

<sup>74</sup> Benjamin Ogle Tayloe, *In Memoriam: Benjamin Ogle Tayloe*, comp. Winslow Marston Watson (Washington: Philadelphia, Sherman & Co., Printers), 24; Allgor, "Queen Dolley," 65.

<sup>75</sup> Jonathan W. White, "'Sweltering with Treason': The Civil War Trials of William Matthew Merrick," *Prologue Magazine*, 39, no. 2 (Summer 2007), (Accessed January 5, 2016), <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2007/summer/merrick.html>

restructuring the court system so as to appoint more pro-Union judges. Mary Merrick's biological family was also pro-Confederate, and her brothers fought for the Confederate army.<sup>76</sup>

Elizabeth Blair Lee assured her husband in a letter marked July 7, 1863 that she and Merrick "never talk[ed] politics," but nevertheless her letters cited several occasions of disagreement between the two.<sup>77</sup> Lee had written the admiral just a few months before that Merrick was "a trying Secesh."<sup>78</sup> The two made snide remarks to one another about developments in the war, such as Merrick to Lee about the Emancipation Proclamation in October 1862 and Lee to Merrick after the fall of the Confederate capital, Richmond, Virginia, to Union forces in April 1865.<sup>79</sup> When an African-American woman in April 1863 came to request her children's admission to the institution, Lee stated that Merrick, "dreading [Lee's] abolitionism," interjected that the decision belonged to the admissions committee. After the woman departed, Lee tauntingly told the room that had it not been for Merrick's interruption, they could have declined admission immediately, as the asylum did not accept African-American children, but Merrick seemed to want to consider the case. As she told her husband, Lee believed she "got the better of Secesh that time." Later in the meeting, Merrick sought retribution in saying that her brother, a member of Confederate General Braxton Bragg's army, had said "that the Rebellion would have ended a year ago but for the courage and fortitude of the Southern women."<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Virginia Jeans Laas, ed., *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, (1999), 469; White, "Sweltering with Treason."

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, July 7, 1863, as quoted in Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 285-286.

<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, May 26, 1863, as quoted in Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 270-1; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "secesh," accessed January 15, 2016, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/view/Entry/174472?redirectedFrom=secesh#eid>.

<sup>79</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, October 10, 1862, Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 190; Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, April 4, 1865, Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 489-490.

Despite the conflict and disagreement between them, Lee still regarded Merrick as a valued member of the Board, desiring to use her talents for the asylum's benefit as well as wishing for her well being. In February 1863, she commended Merrick for being among three managers who attended to the institution when several children had smallpox, calling them "heroines."<sup>81</sup> In May 1863, the Merrick family moved to Baltimore following Merrick's loss of his judicial seat when Congress abolished the District of Columbia Circuit Court. Mary Merrick resolved to quit the asylum, due to the distance, but Lee argued that she should stay, especially as Lee managed the distance from Maryland as well. Lee was relieved when Merrick agreed, stating, "indeed we are really friends."<sup>82</sup> The two found common ground on the stresses of war, even if it was from opposing sides. More than just having loved ones fight on opposing sides of the conflict, and supporting countering positions, Merrick and Lee had brothers on opposite sides of the same battle. In January 1863, Lee wrote that the asylum had received several donations. She recollected, "there Mary Merrick & I sat in charity & kindness when our Brothers are in mortal combat at Vicksburg."<sup>83</sup> The two were once again together in July 1863, shopping for mattresses for the asylum, when news broke that the Union army had taken Vicksburg. Unlike other moments of tension, the news of Vicksburg did not inspire barbed comments but rather a moment of relative camaraderie. Lee reflected on the moment:

I bought the paper & whilst I was getting the money, she read to me Porters dispatch with a firm voice -- two of her brothers were inside & mine is outside of that town. We never talk politics & I believe together in perfect kindness She

---

<sup>80</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, April 8, 1863, as quoted in Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 256-7.

<sup>81</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, February 11, 1863, as quoted in Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 239-240.

<sup>82</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, August 5, 1863, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 77 and Folder 1, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, January 6, 1863, as quoted in Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 227-8.

looked at me with a quiet sadness when my heart overflowed in thankfulness -- and only remarked 'Oh the Sea of blood this dreadful war has cost. she may have said -- will cost.'<sup>84</sup>

At times, the war influenced Lee's feelings as to which children to accept and which to decline. Her ideas, and perhaps those of other managers, about "deserving" temporarily expanded to include not only the financial and moral position of the parents, but also the political. Lee expressed the belief that the institution should show discernment in accepting the children of Confederate parents. She remembered her vow to accept all orphans under the age of seven years, no matter the stance of their parents in the country's bitter war. Older children, though, Lee considered different, and wrote to her husband that she was "'called very cold-hearted'" because of her stance. It remained her belief that doing so would aid the Confederate cause, stating, "'I have no idea of aiding Secesh & giving them any help to make more widows & orphans among us -- . . . .'"<sup>85</sup> Previously, on November 17, 1862, Lee had written her husband about accepting the daughter of a Confederate soldier. The father was killed in the war and the mother was also dead. Lee, most likely jokingly, wrote that she would "'call it Secessia,'" due to her origins.<sup>86</sup>

No example exists of the managers carrying through on Lee's beliefs concerning Confederate children. The cases above show that they accepted children from both side of the war. In his speech celebrating the institution's one-hundredth anniversary, Lee's son Blair Lee praised the institution's ability to transcend state and sectional lines, making it truly "national." Lee stated about the home during the Civil War, "Soldiers' orphans from both the north and the

---

<sup>84</sup> Lee to Lee, July 7, 1863, as quoted in *Wartime Washington*, 285-6.

<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, March 19, 1863, as quoted in Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 253.

<sup>86</sup> Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, November 17, 1862, as quoted in Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 229.

south were taken and protected here. I say it is a national institution because no state line has limited its benevolence, and no sectional division interfered with its Christian service.”<sup>87</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The geographic location of the Washington City Orphan Asylum in the nation’s capital positioned it to form an intimate relationship with the federal government, one that manifested in financial support, political alliances, leaders for the Board of Managers and the Board of Trustees, and guardians for the institution’s children. The asylum, which counted as one of its founders one of the most popular first ladies in United States history, had intermittent support or at least participation from the executive branch into the beginning of the twentieth century. The institution was the first asylum in the nation to apply for congressional support in the form of incorporation and land grants. It, along with St. Vincent’s and the Female Orphan Asylum of Georgetown, were the first orphanages to receive support, triggering a long and somewhat complicated relationship between the legislative branch and the District’s institutions for children. They were likely the first asylums of any form to be incorporated by Congress. This support from Congress was brought about in part from the political connections of the people running the orphanage, networks that they worked to maintain over the decades through invitations to politicians and the continual usage of the image of Dolley Madison.

From some of the asylum’s children, the institution’s political connectedness meant more than Christmas visits from Andrew Jackson and trips to see the decorations for the inaugural balls. For a dozen or so children, the institution’s location in the nation’s capital meant they spent some of their formative years in the homes of senators, governors, and cabinet members. Some

---

<sup>87</sup> “Home Was Opened Hundred Years Ago,” Washington, D.C., *Evening Star*, October 17, 1915, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1915-10-17/ed-1/seq-3.pdf>.

of these children even left the District of Columbia with these politicians. Their stories may have ended happily enough. Lucy Harding married James Brady, had one daughter, and remained in Delaware during her adulthood; she indicated her happiness in a letter to the institution in 1911.<sup>88</sup> Records fall silent in regard to the other children. Either way, these children were not adopted but worked rather as servants and apprentices. Though the professions of their guardian may have set them apart from the institution's other children, their stories in most other ways were along the same narrative.

---

<sup>88</sup> Container 3, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## CONCLUSION

The story of the Washington City Orphan Asylum is really many stories. It is the story of Ann Flinn, who entered in May 28, 1827 at the age of five. Her mother, also named Ann, relinquished her to the asylum. Neither the managers nor Flinn knew much about her father, except that he was of Irish ancestry. The asylum bound Flinn out to John and Isabella Magee in 1831, who took her to live with them in Bath, New York. The managers had originally chosen Elizabeth Bevans to go with Magees, but the family wished to take Flinn instead, and the managers agreed. Flinn stayed with the Magee family until 1837, ending her indenture two years early. She married a man named Mr. Gross from Pennsylvania and later told the institution that Isabella Magee “treated and educated her as her own child.”<sup>1</sup>

It is the story of James, John “Jack”, and Margaret Motto, who entered the institution in 1859 at ages eight, four, and seventeen months. Their mother had died and their father, who was sick, promised the board he would try to provide some money for their support. He lived in the poorhouse, at least for a while. In July 1860, Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Curtis adopted Margaret, taking the two-and-a-half year old with them to their home in Keokuk, Iowa. In 1861, James was indentured to Mr. Griffin, a Washington tailor, who later took him to Indiana. In 1862, Jack was also sent to live with a family in Indiana.<sup>2</sup>

It is the story of Anna Schaumberg, admitted in April 1874 at the age of six or seven at her mother’s request. Her mother asked to remove her the following year, but the managers refused until she brought her husband to speak with them, possibly because they wanted confirmation of her capability to care for the child. The reunion did not happen, at least not

---

<sup>1</sup> Containers 2, 34, and 36, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

permanently. Anna, also called Annie, was adopted by the Osborns, who later placed her with another family, without consulting the managers, a home where she was obligated to care for another child and did not receive the education promised her.<sup>3</sup>

It is the story of Virginia Saddler, a widow who admitted two of her five children, seven-year-old John and four-year-old Mary Catherine “Katie,” in March 1877. Saddler’s husband was a sailor who died in the course of his job. She received \$14 a month from his pension, insufficient funds to care for herself and her children, pay for her husband’s funeral, and cover other expenses such as debts. The Saddler family also received some support from the Ladies of Christ Church and the Capitol Hill Aid Society. Saddler came before the board at the request of Rae Stelle and Alice Gurmand. In August of the next year, Saddler was able to remove her children.<sup>4</sup>

It is the story of Amelia R. Charles, who came to work at the asylum in 1873 as a teacher. She was recommended by John Dike, J.K. Crosby, and her brother R.A. Charles, who was the teacher at the institution’s Sabbath School. Charles stayed with the institution for years, possibly decades, and likely never married. She often stepped into other roles, such as matron, when needed, and also witnessed the signing of indenture contracts. She used her position at the asylum to suggest new curriculum, such as implementing a kindergarten program. Charles also vouched for the institution when Mary Cowen made accusations against the matron Harriet J. Wright.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Containers 36 and 44, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Containers 41, 44, and 45, records of the Hillcrest Children’s Center; “Washington City Orphan Asylum: The Investigation Over,” *Evening star*. (Washington, D.C.), 17 March 1881. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1881-03-17/ed-1/seq-4/>>.

It is also the story of Mary Kittridge Hazeltine Emery, a well-educated native of New Hampshire who joined the Board of Managers in 1874 and served until her death in 1903. Emery made reform her calling; she was active in the Ladies' Association, the Methodist Home for the Aged, the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Societies of the Metropolitan Methodist Episcopal Church, and helped found Washington's Garfield Hospital. She was also married to Matthew G. Emery—an architect, builder, banker, and mayor of Washington from 1870 to 1871—with whom she had four children, two of which she outlived.<sup>6</sup>

One of this work's goals has been to restore the stories of some people previously lost in the historical record. Not every child's story has been included, but I have tried my best to cover the spectrum of experiences. For better or for worse, the Washington City Orphan Asylum played a role in the life of every child who walked through its doors. In its construction, its management, its financial backing, and all the other aspects of its existence, the institution illuminates nineteenth-century Washington and American society. It shows the mentality, motivation, and need behind social welfare, as well as its complicated relationship with politics. It highlights the importance of a social institution's network and system of support. It shows the ways in which an institution shapes its environment and is in turn shaped by its environment. It exemplifies the power of religion and illustrates the tension between public and private. It is a story of agency, citizenship, and conflicting priorities.

With the majority of the children entering the institution having one or two living parents, the asylum illuminates the circumstances that lead families to relinquish their children to strangers. Often within the admissions process there was heartbreak and hard decisions. Records reveal the ravages of poverty, illness, alcoholism, abuse, and death. Some parents found

---

<sup>6</sup> Container 44, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; William Van Zandt Cox, *Biography of Matthew Gault Emery: With an Account of the Tribute to His Memory and a Sketch of Mrs. Matthew G. Emery* (Washington, 1904), 6-14; 80-1; 85-98.

themselves choosing which of their children to keep and which to let go. Many families came to the asylum's door because of the death of the husband or the wife, which deprived the family of financial support or the primary source of childcare. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings, and friends stepped up to care for the children, sometimes to find they were also unable to do so. Some misunderstood the terms of their children's admission, and were devastated and angered when they learned their child had been placed out. Families were not completely powerless or hopeless, though, and many fought their circumstances, and at times the managers, to make their families whole again.

Not all children in the institution were considered or treated equally—the world of social welfare worked according to economics and perceptions of merit. In deciding a case, the managers prioritized full orphans. If a family had one or two living parents they weighed the family's circumstances as justification for admittance. They judged the family's ability to care for their children, among other variables such as age. Though many applications were approved, some were not. Children whose legitimacy was questioned had no hope of admission. Once children were in the institution, their position could likewise be affected by money and the managers' determination of their potential. Children that had financial resources from family or societies like the Odd Fellows had access to educational opportunities often denied to others. Likewise children that the managers deemed worthy, who proved themselves capable and deserving of investment, sometimes received more support from the managers than others.

The children's lives in the institution show the value placed on a specific type of education and environment for dependent children living in asylums. The managers designed curriculum to teach the children educational basics like reading and writing, abilities that, especially in the asylum's earliest years, may have set the children apart from their parents. They also instructed them in skills like sewing. The managers wanted close control over the children's

interactions with the outside world, and restricted their trips outside of the institution and their visits from relatives, particularly as the century progressed.

The institution also shows the ways that some dependent children, often placed in situations without their consent, found ways to exert their power. Sometimes they did so with the collaboration and approval of the managers. They offered opinions on their indenture and adoption placements, even at times causing managers to reject potential contracts. They asked for particular educational training or indicated which career path they wished for their futures. In a few cases they even requested their own admission. At other times they worked against the managers. They used their behavior as a tool for defiance and a means to obtain desired objects. They ran away to reunite with families or find a situation they believed would be better.

The asylum shows the complicated nature of indentures and adoptions, especially in a period without firm adoption laws and professionalized practices for investigating placements. The managers used the institution's incorporation and the parents' relinquishment of their children as justification for placing children in homes. Having the children leave in indentures or adoptions was their ultimate goal; they believed the best thing for a child was placement in a home where they could receive proper care and learn a skill useful for their future. Yet at times the managers' betrayed their own philosophy, indicating that they believed children who had been sent out of the institution would prove a corrupting influence to the other children if they were to return. The managers, the children, and the applicants all had expectations for the characteristics of the placement. Some indentures and adoptions worked out well. Others went very poorly.

There were several moments in the asylum's history that showed the managers' prioritization of the institution as a whole over its individuals. Within this mentality was the hard truth that at times social welfare comes at a cost in some areas, especially in light of limited

resources. In at least one instance they removed a child to the almshouse because they believed her persisting illness a threat to the others. If they required a child's labor within the institution, they might remove her from the schoolroom or keep her from leaving in an indenture or adoption. Rather than looking for placements where siblings could go together, they separated brothers and sisters. They removed children to reform institutions if they believed them too troublesome and or a danger to the others. They fired workers, even ones that they thought of highly, if they believed they proved a risk to the asylum's welfare.

The asylum was an institution managed by some of the most powerful, famous, and richest women in the nation. Like many social institutions, the Washington City Orphan Asylum's managers included women in the middle and upper class. Unlike many other institutions, several women on the Board of Managers were politically connected at the federal level and not just the state or local. They used their local and national political connections to their advantage, not only in their search for funding and incorporation but also in placing the asylum's children in homes. The women on the Board of Managers found opportunity in the Washington City Orphan Asylum to be active and find personal fulfillment. For the tasks they could not perform, they relied on the all male Board of Trustees. The moments of conflict within the Board of Managers and between them and the Board of Trustees exemplifies gender politics of the nineteenth century as well as the ambition of individual personalities in the work of social reform.

The institution's records offer a somewhat limited yet intimate look at the interactions between the people who managed the asylum and the employees that oversaw its daily functions, a complicated and enlightening dynamic. Often the asylum's employees felt comfortable in speaking their minds and acting according to their own discretion, but always under the tacit or explicit approval from the managers. The managers generally valued the women who worked for

them, understanding their role within the institution. Some of the orphanage's employees, especially the matrons and the teachers, formed close relationships with the managers. Other relationships were hostile and tense. At times, the managers allowed women working at the institution to bring and keep their own children in the asylum, an action that complicated the standard separation of children from their parents and also spoke to the managers' willingness to help a family as a whole.

The asylum at its core was a complicated network, one in which the many actors bargained for what they wanted or needed and relied on others to provide support in achieving their goals. The institution's community shows that the world of Washington reform was not one confined to those managing an institution and those entering it, but had a much broader reach. Families often turned to neighbors, friends, ministers, and employers to vouch for their need-based merit in admitting children to the institution. When they wished to remove their children, they might rely on these same types of people to testify that their circumstances had changed. People who wished to take a child in an indenture or adoption contract likewise counted on people in their personal lives to attest to their character and ability to care for a child. At times, the managers and trustees personally knew the people admitting or removing children, and served as references themselves. In doing so, they fulfilled more than one role in the asylum's vast network. In a time before professionalization, when social welfare decisions were based on trust and perception, the managers relied on these recommendations in making choices that greatly altered children's and families' lives.

The people managing the institution relied on others for support, financial as well as taking children from the asylum. The functionality of the orphanage depended on adequate resources and the removal of some its children, especially the older ones, so that they could admit more. The asylum depended also on the other institutions in the District of Columbia, and

on occasion outside of it, to help them care for their children. They sent children who misbehaved to reform schools. They entrusted ones that were seriously ill to the overseers of the poor or the Children's Hospital, depending on the point in the asylum's history. They collaborated with other institutions and aid societies to keep children in need of a place from becoming homeless and therefore at risk of delinquency. The managers and trustees occasionally looked to other institutions along the eastern seaboard to glean ideas for how to better run their orphanage.

The asylum's history reveals the public nature of a private institution. The managers and trustees continuously connected their mission with public welfare, and targeted the citizens of Washington in their appeals for money. They argued that financial support of the institution was not an option but a responsibility. The institution's managers and trustees were not the only ones obligated to ensure that the city's orphaned children received care, education, and training; that duty belonged to everyone. They in turn positioned themselves as an institution with transparent management, framing the publication of their reports in terms of their obligation to the public. The seemingly private affairs of the asylum, ones that the management likely did not wish to have exposed, sometimes made it to public consumption through the city's newspapers, particularly when a former employee or parent of a child brought their real or perceived slights to the public for judgment.

The history of the Washington City Orphan Asylum shows the many practical problems of managing an institution in the nineteenth century. The managers and trustees struggled to find the requisite financial resources to keep the institution running successfully. Even though they might secure enough funds to feed, clothe, and educate the children, their carefully designed buildings presented costly problems. Repairs depleted asylum funds. Plumbing problems after the Civil War not only hurt the asylum financially, but created health issues for its residents. The

managers could hypothetically do all in their conscious power to ensure the health and safety of the institution's residents and still find themselves battling against the chronic problem of building repairs.

The influence of Protestantism in the institution's management speaks to the power of religion in Washington society. The managers wove Christianity into their rhetoric about their mission, expressing it both internally in their records and in their appeals to the public. The asylum counted Protestant churches in the District of Columbia and surrounding areas as part of their network. Ministers served on the Board of Trustees, their wives on the Board of Managers, they recommended families to admit or remove children, they took up special collections in their churches, and they delivered messages at the asylum's meetings. The managers included religious instruction in their educational program. They did not just want the children to grow up to be productive citizens, they wanted to them be productive Christian citizens.

The asylum's take on Catholicism is particularly revealing in terms of religion, presenting a slightly different narrative than existing historiography. The managers and trustees at times clashed with Catholic families and institutions, but they also worked with them. In general, the managers wished for children to receive care according to their religious background. They did not seek to proselytize Catholic children. Once a child was in the institution, however, they were reluctant to let them leave with anyone Catholic other than immediate family or to allow them to go to a Catholic institution. At times the institution worked against the city's Catholic institutions, but other times with them. They recognized the need for Catholic institutions in Washington and at times even looked to learn from them. Their treatment of Catholicism as a whole reflected a belief that people should be grouped according to their religion.

The orphanage shows the reciprocal relationship between a social institution and its environment; in the Washington City Orphan Asylum's case, this was with the city of Washington and the capital of the United States. Washington determined the type of people that managed the asylum and the ones who requested admission for their children. Its small size meant that many children left for indentures outside of the District. The orphanage was at the whim of forces that affected the city as a whole. The institution was founded in response to Washington's destruction during the War of 1812. The cholera epidemic of 1832 crippled the institution financially and prompted the managers to change their admission policies to include a wider range of people. The Civil War created more orphans as well as fostered political tensions that seeped into the Board of Managers. Yet the asylum also worked to shape their environment. They sought financial support from the city government and the federal government. In approaching the United States Congress for support they sparked a conversation about the relationship between social welfare and the federal government. They also started the long path towards federal support for multiple social institutions in the District of Columbia.

The orphanage also shows the concerted efforts behind historical memory and its use as a publicity tool. The people managing the institution took advantage of the famous figure of Dolley Madison and her short-lived but vital participation in the institution. They recalled her connection at asylum events, hailing her dedication and compassion, and hung a copy of her painting in the asylum's building decades after her service. They also sought to continue her legacy, as well as President Andrew Jackson's, and maintain the institution's connection to the executive branch of the federal government, a task which afforded them some success, but not as much as they likely hoped.

The outcomes of the children leaving the Washington City Orphan Asylum show the inconsistent results of the managers' mission. Some children had happy, successful lives. Others

encountered greater struggles and hardships. Some former residents' use of the orphanage as a means of support indicates a lingering form of connection, whether it was emotional or merely practical. The admission of former residents' own children into the institution indicates in some cases a persisting chain of difficult circumstances from one generation to the next.

The Washington City Orphan Asylum continued to house dependent children until the middle of the twentieth century. A brief survey of the asylum's history following 1890 indicates that many aspects of its earlier management remained constant but there were also changes keeping with larger shifts in child welfare. The institution's relationship with the federal government continued as an 1898 Act of Congress allotted the orphanage a certain amount of free water from the Potomac. The institution remained at 14<sup>th</sup> and S, where it moved in 1876, until 1927. As had been the cycle for the institution's structures, by the mid-1920s the asylum's buildings were in need of serious repairs. The dormitories that housed the boys were in such poor condition that the orphanage, in a reversal of their 1833 admissions policy change, stopped accepting boys. By 1924 the institution once again only housed girls. In 1926 the managers and trustees began construction on a new site further away from the city on Nebraska Avenue. As with their major construction projects of the nineteenth century, the relocation was made possible with funds from a wealthy benefactor. Edwin Gould—who was a businessman, philanthropist, and son of Gilded Age railroad tycoon Jay Gould—played a significant part in the asylum being able to relocate to new land and construct new buildings.<sup>7</sup>

When the asylum moved to its new location, it made a few significant changes, one of which fulfilled Jeanette B. Wright's wish to drop the term "asylum"—it changed its name to

---

<sup>7</sup> Containers 2 and 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; "Edwin Gould Dies Suddenly at 67: Son of Railroad Financier and Builder was Noted for Benefactions to Children: Left School for Finance: Made \$1,000,000 Profit Operating Alone in Wall Street Before Father Forgave Him," *New York Times* (1923-Current file); Jul 13, 1933; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times pg. 19.

Hillcrest Children's Village. The other alteration mirrored the change in name. The asylum shifted away from the institutional style of the nineteenth century and adopted a new form of childcare, the cottage system. The cottage system originated at the turn of the century and slowly grew in popularity among orphan asylums. It divided children into groups that lived in smaller buildings with more dedicated supervision and care, aimed to promote individuality in the children. Among the institution's cottages were Madison Cottage, Van Ness Cottage, and Gould Cottage, all names of important benefactors in the institution's history. For a while after moving they only housed boys under the age of six, but in 1940 reorganized some of the girls' cottages so that they could accept older boys as well.<sup>8</sup>

It seems that the shift to the cottage system was among other ways that the Washington City Orphan Asylum (which remained the institution's legal name) shifted to match twentieth-century ideas about how to care for dependent children. Someone connected to the asylum wrote a brief history of the orphanage in the 1940s. They noted that the managers had looked for ways to allow the children to express their uniqueness and creativity, a greater concern for homes for children at the beginning of the century. They abandoned their uniforms and created a museum in one of the cottages where the children could collect personal treasures. They held a fair every year to raise funds for the museum. The person writing the history also stated the general decline in demand for homes like theirs, pointing out the new forms of help to families such as mother's pensions. His or her statement proved prescient. In 1953, the orphanage shifted from housing

---

<sup>8</sup> Container 32, records of the Hillcrest Children's Center; Timothy A. Hacsí, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 148-149; Jeanette B. Wright to Elizabeth Blair Lee, September 22, 1884, Blair and Lee Family Papers, Box 228 and Folder 3; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library; Joseph Sullivan, "Hillcrest Children's Center: A Register of its Records in the Library of Congress," Finding Aid, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C., 2009), ii.

dependent children to acting as a non-residential facility offering treatment to children with emotional and mental health issues, a service it still provides as of 2017.<sup>9</sup>

The story of the Washington City Orphan Asylum in the nineteenth century presents challenges to its modern readers in regards to the contemporary treatment of children in need. The problem of dependent and displaced children persists into the twenty-first century; if history is any indication, it will continue to be an issue for generations to come. Several specific issues in the care of dependent children, as seen in the asylum's history, continue to be concerns. The managers worried over Washington's girls becoming prostitutes. In at least one case, one of the institution's former residents turned to prostitution while still in her teenage years. Maybe the managers and workers did all they could for Edmonia Gates; perhaps they did not. On February 13, 2017, the Texas Tribune published an article titled, "How Hollow Rhetoric and a Broken Child Welfare System Feed Texas' Sex-Trafficking Underworld." Social services still grapple with how to best help children, many of whom are from complex and difficult family situations, steer away from a life filled with violence and oppression.<sup>10</sup>

In placing children in indenture or adoption contracts, the asylum's managers often made the decision to sever ties between the children and their biological families in a way that was more permanent than the children's admission to the institution. In some of these cases they allowed people to take children out of the District of Columbia and its surrounding areas to

---

<sup>9</sup> Hacsí, *Second Home*, 148-9; "Home," *Hillcrest Children and Family Center*, <http://hillcrest-dc.org/> (Accessed February 19, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Morgan Smith, Neena Satija, and Edgar Walters, "How Hollow Rhetoric and a Broken Child Welfare System Feed Texas' Sex-Trafficking Underworld," *The Texas Tribune*, February 13, 2017, <https://www.texastribune.org/2017/02/13/how-texas-crusade-against-sex-trafficking-has-left-victims-behind/>; Child Welfare Information Gateway. *Child welfare and human trafficking*, July 2015, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/trafficking.pdf>; *Preventing and Addressing Sex Trafficking of Youth in Foster Care: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means U.S. House of Representatives*, Serial No. 113-HR09, 113<sup>th</sup> Cong. 1<sup>st</sup> sess., (2013).

destinations hundreds and even thousands of miles away. In doing so they separated children not only from parents and extended family outside of the institution but also from siblings living in the asylum. The harsh reality was that if the managers had waited for families willing to take brothers and sisters, they would likely not have placed many children in homes. The power of biological kinship remains an issue for contemporary social services. Social workers face the complicated task of weighing those ties against the problems of poverty, abuse, and neglect in determining the best choice for a child. Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 that included a section on maintaining siblings connections when appropriate and possible. The Children's Bureau, despite working to maintain the bond between siblings, notes that many children continue to be separated from their siblings in addition to their parents. These children, like children living in the asylum in the nineteenth century, often express their desire to be near their siblings and their heartbreak at being away from them.<sup>11</sup>

Many of the Washington City Orphan Asylum's children left in indentures or adoptions that did not last, most often because the family found some problem with the child. Typically the issue was the child's behavior. Though the managers denied the return of children to the institution at times, they often allowed the person to bring the child back or transfer them to

---

<sup>11</sup> Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-351, 122 Stat. 3949 (2008); Child Welfare Information Gateway. *Sibling issues in foster care and adoption*, January 2013. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/siblingissues.pdf#page=1&view=Introduction>; "Siblings and Adoption From Foster Care," Children Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau, accessed February 20, 2017, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-parenting/foster/siblings/>; Sabrina M. Richardson and Tuppert M. Yates, "Siblings in Foster Care: A Relational Path to Resilience for Emancipated Foster Youth," *Children and Youth Services Review*, 47 no. 3 (12, 2014): 378-388, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.tcu.edu/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.10.015>; Bowen McBeath, Brianne H. Kothari, Jennifer Blakeslee, Emilie Lamson-Siu, Lew Bank, L. Oriana Linares, Jeffrey Waid, Paul Sorenson, Jessica Jimenez, Eva Pearson, and Aron Shlonsky, "Intervening to Improve Outcomes for Siblings in Foster Care: Conceptual, Substantive, and Methodological Dimensions of a Prevention Science Framework," *Child and Youth Services Review*, 39, (4, 2014): 1-10, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.tcu.edu/10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.12.004>; Jeffrey Waid, "Sibling Foster Care, Placement Stability, and Well-Being: A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Family Social Work*, 17 no. 3 (2014).

another home. If the child did return to the institution, the managers usually tried to find them another home shortly thereafter. The turnover in placements meant that several children lived their childhoods in transition and likely did not enjoy the physical and emotional security of permanent homes. Establishing stability in the lives of children remains an issue for the contemporary foster care system, as several children move from home to home and at times leave the system without a lasting connection to any home from their childhood. Many scholars and professionals in the social services argue the multiple placements and not having a home at the time they come of age affects their transition into and stability during adulthood.<sup>12</sup>

Along with the action of removing a child from the Washington City Orphan Asylum in an indenture or adoption and agreeing to care for her or him was the motivation for doing so and beliefs for how that placement would go. Many people committing to placements had expectations for the way the child should act, what work they should perform for a family, what their mental capacity and physical ability and appearance should be, and how they should be separated from their biological families. They often shared many of these expectations with the managers, the trustees, the asylum's employees, and perhaps even the citizens of Washington that supported the institution. One of the greatest lessons the Washington City Orphan Asylum perhaps has to teach is the heavy weight of the "shoulds" that often get placed on children by the people and society trying to care for them.

---

<sup>12</sup> Theodore P. Cross, Eun Koh, Nancy Rolock, and Jennifer Eblen-Manning, "Why Do Children Experience Multiple Placement Changes in Foster Care? Content Analysis on Reasons for Instability," *The Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 7 no. 1 (2013): 39-58, doi: 10.1080/15548732.2013.751300; Yvonne Unrau, Ruth Chambers, John Seita, Kristin Putney, "Defining a Foster Care Placement Move: The Perspective of Adults Who Formerly Lived in Multiple Out-of-Home Placements," *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 91 no. 4 (2010): 426-432, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.tcu.edu/10.1606/1044-3894.4028>; A. Dregan and M. C. Gulliford. "Foster Care, Residential Care and Public Care Placement Patterns are Associated with Adult Life Trajectories: Population-Based Cohort Study." *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 47, no. 9 (09, 2012): 1517-26. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s00127-011-0458-5>.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

### Repositories

Blair Lee Family Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Hillcrest Children's Center, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Van Ness-Philip Family Papers, MS 652, The New-York Historical Society.

### Government Documents

*An Act for Establishing the Temporary and Permanent Seat of the Government of the United States*, 1 Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., July 16, 1790.

“Annual Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1878,” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880).

Byrd, Robert C. and Wendy Wolff, ed., *The Senate 1789-1989 Historical Statistics 1789-1992* vol. 4, bicentennial edition, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).

Child Welfare Information Gateway. *Child welfare and human trafficking*, July 2015, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/trafficking.pdf>

Elliot, Jonathan. *Historical Sketches of the Ten Miles Square Forming the District of Columbia: With a Picture of Washington, Describing Objects of General Interest or Curiosity at the Metropolis of the Union*, Washington, (1830): 310-321, *Sabin Americana*. Gale, Cengage Learning. (Accessed 14 July 2016).

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-351, 122 Stat. 3949 (2008); Child Welfare Information Gateway. *Sibling issues in foster care*

*and adoption*, January 2013. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/siblingissues.pdf#page=1&view=Introduction>

House of Representatives, "Present from the Emperor of Morocco," March 4, 1834, ProQuest Congressional Serial Set Index.

"Joint Resolution for the Relief of Helen Lincoln and Heloise Lincoln, and for the Withholding of Moneys from Tribes of Indians holding American Captives," *US Statutes at Large* 41 (1870), 377.

Minnesota, Territorial and State Censuses, 1885.

Moore, Charles, compiler. *Joint Select Committee to Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia: Part I—Hearings; Statements; Reports From Cities; Suggestions for a Board of Charities*, 55<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1897. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1897.

Moore, Charles, compiler and editor. *Joint Select Committee To Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia: Part II—Report*, 55<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 1898. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898.

Moore, Charles, compiler and editor. *Joint Select Committee To Investigate the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia: Part III—Historical Sketches of the Charities and Reformatory Institutions in the District of Columbia*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898.

Niles' Register, June 6, 1840, vol. 58, p. 218.

President, Message to the House of Representatives "Presents from the Emperor of Morocco," Jan. 6, 1834. ProQuest Congressional Serial Set Index.

*Preventing and Addressing Sex Trafficking of Youth in Foster Care: Hearing Before the*

*Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means U.S. House of Representatives*, Serial No. 113-HR09, 113<sup>th</sup> Cong. 1<sup>st</sup> sess., (2013).

The Territorial Census of Oklahoma, 1890.

U.S. Census Bureau, 1860-1880, 1900-1940.

United States Congress. *Annals of Congress*. 14<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1815. vol. 29.

United States Congress. *Congressional Debates*. 20<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1828.

United States Congress. *Congressional Debates*, 21<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1830.

United States Congress. *Congressional Debates*. 22<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1832.

United States Congress. *Congressional Debates*, 23<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1835, vol. 11, pt. 1.

United States Congress. *Congressional Globe*, 26<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1840, vol. 3.

United States Constitution, Article One, Section Eight.

Washington City Directories, 1860, 1862-1863, 1868, 1869, 1871, 1875, 1880.

Wright, Robert E. *Pennsylvania State Reports vol. XLVI Comprising Cases Adjudged in the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, Vol. X Containing Cases Decided in May and November Terms, 1863, and January Term, 1864* (Philadelphia: Kay & Brother, 1865).

#### **Published Primary Sources:**

Laas, Virginia Jeans, ed., *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

Logan, Mary S. (Mrs. John A. Logan), *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife, an Autobiography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916).

Hillhouse, Rev. John C. Jr., "Obadiah B. Brown: A Neglected, Forgotten Baptist Hero" (address, Annual Directors Meeting of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, Deland, Florida, May, 1993).

- Johnson, Lorenzo D. *The Churches and Pastors of Washington, D.C.; Together With Five Hundred Topics of Sermons, Delivered in 1855 and '6. To Which is Added, a List of All the Church-Edifices, and Their Localities* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1857).
- Pinney, S.U. "Eulogy on Gen. Henry Dodge," 1868, Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, v. 5, 173, Wisconsin Historical Society,  
<http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/whc/id/1220/show/946/rec/2>
- Samson, G.W. *A Discourse of the Law of Humanity to the Destitute and Dependent: Delivered in Behalf of the Washington City Orphan Asylum, February 12, 1854, by G.W. Samson, Pastor of the E. Street Baptist Church* (Washington: Printed By H. Polkinhorn, 1854).
- The Scotch-Irish in America: Proceedings and Addresses of the Fourth Congress, at Atlanta, GA., April 28 to May 1, 1892* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1892).
- Shulman, Holly C. ed, "Jeremiah Mason to Mary Means Mason, 16 March 1816," *The Papers of Dolley Madison, Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008), <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu> (accessed October 22, 2011).
- Shulman, Holly C. ed, "The Washington Orphan Asylum Society to Congress, 18 December 1815," *The Papers of Dolley Madison, Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008), <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu> (accessed October 22, 2011).
- Smith, Margaret Bayard. *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*. New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1965.
- Wilcox, Mary Emily Donelson. *Christmas under three flags: being memories of holiday*

*festivities in the White House with "Old Hickory," in the palace of H.R.H. Prince of Prussia, afterwards Emperor William I, and at the Alamo with the Alcalde's daughter.* Washington: Neale Co., 1900. <http://newfirstsearch.oclc.org/> (Accessed January 3, 2012).

## Secondary Sources

### Articles

Catherine Allgor, "Queen Dolley' Saves Washington City," *Washington History* 12, (Spring/Summer 2000): 54-69.

Cross, Theodore P. Eun Koh, Nancy Rolock, and Jennifer Eblen-Manning, "Why Do Children Experience Multiple Placement Changes in Foster Care? Content Analysis on Reasons for Instability," *The Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 7 no. 1 (2013): 39-58, doi: 10.1080/15548732.2013.751300.

"The David Wyatt Aiken Papers, 1849-1976," University of South Carolina, (Accessed December 15, 2015), <http://library.sc.edu/digital/collections/aiken.html>

"Death of Gen. Zeilin," *The United States Army and Navy Journal, and Gazette of the Regular and Volunteer Forces*, 18 (New York 1880-1881), 314-315.

Dregan, A. and M. C. Gulliford. "Foster Care, Residential Care and Public Care Placement Patterns are Associated with Adult Life Trajectories: Population-Based Cohort Study." *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 47, no. 9 (09, 2012): 1517-26. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s00127-011-0458-5>.

"Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the Peter B. Porter Papers in the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society," Buffalo and Erie County Historical, 1968, (Accessed September 15, 2015), <http://www.buffalohistory.org/docs/3bb4ff10-2e49-4316-9f3b-322c328f389f.pdf>.

- “Guide to the Obadiah Bruen Brown Family Papers, 1807-1941,” Special Collections Research Center, The George Washington University, <https://library.gwu.edu/ead/ms2253.xml>
- Huntington, Frances Carpenter “The Heiress of Washington City: Marcia Burnes Van Ness,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 69/70, no. 47 (1969/1970): 80-101, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40067706> (accessed October 24, 2011).
- “Intramuralia: Books and People,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (08, 1977): 373-380 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3817359> (Accessed September 15, 2015).
- Klaus, Susan L. “‘Some of the Smartest Folks Here’: The Van Nesses and Community Building in Early Washington,” *Washington History* Vol. 3, No. 2 (Fall/Winter, 1991/1992), 22-45  
Published by: Historical Society of Washington, D.C. Stable URL:  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40073039>.
- McBeath, Bowen and Brianne H. Kothari, Jennifer Blakeslee, Emilie Lamson-Siu, Lew Bank, L. Oriana Linares, Jeffrey Waid, Paul Sorenson, Jessica Jimenez, Eva Pearson, and Aron Shlonsky. “Intervening to Improve Outcomes for Siblings in Foster Care: Conceptual, Substantive, and Methodological Dimensions of a Prevention Science Framework,” *Child and Youth Services Review*, 39, (4, 2014): 1-10,  
<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.tcu.edu/10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.12.004>
- Morton, Jennie C. “Governor Charles A. Wickliffe, With Portrait Taken by G.C.D., and Picture of Wickland,” *Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society*, 2, no. 6, (9, 1904): 17-21, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23366340>.
- Peterson, Nancy Simons “Guarded Pasts: The Lives and Offspring of Colonel George and Clara (Baldwin) Bomford,” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 86, (December 1998): 283-305. <http://www.bgc certification.org/skillbuilders/narrativegenealogyngsqstyle.pdf>
- Richardson, Sabrina M. and Tuppett M. Yates. “Siblings in Foster Care: A Relational Path to

- Resilience for Emancipated Foster Youth,” *Children and Youth Services Review*, 47 no. 3 (12, 2014): 378-388, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.tcu.edu/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.10.015>
- Shulman, Holly C. ed, “Editorial Note,” *The Papers of Dolley Madison, Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008), <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu> (accessed October 22, 2011).
- “Siblings and Adoption From Foster Care,” Children Welfare Information Gateway, Children’s Bureau, accessed February 20, 2017, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-parenting/foster/siblings/>
- Sullivan, Joseph “Hillcrest Children’s Center: A Register of its Records in the Library of Congress,” Finding Aid, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C., 2009).
- Unrau, Yvonne and Ruth Chambers, John Seita, Kristin Putney, “Defining a Foster Care Placement Move: The Perspective of Adults Who Formerly Lived in Multiple Out-of-Home Placements,” *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 91 no. 4 (2010): 426-432, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.tcu.edu/10.1606/1044-3894.4028>.
- Waid, Jeffrey. “Sibling Foster Care, Placement Stability, and Well-Being: A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework,” *Journal of Family Social Work*, 17 no. 3 (2014).
- “Willard Saulsbury (1820-1892),” Dickinson College Archives & Special Collections, (Accessed January 15, 2016).
- White, Jonathan W. “‘Sweltering with Treason’: The Civil War Trials of William Matthew Merrick,” Prologue, Summer 2007, vol. 39, no. 2. <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2007/summer/merrick.html>

## **Books**

- Allgor, Catherine. *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006.
- Allgor, Catherine. *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002.
- Ames, William E. *A History of the National Intelligencer*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972.
- Apple, Rima D. *Mothers and Medicine: A Social History of Infant Feeding, 1890-1950*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.
- Ariès, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. Translated by Robert Baldick, New York: Vintage Books, 1962.
- Ashby, LeRoy. *Engangered Children: Dependency, Neglect, and Abuse in American History*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997.
- Baker, Richard A. *200 Notable Days: Senate Stories 1787 to 2002* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006).
- Barzman, Sol. *The First Ladies*, New York: Cowles Book Company, Inc., 1970.
- Berg, Barbara J. *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism: The Woman and the City, 1800-1860*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Boller, Paul F., Jr. *Presidential Wives: An Anecdotal History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Brighton, Ray. *The Checkered Career of Tobias Lear*, Portsmouth Marine Society, 1985.
- Burrows, Edwin G. and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Campanella, Thomas J. and Lawrence J. Vale, eds., *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

- Carp, E. Wayne. "Orphanages vs. Adoption: The Triumph of Biological Kinship, 1800-1993." In *With Us Always: A History of Private Charity and Public Welfare*, edited by Donald T. Critchlow and Charles H. Parker, 123-144, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998.
- Clark, Allen C. *The Life and Letters of Dolly Madison* (Washington, D.C.: Press of W.F. Roberts Co., 1914).
- Cmiel, Kenneth *A Home of Another Kind: One Chicago Orphanage and the Tangle of Child Welfare* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1995).
- Cox, William Van Zandt *Biography of Matthew Gault Emery: With an Account of the Tribute to His Memory and a Sketch of Mrs. Matthew G. Emery* (Washington, 1904).
- Crenson, Matthew A. *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Duckett, Alvin Laroy. *John Forsyth: Political Tactician*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1962.
- Edwards, June. *Women in American Education, 1820-1955: The Female Force and Educational Reform*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002.
- Ginzberg, Lori. *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Ginzberg, Lori D. *Women in Antebellum Reform*, Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2000.
- Glenn, Myra C. *Campaigns Against Corporal Punishment: Prisoners, Sailors, Women, and Children in Antebellum America*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984.
- Gonzalez, Ondina E. and Bianca Premo, eds, *Raising an Empire: Children in Early Modern*

- Iberia and Colonial Latin America*, Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2007.
- Green, Constance McLaughlin. *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878*, Princeton University Press, 1962.
- Grossberg, Michael. *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- Gerson, Noel B. *The Velvet Glove*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1975.
- Gonzalez, Ondina E. and Bianca Premo, eds, *Raising an Empire: Children in Early Modern Iberia and Colonial Latin America*, Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2007.
- Gordon, Linda. *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston 1880-1960*, New York: Viking, 1988.
- Hacsi, Timothy J. *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Herndon, Ruth Wallis and John E. Murray, eds., *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprentice System in Early America*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2009.
- Hoig, Stan and W.S. Nye, *The Kiowas and the Legend of Kicking Bird*, (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000).
- Holt, Marilyn Irvin. *The Orphan Trains: Placing Out in America*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992.
- Hoy, Suellen. *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (Oxford University Press, 1996).
- John, Richard R. *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995.

- Kerber, Linda. *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980.
- Kessler-Harris, Alice. *Out to Work: A History of Wage Earning Women in the United States*, Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Kunzel, Regina G. *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Lears, Jackson. *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009),
- Lebsock, Suzanne. *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984.
- McCarthy, Kathleen D. *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- McIntosh, Elaine N. *American Food Habits in Historical Perspective*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995.
- McKenzie, Richard B. *Home Away From Home: The Forgotten History of Orphanages*, New York: Encounter Books, 2009.
- Meacham, Jon. *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*, New York: Random House, 2008.
- Miller, Julie *Abandoned: Foundlings in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (New York University Press, 2008).
- Mintz, Steven. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Mintz, Steven. *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers*, Baltimore,

- MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Murray, John E. *The Charleston Orphan House: Children's Lives in the First Public Orphanage in America*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Pastoureau, Michel. *Black: The History of a Color* (Princeton University Press, 2008).
- Ramey, Jessie B. *Child Care in Black and White: Working Parents and the History of Orphanages*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012.
- Reese, William J. *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind,"* Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011.
- Rosenberg, Charles. *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Ross, Elizabeth Dale. *The Kindergarten Crusade: The Establishment of Preschool Education in the United States*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976.
- Rothman, David J. *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971.
- Self, Helen J. *Prostitution, Women, and Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003.
- Seraile, William. *Angels of Mercy: White Women and the History of New York's Colored Orphan Asylum*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2011.
- Shelden, Rachel. *Washington Brotherhood: Politics, Social Life, and the Coming of the Civil War*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013.
- Simpson, Brooks D. *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- Smith, Thomas West *The Story of a Cavalry Regiment: "Scott's 900" Eleventh New York*

- Cavalry, from the St. Lawrence River to the Gulf of Mexico, 1861-1865* (Published by the Veteran Association of the Regiment).
- Stackhouse, Eugene G. *Germantown in the Civil War* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2010).
- Stamper, Anita and Jill Condra, *Clothing through American History: The Civil War through the Gilded Age, 1861-1899*, Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2011.
- Stansell, Christine *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986.
- Stott, Richard. *Jolly Fellows: Male Milieus in Nineteenth-Century America*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.
- Sunderland, Byron. *A Sketch of the Life of Dr. William Gunton, Born at Aylsham, Norfolk, England, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1791*, Washington: Joseph L. Pearson, Printer, 1878.
- Tayloe, Benjamin Ogle. *In Memoriam: Benjamin Ogle Tayloe*. Compiled by Winslow Marston Watson. Washington: Philadelphia, Sherman & Co., Printers, 1872.
- Terpstra, Nicholas *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance: Orphan Care in Florence and Bologna*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Wass, Ann Buermann and Michelle Webb Fandrich, *Clothing through American History: The Federal Era through Antebellum, 1786-1860*, Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010.
- Wilentz, Sean. *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005.
- Williams, Susan *Food in the United States, 1820s-1890*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006.
- Willis, Chuck. *Boy Scouts of America: A Centennial History*, New York: DK Publishing, 2013.
- Wood, Gordon S. *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*, Oxford University Press, 2009.

Zmora, Nurith. *Orphanages Reconsidered: Child Care Institutions in Progressive Era Baltimore*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.

**Dissertation:**

Porter, Susan L. "The Benevolent Asylum—Image and Reality: The Care and Training of Female Orphans in Boston, 1800-1840." PhD diss., Boston University, 1984, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International.

**Websites:**

*Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774—Present.*

<http://bioguide.congress.gov> (Accessed November 1, 2011).

"Christ Church, Washington Parish: A Brief History," <http://washingtonparish.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Christ-Church-History-2015-Final2.pdf>

"Elizabeth H. Mullikin" Find A Grave, (Accessed January 31, 2017),

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=154583241&ref=acom>.

First Ladies Library. "Manuscripts for: Elizabeth Monroe."

<http://www.firstladies.org/bibliography/manuscripts.aspx?bioid=5> (accessed October 5, 2011).

Habben, David M. "Anne Marie Cazenove Henderson," Find a Grave, June 12, 2010,

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=53575523&ref=acom>

Oxford English Dictionary, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)

"Sarah Rose Grier Beck," Find a Grave, February 19, 2006,

<https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=13395097&ref=acom>

“St. John's Church: Free and Enslaved African Americans Married & Baptized at the President's Parish,” the White House Historical Organization. <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/st-johns-church>

## VITA

Jamalin Rae Harp was born in San Antonio, Texas on March 13, 1988 to John Charles Harp and Necia Sumrall Harp. She has one brother, Clint, and a sister-in-law, Kelsey. Harp graduated from Douglas MacArthur High School in San Antonio in 2006 and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas, in 2010, double majoring in History and English. The following fall, Harp traveled to Fort Worth, Texas to begin her Master of Arts degree in History at Texas Christian University, which she completed May 2012. She remained at TCU for her doctoral work.

While studying at Texas Christian University, Harp taught survey courses in United States history, earning the Department of History's Graduate Student Teaching Award for 2014-2015. She also served as a graduate assistant for United States history, European history, Latin American and World Geography, and in TCU's New Media Writing Studio. She earned certificates from TCU's Women and Gender Studies program and TCU's Koehler Center for Teaching Excellence. Harp performed community and academic service within the Department of History, the New Media Writing Studio, and Women and Gender Studies. She is a member of the American Historical Association, the Society for the History of Childhood and Youth, the Southern Association for Women Historians, and Phi Alpha Theta.

## ABSTRACT

### THE CAPITAL'S CHILDREN: THE WASHINGTON CITY ORPHAN ASYLUM, 1815-1890

by Jamalin Rae Harp  
Department of History  
Texas Christian University

Dissertation Advisor: Kenneth Stevens, Professor of History

“The Capital’s Children: The Washington City Orphan Asylum, 1815-1890,” tells the story of the Washington City Orphan Asylum, the first orphanage in the District of Columbia, using it as a lens to view nineteenth-century society. The asylum constituted a complex network of children, families, managers, trustees, workers, Washington citizens, and the local and federal governments. Within its story are the complicated interactions of different groups of people working according to varying and occasionally conflicting worldviews, motivations, and goals. This is the first work dedicated solely to the history of a childcare institution in the District of Columbia. As such, it is the first to engage the federal context of an early social institution. As a private orphanage in the nation’s capital, the managers and trustees worked to acquire support from the federal government rather than a state government like other institutions of the time, an action that inspired debates within the government as to the suitability of helping a private social institution. Additionally, the institution developed a federal network as well as a local one, as national politicians provided support and even removed children from the asylum in indenture contracts.

The asylum’s story includes views on dependency and citizenship. It illuminates the positions of families bringing children to the institution and the complex process of placing

children in adoptions and indentures. It shows the complicated nature of religious interactions as the Protestant orphanage collaborated with Catholic institutions and families as well as clashed with them. The asylum's history highlights the close relationship between the institution and the city, as well as the shaping force of big events such as the Civil War. It also reveals the areas in which the orphanage's children exerted agency and the outcomes of some of the children who lived in the institution.