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THE BEDFORD SERIES IN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Welfare Reform in the Early Republic

A Brief History with Documents

Seth Rockman
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BEDFORD/ST. MARTIN'S

Boston ♦ New York

of public charity thus collected in one place, could be better managed, their wants better and more cheaply supplied, and their vices more easily discerned and corrected, than when they are scattered in a thousand obscure alleys, obliged to pay an exorbitant rent for a miserable room, and which rent the corporation⁷ in fact pay when the paupers are pensioners.⁸ . . .”

“As a considerable portion of the poor is black, we think some measures should be taken, to prevent an increase of their number, by continual additions of those who arrive here for the purpose of being emancipated. We do not wish to be considered as being favourable to their slavery—but we believe some advantageous alterations might be made in the abolition system.”

Query 17. Sect. 2d. What are the effects of soup houses established in Philadelphia?

“In such seasons as the one we have recently passed through, when to the rigours of the year, have been added a great dearth of employment and an unusually high price for provisions we do not hesitate to pronounce the soup societies a blessing to the community. We know that the sufferings which the children of the poor must necessarily experience, have by this means been greatly alleviated.” . . .

Query 18. How many children can an industrious husband and wife support by daily labour?

The reports differ very widely upon this subject; some believing that only three can be supported; others 6, and others even 12 or more; according to the occupation, prudence, economy, health, and industry of the parents.

[Several tables omitted.]

Upon a review of the whole, intemperance, and the want of employment, appear to be the origin of the misery which has been so frequently witnessed; and any measures, which will either directly, or indirectly, tend to remove these causes, would be adopted by the society

⁷the corporation: the city.

⁸pensioners: recipients of cash outdoor relief from the city.

with the best prospect of success, towards relieving the public from a heavy burden, and rendering a class of citizens, now worse than useless, profitable to themselves, their families, and society at large—all of which is respectfully submitted.

2

*The New York Society
for the Prevention of Pauperism*

1818

New York's Society for the Prevention of Pauperism (SPP) led the charge to define poverty as a moral flaw, one best repaired by using community policing and the power of the state to regulate the lives of the poor. Modeled on a similar group in England, the SPP held the existing poor relief system responsible for the growth in urban poverty. As their founding document warned, "Indigence and helplessness will multiply nearly in the ratio of those measures which are ostensibly taken to prevent them." The author of this 1818 report was John Griscom (1774–1852), a Columbia College chemistry professor who would become a founder of the New York House of Refuge (see Document 10) in the 1820s.

. . . We were not insensible of the serious and alarming evils that have resulted, in various places, from misguided benevolence, and imprudent systems of relief. We knew that in Europe and America, where the greatest efforts have been made to provide for the sufferings of the poor, by high and even enormous taxation, those sufferings were increasing in a ratio much greater than the population, and were evidently augmented by the very means taken to subdue them.

We were fully prepared to believe, that without a radical change in the principles upon which public alms have been usually distributed, helplessness and poverty would continue to multiply—demands for

Report of a Committee on the Subject of Pauperism (New York: Samuel Wood and Sons, 1818).

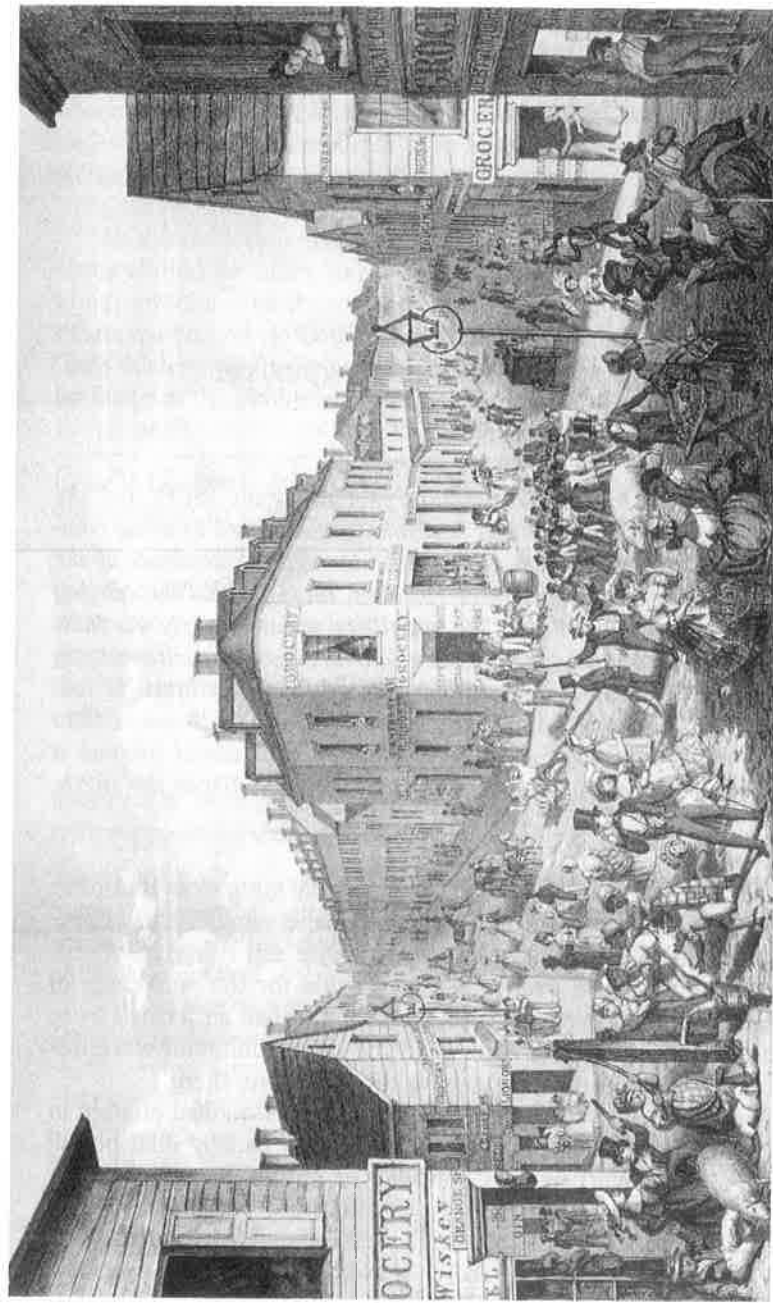


Figure 2. Five Points, 1827.

Members of New York's Society for the Prevention of Pauperism decried the chaos of working-class neighborhoods like Five Points. This street scene catalogued virtually every anxiety of middle-class reformers: racial mixing, unchaperoned women, truancy, alcoholism, prostitution, poor sanitation, gambling, theatrical performances, and disorderly public behavior. McSpedon & Baker, *Five Points*, 1827. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

relief would become more and more importunate, the numerical difference between those who are able to bestow charity and those who sue for it, would gradually diminish, until the present system must fall under its own irresistible pressure, prostrating perhaps, in its ruin, some of the pillars of social order.

It might be long indeed, before such a catastrophe would be extensively felt in this free and happy country. Yet, it is really to be feared, as we apprehend, that it would not be long before some of the proximate evils of such a state of things would be perceived in our public cities, and in none, perhaps, sooner than in New-York. . . .

The indirect causes of poverty are as numerous as the frailties and vices of men. They vary with constitution, with character, and with national and local habits. Some of them lie so deeply entrenched in the weakness and depravity of human nature, as to be altogether unassailable by mere political regulation. They can be reached in no other way, than by awakening the dormant and secret energies of moral feeling.

But with a view to bring the subject committed to our charge, more definitely before the society, we have thought it right, distinctly to enumerate the more prominent of those causes of poverty, which prevail within this city. . . .

1st. **IGNORANCE**, arising either from inherent dullness, or from want of opportunities for improvement. This operates as a restraint upon the physical powers, preventing that exercise and cultivation of the bodily faculties by which skill is obtained, and the means of support increased. The influence of this cause, it is believed, is particularly great among the foreign poor that annually accumulate in this city.

2nd. **IDLENESS**. A tendency to this evil may be more or less inherent. It is greatly increased by other causes, and when it becomes habitual, it is the occasion of much suffering in families, and augments to a great amount the burden of the industrious portions of society.

3d. **INTEMPERANCE IN DRINKING**. This most prolific source of mischief and misery, drags in its train almost every species of suffering which afflicts the poor. This evil, in relation to poverty and vice, may be emphatically styled, the *Cause of Causes*. The box of Pandora is realized in each of the kegs of ardent spirits that stand upon the counters of the 1600 licensed grocers of this city. At a moderate computation, the money spent in the purchase of spirituous liquors would be more than sufficient to keep the whole city constantly supplied with bread. Viewing the enormous devastations of this evil upon the minds and morals of the people, we cannot but regard it as the crying and

increasing sin of the nation, and as loudly demanding the solemn deliberation of our legislative assemblies.

4th. WANT OF ECONOMY. Prodigality is comparative. Among the poor, it prevails to a great extent, in an inattention to those small, but frequent savings when labour is plentiful, which may go to meet the privations of unfavourable seasons.

5th. IMPRUDENT AND HASTY MARRIAGES. This, it is believed is a fertile source of trial and poverty.

6th. LOTTERIES. The depraving nature and tendency of these allurements to hazard money, is generally admitted by those who have been most attentive to their effects. The time spent in inquiries relative to lotteries, in frequent attendance on lottery offices, the feverish anxiety which prevails relative to the success of tickets, the associations to which it leads, all contribute to divert the labourer from his employment, to weaken the tone of his morals, to consume his earnings, and consequently to increase his poverty. . . .

7th. PAWNBROKERS. The establishment of these offices is considered as very unfavourable to the independence and welfare of the middling and inferior classes. The artifices which are often practised to deceive the expectations of those who are induced, through actual distress, or by positive allurement, to trust their goods at these places, not to mention the facilities which they afford to the commission of theft, and the encouragement they give to a dependence on stratagem and cunning, rather than on the profits of honest industry, fairly entitle them, in the opinion of the committee, to a place among the *causes of Poverty*.

8th. HOUSES OF ILL FAME. The direful effects of those sinks of iniquity, upon the habits and morals of a numerous class of young men, especially of sailors and apprentices, are visible throughout the city. Open abandonment of character, vulgarity, profanity, &c. are among the inevitable consequences, as it respects our own sex, of those places of infamous resort. Their effects upon the several thousands of females within this city, who are ingulphed in those abodes of all that is vile, and all that is shocking to virtuous thought, upon the miserable victims, many of them of decent families, who are here subjected to the most cruel tyranny of their inhuman masters—upon the females, who, hardened in crime, are nightly sent from those dens of corruption to roam through the city, "seeking whom they may devour," we have not the inclination, nor is it our duty to describe. Among "the causes of poverty," those houses, where all the base-born passions are engendered—where the vilest profligacy receives a forced culture, must hold an eminent rank.

9th. THE NUMEROUS CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS OF THE CITY. The committee by no means intend to cast an indiscriminate censure upon these institutions, nor to implicate the motives, nor even to deny the usefulness, in a certain degree, of any one of them. They have unquestionably had their foundation in motives of true Philanthropy; they have contributed to cultivate the feelings of christian charity, and to keep alive its salutary influence upon the minds of our fellow-citizens; and they have doubtless relieved thousands from the pressure of the most pinching want, from cold, from hunger, and probably in many cases, from untimely death.

But, in relation to these societies, a question of no ordinary moment presents itself to the considerate and real philanthropist. Is not the partial and temporary good which they accomplish, how acute soever the miseries they relieve, and whatever the number they may rescue from sufferings or death, more than counterbalanced, by the evils that flow from the expectations they necessarily excite; by the relaxation of industry, which such a display of benevolence tends to produce; by that reliance upon charitable aid, in case of unfavourable times, which must unavoidably tend to diminish, in the minds of the labouring classes, that wholesome anxiety to provide for the wants of a distant day, which alone can save them from a state of absolute dependance, and from becoming a burden to the community? . . .

LASTLY. Your committee would mention WAR during its prevalence, as one of the most abundant sources of poverty and vice, which the list of human corruptions comprehends. But as this evil lies out of the immediate reach of local regulation, and as we are now happily blest with a peace which we hope will be durable, it is deemed unnecessary further to notice it.

Such are the causes which are considered as the more prominent and operative in producing that amount of indigence and suffering, which awakens the charity of this city, and which has occasioned the erection of buildings for eleemosynary¹ purposes, at an expense of half a million of dollars, and which calls for the annual distribution of 90,000 dollars more. But, if the payment of this sum were the only inconvenience to be endured—trifling, indeed, in comparison would be the evils which claim our attention. Of the mass of affliction and wretchedness actually sustained, how small a portion is thus relieved! Of the quantity of misery and vice which the causes we have enumerated, with others we have not named, bring upon the city, how trifling

¹eleemosynary: charitable.

the portion actually removed, by public or by private benevolence! Nor do we conceive it possible to remove this load of distress, by all the alms doings of which the city is capable, while the causes remain in full and active operation.

Effectually to relieve the poor, is therefore a task far more comprehensive in its nature, than simply to clothe the naked and to feed the hungry. It is, to erect barriers against the encroachments of moral degeneracy;—It is to heal the diseases of the mind;—It is, to furnish that aliment to the intellectual system which will tend to preserve it in healthful operation. . . .

We therefore proceed to point out the means, which we consider best calculated to meliorate the condition of the poorer classes, and to strike at the root of those evils which go to the increase of poverty and its attendant miseries.

We hold it to be a plain fundamental truth, that one of the most powerful incitements to an honest and honourable course of conduct, is a regard to reputation: or a desire of securing the approbation of our friends and associates. To encourage this sentiment among the poor, to inspire them with the feelings of self respect, and a regard to character, will be to introduce the very elements of reform. . . .

1st. To divide the city into very small districts, and to appoint from the members of the society, two or three visiters for each district, whose duty it shall be, to become acquainted with the inhabitants of the district, to visit frequently the families of those who are in indigent circumstances, to advise them with respect to their business, the education of their children, the economy of their houses, to administer encouragement or admonition, as they may find occasion; and in general, by preserving an open, candid, and friendly intercourse with them, to gain their confidence, and by suitable and well timed counsel, to excite them to such a course of conduct as will best promote their physical and moral welfare. The visiters to keep an accurate register of the names of all those who reside within their respective districts, to notice every change of residence, whether of single or married persons, and to annex such observations to the names of those who claim their particular attention as will enable them to give every needful information with respect to their character, reputation, habits, &c.

It may fairly be presumed, that if this scheme of inspection can be carried into full effect; if visiters can be found, who will undertake the charge, from the pure motive of philanthropy, and if, on the principles of active concert, a reference be always had to the books of the vis-

iters, before charitable relief is extended to any individual, by any of the institutions already established, and due notice taken of the information they afford, a change will soon be perceived in the aspect of the poor. Finding that they have real friends, that their conduct is an object of solicitude, that their characters will be the subject of remark, a sense of decency, and a spirit of independence will be gradually awakened, the effects of which, must eventually be perceived in the diminution of the poor rates of the city.

2nd. To encourage and assist the labouring classes to make the most of their earnings, by promoting the establishment of a Savings Bank, or of Benefit Societies, Life Insurances, &c. The good effects of such associations have been abundantly proved in Europe and in America. Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore have each a Savings Bank.

3rd. To prevent, by all legal means, the access of paupers who are not entitled to a residence in the city. The plan of inspection before described will furnish the means of entirely preventing those disgraceful encroachments upon the charity of the city, which it is believed have been practised to no inconsiderable extent.

4th. To unite with the corporate authorities in the entire inhibition of street begging. There can be no reasonable excuse whatever, for this practice, more especially if the course of inspection, now recommended, be kept in operation.

5th. To aid, if it shall be deemed expedient, in furnishing employment to those who cannot procure it, either by the establishment of houses of industry, or by supplying materials for domestic labour. . . .

6th. To advise and promote the opening of places of worship in the outer wards of the city, especially in situations where licentiousness is the most prevalent. This subject is considered as one of vital importance. If, as we believe, nine tenths of the poverty and wretchedness which the city exhibits, proceeds directly or indirectly from the want of correct moral principle, and if religion is the basis of morality, then will it be admitted, that to extend the benefits of religious instruction, will be to strike at the root of that corrupt tree which sheds dreariness and penury from all its branches. That there is a lamentable deficiency of religious observance, is extremely obvious. It is questionable whether one man or woman in fifty, of the indigent, enters a place of worship three times in a year. The means are not provided for them, and they are unable to provide them for themselves. Now it has been remarked, that in the immediate vicinity of a church, it is rare to find a house devoted to lewdness or depravity. One half of the sum *annually*

expended in the maintenance of the poor, would be sufficient to build three houses for public worship.

Further, if wretchedness proceed from vice, and vice, among the poor, be generally the offspring of moral and intellectual darkness, is it not a most reasonable, social duty, which the enlightened portions of society owe to the ignorant, to instruct before they condemn, to teach before they punish? . . .

7th. To promote the advancement of First day, or Sunday School Instruction, both of children and adults. We cannot but regard this kind of instruction as one of the most powerful engines of social reform, that the wisdom and benevolence of men have ever brought into operation.

8th. To contrive a plan, if possible, by which all the spontaneous charities of the town may flow into one channel, and be distributed in conformity to a well regulated system, by which deception may be prevented, and other indirect evils arising from numerous independent associations, be fairly obviated.

It appears highly probable, that if the administration of the charities of the city were so conducted, as to obviate all danger of misapplication and deception; those charities would flow with greater freedom, and that funds might occasionally be obtained, which would afford the means of erecting houses for worship, opening schools, and employing teachers, and thus direct, with greater efficacy, those materials which alone can ensure to the great fabric of society, its fairest proportions, and its longest duration.

9th. To obtain the abolition of the greater number of shops, in which spirituous liquors are sold by license. . . .

3

HEMAN HUMPHREY

On Doing Good to the Poor

1818

More than a matter of public policy, caring for the poor was a religious obligation for the majority of Americans who considered themselves Christians. Churches fed and clothed the needy in almost every locality, even as understandings of poverty varied from denomination to denomination and from congregation to congregation. The poor might constitute a blessing that allowed the devout to prove their worthiness through good deeds. The New Testament's portrayal of Jesus as a man of humble means who aided and served the desperate might inspire charitable efforts. For Heman Humphrey (1779–1861), a Congregational minister in the small town of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, the growth of poverty constituted a sign of God's anger with the moral laxity of nineteenth-century New Englanders. In this sermon delivered on a day of fasting, Humphrey outlined the causes of poverty and offered a series of curative steps for the redemption of the entire society. In his subsequent career as president of Amherst College (1823–1845) and as a leader of the temperance movement, Humphrey remained a staunch defender of religious orthodoxy and continued to express alarm at the decline of American morality.

In theorizing on the subject before us, even wise and good men have often mistaken first principles; and hence the disappointment of their fondest hopes; hence the failure of their best endeavours to mitigate the evils of pauperism. They have not taken man as he *is*, a fallen, depraved creature; naturally proud, indolent, evil and unthankful; but as he *should* be, holy, humble, industrious, conscientiously disposed to do every thing in his power to maintain himself, and thankful for the smallest favours.

It was once pretty generally supposed, and is still believed by many, that the existing ills of poverty might be cured, and the increase of it

Heman Humphrey, *On Doing Good to the Poor: A Sermon, Preached at Pittsfield, on the Day of the Annual Fast, April 4, 1818* (Pittsfield, Mass.: Phineas Allen, 1818), 17–25, 40–41.

greatness of the interests which are comprehended in them. Public sentiment is yet vague respecting the causes of pauperism and crime; and new and more efficient measures should be taken to bring these subjects, in all their relations and bearings, before the whole body of our citizens. I would say, therefore, in the first place, that if a few of our most intelligent and philanthropic men, men of leisure and influence, would unite for the study of these subjects; not merely or principally by consulting books, but by an extensive personal communication with the poor and with criminals; if these gentlemen would meet frequently—for example, one evening in every week—to bring together their facts and to compare their opinions; if they would occasionally publish these facts and opinions with the sanction of their names; and, when they shall see clearly what are the demands of justice, of humanity, and of religion, if they would combine their efforts, now for the suppression of one and now of another of the springs of evil, and now to obtain one and now another establishment for the salvation and greatest happiness of those who must otherwise be irretrievably lost to all the higher purposes of their being, a great and glorious reform might soon be effected in our city. Am I told that the plan of such an association is impracticable? I ask, why? And I appeal to the sober judgment of the intelligent, the affluent, and influential. Is a greater service here demanded than is due from those whom God has greatly blessed to the poor and degraded and miserable around us? Is it more than God will require from those to whom he has given the means of saving and blessing hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of their race? There is no service on earth from which a higher good will result to those who engage in it. A few judicious and energetic minds, combined and resolved to accomplish all which they may for the suppression of pauperism and crime, would accumulate for themselves, in this work, a better treasure than all their wealth, let them be as rich as they may; and, in a few years, might do more for the advancement of society than, without these services, would probably be accomplished in half a century. . . .

Private Benevolence and Moral Cures for Poverty

5

The Friendly Society of St. Thomas's African Church

1797

Organized around a common ethnicity, religion, or trade, mutual aid societies had long served as a form of life insurance for members of a given community. Twenty-seven Scotsmen living in Boston founded the first mutual aid society in colonial America in 1657. Members of such associations paid annual dues that guaranteed them relief in the case of a financial emergency brought about by illness, accident, or unemployment. When a member died, mutual aid societies paid for a respectable burial and provided payments to widows and orphaned children. When free African American residents of Philadelphia began to develop community organizations in the decades after the American Revolution, black mutual aid societies followed on the heels of independent black churches. Absalom Jones, who had been enslaved until nearly forty years old, led the effort to found St. Thomas's African Church in 1794. The congregation was formally affiliated with the Episcopal church but maintained its autonomy as an African American institution. Its Friendly Society was one of fourteen black mutual aid societies operating in Philadelphia before 1812. Such voluntary associations were essential to the economic and communal self-reliance of free blacks at a time when their status in larger American society remained unclear.

The Constitution of the Friendly Society of St. Thomas's African Church of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1797).

CONSTITUTION, &c.

WHEREAS we the Subscribers, members of the African Episcopal Church, called ST. THOMAS'S, in the City of Philadelphia, frequently conversing on that most amiable of all the social virtues, Charity, and feeling a desire to promote it in the most consistent manner, as far as our circumstances in life will admit, at the same time to make our undertaking as permanently useful as possible, have, and hereby do, conclude to associate and unite ourselves together, by the name, title and description of "THE FRIENDLY SOCIETY OF ST. THOMAS'S AFRICAN CHURCH, OF PHILADELPHIA," under the following

Regulations:

I. THE Officers of the Society shall consist of a President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, and a Committee of Seven Members. . . .

II. WE bind ourselves, and do hereby agree, to meet monthly in a convenient place, to be procured by the committee. At all and every such meeting each and every member, and such as may hereafter become members of this Society, shall deposit one quarter of a dollar into the hands of the President, who shall cause the Secretary to credit each member for every such payment, in a book to be kept fair and correct for that purpose, bearing the date of the payment. . . .

III. THE duty of the President shall be as is expressed in the II. Article, together with that of keeping order and decorum in the Society during the meeting thereof. The duty of the Committee shall be to call delinquent members to account, and make report thereof to the Society: During the recess thereof the Committee shall visit such members of the Society as reside within their district, and if a majority of them be of the judgment that the member so visited stands in need of assistance, they shall (with the consent of the President) have power to draw on the Treasurer for such sums of money as they conjointly may think requisite, not exceeding one and a half dollar per week to each member, during his inability. . . .

IV. THE payments made by the members to the Society, shall be disposed of only for the relief and support of the orphans and widows of deceased members (so long as the widows shall remain unmarried) and for the relief of necessitous members; after which, if the funds of the Society will afford it, to any other charitable purpose that the President and a majority of the committee may deem necessary. . . .

VII. As the business of the Committee may become arduous, such as visiting the sick, inspecting their circumstances, and supplying their necessities, with other duties already pointed out, it is agreed that they shall continue in office only twelve months, unless again elected. . . .

IX. If any member neglect meeting at the slated monthly meeting, he shall for every such neglect forfeit and pay One Eighth of a Dollar.

X. IN case of the death of any member of the society, without leaving sufficient property for his interment, the Committee shall cause him to be buried in a plain and decent manner from the Society's fund. . . .

6

The Providence Female Society for the Relief of Indigent Women and Children

1801

Starting in the 1790s, women's benevolent organizations appeared in many cities. With names like the Aimwell Society or the Impartial Humane Society, women-led charities orchestrated relief measures that other private organizations and public officials would imitate in the coming decades: screening aid recipients through home visitation, bringing children out of poor households and placing them in institutions, and making relief payments dependent upon labor. Women's charities often distributed cloth, which poor women could use to make clothing for their families or to sell back to the managers in exchange for food and firewood. In their fund-raising appeals, women's charities relied heavily on the rhetoric of female dependence and invariably invoked the image of a helpless widow. Yet the organizational activities of benevolent women suggest that middle- and upper-class females were finding new routes to independence in the early republic.

The Constitution of the Providence Female Society for the Relief of Indigent Women and Children (Providence: John Carter Jr., 1801).

shall return to their domestic avocations. The Governess shall lead the Children every Sabbath to Public Worship.

The Funds

Of the Society which arise from annual subscriptions, and donations from Ladies and Gentlemen, shall in part be expended in the purchase of a stock of fuel, other necessities, and of materials for the employment of Women: and such a part as the Society may judge advisable shall be appropriated by the Ladies in office to the establishment of a permanent fund.

The Society of Females, for the Relief of Indigent Women and Children, was proposed in March, and organized on the first Wednesday of April, 1800. Twenty-three poor women have been employed, and five sick persons have been supplied with money to procure medicine and wood. . . .

At the semi-annual meeting the Managers received two hundred and twenty-five dollars; they purchased one piece of coating, one of kersey, one of ravens duck, three of baizes, and six of checks.² Thirty-six outside jackets with baize linings, five under jackets, and twenty pair of trowsers, have been made of the thick cloth, and twelve pair of trowsers of the duck; thirty-seven baize and thirty-eight check shirts, all of which have been sold, except some articles of thick cloathing. The Managers have just purchased two hundred yards of checks, and if they had twice that quantity it would not supply their applicants constantly with work. Many painful sensations have been excited in the breasts of the Managers, by being under the necessity of refusing several who have urgently and repeatedly requested work. It is however presumed their abilities will not be so circumscribed another year, as the amount of sales will be added to the annual subscription.

²These are different types of fabric.

The Female Humane Association Charity School

1803

Presuming that poverty and its attendant vices were passed from generation to generation, charity organizations devoted much attention to the children of poor parents. Some groups relieved widowed women by schooling their children and apprenticing them into more prosperous families. Although states maintained control over the legal apparatus of indenture, groups like Baltimore's Female Humane Association (FHA) funneled poor children into families that needed extra labor and were able to feed an additional mouth. The FHA's charity school accepted girls between the ages of seven and fourteen, with the expectation that they would receive three years of education before being bound out to live in families as domestic servants. Young "scholars" learned reading, writing, arithmetic, and sewing. In this 1803 report to its donors, the FHA provided a testimonial from a group of satisfied employers: "The said children are orderly, quiet, and industrious, and promise, according to their conditions in life, to be useful members of society."

Some time in the fall of the year 1798, several Ladies of Baltimore, taking in their consideration the poverty, and consequent sufferings of indigent women, during the inclement season of winter, Resolved to form a systematic plan for affording them relief. They accordingly established a Society called THE FEMALE HUMANE ASSOCIATION, held regular meetings for the transaction of business, and collected from the generous citizens considerable sums of money. During the winter of 1798-1799, the monies so collected were faithfully distributed among all who became the objects of their peculiar care, according to their several necessities. In the execution of this charity, which the Ladies did actually perform in person, they had daily before their eyes not only the scenes of complicated misery themselves, but the causes which had originally led thereto, that is, the abandoned state of the

A Brief Account of the Female Humane Association Charity School, of the City of Baltimore (Baltimore: Warner and Hanna, 1803).

rising generation, particularly the female part thereof, many of whom were literally raised in the streets in filthiness, rags, and vice. To remedy the evil in its source, to snatch the child from a fate similar to that of its mother, was considered by the Ladies an important public work; for the success of any scheme to ameliorate the condition of such objects, would not only lessen the demand on the public for annual contributions, but it would actually increase the number of those whose labor would be useful to the community. The subject was often mentioned among the Ladies at their meetings, and they as often concurred unanimously in the propriety of establishing a Charity School for the Education and Relief of Poor Female Children. Accordingly, a subscription was opened for the purpose, which by the 23d June, 1800, was sufficiently filled to commence the work. The school was opened under the direction of Mrs. Chapelle, and the children admitted thereinto were invariably taken from the lowest conditions in life; many, nay most of whom were, when taken into the school, not only destitute of common decency in their deportment, but wholly ignorant of the first principles of right and wrong; in truth some of them might have been called savages, whom it was necessary first to civilize, before they would be received into a reputable situation to obtain their living by domestic labor. . . .

[Since opening,] fifty Poor Female Children had been received into the School, clothed, educated, and some of them boarded, of which number twenty-three had received their education, and been placed in reputable families for the purpose of maintaining themselves by domestic labor and employment. . . .

The Female Directors have made it a rule in all instances to board orphan children taken into the school, and such also where the morals of the children would probably be corrupted by remaining any portion of their time with their mothers; in other instances the children have received their boarding with their parents, or in respectable families, and attended school at regular and stated hours of meeting. It not unfrequently happens that families have consented to board a poor female child on the condition that it shall be bound to them when fit for service, but in all such cases the will of the parents is obtained before the child is admitted to the school. By thus procuring board for the children out of the school, the Directors have been enabled to extend the charity to a greater number of objects. . . .

EZRA STILES ELY

Preacher to the Poor in New York

1811

When Ezra Stiles Ely (1786–1861) first arrived at the New York Almshouse in June 1810, the young, energetic chaplain harbored hopes of redeeming a lost flock: "Rarely have I had the pleasure of witnessing, in any audience, more lively gratitude for the glorious Gospel of the grace of God." Recording two years of his labors among the institutionalized poor, Ely celebrated a deathbed conversion or a meeting with a pious widow. Of course, he also found the work exhausting and the sights and sounds overwhelming. After 270 pages of "poverty, misery, and madness," Ely allowed that his reader "may congratulate himself, that he has been a witness of solemn scenes, without experiencing the inconveniences of one, who has been personally concerned in them."

JANUARY 10, 1811

After preaching this evening to the poor in the Almshouse, I went by request to pray with two females, who have attended on my ministry, and are now confined to their beds. One is an aged widow, who is pious, and who, I believe, will recover to limp along through life, on two crutches, to ever-lasting glory. She will recover, to suffer more pain, and peddle pin-cushions to procure some of the conveniences of life, which cannot be distributed in public Almshouses. O! it is astonishing that the heirs of heaven should be found in such circumstances; that the friends of Jesus, who are to share the felicity of heaven with him, should be made meek for glory, through extreme humiliation!

JANUARY 19, 1811

Sympathy is natural and amiable; but *benevolence*, when exercised by a fallen man, is supernatural and holy. Would to God that the two were

Ezra Stiles Ely, *The Journal of the Stated Preacher to the Hospital and Almshouse, in the City of New-York, for the Year of Our Lord 1811* (New York: Whiting and Watson, 1812); *The Second Journal of the Stated Preacher to the Hospital and Almshouse, in the City of New-York, For a part of the year of our Lord 1813* (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1815).

united in every human heart! Possibly both have been exercised in the relief of a certain poor widow, whose husband, a carman, died about a year since; leaving her, after she had defrayed the expenses of his sickness and burial, nothing for her support, but ten children. Four of these are able to provide for themselves, and one or two can give some assistance to the mother, by tending the four younger children, while the mother washes or sews for the necessities of life. For eight months I have known this woman and her family. She is a professor of religion; and more, she is pious. Her children are neat and industrious. For a single room she pays twenty-five dollars, yearly rent; and earns a part of this by sewing nankeen¹ pantaloons and common shirts, for *the eighth of a dollar* for each garment. This I find to be the common price of job-work; so that the poor widows who will support themselves, must be content with *one shilling*, while the purchasers pay *many shillings* for the same work. All who sell ought to have lawful gain, but the poor, who perform the work, ought to receive at least half of that sum which is charged for making of apparel. Some of the children attend that benevolent Institution, "The New-York Free School," and if the Lord shall spare them, I doubt not will make useful mechanics. When this widow was in her most destitute condition, before she could gather something to begin the world anew, with her fatherless children, a young man of generous, native feelings, who never saw her, sent five dollars for her relief. This same man of tenderness, however, gave that for which he was indebted, and soon after defrauded many of his friends. Alas! alas! Why had not this youth *benevolence*, as well as *sympathy*? Another young man, who is poor indeed, but whom providence has hitherto protected, has more than once divided with the family, when almost destitute of wood and bread, his last dollar. The pride of doing good, or sympathy, or *something else*, may have actuated him. God searches his heart!

To give to the street beggars of this city, is not well directed charity. Those persons who have large families, who make great exertions to live out of the Almshouse, when they are almost driven into it by want, are the proper objects for pecuniary assistance.

The wind blew the piercing cold from the north; but the southern sun illuminated the abode of the widow. The children had recovered their ruddy countenances, and were seated round a frugal fire. They had a little wood still remaining and a load of bread in reserve. The widow was restored to her wonted strength, from the debility induced by long watchings with misery; and contentment was in her countenance. The

¹nankeen: yellow cotton fabric.

sight gave new vigour to a heart which had been depressed with remembrance of wretchedness it could not dispel.

FEBRUARY 3, 1811

... Several abandoned women listened to my discourse to-day; and among them was a beautiful girl of only fifteen years of age. It was astonishing to see so fair and young a person as M.D. in such a situation. She was brought [to] the Hospital by her father, who has two other daughters beside this, who have been patients in this Institution. The eldest sister led the way; the younger sisters followed. In early childhood they were all left motherless; and the father, as is commonly the case with labouring men, had no time to stand sentinel over the chastity of three fair daughters.

FEBRUARY 10, 1811

... The deluded child of fifteen years, M.D. was present, and paid solemn attention. But she is sick now; and many are serious while a fever rages in their blood, who with returning health, return to their former stupidity. This unfortunate I design to trace, if possible in her future course. It cannot be a long one; unless God should reclaim her by the power of the Gospel. Should she evince a disposition to live a moral life in future, must she be turned out again upon the world, to encounter strong temptation? The Hospital is designed for the sick, and must not therefore be occupied by the sound. When she is restored to health, she must return to a worthless father's house, where she will find the sisters who seduced her. The eldest took her to a dancing house, provided a gallant for her, and after much solicitation, persuaded her to become a mistress. M—— thinks she should never have yielded, had it not been for the precept and example of this syren sister. The three daughters have all been ensnared by their beauty, pride, and idleness. No mother taught them to be industrious; no mother warned them of the horrible pit into which they have fallen. Their father thinks it enough to provide himself food and drink. By what profession, then could they live; by what art could they adorn their persons? Under such circumstances, where there is no fear of God, an

"M.D. reappeared in the almshouse on September 6, 1811, "covered with filth." According to Ely, she had been on the way to recovery, when a young man from the almshouse had lured her away: "His protection was of short duration; his money was soon gone; she returned to the practice of Corinth, and multiplied abominations, more than her sisters Samaria and Sodom. Extreme sickness was the result; and having lodged for a few nights in a cellar with blacks, she was brought to the Almshouse." Not sparing any judgments, Ely concluded his remarks by noting, "The way of lewdness is the shortest way to hell."

effectual repulsion of insidious approaches, a persevering struggle against temptation, need not be expected. It will never be found.² . . .

In such a city as this, in which are not less than seven thousand females of this description, it is devoutly to be desired, that some retreat should be afforded to those, who, from any cause, are willing to relinquish their vices; and that some association should be formed, which shall save at least a few from what they deem the necessity of prostituting themselves for a piece of bread.³

MARCH 13, 1811

. . . Lastly, I visited the widow and the fatherless, to learn their present situation. A few days ago I was at the abode of the same woman, and her little son was dangerously sick. She watched with him incessantly, which made me apprehensive that I should find her ill; and I was not disappointed. The little boy saw me coming, and welcomed me with a smile; but the mother was almost insensible; was confined to the bed; had sent for no physician; and had no other nurse than her half-recovered child. This woman, I positively know, has been industrious, and poverty in her case is not her fault; unless it is a crime to find needles and silk, to close and bind Morocco shoes at the rate of four shillings for twelve pair, when every cord of wood costs her more money than she can accumulate in a month.

MARCH 24, 1811

When we attempt to praise God in the Almshouse, the dialect of almost every nation is heard; for the English, Scotch, Irish, Dutch, German, French, Spanish, and Italian, as well as the American poor, have met together. What some of the foreigners want in pronunciation, they more than make up in their musical notes. I have become, now, so accustomed to this confusion of dialects that it does not disturb my devotion. Nine persons are dangerously sick in the room where I preached this morning. One of them was well last Thursday evening, attended service in the blind ward, and urged me to preach in her room to-day, with which request I complied; and possibly she may have heard her last sermon. She is now burning with a fever. She is a widow of good report, of amiable countenance, and of exemplary

²According to census returns for 1810, there were not more than 35,000 females between the ages of 10 and 44 in the city. By Ely's count, then, one in five was at risk of engaging in prostitution. Ely envisioned the founding of a Magdalen Society to rescue fallen women. When one finally appeared a few decades later, it became the object of public ridicule when its leader, Reverend John McDowall, estimated that there were 10,000 prostitutes in the city.

deportment. She has one little daughter of eight years of age. The poor-house has become her home, in consequence of a "white swelling" on one of her limbs, which is incurable, and utterly prevents her from labour. Poor woman! Her trials are great; but they will be sanctified to her good, and the divine glory; for she is a child of the most High, a daughter of the Lord Almighty. . . .

I turned to a Scotchman, in the same room, who on the fourth day of this month commenced his eighty-fifth year. He told me in the broad dialect of the land of his nativity, that he was "very auld, and without feeling a'most. I cannae e'en feel," said he, laying his hand on his vest, "to button my clothes."

. . . When I left him, he thanked me for a little attention to "an auld mon." While I was coming out, two other persons of seventy years arose to pay their respects to me. One was a tall, pale, hoary-headed man; and the other was blind. When I exhorted them to pray, the tears of the former fell upon his frosted beard. They said, that in such a noisy place, they found it difficult to pour out their hearts to God in any corner, but in the night, when most around them were asleep, they always attempted it.

I could easily believe their assertion, for on descending and crossing the yard, I met not less than one hundred little children, without any one to restrain them, playing all manner of gambols, and roaring like the young bears of the wilderness.

APRIL 21, 1811

The most pitiable object, whom I have seen of late, is an Irish woman, who is dangerously sick of a fever in the Almshouse. She was a good mother, and wife, before her husband deserted her; and she is a good mother still. From every one, who has known her, I learn a favourable account of her moral conduct. To-day she would have melted any heart. Four little children surrounded her bed, who were all of them like herself, and all so much like one another, that nothing but stature seemed to distinguish one from the other. All of them were crying for their poor mother. The whole family lately came from Ireland, but the husband has left her with her babes to languish, and perhaps to die, without a friend. Alas! that drunkenness should, in this country, transform a generous and wildly enthusiastic son of Erin into something worse than a brute! In Hibernia,⁴ it is probable that this same fellow would have divided his last potatoe with his superannuated grandmother; or would have shed his blood in defence of his wife and children; but here, where

⁴*Erin, Hibernia:* Ireland.

ardent spirits are sold for six shillings by the gallon, wife children, relatives, and friends, may all go to the Almshouse, or even to "potter's field,"⁵ for a glass of grog. It is said that a newly naturalized citizen, to induce some of his countrymen to immigrate to this country, wrote to his friend, "that in America a man might get drunk twice for sixpence!" This is too true!

MAY 19, 1811

... Ten persons were confined to their beds in the room in the Hospital which was this afternoon visited by the word of the Lord; and one of them, who seemed unusually tender upon religious subjects, told me in conversation, that many had been the troubles of his life, "but they are not worthy to be named; for I have deserved them all, and I think that they have been for my good." He has been born in England, bred a brewer, and for some time past, had been a journeyman at his trade in this city. On the first of May, a time when half of the poor remove from one shed to another, he was left houseless for the night.⁶ The room which he occupied, had been let to another, who could pay a higher rent. He could not, on that day, procure another tenement; and the new occupant, according to the custom of this good city, cast the furniture of T— T— into the street. To preserve his goods during the night, the brewer seated himself on a stoop beside them. When all was silence but the hourly rap of the watchmen on the pavement, he fell asleep. A young rogue passed that way, and undertook to search the sleeper's pockets, in which he found some money; but could not make good his retreat, without arousing his plundered neighbour. The brewer gave him chase, and followed him into a cellar. This is the last that he remembers of the events of the night, but in the morning he was found alone, with a bruised head and a broken leg. "It is all well, however," said he, concluding his tale with a sigh, "for the sufferings of the present state are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

MAY 21, 1811

The fire has greatly increased the population in my dominions.⁷ This evening the doors were open into three wards in the Almshouse, so that many more than usual listened to my discourse. It was a solemn

⁵*potter's field*: public burial ground.

⁶In New York City, almost all leases expired on April 30, which generated an intense flurry of activity as the city's residents reshuffled themselves on May 1.

⁷Two days earlier, a huge fire had torn through Manhattan.

evening to many, and God grant that the persons burned out of home, may derive some spiritual advantage from the affliction.

AUGUST 29, 1811

... Mrs. M— S—, who is bloated with the dropsy, discovered so much concern for her youngest son, that a young man went in search of him, to procure him a lodging in the Almshouse. The lad was found with a family, which resides in a cellar, and is supported by selling vegetables and making coarse shoes. The shoemaker had protected the child for some weeks, and fed him gratis; but said that he could not keep him long, because he was too small to set upon the bench of his profession. "Well then, my little fellow," said the young gentleman, taking the boy by the hand, "I will get you a birth in the Almshouse, for I am too poor to keep you."

The cobbler and his wife came to the door with sad countenances. The frugal pair had potatoes to sell, and could make shift to live by the sweat of the brow. "I would gladly keep him," said the man, "but I have a large family, and he cannot earn any thing yet."

He was about to be led away to a sad place. "Tis a pity," said the good woman, "that such a likely child should go to the poor-house: let him stay here."

It was concluded that the boy should remain where he was, until his mother was dead, or until a more eligible situation could be found.

The poor are frequently more beneficent than the rich: and the person, who of his penury gives all that he has, when duty demands it, shall be more honourable than those who give but a pittance from their luxuries, but two mites from their abundance. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

JANUARY 21, 1813⁸

Early this morning, a sick man, W.F. sent for me to call at the Almshouse, and pray with him. Repeatedly I have visited him, but he is never weary of hearing the Gospel, and of uniting in prayer. This man, when young, was extravagantly fond of the theatre, and associated with lewd people there, so long, that he lost his health, and by the virulence of disease, his eyes. After he was thus visited for iniquity,⁹ the

⁸Ely continued his ministry in 1812 but refrained from keeping a journal as he had become "weary with writing the history of human miseries." He resumed in 1813 as a way to provide an account to those who funded his efforts.

⁹*visited for iniquity*: struck with sickness on account of sinful living.

present place of his residence became his only home. Here he married one of the paupers, by whom he has a large family of children. He expresses much gratitude for my attentions to the welfare of his soul, and declares, that he desires complete sanctification from his sins, while his sole confidence for justification is reposed in Jesus Christ. This man I would not reproach with the past, which he deplores, but to the reader, I must say, that attachment to theatrical amusements took this person from all serious business, exposed him to strong temptations, and, in the issue, not only deprived him of sight, but made him the father of a numerous race of paupers. He was a man of no mean mental powers; but now he reposes in one of the lowest wards of the Almshouse, wears a long beard, is exposed to vermin, and is surrounded by every thing which is calculated to offend his remaining senses, and annihilate all hope for present life.

MARCH 9, 1813

...I went to a house in Henry-street, to instruct a sick and dying woman. In the third loft, the garret, I found the very person through whose habitation the wintry blast howls, and whose door is kept by famine. She has been feeble for years, and for five months has been unable to leave her bed. Her husband died of a fever in Havanna [*sic*], and left her, sick, and penniless, to support two little children. One bed, one chair, and the half of another, one table, one candlestick, and a cup, an old pot, and the piece of a frying pan, is the complete inventory of her furniture. Her mother, an aged widow, spends the day with her, and in the night returns home; that is, to the house of another poor daughter, whose husband has marched with the army for Canada.¹⁰

MARCH 14, 1813

While I was preaching in the Hospital, this morning, an English seaman sat beside me, and wept continually. He has often discovered, on a similar occasion, the same feelings. It is difficult to form an opinion of him, for his character is that of a Christian, with one exception; he will, occasionally, drink intemperately. Formerly he became mad by intoxication; but ever since his recovery, deducting only a few weeks, he has been assistant-keeper in the Lunatic Asylum. No man is more faithful in the discharge of his duty, than he commonly is. No man seems to feel more

¹⁰As mentioned in the Library Committee report (Document 1) and the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism report (Document 2), the War of 1812 undermined the household economies of numerous families.

deeply than himself, the need a sinner stands in of the divine mercy. Few men appear to abhor the sin of drunkenness more thoroughly. He has been accustomed to drink nothing but his allowance of beer daily; and he has made many solemn promises to taste of no other liquor; but once in a few months he will enter the city to visit some friends, they will invite him to take another mug of ale, and then he has no sort of government of himself. He drinks until he can no longer stand. After a fit, his convictions and tears are renewed. He is haunted with extreme horrors, thinks himself lost, but will plead with God, almost continually for mercy. He confesses his transgressions, in a most humble manner, is fond of the Bible, and of public worship, and entreats that he may be locked up in one of the cells, when he is likely to become intemperate again. In short, he gives evidence that he is as much of a humble penitent, and sincere believer, as he can be; and yet occasionally have a drunken frolic. How invincible are those habits, which have, for a long time, been interwoven with the woof of our existence!

A drunkard and a Christian! It cannot be. Those names cannot subsist together in fellowship. . . .

9

The Boston Society for the Moral and Religious Instruction of the Poor

1819

Like Ezra Stiles Ely, Boston's Society for the Moral and Religious Instruction of the Poor looked upon working-class neighborhoods as rife with vice and ripe for conversion. Presuming that poverty was a function of individual sin, the male-run Boston Society equated missionary efforts with poor relief. "Associations are formed to relieve the daily wants of the sick, unfortunate, infirm, or aged," observed one of its annual reports, "but there are, we know, other wants than those of food, clothing, and shelter." By distributing tracts and Bibles and by guiding poor children into Sunday schools, the Boston Society hoped that spiritual salvation and economic uplift would go hand in hand.

Third Annual Report of the Boston Society for the Moral and Religious Instruction of the Poor, Presented at Their Anniversary, November 8, 1819 (Boston: U. Crocker, 1819).

execute it. In every thing that relates to the affairs of the poor, a rare union of system, intelligence, talents and industry is requisite; and without such union as a judicious writer has observed, "Millions may be wasted without bettering their condition." In selecting therefore, the person who may be the chief conductor of the business, many difficulties will occur, and unless such a salary is allowed, as may command abilities, reward industry, and prevent the effect of small temptations, it is in vain to hope for any permanent advantages. . . .

14

Rules and Regulations of the Salem Almshouse

1816

Although almshouses were not penal institutions like jails or penitentiaries, they served a disciplinary purpose. Indeed, many localities tried to make their almshouses as inhospitable as possible to discourage the poor from living at the public's expense. Most almshouses regulated the waking hours of their inhabitants, mandating strenuous labor, stipulating a diet of bland food, and limiting opportunities for relaxation. The 1816 rules of the Salem, Massachusetts, almshouse were typical of early republic institutions.

Time of Rising and Public Worship. At the first ringing of the bell in the morning, every person, the sick and infirm excepted, must instantly rise, dress and repair to the Pumps and cleanse themselves; after which, if Sunday, they must put on their best apparel, and at the ringing of the bell, at a time which will be communicated to them, they must repair to the Chapel, and there behave with decency and sobriety; no noise or disturbance shall be allowed in any part of the house, and the day shall be strictly observed as set apart both from recreation and unnecessary labour, and any persons willfully absenting themselves from divine services, shall be subject to prompt and severe punishment.

Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Alms-House in Salem . . . December, 1816, broadside, American Antiquarian Society.

Meals. The bell will be rung 10 minutes before each Meal, when every person will cease from any occupation they may be engaged in, and be ready with clean hands and faces for the ringing of the second bell, when they will repair to the Mess-Rooms, and take such seats as shall be assigned to them by the keeper, where they must strictly observe decency and good order. Half an hour each will be allowed for Breakfast and Supper, and one hour for dinner, at the expiration of which times the bell will be again rung, when every person shall immediately repair to the work assigned them by the keeper. They shall not take any bread or other food with them; they shall not loiter on the way, but shall proceed with alacrity and at once commence their labour. No cooking whatever will be permitted in any room except the kitchen, nor shall any provisions be carried into any of the rooms, those occupied by the sick and infirm excepted.

Kitchen and Mess Rooms. The Kitchen and Mess Rooms, cooking utensils and furniture, are to be under the immediate care of the Chief Cook, who must keep them all perfectly clean; he must be punctual in preparing his Meals, prudent and careful of the provisions and wood entrusted to him, and see that nothing is wasted—and he shall carefully collect the fragments after meals, and preserve them for the Pigs, which are also under his care, and to feeding of which he must be attentive. Immediately after each meal he must clean the mess rooms and tables, and prepare them for the next meal. To aid in all which, necessary assistants will be assigned him, who must obey his directions; he must not suffer any idlers to be in the kitchen, nor deliver to any person, or allow to be taken any provisions out of the usual meal times, unless ordered by the keeper.

Cleanliness. Every tenanted Room in the House, together with the entries and stairways, must be swept clean every morning, and scoured once a week, or oftener if necessary, by such persons as the keeper shall appoint. No filth or dirt shall be thrown out of the windows, and no person shall in any way dirty the yards or out-houses, and the sweepings of the house shall be deposited by the sweepers in a place or places directed by the keeper.

Washing Day. On Sunday morning every person shall bundle their dirty cloaths together and place them in rooms which shall be assigned for that purpose, previously designating them by some proper mark, from whence on Monday morning they shall be taken by the washer

women, appointed by the keeper, thoroughly washed, dried and bundled each by themselves, and placed in the rooms from whence they were taken, and no washing at any other time will be allowed unless by permission of the keeper.

Retirement for the Night. At 9 o'clock P.M. in Summer, and at 8 o'clock P.M. in Winter, on the ringing of the bell, every person in the house must repair to their apartment, extinguish the lights, secure the fires, and retire to bed.

Turnkey. The Turnkey must attend to the opening of the Gates, no visitors are to be admitted by him nor any person belonging to the house allowed to go out, without leave of the keeper. All visitors of a suspicious appearance, as well as tenants of the house, of the same description, shall be strictly searched, and if any ardent spirits shall be found upon them, the former shall be forever after refused admission to the house, and the latter confined in a cell.

Admission of Visitors. No visitors will be admitted to the house except on Wednesdays between 9 o'clock A.M. and 4 o'clock P.M. except the friends and relations of the sick, who may be admitted at other times by permission of the keeper. No money will be allowed to be presented to any inhabitant of the house, except through the hands of the keeper. The inhabitants of the house are strictly forbidden to beg either within or out of the house.

Tasks. Tasks shall be assigned by the keeper to all who are capable of labour, and those who perform them faithfully and cheerfully, shall be rewarded according to their merits by such indulgencies as the keeper shall deem expedient. No work whatever shall be performed by the inhabitants of the house out of the same for any citizen of the town.

Disorderly conduct and profane language. The severest punishment will be inflicted on all those who are guilty of drunkenness, disorderly conduct, profane or obscene language, theft embezzlement, waste of food or manufacturing stock, or any other waste whatever; and no rum or other ardent spirits, on any occasion, or under any pretence whatever, will be permitted to be brought into the house.

Solitary confinement. In all cases of solitary confinement for highly criminal conduct, the prisoner shall be debarred from seeing or conversing with any person whatever, except the keeper of the house and

the person employed by him to supply to their wants, and they shall in all other respects be subject to the severest privations; their food shall consist solely of bread and water, and any inhabitant of the house, other than those excepted, who shall have any communication whatever with a person so confined, shall be subject to a like punishment. All persons confined to the cells must be previously searched, and every instrument taken from them.

Intercourse of the Sexes. No communication whatever, except in cases specially authorised by the keeper, shall be allowed between the unmarried males and females belonging to the house, and all unlawful connection between the sexes is strictly prohibited—any violation of this rule shall subject the violator to the severest punishment.

Hospital. The Nurses who take charge of the Hospital are exempt from all other duty; they shall keep the apartments, beds and bedding in perfect cleanliness, and shall at all times, by night and by day, pay every care and attention to the sick.

Burials. Whenever a person dies in the house, the relatives or friends may remove the body and inter it at their own expence, otherwise it will be buried in the ground which now is or may hereafter be laid out for that purpose; the relations and friends of the deceased will be allowed to attend the funeral at the discretion of the keeper—and any unbecoming conduct will be punished.

School. School hours shall be from 9 to 12 o'clock, A.M. and 2 to 4 o'clock, P.M. in the Winter, and from 8 to 11 o'clock, A.M. and 2 to 5 o'clock, P.M. in Summer, Sundays and the afternoons of Wednesdays and Saturdays excepted. . . .

Sick and infirm. No person shall be considered sick and infirm so as to exempt them from labour, unless pronounced so by the attending Physician.

Punishments. The keeper will be vigilant in detecting every negligence or wilful violation of these Rules, and will promptly inflict the most exemplary punishment—at the same time, those who conduct well will receive the kindest treatment, and every reasonable indulgence.

a system of discipline, or of restraint; or of useful labour. At present, however, this is absolutely impracticable. There is no place, suitable for their reception. The present Alms House is insufficient for its present tenants; more it is impossible to accommodate. A work house, or house of industry, is, therefore, absolutely essential, previously to taking any steps for the improvement of this unhappy, and abandoned class, of children. On this point, your committee do not apprehend that any thing more forcible can be added, to make the essential nature of such an establishment as that, which they recommend, apparent and unquestionable.

The fourth class, the poor by reason of vice, constitute, here, and every where, by far the greater part of the poor; amounting always, probably to a full two thirds of the whole number of the adult poor. As it is for these, that the proposed house of industry is intended, in its first operations, to provide, the present seems a proper occasion to explain the general views of your committee in relation to this establishment; and to what objects and plans those views, at present, and to what they ultimately extend. Indolence, intemperance, and sensuality, are the great causes of pauperism, in this country. Notwithstanding the imbecility induced by their habits and vices, it is yet found by experience, that generally speaking, all of this class can do something; and very many of them a great deal; and some of them fall little, and often not at all, short of the ability to perform, daily, the complete task of a day labourer.

The present accommodations of the Boston Alms House, not furnishing the means, nor the space for actual employ, their labour is but little, and of small account. The course of practice of this class is, to come, or to be brought to the Alms House in a state of disease, or intoxication, or, in the winter, in actual want, and after passing weeks, or months, crowded together, within its walls; after being cured, restored and supported, during sickness and through inclement seasons, they are permitted to depart; to enter upon the same career of vice and indulgence, until they are brought back again; to be again supported and cured; and again sent forth to commence and pursue the same circle. Now, it is apparent, that so long as this class can come when they will, and depart when they will,—so long as Alms House fare is upon a level, in point of quality and comfort, and often a little superior to their out-of-door support and comforts,—so long as little, or no, work is required of them, within the walls, and there is no land belonging to the establishment, on which they can work, without,—that they have

little, or no inducement either to labour or to economize, in order to prevent their being compelled to resort to it: on the contrary, it is obvious that the certainty of a comfortable and easy life, in the winter, is a perpetual and very effectual encouragement to a thoughtless, dissipated and self-indulgent course in the summer. Accordingly institutions of this kind, when from necessity, or any other circumstances, they are conducted upon such principles, may justly be considered as encouraging and augmenting the amount of pauperism in a community. It follows, therefore, from these considerations, that it is the great duty of every society to take care that their Alms Houses should be provided with space of land and accommodations, to enable those, who have the superintendence of them to provide work for this class; and for every class in it, according to its ability; to the end that they should never become the resort of idleness, for indulgence; nor of vice, for comfort; nor of disease, for cure, without cost. . . .

16

*Inmates of the Baltimore Almshouse**June 1825*

When needy Baltimore residents entered the city's almshouse, the clerk entered their names into a massive leather book. In hopes of developing a better understanding of the causes of urban poverty, the institution's administrators surveyed each entrant about age, birthplace, duration of residence in Baltimore, religion, malady, occupational skills, and tobacco use. Although impoverished men and women may have told scintillating tales of their travels and exploits, the data entered into the admissions book was so standardized as to mute the teller's voice. Instead, the clerk holding the pen was able to distill an entire life into shorthand that reduced lived experience to only a few salient categories. Nonetheless, the entries for the forty-three people who arrived at the almshouse in June 1825 present a demographic profile of early republic failure and desperation.

OTTER CAST

Occupation: gravedigger

Admitted: June 6, 1825

Exit: died in the Almshouse
September 16, 1825

Malady: crazy from drink

PHILIP LEE, 48

Birth: 1777, Harford County, Maryland

Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1800

Occupation: currier

Religion: Methodist

Admitted: June 6, 1825

Exit: died in the Almshouse
November 15, 1825

Malady: consumption

Other: uses tobacco

Previous Stint: August 30, 1824 to May 26, 1825 (discharged)

ELIZABETH WOLCOTT, 23

Birth: 1802, Virginia

Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1824

Occupation: housework

Admitted: June 6, 1825

Exit: discharged July 5, 1825

Malady: pregnant by Wm. Founham, who has no residence

WILLIAM CARROLL, 8

Birth: 1817, Baltimore

Admitted: June 7, 1825

Exit: bound out as apprentice
July 18, 1825

Malady: deserted by his father, William James Carroll, a 33 year-old Irish Catholic weaver who had arrived in Baltimore in 1814. William James Carroll had brought four of his children into the Almshouse in January 1824. His daughter, 11 year-old Mary, was bound out shortly after. His three sons—William, Barney, and John—left the Almshouse with him in May 1825, but returned the following month without him. Previous Stint: January 2, 1824 to May 28, 1825 (discharged with father)

BARNEY CARROLL, 6

Birth: 1819, Baltimore

Admitted: June 7, 1825

Exit: discharged with brother John,
August 15, 1825

Malady: deserted by his father

Previous Stint: January 2, 1824 to May 28, 1825 (discharged with father)

JOHN CARROLL, 4

Birth: 1821, Baltimore

Admitted: June 7, 1825

Exit: discharged with brother Barney,
August 15, 1825

Malady: deserted by his father

Previous Stint: January 2, 1824 to May 28, 1825 (discharged with father)

MARGARET (PEGGY) MARRS, 40

Birth: 1785

Admitted: June 7, 1825

Exit: died in the Almshouse
January 16, 1826

Previous Stints: May 2, 1823 to June 18, 1823 (ran-away); September 26, 1823 to October 21, 1823 (eloped¹); October 24, 1823 to December 26, 1823 (eloped); January 6, 1824 to May 30, 1825 (eloped)

MARGARET SOUGLE, 69

Birth: 1756, Ireland

Admitted: June 7, 1825

Religion: Catholic

Exit: discharged March 28, 1826

Malady: old age

WILLIAM ACKERMAN, 23

Birth: 1802, Baltimore

Occupation: blacksmith

Religion: Lutheran

Admitted: June 8, 1825

Exit: eloped June 15, 1825

Malady: deranged by drink

Other: uses tobacco

HUGH GERVIN, 83

Birth: 1742, Ireland

Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1823; in the U.S. since 1785

Religion: Presbyterian

Admitted: June 8, 1825

Exit: discharged August 1, 1825

Malady: old age and spitting blood

PHILIP HARMAN, 63

Birth: 1762, Pennsylvania

Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1785

Occupation: carpenter

Religion: Lutheran

¹eloped: ran away without performing enough labor to clear one's debts for room and board.

Admitted: June 8, 1825 Exit: discharged March 28, 1826
Other: uses tobacco

SAMUEL MONTGOMERY, 49
Birth: 1776, Ireland
Residence: lived in U.S. since 1803; in Baltimore 1 day
Occupation: shoemaker Religion: Presbyterian
Admitted: June 8, 1825 Exit: discharged July 2, 1825
Malady: had been in the Philadelphia Almshouse
Other: uses tobacco

DONALD McDONALD, 103
Birth: 1722, Ireland
Residence: lived in U.S. since 1752; in Baltimore 1 day
Occupation: labourer Religion: Catholic
Admitted: June 11, 1825 Exit: eloped July 5, 1825
Malady: a runaway from the Philadelphia Almshouse
Other: uses tobacco

WILLIAM H. BUEL, 54
Birth: 1771, New York
Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1797
Occupation: mariner Religion: none
Admitted: June 12, 1825 Exit: eloped June 20, 1825
Malady: diarrhoea from drunkenness
Other: uses tobacco

ANN [NANCY] PETERS, 50
Birth: 1775, Baltimore County
Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1805
Religion: Presbyterian
Admitted: June 12, 1825 Exit: died in the Almshouse
August 26, 1825

Malady: lame arm and sore
Previous Stint: in the Almshouse in 1820; May 18, 1824 to March 1, 1825
(discharged)

JANE MCCAULLAY, 21
Birth: 1804, Ireland
Residence: in the U.S. 1 month; in Baltimore 1 day
Religion: Protestant Episcopalian

Admitted: June 13, 1825 Exit: discharged July 6, 1825
Malady: pregnant, says she was shipwrecked and lost her husband
and child

JAMES WILSON, 44
Birth: 1781, Baltimore
Occupation: carpenter Religion: none
Admitted: June 14, 1825 Exit: discharged, March 4, 1826
Malady: drunk when admitted, sprained wrist

ELIZABETH YOUNG, 17, coloured²
Birth: 1808, Washington
Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1821
Occupation: housework Religion: none
Admitted: June 14, 1825 Exit: eloped September 15, 1825
Malady: venereal

RICHARD EAGEN, 59
Birth: 1766, Baltimore
Occupation: carpenter Religion: Baptist
Admitted: June 17, 1825 Exit: discharged December 16, 1825
Malady: ulcer on the leg
Other: would return to Almshouse for 1 month in 1826 with venereal
condition and ulcer on the leg

AMEY BULL, 53, Negro
Birth: 1772
Admitted: June 18, 1825 Exit: died in the Almshouse
October 4, 1826

Malady: brought from jail—insane
Previous Stint: April 29, 1823 to July 28, 1823 (eloped)

NANCY CHASE, 50, coloured
Birth: 1775, Harford County, Maryland
Admitted: June 18, 1825 Exit: eloped March 8, 1826
Malady: insane—brought from jail

²The clerk listed African American inmates as "coloured," "Negro," "Black," and "mulatto." Although the last term indicates someone having a "white" parent, the different connotations of the first three terms are not clear.

WILLIAM GILBREATH, 27

Birth: 1798, Baltimore

Admitted: June 18, 1825 Exit: eloped July 30, 1825

Malady: insane

Previous Stints: June 24, 1823 to August 12, 1823 (eloped); November 18, 1824 to February 25, 1825 (eloped)—in both cases sent to Almshouse from jail.

Other: would return to the Almshouse as a vagrant, November 29, 1825 to March 23, 1826 (eloped)

THOMAS STALLINGS, 25

Birth: 1800, Maryland

Residence: in Baltimore 3 months, previously in Philadelphia

Occupation: blockmaker Religion: Methodist

Admitted: June 18, 1825 Exit: eloped August 7, 1825

Malady: venereal Other: uses tobacco

JAMES CONNER [CONNELL], 64

Birth: 1761, Ireland

Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1784

Occupation: baker Religion: Catholic

Admitted: June 21, 1825 Exit: discharged August 30, 1825

Malady: rheumatism

Other: uses tobacco; would return to Almshouse from November 3, 1825 to May 23, 1826

CATHERINE FOSS, 35

Birth: 1790, Massachusetts

Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1815

Religion: Methodist

Admitted: June 22, 1825 Exit: died in the Almshouse
August 27, 1825

Malady: dropsey

Other: arrived at the Almshouse with 2 sons [see below]; a third child reported to be hers arrived at the Almshouse in October and was bound out soon after.

JOHN FOSS, 8

Birth: August 6, 1816, Baltimore

Admitted: June 22, 1825 Exit: bound out as apprentice
July 18, 1825

WILLIAM HENRY FOSS, 6

Birth: August 10, 1818, Baltimore

Admitted: June 22, 1825 Exit: bound out as apprentice
September 26, 1825

MARY GORE, 44

Birth: 1781, Virginia

Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1799

Occupation: spin, card, knit, &c.

Religion: Catholic

Admitted: June 22, 1825 Exit: discharged June 7, 1826

Malady: rheumatism Other: uses tobacco

ZACHARIAH STALLINS, 30

Birth: 1795, Calvert County, Maryland

Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1799

Occupation: labourer Religion: none

Admitted: June 22, 1825 Exit: eloped July 30, 1825

Malady: venereal

Other: uses tobacco; would return with daughter (Elizabeth, 9) to Almshouse for two months in January 1826³

SALSBURY WILEY, 47

Birth: 1778

Religion: Presbyterian

Admitted: June 22, 1825 Exit: discharged October 3, 1825

Malady: nearly blind

Previous Stints: January 9, 1819 to April 19, 1819; March 5, 1823 to February 1, 1825; February 12, 1825 to March 29, 1825 (discharged all three times).

Other: would return to Almshouse due to want of employment, November 12, 1825 to March 12, 1826 (discharged)

³Zachariah Stallins stirred up a controversy in early 1827 when he attempted to reenter the almshouse, having eloped several times before. When the overseer, Mr. Morton, turned Stallins away, the rebuffed pauper asked, "Am I to die in the street?" Because Morton supposedly nodded in assent, the manager of the poor from Stallins's neighborhood threatened to resign. In his defense, Morton explained: "I am at least *certain* that I never gave such an answer to any person whom I thought in danger of a fate so dreadful *in consequence of that answer*; but if a sturdy vagrant, or one labouring under no disability but what a few hours of abstinence from liquor would remove . . . had asked me whether he was to perish in the street, it is possible, that I might have replied in the affirmative to the hypocritical query."

JOSEPH BRUCE, 42
 Birth: 1783, England
 Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1817
 Occupation: weaver Religion: none
 Admitted: June 23, 1825 Exit: died in the Almshouse
 June 24, 1825
 Malady: intemperance and bruises

MATILDA GRAY, 30
 Birth: 1795, Maryland
 Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1811
 Occupation: spin, knit, & housework
 Religion: Methodist
 Admitted: June 23, 1825 Exit: discharged October 3, 1825
 Malady: rheumatism Other: uses tobacco

JOHN RILEY (the 2nd), 34
 Birth: 1791, Ireland
 Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1806
 Occupation: painter Religion: Presbyterian
 Admitted: June 23, 1825 Exit: discharged October 3, 1825
 Malady: swollen feet Other: uses tobacco

ADAM THOMPSON, 62
 Birth: 1763, Ireland
 Occupation: no trade Religion: Presbyterian
 Admitted: June 23, 1825 Exit: died in the Almshouse
 May 30, 1826

Malady: one-legged; drunkenness
 Other: uses tobacco, can read and write
 Previous Stints: May 26, 1823 to October 28, 1823 (eloped); November 7, 1823 (suicidal when admitted) to April 26, 1825 (discharged)

ELIZABETH RELAND, newborn
 Birth: June 24, 1825 in the Almshouse to Mary Ann Reland, a 21 year-old German Lutheran who had arrived to Baltimore in 1819 and entered the Almshouse on April 18, 1825, pregnant.
 Exit: discharged with mother July 9, 1825
 Other: father is Frederick Hess—Butcher who formerly lived with Mr. Cry on Federal Hill

DANIEL M. CASEY, 57
 Birth: 1768, Calvert County, Maryland
 Residence: in Baltimore 1 day, last in Georgetown, District of Columbia
 Religion: Methodist
 Admitted: June 25, 1825 Exit: died in the Almshouse
 July 4, 1826
 Malady: colic Other: uses tobacco

JOSEPH COLLINS, 33
 Birth: 1792, Maryland
 Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1795
 Occupation: sailor Religion: Catholic
 Admitted: June 25, 1825 Exit: discharged—and taken by the
 Sheriff on a charge of felony
 July 1, 1825
 Malady: drunkenness and sore leg
 Other: uses tobacco
 Previous Stint: February 20, 1823 to November 23, 1824 (discharged)

SAMUEL MCELROY, 56
 Birth: 1769, Philadelphia
 Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1816
 Occupation: cabinet maker Religion: Presbyterian
 Admitted: June 25, 1825 Exit: died in the Almshouse
 August 17, 1825
 Malady: crazy from drink Other: uses tobacco
 Previous Stint: August 7, 1824 to August 31, 1824 (eloped)

JOHN WATSON, 50
 Birth: 1775, Ireland
 Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1802
 Occupation: labourer Religion: Episcopalian
 Admitted: June 25, 1825 Exit: discharged August 24, 1825
 Malady: injured by the fall of a house

JOHN COCHRAN, 46
 Birth: 1779, Ireland
 Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1816
 Occupation: sailor Religion: Catholic
 Admitted: June 26, 1825 Exit: discharged October 11, 1825
 Malady: consumption Other: uses tobacco

DAVID RIGGIN, 52

Birth: 1773, Maryland

Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1801

Occupation: carpenter Religion: Episcopalian

Admitted: June 27, 1825 Exit: discharged February 13, 1826

Malady: intemperance

Previous Stints: May 23, 1825 to June 23, 1825 (eloped)

Other: uses tobacco; would return to the Almshouse, February 16, 1826 to March 13, 1826 (eloped)

ELIZABETH DAVIS, 22

Birth: 1803, Eastern Shore, Maryland

Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1820

Occupation: spin, card, knit, weave

Religion: none

Admitted: June 29, 1825 Exit: eloped August 2, 1825

Malady: venereal Other: uses tobacco

CARILINE CORNISH, 14, Black

Birth: 1811, Philadelphia

Residence: lived in Baltimore since 1823

Occupation: housework

Admitted: June 30, 1825 Exit: eloped September 11, 1825

Malady: venereal Other: uses tobacco

17

Report of the Trustees of the Baltimore Almshouse

1827

This report covers the men and women admitted to the Baltimore almshouse in June 1825. Compare the trustees' findings with the raw data in Document 16. Each year, the almshouse trustees compiled statistics from the admissions book and reported to the mayor and city council.

Report of the Trustees of the Alms-House for Baltimore City and County—1827, Baltimore City Archives.

They touted their successes in keeping expenses low, in extracting productive labor from inmates, and in curing them of diseases. Their annual operating budget for the previous year had been just over \$19,000, which included \$2,200 to maintain 137 pensioners in their own homes. Compared to the poor-relief budgets of other large cities, Baltimore's expenses were minimal (see Document 18). Baltimore's almshouse kept expenses low by relying on the labor of its inhabitants to raise crops, sew clothing, and maintain the facilities. Indeed, in the period covered by this report, pauper labor produced 3,710 square yards of fabric, 666 pairs of shoes, 53 barrels of soap, 369 coffins, 16,020 heads of cabbage, and 1,735 pounds of butter. Still, the trustees warned, greater efforts were necessary to keep people out of the almshouse in the first place. Consider how the tables included with this report allowed the trustees to draw conclusions about the causes and character of urban poverty.

... It is with much satisfaction that the Trustees are enabled to state to the Mayor and City Council, that the same excellent discipline good order and economy which have for several years past distinguished the Alms House, continue to be maintained there; and that the school for the education of the children, has been regularly kept; the average number taught being between 40 and 50, and also that religious service is regularly performed in the House at least once a week, at which times the Paupers, whose state of health will admit of it, very generally attend.

The Alms House at Calverton, under its present organization embraces several objects, which are naturally connected with the Institution, and which it is believed greatly extend the value of the establishment.

First.—It contains an Infirmary for the indigent sick.

Secondly.—A Lying-in Hospital.¹

Thirdly.—A Work House for the employment of vagrants, and such of the poor as may be capable of contributing in some degree, towards their own support.

Fourthly.—An asylum for destitute children, in which upwards of one hundred are generally supported, and an average of about half that number receive the benefit of school education.

Fifthly.—A Lunatic Hospital, and

Sixthly.—Upon the foregoing Establishments there is engrafted a medical and chirurgical² school, in which a highly advantageous

¹Lying-in hospital; maternity ward.

²chirurgical; surgical.

and exhibits an anomaly altogether unique, and such [h]as excited the surprise of all persons in other places to whom it was described. Indeed they could hardly realize the existence of a state of things so contrary to their own practice, and so evidently tending to unnecessary expense, and unavoidable immorality. Thus in Baltimore, the trustees for the poor expressly stated, that they did not consider themselves subjected to any expense on this head; in New York 80 or 90 cases come under their notice; in Boston *nine or ten*, in Salem *two or three*, and in Philadelphia 269!!! a difference which can never be accounted for by greater population, nor by any alleged or supposed inferiority of moral feeling or principle. Does it not rather arise from the support and countenance held forth on the one hand, and the absolute denial of them on the other; from the impunity with which decorum and virtue are set at nought within our borders, and the restraint, reproof, and punishment, which elsewhere attend their violation? Let any one whose convictions on this point are not sufficiently clear, attend at this room on the day when the committee on bastardy pay the weekly allowances to their pensioners, and mark the unblushing effrontery, that some of them exhibit. The thanklessness with which they receive their allotted stipend; the insolence with which they demand a further supply, arrogantly exacting as a *right*, what ought never to have been granted, even as a charity. . . .

It is time to bring these observations to a close; they are extended to a greater length than was anticipated by your committee on commencing them. They will only remark in conclusion, that while admitting the inferiority of our own institutions, compared with those they have visited, they find consolation in the reflection, that as the cause of this inferiority is sufficiently obvious, the means of improvement are abundantly within our reach. . . .

Structural Explanations and Cures for Poverty

19

Petition of New Jersey Working Widows to the U.S. Senate

1816

Supporters of American textile manufacturing saw an untapped resource in the labor of the urban poor, especially females. To this end, the Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and the Useful Arts was founded in 1787. More famously, Alexander Hamilton and his associates opened a manufacturing village in Paterson, New Jersey, in 1792. By the early 1810s, a significant number of poor women had left cities to labor in manufacturing villages that dotted the countryside. Work was abundant during the years of conflict with Great Britain, but the end of the War of 1812 allowed cheap English imports to flood American markets. Textile villages ceased production, and many working families lost the means of support. This remarkable petition resulted in the passage of a protective tariff in 1816 to exclude foreign cotton textiles. Such tariffs would remain in place through the 1820s but did not guarantee a subsistence to working families.

U.S. Senate, 14th Congress, 1st Session, National Archives, Legislative Reference Section, RG 46, Sen 14A-C6. Reprinted in Alfred D. Chandler, *The New American State Papers: Manufactures* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1972), 1:439.

14th Congress, 1st Session

U.S. Senate

**Petition of a number of widows, orphans and families of
New Manchester N.J. in behalf of domestic manufacturing**

FEBRUARY 5, 1816

TO THE HONORABLE THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE UNITED STATES IN CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.

THE PETITION OF THE WIDOWS AND ORPHANS AND FAMILYS OF THE
TOWN OF NEW MANCHESTER, COUNTY BERGEN HUMBLY SHEWETH

That your Petitioners from the demand for labor of Persons in the various branches of the Cotton Manufactures were led to settle with their families in this Town, and previously to the peace were enabled by the strictest Economy to support, some of them their infirm Parents and some of them their fatherless Infants; with some degree of decency and Comfort, your Petitioners have found themselves at a subsequent period altho plunged into Difficulties, still enabled to obtain some of the necessities of Life yet struggling with embarrassments too numerous to trouble your honorable body with the recital of.

They struggled however, cheered by hope and with resignation waited for better times; fallacious has been our expectations, and the latter Crisis has brought us of that Hope the only remaining Comfort of the wretched. Dispair now stares up on us with horrid Aspect and we view no other prospect but that of absolute Nakedness. The severity of the present Season adds to our other distress, our helpless Infants crying for bread to those to whom support is withheld crying with piteous Accents, with the pains of frozen limbs and Disease incident to poverty of our Situation, some of those indeed for whom they toiled now snatched to that world where they shall hunger no more and no more be witness to the miseries of their helpless families altho it might relive the accumulated purpose of their wants, adds ten fold misery to the finer feelings of their Souls, your Petitioners approach your honorable body emboldened yet respectfully by the urgency of their situation to pray your honorable body to view with commiseration their distress and extend aid to them by granting such encouragement to the Cotton Manufacturing Establishments which you may deem conducive to the general Interests of our Country and for which your petitioners with tens of thousands of distressed females as in duty bound will ever pray.

New Manchester Bergen Co.

New Jersey 18 January 1816

*The Working People
of New Castle County, Delaware*

1829

As their prospects for upward mobility narrowed at the end of the 1820s, skilled artisans (especially those at the journeyman level) developed a stinging critique of American inequality. Wrapping themselves in the republican ideology of the American Revolution, militant workers formed new organizations in large cities like New York and Philadelphia, as well as in small communities like New Castle County, Delaware. These unions and workingmen's parties shared a belief that laboring people could use the strength of numbers to protect their interests. If government could be put into the service of the many instead of the few, it would be possible to fulfill the destiny of the Revolution. On a more mundane level, it would be possible for working men and women to stave off poverty.

FELLOW CITIZENS AND FELLOW LABORERS,

The Association of Working People having at length become organized, have deemed it expedient to address you, with a view of making known to you their intentions and at the same time engaging your assistance in carrying their views into effect.

The Working People have been emphatically denominated the "bone and sinew" of the body politic; and this is true, inasmuch as they are the most numerous and at the same time the most useful of all classes in which men are divided; it being by them that all things are made, that are made for the use of man, by the power of art in peace; and they forming in war their country's principal and sure defence; while to say the least, *some* of the other classes are mere drones in the hive, who not only live upon the product of the working man's labor, but in fact, appropriate a much larger share to themselves, than the producer himself is able to enjoy.

And, Fellow Citizens, why are these things so? Why is it that one class of men are sunk so far below the rest, in a country which has declared to the universe, that "all men are created free and equal?" Have we not laws to secure to us that "Freedom and Equality" to

Free Enquirer, October 7, 1829.

The pernicious consequences of the inadequate wages paid the women of the classes in question, is strikingly displayed by the state of the out-door paupers in the city of Philadelphia. Of 498 females, there are

Seamstresses,	142
Washerwomen,	62
Spoolers,	28
Shoe-binders,	10
—	242.

Being nearly one-half of the whole number. There are 406 widows.

It may excite wonder how the seamstresses, spoolers, &c. are able to support human nature, as their rent absorbs above two-fifths of their miserable earnings. The fact is, they generally contrive to raise their rent by begging from benevolent citizens, and of course their paltry earnings go to furnish food and clothing.

... The fourth position which I undertook to controvert, is, that

"Taxes for the support of the poor, and aid afforded them by benevolent societies and charitable individuals, are pernicious; as, by encouraging the poor to depend on them, they foster their idleness and improvidence, and thus produce, or at least increase the poverty and distress they are intended to relieve."

If I have proved, as I hope I have satisfactorily, that there are classes of people, male and female, whose dependence is on their hands for support, and whose wages, when fully employed, are not more than sufficient for that purpose; that when unemployed, they must be reduced to penury and want; and that there are classes of females, whose wages are inadequate for their support, even when constantly employed; it follows, of course, that the poor rates, the aid of benevolent societies, &c. far from producing the pernicious effects ascribed to them, are imperiously necessary, and that without them, numbers would actually perish of want, as I have stated, or would have recourse to mendicity;¹⁰ and mendicants impose a far heavier tax on a community than the same number of paupers, supported by poor rates. The support of the 549 out-door paupers of Philadelphia averages 46¼ cents per week—or less than 7 cents per day. Some of them

¹⁰ mendicity: street begging.

receive only a quarter dollar a week. I submit a statement of the whole number, with the pittance they respectively receive:—

42	@	25 cents.
2	@	31¼
186	@	37½
259	@	50
17	@	62½
42	@	75
1	@	100

549

If these were strolling mendicants, as, by the abrogation of the poor laws, and the annihilation of benevolent societies, they would become, the average, instead of seven cents per day, would more probably be 25 or 30 cents, thus increasing the burdens on the community three or four fold. Many of them, with a woe-begone appearance, whether real or fictitious, calculated to excite sympathy, would probably realize 50 cents, and often a dollar a day.

Those of our fellow-citizens who complain of the oppression of our poor laws, will learn with surprise, that of the 549 out-door paupers, there are no less than 390 above 60 years of age, and 6 above 100.—Almost all of these are in a state of superannuation, 50 of them are blind, and 406 of the whole number, as I have already stated, are widows. . . .

24

The Manayunk Working People's Committee

1833

Mechanization accounted for the boom in American textile manufacturing in the 1820s and 1830s. Although mills offered jobs to men, women, and children alike, wages and working conditions were hardly ideal. Manayunk was the center of textile production in the Philadelphia region,

Pennsylvanian, August 28, 1833. Reprinted in John R. Commons et al., eds., *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1910), 5:330–33.

and critics compared it unfavorably to Manchester—the dismal English manufacturing city. Instead of making the lives of workers easier, the new mill technology seemed to turn humans into machines. Grueling hours, dangerous conditions, and low wages led to serious disenchantment for mill workers, who emulated skilled artisans by organizing themselves politically and bringing their grievances before the public. For laborers throughout the country, a ten-hour workday had become a standard demand. Workers insisted upon the extra hours in the day for self-improvement and political activity, much to the dismay and fear of their employers.

FELLOW CITIZENS:

Deeply impressed with a sense of our inability to combat single-handed the evils that now threaten us, and being fully convinced, that the future happiness of ourselves and families depend on our present exertions, we are, with reluctance, obliged to lay our grievances and petition before you, well knowing that we are appealing to an enlightened and generous public. We therefore submit the following, with all the candor of feeling with which the human mind is capable of expressing itself, and may you judge us according to our merits.

We are obliged by our employers to labor at this season of the year, from 5 o'clock in the morning until sunset, being fourteen hours and a half, with an intermission of half an hour for breakfast, and an hour for dinner, leaving thirteen hours of hard labor, at an unhealthy employment, where we never feel a refreshing breeze to cool us, overheated and suffocated as we are, and where we never behold the sun but through a window, and an atmosphere thick with the dust and small particles of cotton, which we are constantly inhaling to the destruction of our health, our appetite, and strength.

Often do we feel ourselves so weak as to be scarcely able to perform our work, on account of the overstrained time we are obliged to labor through the long and sultry days of summer, in the impure and unwholesome air of the factories, and the little rest we receive during the night not being sufficient to recruit our exhausted physical energies, we return to our labor in the morning, as weary as when we left it; but nevertheless work we must, worn down and debilitated as we are, or our families would soon be in a starving condition, for our wages are barely sufficient to supply us with the necessities of life. We cannot provide against sickness or difficulties of any kind, by laying

by a single dollar, for our present wants consume the little we receive, and when we are confined to a bed of sickness any length of time, we are plunged into the deepest distress, which often terminates in total ruin, poverty and pauperism.

Our expenses are perhaps greater than most other working people, because it requires the wages of all the family who are able to work, (save only one small girl to take care of the house and provide meals) to furnish absolute wants, consequently the females have no time either to make their own dresses or those of the children, but have of course to apply to trades for every article that is wanted.

"The laborer is worthy of his hire," is a maxim acknowledged to be true in theory by all, and yet how different is the practice. Are we not worthy of our hire? Most certainly we are, and yet our employers would wish to reduce our present wages twenty per cent! and tell us their reason for so doing is, that cotton has risen in value, but is it not a necessary consequence of the rise of cotton that cotton goods will rise also; and what matters it to us what the price of cotton is, our wants are as great when cotton is dear as they are when it is cheap; if our employers make more profit on their goods at any one time than they do at others, they do not give us better wages, and is it justice that we should bear all the burthen and submit to a reduction of our wages? No, we could not consistently with our duty to ourselves and to each other, submit to it, and rivet our chains still closer! We have long suffered the evils of being divided in our sentiments, but the universal oppressions that we now all feel, have roused us to a sense of our oppressed condition, and we are now determined to be oppressed no longer! We know full well that the attempted reduction in our wages is but the forerunner of greater evils, and greater oppressions, which would terminate, if not resisted, in slavery.

When we look around us, and see the cheerful faces, the happy homes, and many comforts and conveniences of life, which others enjoy; we cannot but feel the disadvantages under which we labor, in our present reduced situation. Where is the man who would change situations with us, after viewing us, and the tyranny by which we are oppressed? There is not one! The hardy workman who labors upon the public roads, breathing the pure air of heaven and enjoying more perfect happiness and liberty than we do—would say, "Give me my sun burnt features, my health and strength, in preference to the pale cheek, the sunken eye, and emaciated form that manufacturers exhibit!"

The deplorable condition of the children working in the factories of England, has been represented in glowing colors, and their burthens alleviated—but what has been done for ours? Nothing! Although our children are oppressed as much as those in the English factories, there has been but few to vindicate their rights, or redress their wrongs; but we hope that every good feeling person will assist us in relieving them of their present burthens.

They are obliged at a very early age to enter the factories, to contribute to the support of the family—by which means they are reared in total ignorance of the world, and the consequence of that ignorance, is the inculcation of immoral and oftentimes vicious habits, which terminates in the disgrace of many of them in public prisons. When on the other hand, if we were relieved of our present oppressions—a reasonable time for labor established, and wages adequate to our labors allowed us, we might then live comfortable, and place our children at some public school, where they might receive instruction sufficient to carry them with propriety through life. But situated as they are, and reared in ignorance, they are trampled upon by every ambitious knave who can boast of a long purse, and made the tools of political as well as avaricious men, who lord it over them as does the southern planter over his slaves!

The female part of the hands employed in the factories are subject to the same burthens that we are, without the least allowance made on the part of our employers, for their sex or age—they must labor as we do, and suffer as we do; and those of them who are grown to womanhood, can barely support themselves by their industry.

We have here drawn but a faint sketch of the oppressions we labor under, but we hope by this to induce the public to examine for themselves. It would be endless to point out in detail, all the injustice we suffer from an overbearing aristocracy, but all that we have here stated are facts which cannot be denied.

PHILADELPHIA NATIONAL LABORER

On Wage Slavery

1836

As capitalist labor relations intensified in northern cities in the 1830s, militant artisans began to describe themselves as "wage slaves." The republican identities of white northern workers had always stemmed from the fact that despite working with their hands, they were not degraded like slaves. Hence, to say that capitalists were turning them into slaves was powerful rhetoric. But this language had unintended consequences, which southern ideologues seized to fend off abolitionist attacks: Northern workers were not only slaves, but they were worse off than Southern slaves who received cradle-to-grave welfare from their owners. In contrast, the exploitative northern system treated workers like machines, broke their bodies, and cast their hollow remains on the government to care for. Obviously, the similarities between slaves and wage laborers could be overstated, and there are no records of Northern workers selling themselves into slavery for better treatment. Nonetheless, standards of worker welfare became an important benchmark as northerners and southerners contrasted their societies in the 1830s and beyond.

A southern planter possesses five hundred slaves: he acquired them by inheritance, or purchased them with his money. He claims their perpetual services; and the laws of his country sanction his claim. By his powerful exertions, or by a fortunate occurrence of circumstances, he has acquired an absolute ascendancy over these men: consequently they are absolutely his slaves.

A northern farmer is in possession of a landed estate, worth one hundred thousand dollars. His fields are cultivated by fifty or sixty ragged miserable laborers; to which he gives twelve dollars a month one year, because they cannot be procured at a cheaper rate. Another year, laborers are numerous; they range over the country in every direction begging for employment. He now hires them for ten, eight, seven, six, five, four, dollars a month, and even sometimes allows them nothing (to make use of a favorite expression of his own) but

"Sarage," *Philadelphia National Laborer*, April 9, 1836.