Child welfare reformers, academic psychologists, and the dependent child in Progressive Era America

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CHILD WELFARE REFORMERS, ACADEMIC PSYCHOLOGISTS, AND THE DEPENDENT CHILD IN PROGRESSIVE ERA AMERICA

BY

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DISSERTATION

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in

Psychology

May, 2002
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Date: March 25, 2002
DEDICATION

For Gabriel and Kiki Louise

Who may not grow up to remember their mother's struggle to complete this project

(which never could have happened without the support of their father)

but will hopefully gain something from the spirit of the effort.
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ABSTRACT

CHILD WELFARE REFORMERS, ACADEMIC PSYCHOLOGISTS, AND THE DEPENDENT CHILD IN PROGRESSIVE ERA AMERICA

by

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University of New Hampshire, May, 2002

This study explores what was being done on behalf of dependent children during the Progressive Era, drawing connections between the reform movement and theories and figures from academic psychology. Chapter One is a detailed overview of the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children, with an emphasis on discussions that stress reformers' attitudes toward proper care of dependent children. Chapters Two, Three and Four take up individual themes that emanate from the Conference and correspond with current gaps in the historical literature. Chapter Two explores both the majority position opposing congregate asylums and the minority position supporting congregate asylums in the context of a society that was becoming more focused on individual needs and differences. Chapter Three is about the impetus to move dependent children out of congregate orphan asylums and into rural cottage settings, highlighting three case studies of leading Progressive Era cottage-based institutions. Chapter Four focuses on the cultural context of the placing out movement, emphasizing the role the American eugenics movement played in thwarting the advancement of placing out work. In the Conclusion the findings of the study are summarized and connections to the post-Progressive Era years are drawn.
INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the last century our country was changing dramatically as the population swiftly expanded and the economy burgeoned. Large-scale immigration transformed the cultural face of America, and the city, a natural draw for the majority of immigrants, became the center of cultural, industrial and economic activity, displacing the once prominent role of the small rural town. Although the sweeping changes were generally welcomed, they also yielded a plethora of practical problems, leading to a rapid period of social reform.

Concerns about the welfare of children were central to the reform agenda during this period in U.S. history known as the Progressive Era. One issue historians have been concerned about is what motivated Progressive Era reformers in their efforts. Were they primarily driven by humanistic, altruistic motives, or a desire for social control? Up until the middle of the twentieth century the historical emphasis was on the liberal, altruistic impulse, but beginning in the 1950s a new generation of historians offered another view. In the "revisionist" interpretation, the Progressive Era is cast as a conservative one. It is argued that reformers, mostly from small rural towns, were uncomfortable with the fast pace of urbanization and industrialization so they sought to control the process of change through restructuring and reorganizing society. Revisionists characterize Progressive attitudes toward state and local government as ambivalent and somewhat distrustful.

1 Although some historians have defined the Progressive Era as stretching from 1890 – 1930, it has traditionally been defined as 1890-1917. The traditional period of 1890-1917 made sense for the purposes of this study because there was a noticeable shift in attitudes toward dependent children by 1919, indicating a less biological-based and more environmentalist-based approach to thinking about orphans, half-orphans, and other needy children. This shift is discussed at the end of Chapter Four and during the Conclusion of this dissertation.
Progressives wanted to keep society orderly, therefore they emphasized efficient methods of control. At the heart of the revisionist perspective on the Progressive Era is the notion that by trying to take charge of the way that immigration, industrialization, and urbanization unfolded, reformers sought to reinstate the dominance of elites within American society.²

This historical debate about the motivations of the Progressive Era reformers has also taken place within the more specifically focused literature on Progressive Era child welfare reform.³ Those historical accounts that were written closer to the period emphasize the idealistic and altruistic motives of the "child-savers." In other words, child-savers were moved to act by their own sense of goodwill and duty; record numbers of children were in need of all sorts of help, and reformers responded.⁴ Beginning in the 1960s, however, historians such as Michael Katz and Christopher Lasch offered influential revisionist perspectives. In Katz's view, the child welfare reforms of this period only helped people to adjust to the inherent inequities of the emerging capitalist system. For him, the public school, an institution of great concern to social reformers of the Progressive Era, provided children with an ideological introduction to the American


³ Within the history of Progressive Era child welfare reform, the interpretative debate appears to be most centered around two areas of scholarship: the juvenile court system and public schooling. On the juvenile court system see especially Anthony Platt, The Child Savers (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1969), Robert M. Mennel, Thorns & Thistles (Hanover, NH: Published for UNH by the University Press of New England, 1973), and David J. Rothman, Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and its Alternatives in Progressive America (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980). For historical work on the public schooling movement see Note 5.
economic system by sending them the message that those who succeed are worthy of their achievements, and those who do not are less worthy.⁵ In Lasch’s opinion “education” was the reformers’ method of control, and though it may be better than the old-fashioned way of controlling people through brute force, it was still a form of manipulation, used to achieve desired results.⁶

My own view is most closely aligned with that of historian Susan Tiffin, whose position blends the revisionist perspective with the earlier humanistic perspective. In her book, *In Whose Best Interest?: Child Welfare Reform in the Progressive Era*, Tiffin argues that the middle-class, native-born reformers led a conservative effort to stabilize their society in ways that were in line with their own aspirations. But, harkening back to earlier historical appraisals of the Progressive Era, the main force of her argument is that in spite of the non-radical interests of the child welfare reformers, they were indeed sincerely moved by the plight of children and were motivated to act based on genuine concern.⁷

Tiffin’s work might be grouped with that of a small handful of women historians who have taken a recent interest in child welfare during the Progressive Era, and in the

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process have highlighted the role that women played in the movement. Linking the child welfare movement with women’s changing role in the twentieth century, these historians have shown that many of the most energetic members of the reform campaigns were members of the new national women’s organizations, such as the General Federation of Women’s Clubs and the National Congress of Mothers. Middle and upper class women, for example, dominated the efforts to establish the U.S. Children’s Welfare Bureau (1912).\(^8\)

Although there is no historical consensus about whether the initiatives and structural changes that Progressive Era reformers worked toward and achieved should be deemed “successful,” there is also no overlooking the terribly long list of issues they tried to address and structures they put in place. Their reasons for concern certainly seem irrefutable. It is hard to deny the grim conditions that children labored under in factories and fields, the crowded tenements that produced a host of dangers to their health, the rigid institutional asylums where many needy children were sent, or the harsh, punitive system of justice to which children of all ages were subjected. Reformers organized and lobbied for legislation that would protect children in all of these domains, including laws against child labor, for public health, for the prevention of sales of abusive substances to

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minors, for compulsory education, for kindergarten classes, for care of delinquent and wayward boys and girls, and for care of the feeble-minded. In addition, in keeping with many reformers' ambivalent attitude toward government, they sponsored and/or supported a variety of volunteer movements initiated during this era, such as the Boy Scouts and the Playground Movement.9

The Present Study

This is a story about one population of children, dependent children, who were of particular interest to reformers during the Progressive Era. The term "dependent" was used to describe children who were full orphans, half-orphans (one surviving parent), and those temporarily or completely abandoned by surviving parents. Often distinguished from "delinquents" and "defectives", "dependents" were not characterized as exhibiting derelict behavior. Rather, they were defined as "normal" children who had to rely on non-familial adults, private charities, and/or public services for their survival. Although there had always been children in need of such attention, reformers became intensely interested in dependent children during this period for at least two key reasons. First, there were many more of them. As a result of the exponential population growth and a

new economy that brought with it dangerous industrial jobs and a large itinerant workforce, many parents were forced, due to death of a spouse, injury, and/or economic necessity, to find alternative plans for the care of their children. Second, the most common nineteenth century method of caring for dependent children, the congregate orphan asylum, was coming under fire. The combination of increasing numbers of dependent children, and a loss of faith in the primary system of caring for them, brought the problem to a head.

The purpose of this study is to explore what reformers were doing on behalf of dependent children during the Progressive Era and why they were motivated to support different solutions than the ones that had been acceptable throughout most of the nineteenth century. My research will show that the new societal emphasis on individuality and individual needs led to concerns about the old style of caring for dependent children, and to new ideals of care. Yet despite the numbers of reformers who subscribed to the new ideals, realizing them proved very difficult. Due to practicalities of expense, increasing numbers of dependent children, and increasing concerns about the relationship between dependency and degeneracy, compromises were created, and progress in the direction most reformers were headed was slow.

Existing historical work on Progressive Era attitudes toward dependent children can be clustered together into different strands of research. One body of research is the historical work on orphan asylums. Whether they be broad-sweeping treatments such as Timothy Hasci’s work on orphan asylums in America, or case studies of individual orphan asylums such as Kenneth Cmiel’s study of one Chicago orphanage, these works provide concrete descriptions of how some dependent children were treated at the turn of
the last century. These works are helpful for understanding the complex reasons why the majority of reformers rejected this mode of care in theory, despite how long it took for the theoretical rejection to catch up with actual practice.  

Statistics from the 1910 Census of Benevolent Institutions underscore the slow progress in moving away from the congregate style orphan asylum. This document shows that institutions for dependent children multiplied dramatically during the first decade of the Progressive Era when at least 247 congregate institutions were incorporated between 1890 and 1900. During the first decade of the twentieth century the number dropped a bit, to 214 newly incorporated institutions, for an average of 22 per year between 1886 and 1909. These statistics indicate increasing numbers of dependent children during this period, but they fail to capture the movement to ease children out of institutional care, a movement that was building throughout this period and that culminated in the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children.

There is a strand of research on dependent children that discusses this White House Conference. Historians such as Kristie Lindenmeyer, Robyn Muncy, and Nancy Weiss briefly discuss the 1909 Conference in histories of the rise and fall of the U.S. Children’s Bureau, as the 1912 establishment of the Bureau is the significant piece of legislation having roots in the 1909 Conference. Historians such as Walter Trattner, Michael Katz, LeRoy Ashby, and David Rothman also mention the Conference in the

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context of general histories of child welfare in America, wherein they mark the
Conference as a turning point, when reformers came together to formally denounce the
congregate orphan asylum.13

Whereas this majority position opposing congregate asylums is often
acknowledged, the minority position supporting congregate asylums is not as recognized,
and to my knowledge, has not been explored in any depth. Both views were expressed
during the 1909 Conference, as were views on alternative care for dependent children.
The three alternatives discussed during the Conference include: employing smaller,
cottage-style forms of care rather than the congregate form, keeping half-orphans at home
with a surviving parent (usually the mother) through the use of mother’s pensions, and
placing dependent children out into individual family homes. Of these three, the story of
mother’s pensions, which was the precursor to Aid to Dependent Children (AFDC), has
been told well.14 Both the cottage movement and the placing-out movement, however,
warrant more attention.

The cottage movement is discussed by historians such as LeRoy Ashby, who
referred to cottage style orphan asylums as “anti-institutional institutions”, and Timothy
Hasci, who devoted a few pages to the movement within his larger history of the orphan

Press, 1974); Michael B. Katz, In the Shadow of the Poorhouse; Leroy Ashby, Saving the Waifs: Reformers
and Dependent Children, 1890-1929 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); David J. Rothman,
Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic (Boston: Little, Brown and
Company, 1971). Another source that touches briefly on the 1909 Conference is Robert H. Bremner, ed.,

14 See, for example, Winifred Bell, Aid to Dependent Children (NY: Columbia University Press, 1965).
Although the reformers at the 1909 White House Conference called for private assistance for mother’s
pensions, many state laws were passed during the 1910s providing public assistance in the form of mother’s
pensions.
asylum. Beyond this, however, it has not been the subject of much attention. Likewise, there is still much to be explored with respect to the early placing out movement that began during the Progressive Era. The only strand of the placing-out movement that has been the subject of extensive scholarship thus far is the history of the orphan trains. As will be discussed in Chapter One, this fascinating story is about the trains full of orphans, half-orphans, and abandoned children that left New York City heading west, stopping along the way for townspeople to consider the available choices and take children into their homes. Led by social reformer Charles Loring Brace and his New York Children’s Aid Society, the orphan trains ran between the early 1850s through the early 1920s and still remain a source of great interest to both scholars and the general public. Although the orphan trains are a very important part of the placing out movement, there are many other aspects worthy of attention, including the factors that kept it from having the kind of positive, widespread impact that reformers had hoped it would have in the lives of dependent children.

The concrete examples and styles of reform described in this study are discussed within a broad cultural context. One way the cultural context is explored is through the

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15 Ashby, Saving the Waifs; Hasci, Second Home.

16 For a quick and poignant case study see Andrea Warren, Orphan Train Rider: One Boy’s True Story (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996). There is also M. Patrick, E. Sheets & E. Tricker, We Are Part of History: The Story of the Orphan Trains (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Co, 1994); A.R. Fry, The Orphan Trains (NY: New Discovery Books, 1994); M.E. Johnson & K. B. Hall (Eds.), Orphan Train Riders: Their Own Stories (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1992); P.J. Young & F. E. Marks, Tears on Paper: The History and Life Stories of the Orphan Train Riders (Bella Vista, AK: P.J. Young, 1990); M.D. Patrick & E.G. Trickel, Orphan Trains to Missouri (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997). For the most scholarly reading on the subject see Marilyn Irvin Holt, The Orphan Trains: Placing Out in America (University of Nebraska Press, 1992). Linda Gordon’s The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) examines a controversy that arose when Irish Catholic orphans were placed with Hispanic Catholic families during an orphan train stop in Arizona.

17 Tiffin, In Whose Best Interest?, describes some early efforts at child placing.
use of popular literature from the Progressive Era, including magazine articles, self-help books, and children's novels that feature orphans and half orphans. This last genre warrants some explanation. In preparation for this study I read as many novels about child orphans and half-orphans as I could find – ten in total that were published during the Progressive Era. In reading about the background of the authors I discovered that some of them were indeed involved in reform movements of the era. Kate Douglas Wiggin, author of the classic *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, for example, was at the forefront of the kindergarten movement, and Dorothy Canfield Fisher, author of another classic children's book, *Understood Betsy*, was an active proponent of the Montessori method of child care.¹⁸ Laura Richards, author of the best-selling children's book *Captain January*, was the daughter of Julia Ward Howe, and Samuel Gridley Howe, two highly prominent social reformers from Boston. A philanthropist and Pulitzer-prize winning biographer, Richards was an early proponent of children's summer camps, co-founding Camp Merryweather in Belgrade, Maine.¹⁹

None of these authors, however, were involved in reform activities specifically directed toward dependent children, and I do not make any claims in this study as to their motives in using orphans and half-orphans as protagonists in their novels. It is just as likely, given the longstanding tradition of featuring orphans in children's literature, that

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¹⁹ Laura E. Richards, *Captain January* (Boston: Estes & Lauriat, 1893). Author of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”, Julia Ward Howe was an anti-slavery activist and a leading member of the women’s suffrage movement. Samuel Gridley Howe founded the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston and worked with Dorothea Dix to advocate for better treatment of the mentally ill. Their daughter, Laura Richards, published numerous children's books and verse, and a biography on each of her parents.
these authors were using the orphan as a literary device, than as a way of making a statement about their views on orphans or orphan asylums.20 Even so, as products of their time these novels are useful for capturing suggestive glimpses of cultural attitudes of the period, and I use them selectively for this purpose in the chapters that follow.

Another goal of this study is to explore the degree to which reformers’ efforts on the behalf of dependent children overlapped with the theories and efforts of academic psychologists. The Progressive Era is an interesting period to explore for this sort of overlap because it directly precedes the period when psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and other mental health professionals became the experts of child placement practices.21 In her recent work on the history of adoption historian Ellen Herman has argued that although the middle of the twentieth century was the most critical, adoption began developing a psychology unto itself as early as 1915. Examining the period just before child placement entered into a new domain provides a window into a time when the boundaries around dependent children were less formalized and more fluid.22

By the 1890s, the beginning of the Progressive Era, the establishment of psychology as a new academic discipline was well underway. During the 1870s, William James and Wilhelm Wundt took significant steps toward creating the new discipline by

20 I discussed this longstanding tradition, within children’s literature, of using orphans as literary devices with Susan Bloom, the Director of The Center for the Study of Children’s Literature at Simmons College, over the phone during the Fall of 2000.

21 To my knowledge, the only historical work that has addressed the relationship between psychologists and child welfare reformers during the Progressive Era is a book chapter by Hamilton Cravens, “Child Saving in the Age of Professionalism, 1915-1930”, in American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook edited by Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, pp. 415-88 (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1985). Coverage begins toward the end of the Progressive Era and does not focus specifically on dependent children.

22 Ellen Herman, “Rules for Realness: Child Adoption in a Therapeutic Culture,” a paper presented at the Conference on Therapeutic Culture, Boston University, Institute for the Study of Economic Culture and Society (March 31 and April 1, 2001).
opening laboratories at Harvard and Leipzig, respectively. Both of these founding fathers strongly believed that psychology should leave its home as a branch of moral philosophy and establish itself as a branch of the natural sciences.\(^{23}\) Their conception of where psychology should be located in the hierarchy of the sciences was a guiding force as an effort to inaugurate the new discipline was mounted. This launching of the discipline – the attempt to establish it as a bona fide academic discipline, with full-fledged university support and an organized sense of group identity - is what historians have referred to as the process of professionalization.\(^{24}\)

Historians of psychology have given ample attention to the process of professionalization that occurred during the years before and after the turn of the last century. Through the study of early American psychologists' “intentional and resolute pursuit of professionalization”, a number of important milestones have been noted, including: G. Stanley Hall’s (a student of both James and Wundt) appointment as a psychology lecturer at Johns Hopkins University, where he opened the first U.S. laboratory dedicated to psychological research in 1883; the establishment of the field’s first scholarly journal *The American Journal of Psychology*, in 1887; the publication of William James’s visionary textbook *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890; and the


\(^{24}\) During the 1890s scientific professionalism was taking place in tandem with the rise of the modern university, where graduate and professional schools were located at the pinnacle of the new university structure. See, for example, Joseph Ben-David, *The Scientist's Role in Society: A Comparative Study* (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1971) pp. 145-146. Also see the final chapter of Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (NY: Norton, 1976), and Samuel Haber, *Authority and Honor in the American Professions* (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1991) p. 276.
establishment of the field's first and foremost professional organization, the American Psychological Association, in 1892.25

There is ample evidence in his landmark textbook *Principles of Psychology* (1890), that William James was hopeful about the ways in which the new science of psychology might someday be applied outside the walls of the academy. Even when some of his colleagues questioned the boldness of his vision for the usefulness of psychology, James held fast to his view:

> What every educator, every jail-warden, every doctor, every clergymen, every asylum-superintendent, asks of psychology is practical rules. Such men care little or nothing about the ultimate philosophic grounds of mental phenomena, but they do care immensely about improving the ideas, dispositions, and conduct of the particular individuals in their charge.26

In retrospect, James's broad vision for an applied psychology came to fruition, in part. Early American psychologists went on to tout their services and forge strong alliances with educators, business people, and the U.S. government, yielding the birth of educational psychology, industrial psychology, and the mental testing movement. But as much historical work has shown, early American psychologists did not embrace with equal interest or warmth all opportunities to apply their science. Applied alliances were deemed fruitful when they were in keeping with professionalization goals. Therefore, opportunities to build relationships with other disciplines, organizations, and segments of society were pursued when they served to add stature to the new discipline's identification with the natural sciences. Early psychologists were quick to tighten the


boundaries of their field in response to theories, methods, and movements that were perceived as threatening to the field's scientific credibility.27

One such movement from which the majority of early psychologists wanted to distance themselves was the child study movement. The beginning of the movement is marked by the publication of G. Stanley Hall's book *The Contents of Children's Minds on Entering School*, in 1883.28 Put simply, the child study movement, led by Hall, was an attempt to organize public schoolteachers to collect observational and questionnaire data for psychologists to analyze. The movement carried significant momentum throughout the 1890s as Hall, in his characteristic way, spoke about child study with an evangelical fervor that infected teachers and parents alike.29 Although historians of psychology and education have noted productive legacies of the movement, by the turn of the century most of Hall's contemporary psychologists publicly and/or privately scoffed at it for a variety of reasons, including the rather haphazard and unscientific questionnaire 

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methods for which it was becoming known. Hall himself admitted that his own attempts to forge alliances with the applied world of child saving had failed, and that the child study conferences he organized at Clark in 1909 and 1910 had not had the impact he had hoped for.

Whereas the story of his child study movement is not particularly relevant to this dissertation, the influence of Hall’s psychological theories and professional mentoring is significant. Although Progressive Era reformers were largely embroiled in applied activities and their contemporary early American psychologists were heavily embroiled in establishing their discipline and insuring its survival, my research suggests varying levels of connection. Former graduate students of psychologist G. Stanley Hall played important leadership roles within the reform-led playground movement, for example, and another student of Hall’s, psychologist Henry Goddard, spoke directly to the subject of dependent children. In addition, I argue that evidence suggests a broad cultural connection between reformers and psychologists of this era, as both groups reflected concerns with individual needs and differences.

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In this study I examine what was being done on behalf of dependent children during the Progressive Era and draw connections between the reform movement and theories and figures from academic psychology. Given the strengths and weaknesses of the available scholarship on dependent children the study has been structured in the following way. Chapter One is a detailed overview of the 1909 White House Conference, with an emphasis on discussions that stress reformers' attitudes toward proper care of dependent children. Chapters Two, Three and Four take up individual themes that emanate from the Conference and correspond with current gaps in the historical literature. Chapter Two explores both the majority position opposing congregate asylums and the minority position supporting congregate asylums in the context of a society that was becoming more focused on individual needs and differences. Chapter Three is about the impetus to move dependent children out of congregate orphan asylums and into rural cottage settings, highlighting three case studies of leading Progressive Era cottage-based institutions. Chapter Four focuses on the cultural context of the placing out movement, emphasizing the role the American eugenics movement played in thwarting the advancement of placing out work. In the Conclusion I summarize the findings of the study and draw connections to the post-Progressive Era period.
CHAPTER ONE

THE 1909 WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON CARE OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN

Why is it that we have been so slow in America to follow these modern devices for minimizing dependency?\footnote{Jane Addams, as quoted in Senate Document 721, 60-2-2. Proceedings of the Conference on the Care of Dependent Children, held at Washington D.C., January 25-26, 1909, p. 100. (Hereafter referred to as White House Conference.)}

Jane Addams

Historians have referred to the 1909 White House Conference as an important turning point in the history of child welfare. Although reformers had called for many of the same changes earlier, in different venues, it was this conference that succeeded in bringing together a critical mass of high profile reformers who articulated and promoted a unified agenda for the care of dependent children. Two concrete outcomes of the conference are particularly worth mentioning. The idea of a national children’s bureau did not originate at the conference, but it was discussed, recommended, and applauded during and after the conference, and in 1912 the U.S. Children’s Bureau became a reality. Another issue discussed at the conference was mothers’ pensions – providing mothers of dependent children with private funding to stay at home and take care of their own children rather than give them up to orphan asylums. This idea was promoted heavily both during and after the conference and during the 1910s a number of states passed legislation in support of public funding for “worthy” single mothers to provide for their children. In addition to such concrete legislation, a number of important ideas about how
dependent children should be cared for were endorsed during this conference, as discussed below.

On December 22, 1908, nine men well known within the child-saving movement wrote a letter to President Theodore Roosevelt to call his attention to the problem of America's dependent child. These men, Homer Folks (Secretary of the New York State Charities Aid Association), Hastings Hart (Chairman, Study of Child Placing, Russell Sage Foundation), John M. Glenn (Secretary and Director of the Russell Sage Foundation), Thomas M. Mulry (President of the St. Vincent de Paul Society of the United States), Edward T. Devine (Editor of Charities and The Commons, General Secretary of the Charity Organizing Society, and Professor of Social Economy, Columbia University), Judge Julian W. Mack (Judge Circuit Court, of Chicago, and Ex-President of the National Conference of Jewish Charities), Charles Birtwell (General Secretary of Boston’s Children’s Aid Society), Theodore Dreiser (Editor of the reform journal The Delineator & author of novels such as Sister Carrie), and James E. West (Secretary of the National Child-Rescue League), took care to define what they meant by dependency. Dependent children were to be distinguished from delinquent children; dependent children were not troublesome. Orphans and half-orphans, abandoned and/or neglected, dependent children were described by these men as the ever growing population of unfortunate children in the United States.\(^{33}\)

What they were requesting was the chance to bring the problem into the national spotlight by making the care of dependent children the subject of a White House

\(^{33}\) According to a special bulletin of the U.S. Census (Senate Document 721 60-2-2) by the end of December, 1904 there were 92,887 dependent children in congregate institutions and approximately 50,000 dependent children under supervision in family homes.
Conference. Such a conference would allow for the exchange of ideas among those people involved in the child-saving movement. An important goal of the conference would be to provide the President with a brief for his consideration, directing him toward the kinds of legislation that would be especially helpful to dependent children and those working with them.

About three weeks later, on January 10, 1909, the President appointed James E. West, Homer Folks, and Thomas Mulry to a committee on arrangements for the conference. This committee was responsible for coming up with an agenda for the conference, choosing speakers to prepare comments on each of the subjects for discussion, preparing rules that the conference would be governed by, and issuing invitations to the conference, which was to take place over January 25th & 26th.

Two hundred and sixteen invitations to the conference were issued, and with only a few exceptions, everyone who was invited was able to attend. Looking over the list of invitations it is clear that most attendees could be described as community leaders, whether at the national, regional, county or city level. A few members of the academic and extended intellectual community were included, such as college professors and journal editors. What the attendees had in common, however, was "hands on" experience with dependent children. Theoretical talks about child care and/or child development were not scheduled into the program. The committee planned to discuss issues that directly affected the daily lives of dependent children and their caregivers, and the list of those who attended reflects this focus.

Over the course of two days the conferencegoers debated 14 propositions. At the outset of each discussion, at least two speakers gave prepared talks on the subject at hand.
Following the prepared talks, a rotating Chairman led the group in a timed discussion, wherein a participant had a few minutes to offer his or her thoughts and questions. After the first day of the Conference, a Committee on Resolutions, made up of Hastings H. Hart, the Honorable Edmond J. Butler, Judge Julian W. Mack, the Honorable Homer Folks, and James E. West, began meeting. As described in the conference proceedings, the task of the Committee on Resolutions was to write a statement about each proposition reflecting the consensus of the conference. But because the goal was to read the resolutions to the conference by the end of the second day, members of the Committee met throughout the second day of the conference, rotating in and out so that at least one member was present during active discussion of each proposition. As promised, the Committee submitted its report to the conference at the end of the second day, and it was voted in, unanimously. In the case of a few propositions, full verbal support (the conference did not vote by ballot) of the submitted resolution is interesting because according to the range of views offered on certain subjects, a clear consensus opinion did not always emerge. But in the end, those who expressed minority opinions throughout the conference accepted the recommendation of the Committee on Resolutions, and the report was issued to the President with full support.

The majority of the 14 propositions discussed during the conference related to concerns about local, regional, and national organization. At the national level, for example, the conference attendees debated the merits of establishing a National Children’s Bureau (the subject of Proposition 1) for “the collection and dissemination of accurate information in regard to child-saving work and in regard to the needs of children
throughout the United States.\textsuperscript{34} They also discussed establishing a separate, permanent committee (the subject of Proposition 9) to conduct “an active propaganda with a view of securing better laws in relation to children, better organization of child-caring agencies, and better methods of relief and aid to children throughout the United States.”\textsuperscript{35} At the State level, the conference attendees supported new laws and protocols requiring State inspection and approval of all child-caring agencies (subject of Propositions 2 and 3), as well as State supervision of the educational work of orphan asylums (subject of Proposition 7). They strongly endorsed the importance of close cooperation between all child caring agencies within a community, and on a national level (subject of Propositions 8 and 13). In addition, the conference attendees addressed issues of accountability. They recommended that child-care agencies should secure and record as much information as possible about the history of their charges (subject of Proposition 10) and thoroughly investigate all applications to host dependent children within family homes (subject of Proposition 12). For the most part, all attendees agreed that each of the structural and organizational propositions should be supported and pursued either in the form of national or state legislation, or through creation of a voluntary association.\textsuperscript{36}

These topics pertaining to improved organization at all levels, stronger mechanisms of cooperation, and higher standards of accountability, are very important elements of the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children. They indicate reformers’ interest in professionalizing, in arriving at some kind of consensus about the standards for their work. Although the knowledge that child welfare reformers

\textsuperscript{34} White House Conference, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p. 38.
were putting efforts into professionalizing during this period is helpful in creating a backdrop for this study, the specific discussion of these structural concerns is less central to my purposes.

The 1909 Conference shed light on Progressive Era child welfare reformers’ attitudes toward dependent children and how they should be cared for. In particular, the discussions of four propositions (Proposition 4, 5, 6, and 14) suggest three main conclusions about reformers’ attitudes toward the future of care for dependent children. By 1909, the majority of child welfare reformers could no longer support the existence of the congregate orphan asylum, in theory. The newer system of group care, the cottage system, was, however, appealing to most of them. But the most heavily endorsed alternative to the orphan asylum was the family home.

**Proposition 4**

Should children of parents of worthy character and reasonable efficiency, be kept with their parents — aid being given the parents to enable them to maintain suitable homes for the rearing of the children. Should the breaking of a home be permitted for reasons of poverty, or only for reasons of inefficiency or immorality?  

This proposition was debated at great length. Three people gave prepared responses to the proposition: Mr. Michael J. Scanlan, President of the New York Catholic Home Bureau, Mr. Ernest P. Bicknell, President of Conference Charities and Correction for 1909, and Mr. James F. Jackson, Superintendent of Associated Charities, Cleveland.

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36 For a summary of each of the Propositions mentioned in this paragraph please see Appendix A.

37 White House Conference, p. 37. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, during this era “inefficient” meant more than “ineffectual” or “ineffective.” The basis of efficiency was physical, mental, and moral strength and health. In an 1898 article from the *Times* (16 Dec., page 7, column 6) “inefficient” was used this way: “ill-born, ill-fed, ill-housed, ill-clad, many of them at best are poor animals, and inefficients by birth or degeneration.
Ohio. In addition to the three who gave prepared talks, fourteen others spoke to the issue. For the most part, there was strong agreement that children of worthy parents should be kept with those parents, even when they fall upon hard financial times as a result, for example, of industrial accidents or disease.

The words of Mr. W.B. Sherrard, Superintendent of the National Children’s Home Society, capture the flavor of the typical statement given on this subject: “Mr. Chairman, among my friends I am looked upon as a radical in regard to the rights of childhood, but I think the question as presented for consideration has only one side to it, namely, that we should help the parents to keep their children, bearing this in mind: That that provision is made conditioned that they are proper people themselves.” (p. 45)

Mild exceptions to the consensus were expressed by Mr. Mornay Williams of New York City, Chairman of New York Labor Committee, and echoed by Dr. Edward T. Devine of New York City, Editor of *Charities and the Commons*. Williams cast himself in the minority because he was “not entirely convinced that even in the case of dependent children it is always best to leave them in their own homes.”\(^{38}\) Rather, Mr. Williams argued “that there are very often cases where the good school is better than the home.”\(^{39}\) Dr. Devine spoke on the heels of Williams’ remarks, distinguishing himself from the group as someone who had always thought more highly of congregate institutions than most people at the conference. He argued that there were some occasions when the only way that a widow or poor parents could find relief was to “temporarily lighten the

\(^{38}\) Ibid, p. 46.

\(^{39}\) Ibid, p. 46.
burden” by putting some children into orphan asylums “in order that the parents may give adequate care to the children that remain.”40

These opinions were not championed at the conference, however. By far, the majority of those in attendance believed that there was only “one side to the question.”41 As Mr. George L. Sehon, Superintendent of the Kentucky Children’s Home Society, put it: “I believe it is almost a criminal act to take children from their families unless it is absolutely imperative.”42

Given the strong agreement on this subject, some speakers were roused to take the proposition to the next level. They posed whether families in need should be funded by private or public means, for example, and spoke against child labor serving as any kind of adequate solution for the poor family. As these subjects arose the Chairman took his cue and steered the group onto the next proposition.

With regard to Proposition Four, the report issued by the Committee on Resolutions began: “Home life is the highest and finest product of civilization. It is the great molding force of mind and of character. Children should not be deprived of it except for urgent and compelling reasons.”43 The Committee went on to recommend that children of parents of “worthy character”, who had suffered “temporary misfortune”, and children of “deserving” widows, should be kept at home. In order that such parents were able to “maintain suitable homes for the rearing of the children”, funds should be

40 Ibid, p. 47.
41 Ibid, p. 53.
42 Ibid, p. 53.
43 Ibid, p. 192.
They argued that such aid should come "preferably in the form of private charity rather than of public relief", and concluded that "except in unusual circumstances, the home should not be broken up for reasons of poverty, but only for considerations of inefficiency or immorality."  

**Proposition 5**

Should children normal in mind and body, and not requiring special training, who must be removed from their own homes, be cared for in families wherever practicable.  

It is telling that the organizers of the conference decided to make this proposition the main subject of discussion during the one public session of the conference. At 8:00 PM on January 25, nearly 1600 people joined the conference attendees at the New Willard Hotel, to hear prepared talks on the issue of whether normal dependent children should be cared for in families whenever possible. It is not surprising that the conference organizers chose to highlight this proposition as the subject of a public forum because it was the central topic of the conference. That is, it certainly appears that if the organizers could make a convincing case for support of this proposition, they would have considered the conference a success. The conference leaders were working under the assumption, supported not by any numbers or statistics but by anecdotal evidence and personal experience, that family homes were far preferable to institutional care for dependent children.

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44 Ibid, p. 192.
It was a carefully organized program of speakers who had been lined up. Five very well known presenters were chosen to represent carefully targeted constituencies. In addition to representing the most recent immigration groups, including eastern (Jewish) and southern (Catholic) Europeans, and African Americans who were migrating from the south to northern cities, the speakers represented three of the hubs of that immigration and migration, including New York, Chicago, and Boston.

The first speaker, Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, President of the National Conference of Jewish Charities, offered a dim view of institutions: "Institutions represent the line of least resistance. But in morals the line of least resistance is never the first but always the last that ought to be chosen. Childhood is too sacred a possession and too mighty a potentiality to be handled on the ready-made plan."47 Rabbi Hirsch's speech was lengthy, as he detailed many reasons against the institutional plan of caring for children. In his opinion, there was only one reason to keep institutions for dependent children in existence – in order to have a spot to temporarily house children until permanent homes were found for them.

Rabbi Hirsch was followed by the Rt. Rev. D.J. McMahon, Supervisor of Catholic Charities, New York City, who painted institutional life in a completely different, more positive, light. He was against the idea of providing worthy mothers in need of financial help with pensions because he thought that such a practice would be abused. He acknowledged that his home, New York City, was unique with respect to

numbers of dependent children because it served as the first home of most immigrants, and "the great receiving depot for the impoverished and shiftless of our own country." 48

Most of these great numbers of dependent children in New York were taken care of through private institutions, which McMahon eloquently sought to defend:

We hear much about the mechanical drill to meals, the unnatural silence, the absence of expressive faculties, and so forth, ad nauseam. What are these but manners, even be they as dreadful as they are frightfully pictured by antagonists for a purpose? Their influences on character and development is of meager weight....I have no hesitation in saying in conclusion that the health of the children is far better than it would be in a family home; that their education is cared for; that their play, their conduct is suited to their years, and that for devotion and self-sacrifice to their interests none can compare with the Sisters and Brothers who watch over these wards of the State. 49

It is safe to say that although a few people were willing to stand and ask that institutions not be entirely discounted by the conference members, no one spoke as forcefully in favor of institutions as McMahon did.

Jane Addams, of Chicago’s Hull House, followed McMahon, addressing the issue of how poorly America ranked among other countries when it came to measures for minimizing dependency. As examples, Addams offered the five European states that had limited the number of hours a woman could work during the day, Switzerland’s program which rewarded every school-aged child of a widow with a “scholarship” (a form of allowance) at the end of each school week, Germany’s policy of State-shared industrial accident insurance, and England’s Employer’s Liability Act, whereby employers shared responsibility for the losses that each worker came to bear. After offering all of these examples, Addams demanded of her audience:

48 Ibid, p. 97.
49 Ibid, p. 98.
Why is it that we have been so slow in America to follow these modern devices for minimizing dependency? Why is it that we, at best, are suggesting foster families rather than schemes for preserving the natural family of the father, the mother, and the little children living together as they were meant to live? It is, perhaps, against our Anglo-Saxon traditions that the State should come in and render this aid. Are we afraid of "paternalism" or of some of the other hard words which we so readily apply to such undertakings in America?  

Mr. David F. Tilley, a member of the Massachusetts State Board of Charities, was next on the docket. He favored the idea of offering temporary financial assistance (or pensions) to families in order to keep them together. His main point was that "outdoor public relief", as he called it, did not seem to "increase pauperism." Tilley acknowledged that "indiscriminate almsgiving" could present "dangers to the community" as well as to the individual. But his main argument was that if "outdoor relief" was "administered in a wise and discriminate manner and by officials who in addition to having big souls and plenty of good common sense, are not governed and controlled by political influence", then it could be very successful indeed.

The final speaker to offer a prepared talk on the subject of raising dependent children within families, was Dr. Booker T. Washington, President of the Tuskegee Institute. Washington discussed his perspective on why there were so few Negro children in need of dependent care. He reported that 85% of Negroes living in the Southern States lived in rural locations. A survey of the orphan homes in the rural south, which Washington had conducted himself before coming to the conference, turned up extremely few Negro "inmates." The reasons for this, in his opinion, were cultural in nature:

"Why, my friends, in our ordinary southern communities we look upon it as a disgrace

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50 Ibid, p. 100.

51 Ibid, p. 102.
for an individual to be permitted to be taken from that community to any kind of institution for dependents.”

For Washington, the key to keeping the numbers of Negro dependents so low was to keep Negroes in the South. In classic Booker T. Washington fashion, he argued that as soon as members of his race left the south and came to New York or Baltimore, they would lose the “spirit of simplicity, the spirit of helpfulness which (they) had before coming to the city environment.” Washington asked the audience to use their influence whenever possible, to keep the Negro “on the soil in the rural districts, especially in the rural districts of our southern country.”

Following these prepared talks, Proposition 5 was opened up for discussion. Nineteen people rose to speak on the matter. Of the 19, 10 spoke absolutely in favor of family homes for dependent children and against institutional care. The tenor of the comments by those in favor of family homes and against orphanage care for dependent children is best captured by a common phrase that Rev. J. P. Dysart, Superintendent of the Children’s Home Society of Wisconsin, used during his remarks: “Where there’s a will there’s a way.” In short, a majority of conference attendees believed that institutions were not working and that family homes would provide better results. Therefore, they believed that making a full transition away from institutional care was just a matter of commitment to the system of placing children into family homes. As one conference attendee asked, “If the child is normal, why should you take him and put him

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52 Ibid, p. 103.
in an abnormal place?"\textsuperscript{56} For over half of those who spoke on this matter, it was as simple as that.

On the other hand, four people argued that institutions should not be discounted and could serve a purpose for a certain population of dependent children. For example, Ludwig B. Bernstein, the Superintendent of the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Orphan Asylum in New York City, drew upon what he had learned from psychology to question whether family homes were always the best environment for all dependent children. Based on what he had read about the "pre-adolescent" years, Bernstein suggested that although family life is ideal for young children, perhaps it is not as ideal for pre-adolescents. By pre-adolescence "the sense of companionship, the sense of good-fellowship, the sense of friendship, is very much stronger than that of filial devotion."\textsuperscript{57} Needs for friendship with peers might be better met in institutions than in family homes. Others, such as the Reverend C.C. Stahmann, the State Superintendent of the Missouri Children's Home Society, argued that "the institution is a proposition not to be despised" – that it had a place for a certain type of dependent child.\textsuperscript{58}

Lastly, five people made other related points. For example, R.R. Reeder asked for hard data – he wanted to know if any societies had kept records and could report on how many children had been placed in homes a second, third, and fourth time, the average tenure of each home stay, and the average educational level attained. And Mrs. Martha Falconer, Superintendent of a Girls' House of Refuge in Philadelphia, was concerned

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, p. 129.
about how the views expressed at the conference were going to reach the people whom she thought needed to hear them the most: "The people who are running these orphan asylums, good people, in almost every section of the country, do not come to these conferences. How are we going to reach the people who are running orphan asylums, where the children are put in as orphans and kept until they are 13 or 14 years of age?" 59

Although a variety of opinions was expressed during this discussion, the Committee on Resolutions wholeheartedly supported the majority view in its report: "As to the children who for sufficient reasons must be removed from their own homes, or who have no homes, it is desirable that, if normal in mind and body and not requiring special training, they should be cared for in families whenever practicable." 60 The Committee recommended that foster homes for dependent children should "be selected by a most careful process of investigation, carried on by skilled agents through personal investigation and with due regard to the religious faith of the child." Recognizing that each locality would face different circumstances with regard to finding appropriate family homes for their dependent children, the Committee acknowledged that "unless and until such homes are found, the use of institutions is necessary." 61

Proposition 6

So far as institutions may be necessary, should they be conducted on the cottage plan; and should the cottage unit exceed 25 children? 62

59 Ibid, p. 130.
The cottage plan involved taking dependent children out of the large, congregate institutions that were typically based in urban centers, and housing them in smaller cottage homes that were typically located in rural locations. The concept was not entirely new; other types of institutions had sporadically been cottage-based, such as the Willard Asylum for the Chronic Insane and a few asylums for delinquent children from the postbellum era.63 But it was relatively new as a form of caring for dependent children. As will be described at some length in Chapter Two, the orphan asylum had dominated the care of dependent children for most of the nineteenth century.

The first person who gave a prepared talk on this topic at the conference was Dr. Rudolph R. Reeder, the Superintendent of the New York Orphanage at Hastings-on-Hudson. A strong advocate for the cottage plan, Reeder’s talk seemed to ruffle the feathers of at least a few members of the conference, judging from the subsequent discussion. First, he argued that all homes for dependent children were but substitutes for the real biological home, and that: “The poorest type of substitute home is the congregate institution…The life in most of these institutions is so dreary, soul shriveling, and void of happy interests, the daily routine of marching and eating and singing and of lining up for whatever is to be done so stupefying, as to inhibit the child’s normal development.”64

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63 Although the idea of small, intimate asylum for the mentally ill was an ideal during earlier periods, by the second half of the nineteenth century this approach to caring for the insane was deemed unrealistic. At the same time that reformers were pushing the cottage plan for orphan asylums, larger and larger congregate style institutions were being erected to deal with the burgeoning population of people considered insane. See Ellen Dwyer, Homes for the Mad: Life Inside Two Nineteenth-Century Asylums (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 1987), p. 137; Gerald N. Grob, The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America’s Mentally Ill (NY: The Free Press, 1994), p. 114.

64 White House Conference, p. 141.
The cottage plan, as conceived by Reeder, was: “An old fashioned home with school attached, not the empty, uninteresting home so common today, which is much like a boarding house, but a home of a hundred years ago, in which obedience, industrial training, and daily mutual services among the members of the household were important features.” Reeder argued that such a plan actually had certain advantages over placing children in family homes, as he felt that cottage-style living instilled a sense of initiative, industry, and obedience that did not exist as strongly in modern family homes.

Mr. Galen A. Merrill, Superintendent of the Minnesota State Public Schools, had a number of criticisms of congregate housing for orphans, arguing that they could not treat children as individuals, and that they were repressive, which slows growth. While Merrill praised the cottage system of housing dependent children, unlike Reeder he did not consider it preferable to family life. Rather, he continued to praise family life as the ultimate form of care for dependent children, and the cottage plan for being a closer resemblance to family life than the congregate plan could ever be. In the final set of prepared remarks, Mr. Adolph Lewisohn, President of the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society of New York City, did not add very much to the discussion. He argued that the cottage system should be of service only when dependent children could not be kept at home with a mother being paid a pension, or could not be placed out into the homes of others.

Discussion of the cottage plan was relatively brief. Although there seemed to be agreement among the featured speakers that the cottage plan was superior to the congregate plan of housing dependent children, the four conference attendees who spoke

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65 Ibid, p.142.
following the prepared remarks defended the congregate plan. For example, Mr. George Robinson, President of the New York Catholic Protectors, said that he had visited some cottage institutions "in which there was not the contact with the parents of the children that exists in our (2500 large congregate) institution." In addition, the Honorable Simon Wolf, Founder and President of the Hebrew Orphan’s Home in Atlanta, argued that his congregate institution sought "to instill the highest conception of patriotic ideals. [The children] are not a compact mass who govern by rule or rote, but each child is permitted to have individuality."67

Solomon Lowenstein, Superintendent of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum in New York City, also rose to say that although he believed firmly in the cottage institution, he wanted to: "Dissent from the idea that living in a congregate institution in necessarily a hopeless, dreary, cheerless lot. It is nothing of the sort. The children can derive much happiness from such life, and can be prepared to do excellent work after their discharge." In short, it seems that at this point in the discussion some conference goers felt the need to defend the congregate plan against the sweeping dismissals made during the prepared talks. In their view, there remained a place for the congregate institution. But it is significant that this view, that the congregate institution had a place within the overall system of caring for dependent children, was not represented in the report issued by the Committee on Resolutions. Rather, the Committee uniformly supported the cottage system, "in order that routine and impersonal care may not unduly suppress individuality and initiative." They also recommended, as stated in the wording of the

67 Ibid, p. 149.
proposition, that the cottage unit not exceed 25 children, a number that would “permit effective personal relations between the adult caretaker or caretakers of each cottage and each child therein.”69

The Committee pointed out that the cottage system was likely more expensive, “both in construction and in maintenance”, than the congregate system. But they also pointed out in their report that in the long-run, the cottage plan was more economical because it “secures for the children a larger degree of association with adults and a nearer approach to the conditions of family life, which are required for the proper molding of childhood.” A lack of funds, they argued, should never be used as an excuse for the employment of inferior methods of child care. Rather, it should be the responsibility of each child-caring agency to “press for adequate financial support” because “cheap care of children is ultimately enormously expensive, and is unworthy of a strong community.”

Finally, the Committee recommended that existing congregate institutions unable to switch to the cottage system immediately, should, in the meantime, try to simulate the cottage experience for their inmates by segregating them into groups.70

Despite the fact that the report by the Committee on Resolutions was unanimously approved at the conclusion of the two day long conference, it is notable that the Committee chose to ignore the views of those attendees who rose in defense of the congregate plan. It certainly appears as though the Committee members handpicked individuals to speak in favor of the cottage system, and then, even in light of evidence that a representative number of conference attendees supported the congregate plan under

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68 Ibid. p. 151.
69 Ibid. p. 194.
certain circumstances, they overlooked such views. The language of their report, which they presented as the consensus of the meeting, was in full support of the cottage plan, which they deemed superior.

**Proposition 14**

Should there be the freest opportunity for the placing of children in families without regard to state lines, excepting such reasonable provisions as will insure each State against an improper burden of public dependence? Is it desirable that legislation enabling state boards of charities to exercise supervision over the placing-out work of both domestic and foreign corporations be uniform?⁷¹

The history of the issues raised within this proposition is interesting. The question of whether or not dependent children could be placed in families regardless of where those families lived within the United States, and the desire for uniform legislation regarding how such children be supervised were both related to Charles Loring Brace and the orphan train movement. Brace was one of the first activists to argue against institutionalizing children in the very large, congregate-style orphan asylums. Having graduated from Yale in 1848, Brace went to study at Union Theological Seminary before coming to work with Reverend Louis Morris Pease in New York City’s “Five Points” area. In New York, Brace was unsatisfied with his attempts to address the overwhelming social problems around him. Therefore, in 1853, at the age of 27, he established his own organization called the New York Children’s Aid Society. His society devised a number of strategies for dealing with the urban problems confronting poor children, including

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⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 194.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 38.
lodging houses for street children, and industrial schools that taught the trades to girls and boys.\textsuperscript{72}

But it was his emigration work for which Brace became most well known. Brace developed the idea of the “orphan train”, a way to transport orphans from New York City to the west. The orphan train stopped in towns along its route and townspeople would come, look the children over, and decide which ones they wanted to bring home with them. By the 1890s Brace’s orphan trains had transported over 90,000 orphans to be “placed out” in the west. According to Brace’s reports, the system was an all-around success - from the perspective of the children, who grew to be healthy, independent adults, and of the families, who were uniformly pleased with their new additions. Not surprisingly, there were actually many problems with the system, as many orphan train riders moved from home to home out west, were misused and/or abused, and eventually made their way back to New York City.\textsuperscript{73} In general, the mid-western and western states held a certain amount of animosity toward Brace and the orphan train movement as a whole, due to the upheaval it caused them on a number of fronts.

During the Conference there was significant disagreement about how freely dependent children should be placed across state borders, and the positions articulated generally fell along geographical lines. The debate was not allowed to go for very long, however, because the Chairman had to leave enough time to hear the report from the Committee on Resolutions. The gist of the issue was that many states in the West had passed laws restricting states in the East, namely New York, from sending dependent

\textsuperscript{72} For an overview of the literature on the orphan trains please see Footnote 16.

\textsuperscript{73} Holt, \textit{Orphan Trains}, Chapter 1.
children to them. The issue under debate was how carefully the New York Children's Aid Society had placed and supervised children in western states.

For some, such as Mr. A. W. Clark, Superintendent of the Child Saving Institute of Omaha, Nebraska, there was no longer any reason to restrict the New York Children's Aid Society from sending dependent children out west, as long as there were families qualified and willing to accept them. Dr. Charles McKenna, Secretary of the Catholic Home Bureau of New York City, agreed with Mr. Clark that such restrictions should not be in place, and he asked to be able to take the floor if any other delegate had any real argument against the proposition.

Each of the five people who spoke next represented one of four mid-western and western states (Indiana, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa) and expressed a very cautious tone. They called for universal legislation regarding supervision of dependent children who were placed-out because they did not trust people in the East to follow through on placements made out West. For example, in the words of W. B. Sherrard, Superintendent of the National Children’s Home Society in Sioux Falls, South Dakota: “We of the West have been forced to put up the bars to protect ourselves from the poor work of the East. Children have been sent in there without any supervision, no watching, no care, and they drifted into our reform schools.”

The feeling among those who spoke from these Western states was that New York had employed a “method of disposing of undesirable children” and the West had been forced to deal with the consequences. The former conditions were said to be

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74 White House Conference, p. 188.
75 Ibid, p. 189.
“intolerable”, therefore restrictions had been put upon the statute books in many states
including Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, Indiana, Iowa, and the Dakotas.

Mr. Charles Loring Brace, Secretary of the New York Children’s Aid Society, did
rise to speak on behalf of his Society. Without offering any numbers or statistics of his
own, he challenged some of the numbers of dependent children that delegates from
Western states had claimed New York had sent to their states in years past. He went on
to encourage these delegates to write to his Society to get the actual numbers of children
placed in their individual states. Contrary to the accounts already given, he said that his
society was very responsible about following up on the children placed in all states and
that he heartily approved of the plan to have similarities across all states.

In its report, the Committee on Resolutions supported the idea that it was time for
states (clearly intending western states) to reconsider any laws that protected them from
outside agencies intending to place dependent children within their bounds. In the
Committee’s words, it “greatly deprecated” this approach of placing “unnecessary
obstacles” between dependent children and any family willing to care for them. At least
this was its view with respect to “healthy normal children”, who constituted “a valuable
increment to the population of the community and an ultimate increase of its wealth.” In
contrast, the Committee recognized “the right of each State to protect itself from vicious,
diseased, or defective children from other States by the enactment of reasonable
protective legislation.” The Committee concluded by reiterating its protest against
“prohibitive” legislation and by urging “that where it exists, it be repealed.”\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, p. 196.

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These discussions from the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children set the scene for the three chapters that follow. Each chapter is a deeper exploration of a topic grounded in the Conference. Analysis of relevant portions of the Conference discussion indicates that a majority of reformers were losing faith in the ability of the congregate orphan asylum to attend to the needs of dependent children. In its stead, reformers were advocating for the cottage style system of care, or for placing children out into nuclear family homes. In the chapters that follow I will treat each one of these positions, exploring its history, its contemporary cultural context, and any relevant connections to figures or theories from academic psychology.
CHAPTER TWO

INSTITUTIONALISM, INDIVIDUALITY, AND IMAGINATION

"The best of institutions must after all neglect individual differences. They cannot take account of personality. They deal with inmates." \(^\text{77}\)

C.A.S.

During the Progressive Era the tide of opinion was beginning to shift against the orphan asylum. Whereas throughout most of the nineteenth century the orphan asylum was hailed as a superior alternative to the almshouse because it catered to the distinct needs of children, by the turn of the century the majority of reformers considered it outdated. References to institutional orphan asylums in newspapers and magazines were predominantly damning. For example, in 1904 the magazine *Charities* published the statement that while the dependent child "may have been the victim of wretched parents, he should not be made the victim of wretched institutionalism", and a 1910 article in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* urged that orphans should never again be condemned to "soul-destroying institutions." \(^\text{78}\)

This chapter explores the negative view of orphan asylums prevalent during the Progressive Era. This disapproving attitude is explored within the context of a larger societal concern with individuality. A keen excitement about individuality is reflected in

\(^{77}\) C.A.S. (only these initials were used) quoting Rabbi Hirsch, President of the National Conference of Jewish Charities, *New York Times* (April 16, 1910) Page 10, Column 5.
popular books for adults and children published around the turn of the century. An equally strong interest in individuality, particularly individual differences, is reflected in the language of academic psychologists during this time. The condemnatory opinion of asylums that the majority of reformers held is discussed and juxtaposed with the opinion of a small minority of reformers who believed in the merits of the orphan asylum. In order to provide a backdrop for a discussion of the anti-institutional view, the chapter begins with an overview of the nineteenth century orphan asylum.

The Nineteenth Century Orphan Asylum

During the early part of the nineteenth century fully orphaned children (without both parents) and half-orphaned children (without one parent) were commonly placed in almshouses. In the almshouse children were often mixed in with the ill, elderly, criminal, and insane. The disadvantages of this environment for children were acknowledged, yet the almshouse continued to serve as an option for dependent children until after the Civil War in most northern states, and into the twentieth century in some southern and western states. One possible advantage for needy children who ended up at the almshouse, however, is that they were often accompanied by at least one living parent, and/or their sibling(s); undergoing separation from family members was not a necessary component of entering the almshouse. This was not the case when dependent children were admitted to orphan asylums, which more and more became the norm from the 1830s onward.79

79 A vast body of literature exists on the history of child welfare in this country. For this section on 19th century developments, I relied most heavily on: Timothy A. Hacsi, Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Michael B. Katz, In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America (NY; Basic Books, 1986); Mathew A. Crenson,
Prior to 1830, most of the approximately 30 orphan asylums in America were managed by members of community churches -- primarily by middle-class Protestant women, although Catholic nuns established and supervised a fair share of early orphan asylums as well. The first orphan asylum in the country was started in 1729 by nuns at the Urseline convent in what is now New Orleans, in response to the dire needs of children whose parents had been killed during Indian attacks. Several of the early Catholic asylums started by nuns had the goal of educating poor or ill girls, as many orders of nuns were forbidden from working with boys.

The first and only public orphan asylum of the eighteenth century was established in Charleston, South Carolina, when the city took on the care of poor orphans in the wake of the Revolutionary War. At first Charleston's city government paid for the education and care of orphans whom they had placed in other family homes, but by 1790 the city decided to build an asylum to care for all the children in one spot. Other early orphan asylums were opened in urban settings as well, including Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Savannah, Boston, New York City, Cincinnati, Troy (NY), Salem (MA), Newburyport (MA), and Portsmouth (NH). Again, these were privately run, religiously based organizations, established during a time when a sense of voluntarism dominated middle-class American society.

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80 The founding of the first orphan asylum in the U.S. is mentioned in most all books on the history of orphan asylums. For a more detailed account in the language of the time, see the account of the founding as printed in The Survey, 13, (1918): 115-116. There is a footnote indicating that the story was taken from the archives of the Ursuline Orphan Asylum, but no date is given.
Almost always neighborhood leaders founded a new orphan asylum to serve their own particular ethnic population within a city in response to some type of disorder. For example, the cholera epidemic that broke out during the mid 1830s left many orphans and half-orphans, as did other epidemics such as outbreaks of tuberculosis and yellow fever. Sometimes a site would be opened with one particular goal in mind, such as treating an ill group of children, or providing child care for single working poor parents; once a greater need was assessed, the site would expand into a home for orphans. Other times a need for an asylum was assessed at the outset and private funds, usually religiously based, were used to open it. It was for these local reasons that orphan asylums were established by people who had a direct interest in protecting and/or saving members of their own ethnic or religious community.

In addition to the diseases that ravaged communities, especially those neighborhoods inhabited by the poor, many other factors contributed to the opening of greater numbers of orphan asylums during the 1830s and beyond. It was a time of extremely swift and broad economic change, fueled in large part by the tremendous numbers of immigrants from Europe who were descending upon American cities. Industrializing cities drew the immigrants because of the opportunities in manufacturing and low skill labor that were available to parents and children alike. Although the general U.S. population more than doubled between 1830 and 1860, going from 13 million to 31 million, it was the northeastern urban centers that grew the fastest. By 1860, twenty percent of the general population was city residents. Lastly, better and faster modes of transportation made travel of people, and diseases, more plentiful. Railroads and canals made it possible for workers to travel from city to city, as the labor
market drew them. Poor, mostly migrant families, who were living hand to mouth and often had to travel to the next available job, were not economically prepared for any kind of family crisis. When one or both parents died, became injured, or were no longer able to work for any reason, orphan asylums responded.

Although many histories of particular orphan asylums exist, they represent a relatively small percentage of the number of asylums that were functioning in nineteenth century America, and the majority of them are celebratory rather than scholarly accounts. As a result, an incomplete picture of what life was like in orphan asylums is all that is available at this time. We do know that they were extremely varied. Depending on the mission of the asylum, the location of it, the population that it served, and the individual managers in charge, children's experiences of being raised in orphan asylums were just as diverse as those of children raised within families.1

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One orphan asylum whose history has been well documented is the Chicago Nursery and Half-Orphan Asylum. Founded in 1859-60 by a group of Protestant women, this Chicago asylum was opened specifically for half-orphans of "worthy" families. In keeping with a strong sense of Victorian Protestant moralism, this asylum strove to keep itself a place of refuge for children to come and stay for short periods of time while their families recovered from whatever crisis had precipitated the child's arrival. To this end, parents who brought their children to the Chicago Nursery and Half-Orphan Asylum were subject to careful inspection; if they deceived or were perceived as having inappropriate attitudes toward sex or alcohol during the application process, the family was judged "unworthy" of admission. In other words, this asylum was serving a specific population: working poor families with honorable moral values, one deceased parent, the ability to make a financial contribution toward the cost of a child's stay, and the intention to reclaim that child within a year's time.12

Life within the Chicago Nursery and Half-Orphan asylum reflected these same goals. Because of the fear of disease that most asylums faced, as well a commitment to making the asylum a healthy place of refuge, children's heads were shaved and they wore uniforms. Religious training was a central part of their lives at the asylum. The children were separated into three groups (boy and girls under six, older boys, and older girls), and slept in large dormitories that could accommodate up to sixty children. Relatively minor forms of corporal punishment such as a slap on the hand, were used. Efficiency was certainly valued. Even in light of some of the stern asylum rules to promote efficiency, however, the evidence suggests that there was a good deal of love and warmth that

12 Cmiel, Home of Another Kind, pp. 20-22.
developed between the children and their caregivers. Cmiel points out that whenever the press arrived unannounced at the Half-Orphan asylum during the nineteenth century they discovered children playing heartily and communicating affectionately with their matrons. Therefore, the Chicago Nursery and Half-Orphan asylum seems to have provided a highly structured schedule for its charges, but one that also provided opportunities for mental and physical activity. Individual attention was not plentiful for these children, but for the ones who were lucky enough to be admitted, their lives were not dull or bereft of affection.83

According to historian Timothy Hasci's helpful scheme for categorizing the many kinds of orphan asylums in existence during the nineteenth century, the Chicago Nursery and Half-Orphan asylum appears to be most like a "protective" institution. Under Hasci's scheme, "protective" orphan asylums sought to remove their children from the outside, usually urban, world. They provided a secular education, as well as a religious education that was in line with the religion of the child's parents. If a living parent or another family member wanted to reclaim a child, this was allowed, if not encouraged. "Isolating" asylums, on the other hand, were much more focused on social control. The children of these institutions were thoroughly cut off from the outside world, including having very limited contact with living parents. In addition, "isolating" asylums usually tried to obtain legal guardianship for their children; they were interested in separating their children from their heritage because they believed that their past experiences had been detrimental. Whether protective or isolating, however, orphan asylums of the nineteenth century very rarely tried to reform their children. From the perspective of

83 Cmiel, Home of Another Kind, pp. 21-23.
almost all of the managers of asylums, it was not the child who was in need of reform, it was the child's environment that needed to be altered. In contrast to the Chicago Nursery and Half-Orphan asylum, many asylum managers hoped that the "unworthy" poor would indeed seek out their services, for in this way, the children could be separated from their harmful environments and "saved."84

If the Chicago Nursery and Half-Orphan asylum is an example of a "protective" nineteenth century asylum, the Albany Orphan Asylum, of Albany, New York, had much in common with the "isolating" type. Incorporated in 1831, the Albany Orphan Asylum catered mostly to Protestant families, although there were also some Catholics and blacks who attended; all were drawn from the city and county of Albany and the wider New York State area. In contrast to the Chicago Half-Orphan asylum, the Albany asylum took in children from all kinds of backgrounds, including those of the working poor, those of unmarried or abused women, those of insane asylum and prison inmates, and those of alcoholics and prostitutes. Average stay was two and a half years. Although some children returned to their "natural" parent(s), in keeping with the outlook of "isolating" asylums the Albany asylum did keep children from returning to a parent if the asylum manager had any cause to suspect that the parent was not fit to care for the child.85 Those without parents became long term residents of the orphan asylum, and/or they would be indentured out to a new family. By the middle of the nineteenth century this practice was

84 Hasci, Second Home, pp. 55-57.
85 See, for example, the case of Charlie Sanders, as recorded in Dulberger, Mother Donit Fore the Best, pp. 78-82. Charlie Sanders was a young boy who was admitted to the Albany Asylum when he was three years old because the Saratoga County officials believed that his mother, Susi Sanders, a prostitute, was not fit for motherhood. Susie wrote letters asking to have her boy returned to her at many points as he grew older, but the Asylum and the County officials declined to give him back. Charlie was finally released from the Albany asylum into the custody of his older brother when he was 15 years old.
referred to as "placing out." Some orphans were "placed out" into kind homes with loving families, while others were taken in by adults who were more interested in putting the children to work than providing them with a home.

Orphan asylums, which were already the country's main option for the care of needy children during the first half of the nineteenth century, spread in even larger numbers after the Civil War. In the 1860s and 70s, homes for soldiers' orphans were opened throughout the north and south. The national population continued to burgeon following the Civil War, leading to a continued growing need for homes for orphans. As was the case earlier in the century, orphan asylums were founded in or near cities, and the majority were still privately run operations targeted toward particular ethnic groups. The number of asylums managed by Catholics and Protestants was growing. During this time period it was not uncommon for there also to be one, or perhaps two, Jewish orphan asylums in a city and a few asylums were opened specifically for free blacks.66 Publicly run state and county orphan asylums began appearing more often in the 1870s and 1880s, as states began to show more involvement and interest in looking after their dependent children.

New York State, for example, took a strong interest in the welfare of its dependent children, resulting in New York's 1875 Children's Act. This mandated that all children between the ages of 2 and 16 be removed from Almshouses and placed in homes or institutions of their parents' religious background. This act was a formal step in a direction that a number of counties and states had already been leaning toward as they

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66 Hasci, Second Home, p. 5, makes the interesting point that the history of orphanages "focuses chiefly on Jewish orphanages, which barely existed in the nineteenth century and, even at their peak made up only a small percentage of all orphan asylums." Histories of Jewish orphan asylums include: Polster, Inside

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grew increasingly concerned over the effect that the almshouse environment had on children. In 1874 the New York State Commissioners of Public Charities wrote in their Annual Report:

Degrad ing and vicious influences surround them in these institutions, corrupting to both body and soul. They quickly fall into ineradicable habits of idleness, which prepare them for a life of pauperism and crime. Their moral and religious training is in most cases, entirely neglected, and their secular education is of the scantiest and most superficial kind. Self-respect is, in time, almost extinguished, and a prolonged residence in a poorhouse leaves upon them a stigma which clings to them in after years, and carries its unhappy influences through life.¹⁷

Other states soon followed New York's lead. Pennsylvania and Indiana passed equivalent laws in the early 1880s, and Michigan, Minnesota and North Carolina responded similarly.

There were at least two outcomes of such strong sentiment regarding moving children out of almshouses. One was that half-orphaned, or otherwise needy and dependent children were now more often separated from their living family members, who might previously have moved to the almshouse together during a period of crisis. Some evidence indicates that even in light of painful separations from their children, many poor parents were grateful for the orphan asylum and what it could offer their children, especially by way of an education. To many poor parents who were living with numerous threats to their economic and physical well being, there was a measure of comfort in knowing one's child was being kept safe behind the asylum walls.¹⁸

Looking Out; Friedman, These are our Children, and Nurith Zmora, Orphanages Reconsidered: Child Care Institutions in Progressive Era Baltimore (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

¹⁷ Quotation taken from Katz, In the Shadow of the Poorhouse, p. 107.

¹⁸ This sense that many parents felt a measure of safety and security knowing that their children were being cared for by orphan asylums is especially evident in Dulberger, Mother Doneit Fore the Best. This is the best source I have uncovered for a direct and raw sense of what life was like in the nineteenth century asylum.
A second outcome of laws such as the 1875 New York Children’s Act is that as dependent children were turned out of almshouses there was even more need for orphan asylums, especially Catholic asylums, as the gross majority of children leaving the poorhouses were of Catholic backgrounds. In New York City, especially, the need was immense. Even families with two living parents were turning to the orphan asylum as a place to leave their children for a period of months or a few years as they tried to improve their lot. Others ended up on the steps of the orphan asylum as infants or older children, having been abandoned for good by overwhelmed or "delinquent" parents.

What historical evidence is available suggests that a majority of founders and managers of nineteenth century orphan asylums were proud of the service they provided. Most believed it was beneficial to their child inmates, the children’s families, and society at large. Nevertheless, there were certainly scandals that drew a great deal of attention to particular orphan asylums and provided reasons to question asylum life in general.

One scandal that was reported widely in the Northeast, for example, surrounded the Westchester Temporary Home for Indigent Children, of White Plains, New York. The case was drawn to the public’s attention beginning in early January of 1896, when Harry Weeks, a half-orphan who had been sent to the home six years before, ran away on Christmas Eve, with iron shackles and chains around his ankles. The boy was "captured" outside of Greenwich, Connecticut, and returned to the Superintendent of the Westchester Home, James W. Pierce, who allegedly put Harry in a cage near a furnace, in which there

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was a fire. Thus began the saga that the New York Times covered throughout the winter and early spring of 1896.

Before 13-year-old Harry Weeks accused Superintendent Pierce of cruelty, former inmates of the Westchester Home had already leveled many accusations of abuse, that, as reported in the New York Times, had not been addressed to the satisfaction of the community. Thus, the Weeks' story was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back and it was clear, given public outcry, that a full-fledged investigation into the management of the Home would be necessary. According to the New York Times there was great public interest in the outcome of the investigation and many villagers chose to sit in on the testimony of the former inmates and employees of the Home, which was conducted in a trial-like fashion.

During the testimony Pierce admitted to punishing his charges by beating them and/or whipping them with cat-o-nine tails, and shackling them in chains, sometimes to one another, for days, weeks, sometimes up to a month. Even during a period when corporal punishment was more socially accepted as a means of punishment, the community's reported response to the alleged actions showed that they felt his methods went far beyond what was considered acceptable, even with irascible, ill-behaved youth. Townspeople who crowded into the room to hear the testimony booed and hissed at

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91 New York Times, 1896, Jan. 1 (9-4), 5 (17-6), 10 (10-7), 14 (9-3), 25 (9-6), 28 (10-5); Feb. 4 (16-2), 11 (10-5), 23 (17-2), 25 (16-3), 28 (9-6); March 19 (9-1), 20 (9-6), 26 (2-1), 27 (8-5).

Pierce throughout the trial, causing the referee to threaten to close the testimony off to the public on more than one occasion.\textsuperscript{93}

Pierce was ultimately found guilty, and one outcome of the scandal was the enactment of new legislation proposing that:

The Superintendent of the Poor of the County of Westchester shall have power, and it shall be his duty at any time to enter any asylum or institution which has charge of any pauper, destitute, or indigent child who is a charge upon said County of Westchester and transfer such child or children from such asylum or institution to any suitable home or to the Children's Aid Society in the City of New York whenever, in his judgment, the interests of such child or children or of said county will be subserved thereby.\textsuperscript{94}

The idea that there should be legal recourse -- a legal right for a public official to remove children from homes that were deemed unsafe or inappropriate -- certainly fits within the context of a society that was growing increasingly focused on children during the early years of the Progressive Era. As noted in Chapter One, the need for this kind of professional organization was a theme that was later elaborated on during the 1909 White House Conference.

It is likely that scandals such as the one that took place at the Westchester Temporary Home for Indigent Children combined to play a role in the backlash against orphan asylums which surfaced during the 1890s. It was also the case that during this period intensified interest in the importance of individuality is evident. Was it possible for asylum managers and workers to attend to each child as an individual? This question was enough to make people doubt the adequacy of even the most well managed orphan


asylums. As popular and academic interest in personality and individuality began to rise, attitudes toward the "old time" orphan asylum began to become more negative.95

A Culture of Individuality

Historians have noted that as the turn of the twentieth century approached, America was in the process of cultural transformation. In contrast to nineteenth century culture, which highly emphasized the role and importance of character, a variety of indicators highlight an increased fascination with individuality by the turn the century.96 Qualities that historians have associated with the popular nineteenth century term "character" include citizenship, duty, hard work, honor, morals, manners, integrity, and manhood. Adjectives associated with the term "individuality", on the other hand, include magnetic, masterful, dominant, creative and fascinating.97 The term "personality" was used as well in this context – as an extension of "individuality." That is, having "personality" helped one to be set apart as an "individual." The contrast between the two terms "character" and "individuality" has been linked to the difference between the producer-oriented world of the nineteenth century, and the consumer-oriented world of the twentieth century. In other words, it has been argued that the new interest in individuality developed with the rise of consumer mass society. Whereas certain qualities, such as a strong work ethic, were useful in an agrarian, producer-oriented

95 Reform R.R. Reeder referred to the nineteenth century congregate style orphan asylum as the "old time orphan asylum" in an article entitled "The dangers of institutional life," The Delineator, 75 (1910): 78.


society, others were useful in a consumer-oriented society. It has been suggested that the changed social structure demanded a new vision of self that stressed self-fulfillment and the ability to stand out from the crowd.98

The genre of popular adult books provides a helpful marker of the cultural shift that was taking place. As the turn of the century dawned, a plethora of self-help books on the market addressed popular concern with self-improvement. Many had “personality” or “individuality” in the title. As this example from Bliss Carman’s *The Making of Personality* shows, these books emphasized the importance of developing a compelling and impressive persona, or sense of individuality:

> There is still nothing more interesting than personality. Selves are all that finally count. To discerning modern eyes all of life is a mere setting for the infinitely intense and enthralling drama of personalities. We slave and endure and dare and give ourselves to the engrossing demands of business and affairs, deluding ourselves for the hour with the notion that mere activity ensures success, and that deliberate achievement, if only it be strenuous enough, will bring happiness. But in moments of calm sanity we perceive our folly, and know full well that personality and not performance is the great thing.

Current thought attests this. Popular aspiration passionately affirms it. Whatever any one’s philosophy of living may be, whether transcendental or materialistic, the first and chief concern in its pursuance is how to make the most of it in making the most and best of oneself. All our social disquiet, our constant turmoil in political and industrial life, means only an attempt to give larger freedom and greater scope for the perfection of human personality.99

“Making the most and best of oneself” is something that many writers of self-help books were preaching during the Progressive Era. In one of his many self-help books, *The Power of Silence*, Horatio Dresser encouraged his readers to concentrate on

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improving themselves by reflecting on each important point in the book, and considering its meaning for him/her as an individual:

Life is a problem which has for each an individual solution. No one can wholly solve it for us or take from it the element of personal responsibility. It has its own particular history and meaning in each individual case. Difference in temperament and in experience gives infinite variety to these personal solutions. It is hoped, then, that the reader will stop at every important point, as the discussion approaches daily life, to make the thought his own through quiet realization of its spirit and its meaning. Let him pause in restful silence to ask, without forcing himself to think, What does this mean for me? How does it explain, how does it accord with my experience?100

According to Dresser, there is no one solution to life’s problem. Having a good strong character may be helpful, but it is certainly not enough. Rather, personal reflection about one’s own experience and sense of individuality will lead to unique, personally crafted solutions.

During this era of political and social reform self-improvement was not always an end in and of itself. In books written for both an academic and general audience, some writers linked self-improvement to larger questions about the individual’s place in the world.101 This topic was the subject of Nathaniel Southgate Shaler’s book, The Individual. Shaler, a Harvard geologist, took a scientific, or naturalist’s, approach to the question of what the individual’s “presence in this world means.”102 Writing on subjects

100 Horatio Dresser, The Power of Silence: An Interpretation of Life in its Relation to Health and Happiness (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1895) pp 10-11. A popular self-help writer of the period, Dresser also published books on subjects such as spiritual healing, the importance of hope, and the purpose of the soul.


such as the nature, expression, and appreciation of individuality, Shaler put the individual in a larger, evolutionary perspective. Another example of Progressive Era concern with the role of the individual in society is found in Herbert Croly's most influential book, *The Promise of American Life*. In this 1909 book, well known for its pivotal role in shaping Theodore Roosevelt's political platform, Croly tied self-improvement to the improvement of American democracy:

What the better American individual particularly needs, then, is a completer faith in his own individual purpose and power – a clearer understanding of his own individual opportunities. He needs to do what he has been doing, only more so, and with the conviction that thereby he is becoming not less but more of an American. His patriotism, instead of being something apart from his special work, should be absolutely identified therewith, because no matter how much the eminence of his personal achievement may temporarily divide him from his fellow-countrymen, he is, by attaining to such an eminence, helping in the most effectual possible way to build the only fitting habitation for a sincere democracy. He is to make his contribution to individual improvement primarily by making himself more of an individual. The individual as well as the nation must be educated and "uplifted" chiefly by what the individual can do for himself.103

As these examples illustrate, there was a growing and broad based interest in individuality during the Progressive Era. America was undergoing significant change from a rural, producer-oriented society to an industrial, consumer-oriented society. As the population grew in number and became more ethnically and racially diverse, new concerns came to the fore. Having a compelling and magnetic personality was recommended as the key to being noticed. By accentuating what made you an individual, you could help yourself to stand out from the crowd. And by focusing on one's own individuality and how it could be improved, one could make a larger contribution to American democratic society as a whole.

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Individuality and Academic Psychology

During these years academic psychologists were certainly not insulated from the general interest in personality and individuality. As colleagues, Harvard philosopher/psychologists William James and Josiah Royce each played a role, for example, in helping to shape the thinking of Nathaniel Southgate Shaler and Herbert Croly. Other psychologists exhibited an interest in reaching the general reader by adapting their work for the self-help market. University of Wisconsin psychologist Joseph Jastrow, for example, published a weekly newspaper column, a radio show, and numerous books that spoke to the general public's fascination with individuality and self-improvement. As shown in this sample from a book comprised of previously published newspaper articles, Jastrow advised his readers of the importance of developing a pleasing and influential personality:

The why of our likes and dislikes of persons is an important inquiry, because so much in life depends upon it...The deeper qualities of expression of personality have done most to make friends; pleasing manner, affectionate disposition, sincerity, social grace, strong individuality, constancy, while physical beauty also stands in this favored group of traits. The least magnetic in drawing friends is mere beauty of face or form, and especially ineffective is dress unsupported by other charms. In between, along a variable scale, are the more intellectual and related qualities, brains, cleverness, energy, good nature, voice and refinement.

Jastrow was writing for a general readership, and his message was one that fit within the larger societal focus on the merits of developing a charming and distinctive

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104 The influence of James and Royce is acknowledged in the Preface and/or Introduction of Shaler and Croly's above mentioned books.


106 Jastrow, Keeping Mentally Fit, p. 207.
personality, or sense of individuality. Writing for a more academic audience, other psychologists were in the process of defining their field as that which focused on the individual. James Mark Baldwin, for example, in his book *The Individual and Society* wanted to define what separated psychology from its sister science, sociology:

It is clear, even from the most superficial examination of the facts and movements of social life, that two different points of view and two somewhat different interests are present in it. The rights, duties, liberties of the individual may have emphasis, on the one hand, and the requirements, laws, conventions of society as an organized body may be invoked, on the other hand. These two contrasted, if not actually opposed, interests confront the social theorist no less than the man of affairs, and the contrast inevitably suggests itself as a point of departure for discussion.

In fact, the contrast takes form in the distinction between the problems of the psychologist and sociologist, respectively. However we may refine the distinction and confuse the issue by debating the exact dividing line, it still remains true that psychology deals with the individual, and sociology deals with the group....It is, to my mind, the most remarkable outcome of modern social theory – the recognition of the fact that the individual’s normal growth lands him in essential solidarity with his fellows, while on the other hand the exercise of his social duties and privileges advances his highest and purest individuality. The movements are one, although the sciences, from their necessary difference in point of view, must treat them as if they were two.107

Baldwin’s view that “psychology deals with the individual” is in keeping with early American psychologists’ distinct interest in the “normal” individual, particularly the study of individual differences. As most American psychologists spent time studying with the pioneering German psychologists during the 1880s and 1890s, they returned to the U.S. reflecting German interests in studying the conscious mental processes of the “normal” adult human mind. That is, they were focused on studying adults functioning in everyday society, and not those who, for whatever reasons, were deemed “abnormal” or were unable to function in adult society. But it was not long before American

psychology developed an identity of its own. Spurred on by Darwin's thinking about the origins of mind and the notion that there may be differences in individuals' minds, American psychologists turned to studying individual differences in human intelligence. A fascination with this subject, which held little appeal in Germany, served to distinguish American psychologists from their European counterparts.  

One early American psychologist who took a great interest in individual differences in mental measurement was James McKeen Cattell. After studying with Wundt in Germany and Francis Galton in England, Cattell came home and launched a research program to study the relationship between physical and mental characteristics of Columbia college students. Hoping to prove that intellectual differences were linked to physical characteristics, Cattell collected reams of data but could not correlate them with the help of any statistics. By 1910, however, the science of mental measurement took a dramatic turn towards standardization with the introduction of the Binet test. The new psychometrics, or psychology of capacity, was attractive to many psychologists because of its obvious potential for applied use. It was widely believed that mental tests could be helpful in classifying individuals for a variety of purposes.

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However, the interest in individual differences that characterized turn of the century American psychology, including interest in mental measurement, was still focused primarily on adults. Until the end of the Progressive Era most academic psychologists cared little about child psychology because they tended to associate it with Hall’s Child Study Movement, which they generally looked down upon. Hall and many of his doctoral students exhibited strong interest in the concept of individuality among children and adults, and two of Hall’s students in particular, Henry Goddard and Lewis Terman, became famous for their own work in the area of mental measurement.111

One psychologist who was able to maintain ties to Hall and the child-study movement, while at the same time maintaining the respect of a majority of those working within the academy, was the educational psychologist Edward Thorndike.112 In 1911 Thorndike published a book entitled Individuality, a short treatise on the available scientific facts regarding the extent to which individuals vary. The main purpose of the book, a purpose that separated Thorndike from the vast majority of his fellow psychologists, was to promote better education for children through an understanding and appreciation of human individuality. In an introduction to the book, Henry Suzzallo, President of the University of Washington, put the work in context. He explained that “the growing belief that the education of all children is a public duty initiated difficulties that forced attention to the need of individual treatment of children.” In describing the “factors that were breaking up the uniform methods of the traditional school”, Suzzallo noted that the child-study movement had “probably” made a difference. For it had taken

“the attention off certain ready-made conceptions as to what the human mind is, and turned it toward the study of the children themselves.” By studying the “concrete acts of many children, observed under all sorts of conditions”, the child study movement “could not help but stimulate the growing belief that childhood has infinite variety.” Schools, the university president concluded, “must be respecters of individuality.”

Within this short book, Thorndike emphasized a few key points about the concept of individuality. One point he accentuated throughout is how “it is misleading to judge from measurements of a few individuals.” He explained that:

Only very rarely can anything approaching at all closely to an accurate and adequate account of a man's individuality be given by the statement that he is of this or that “type.” In fact, there is much reason to believe that human individualities do not represent ten or a hundred or a thousand types, but either one single type or as many types as there are individuals, according to whether the thinker wishes to emphasize the mode around which they vary or the exact nature of their variations from it. By this view the effort to assign individuals to a number of classes “mammals,” “reptiles,” “amphibians,” “fishes,” etc., is doomed to failure or incompetence. The first duty of the thinker is to learn the constitution of the one type, man. His second duty is to learn each individual’s variation from this common humanity. In theory it means that man is mentally, as much as physically, one species. In practice it means that each individual must be considered by himself.

Thorndike believed that the correct way to conceive of human individuality was first to determine what all members of the human race have in common, and then to consider how each individual varies from that commonality, or standard. Throughout Individuality he strongly argued against the idea that there was usefulness in grouping individuals into “types.” As the next section addresses, with some interesting exceptions

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112 For a discussion of Thorndike’s relationship to the Child Study Movement see Ross, G. Stanley Hall, pp. 345-351.
113 Henry Suzzallo, as quoted in the Introduction (pp v – xi) of Edward L. Thorndike’s Individuality (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911).
the majority of Progressive Era reformers concerned about the welfare of dependent children exhibited widespread concern over the inability of orphan asylums to treat their charges as individuals. They were not so quick as Thorndike, however, to reject the idea of "types" of individuals. In fact, evidence suggests that many reformers were strongly motivated by the belief that typical orphan asylums were likely to turn out children of the "institutional type."

Individuality, Collectivism, and the Dependent Child

On March 7th, 1910 someone identified by the initials W.J.L. wrote a Letter to the Editor of the *New York Times* entitled "A Talk on Orphans":

> The other day I stood with a man, a tender hearted man, at the corner of Broadway and 56th Street, and watched two groups of orphan children, boys and girls, pass along under charge of two or three Sisters. The man sighed as he looked at them and said it almost made him weep to see all those little ones bereft of a mother's love and thrown on the cold charity of an unfeeling world, etc. Just then we were joined by a third man of a different type, and the tender-hearted man went over it again. But the other man did not contribute any tears. On the contrary, "Rats", said he, "It's the best thing ever happened to them. Look at the bunch of them, all well fed and well clothed, and under proper guardianship. They are kept off the streets, except as much as is good for them. They have playgrounds and are given all the exercise they need; they are taught good manners and good habits; somebody is looking after their welfare day and night; the boys are taught trades and the girls how to be good housekeepers; their whole lives are passed under so much better influences than most of them would have had if they had not been orphans that they and all the rest of us should smile, not weep, as we see them trotting along with the good Sisters".....He said a lot more of the same sort, and later the tender-hearted man told me he thought he was a brute, but I don't know. Maybe he was and maybe he wasn't. It depends. Or does it?115

The two views of orphans expressed by W.L.J.'s companions encapsulate the themes of this section. At odds were individuality and collectivism as solutions to the needs of

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dependent children. The view of the first man who joined W.L.J. at the street corner -
the anti-institutional perspective - was the more frequent view expressed during the
Progressive Era. In keeping with the message of the 1909 White House Conference on
Dependent Children, orphan asylums were frequently denigrated during these years for
their institutional features and effects. For example, in response to W.L.J.'s Letter to the
Editor another citizen wrote: "There are few more pitiful specimens of humanity than the
youth who has spent his childhood in an institution and who is at last forced out into a
world of which he knows nothing by actual experience, unfitted for usefulness and
doomed to failure." Nevertheless, despite the dominance of this view, there were those
who maintained a positive view of the orphan asylum as a refuge from a harsh world, in
keeping with the view of W.L.J.'s second companion. This minority view was often
expressed by religious leaders and was in keeping with a collectivist outlook.

The Dominant Individualist Perspective

A majority of Progressive Era reformers concerned about the welfare of
dependent children voiced strong distaste for the orphan asylum and all that it did to limit
a sense of individuality. For example, shortly after the 1909 White House Conference
R.R. Reeder, Superintendent of the New York asylum at Hastings-on-Hudson and one of
the Conference speakers, wrote these words for the reform magazine the Delineator:

The knell of the old time orphan asylum was sounded in this conference. Scores
of these ancient institutions are still in existence, snugly tucked away in quiet
corners, or fenced around in the great cities with high walls, where but little of
this vain world can enter. Will the managers of these institutions and their staffs
even know that such a conference has been held? They are good people, really

good and pious; they believe that they are doing noble work by keeping the poor
orphans wrapped up in cotton and oatmeal, while the little ones are pining for life
— rich, full, free, natural and individual life.117

If orphan asylums could not provide for a “rich, full, free, natural and individual
life”, what did they provide for? Reformers were concerned that the “old time orphan
asylum” was responsible for creating “the institutionalized type” of child. In contrast to
the educational psychologist Edward Thorndike, many reformers found the concept of a
personality “type” to be useful, at least in describing children who had been
institutionalized for an extended period of time. One of the handful of people who
responded to W.L.J.’s Letter to the Editor defined “the institutional type” this way:

The best of institutions must after all neglect individual differences. They can not
take account of personality. They deal with inmates. And inmates necessarily
lapse into the nondescript devitalized value of a number...Discipline of military
rigor is absolutely indispensable where hundreds and hundreds of children are
herded together in one asylum. No account may be taken of individual needs and
no patience can be shown individual idiosyncrasies. The inmates are of necessity
trimmed and turned into automatons. The result is the institutional type."118

Concerns about “the institutional type” of child were common from the turn of the
century onward. Another example of the typical concerns that reformers voiced about the
effects of institutionalization is taken from an article that Dr. Henry Smith Williams
published in the journal North American Review. In this piece entitled "What Shall Be
Done With Dependent Children?" Dr. Williams shared his serious concerns about the
ways in which orphan asylums break any sense of independence or individuality in the


118 C.A.S. quoting Rabbi Hirsch, President of the National Conference of Jewish Charities, April 16, 1910
child, a conclusion he came to based on his experience working as a medical doctor with asylum children. He explained:

To casual observation a well-regulated institution supplies the child with a neat, orderly home, and gives it a certain amount of schooling, and perhaps the elements of a useful trade. But closer scrutiny shows that the institution also does something very different for the child. It makes him a part of a great machine whose working is never duplicated in the outside world. He is gradually molded to fit his niche in this great machine until at last all spontaneity, independence, and individuality are well nigh pressed out of him. In a word, the institution training tends to make its recipient an automaton rather than flesh and blood mortal. He can recite his school lesson and do his task in the workshop well enough, but as for having any real dependence in himself or any true grasp of his proper position in the world, he has none.

Dr. Williams concluded that because life within the asylum was nothing like life outside of the asylum, the children living there had no hope of returning to society with the skills they would need to make a life for themselves. The problem, as he understood it, was not a question of institutions needing to undergo improvement. Rather, Dr. Williams took the position that any kind of institutional life is abnormal, and therefore necessarily detrimental to children:

It is inevitable, therefore, that a child whose surroundings are abnormal imbibes ideas that are abnormal, and so it is not to be hoped that a child reared even in the very best institution will become a normal and properly educated person, however thoroughly it may be versed in mere school tasks. How piteously abnormal the institution child does become in point of fact only those who have observed it can adequately realize. You may see little tots of three or four, with the cherubic faces of infancy, sitting in rows on benches like so many dolls, seemingly devoid of sensation. Now and again one falls asleep and tumbles over on to the floor. But it does not set up a shriek like a normal child. Instead, it gravely picks itself up and crawls back to its seat. An electric doll would show as much emotion. Seemingly, the poor little automaton has come to regard such hard knocks as a part of its regular portion. I have known even much older children to suffer pain from an acute pneumonia for days without so much as making known their

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condition. The spontaneity that characterizes the normal child's expression of its varying moods has been banished from the mind of the institution waif. 121

Dr. Williams and the majority of his reform oriented peers believed that orphan asylums could not provide for the individual needs of their inmates. Instead, asylums created "poor little automatons" not fit for life outside. That is, because life inside the asylum was by necessity so unlike life outside the asylum, the asylum life was deemed "abnormal", and the children raised within it were doomed to develop in an abnormal fashion. But what if the working assumptions of Dr. Williams and many others were reversed, and the world outside the asylum was not considered a primarily normal, desirable environment? Such was the premise of at least one group who expressed a minority opinion of asylum life during the Progressive Era.

The Minority Collectivist Perspective

One perspective on asylum life that was expressed by a small group of reformers, but expressed passionately and vociferously, was the idea that orphan asylums could serve as an oasis from modern life. Clearly a minority opinion, it is worth exploring in comparison to the majority reform position, and because, to my knowledge, it is not a view that has been drawn out by child welfare or Progressive Era historians to date.

For the most part, those reformers who conceived of the orphan asylum as an antidote to society were religious leaders affiliated with asylums that catered to a particular religious group. Evidence of a collectivist view of orphan asylums was expressed by a small but religiously diverse group of reformers, including Catholics,

121Ibid, p. 407-408.
Probably the best example of such a collectivist perspective comes from a paper by Rabbi Solomon Schindler, a "prominent contributor" to *The Arena* magazine. Schindler promoted his enthusiastic and hopeful perspective on orphan asylums throughout the early years of the Progressive Era. During the early 1890s he published an article for *The Arena* that highlighted his experience visiting a large orphan asylum of 500 children:

I observed the orphans in the classroom, in the yard, and while taking their meals. I could not help noticing their blooming health, their youthful sprightliness, their healthy appetite, their clean and well-fitting garments. It caused me exceeding pleasure to observe with what affection they clung to their teachers and especially to the superintendent, nor did I fail to observe the love which the teachers harbored for their pupils, or the brotherly and sisterly sentiments which these orphans showed to one another. It was a pleasure to notice how the larger children took care of the smaller ones; in a word, I saw many things which every visitor may see but which he rarely observes.

The Rabbi's description of asylum life could not be more different from the description offered by Dr. Williams and the majority of reformers who wrote scathing reviews of institutional asylum life throughout the Progressive Era. In keeping with the view of the second companion who joined W.L.J. at the street corner in New York City, Rabbi Schindler made the case that orphans living in asylums were better off than they would be living in the poor families from which they came:

I saw, moreover, that the five hundred children of this institution were not at all to be pitied on account of the loss of their parents, but that their lot had become one to be envied when compared with the hundreds of thousands of children whose...

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123 Schindler was described this way in an article by B.O. Flower entitled "A day in a Twentieth-Century Orphan Home," *The Arena*, 40 (1908): 577.

124 Schindler, "Thoughts in an Orphan Asylum", p. 659.
parents have to struggle with the worries and anxieties of everlasting poverty, or with those whom death has robbed only of either the father or the mother.\textsuperscript{125}

The dominant individualist perspective, as articulated by Dr. Williams, was that the asylum represented an abnormal set of circumstances, therefore it created abnormal children – children not fit to thrive in the outside world. Rabbi Schindler and a small handful of other religious reformers agreed that the world of the orphan asylum was unlike the world outside, and that children institutionalized for any length of time would have a difficult transition to life outside. But they differed on the notion of which was a healthier environment. Rabbi Schindler, for example, argued for the superiority of asylum life:

The asylum, therefore, which gives an ideal training, does not fit the pupil for practical life. The asylum teaches the individual to suppress selfishness and work for the community, seeking his own happiness in the welfare of the social body. The world applauds only him who is able to suppress others and to make them do his will. The asylum teaches the equality of all human beings; the world bows to him who possesses more than others do. The asylum is a haven of peace in which even passions are silenced; the world is a battlefield in which no sympathy is shown to the defeated. In the asylum money is of no value; in the world it is worshipped as a king, yea, even as a god.....We have the choice between two methods to remove these drawbacks of the asylum system of education. Either the asylum must fit itself to the world, or the world must fit itself to the asylum. Either the paradise of the asylum must be transformed into a realm of strife, deceit, and intrigue, or the world must be transformed into an abode of peace.\textsuperscript{126}

Rabbi Schindler (who went on a few years later to found an orphan asylum of his own) expressed a collectivist vision of life within the orphan asylum.\textsuperscript{127} He emphasized

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid, p. 670-671.

\textsuperscript{127} Five years after he published "Thoughts in an Orphan Asylum" Rabbi Schindler opened his own orphan asylum, the Leopold Morse Home for Hebrew Orphans and the Aged. In 1908, after the home had been operating under his management for 10 years, a reporter from The Arena spent a day visiting the Hebrew orphan home and reported that: “Rabbi Schindler has quietly but with rare discrimination and patient faithfulness carried out ideas he had years before conceived to be feasible for the rearing of children under
the importance of being a member of a group and the idea that the asylum caused the orphan to "suppress selfishness and work for the community, seeking his own happiness in the welfare of the social body." The outside world, on the other hand, with its emphasis on individual gain, required one to live by entirely different, self-oriented principles. Signs of the Rabbi's dismay over the prominence of consumer culture are evident in his references to a world which "bows to him who possesses more than others do" and where money is "worshipped as a king, yea, even as a god." His endorsement of the asylum was, in part, a rejection of consumer culture and its central figure – the individual. Considered in historical context, the minority collectivist vision of asylum life may serve as an interesting ideological challenge to the dominant view. At the time, however, it did not prove to be an actual challenge to the attacks that the majority of reformers leveled against orphan asylums. For better or worse, the dominant view prevailed. Reaching beyond the political forum, the anti-institutional message extended throughout other mediums, including the children's literature of the day.

Personality, Imagination, and Progressive Era Children's Literature about Orphans

Another source for understanding cultural attitudes towards dependent children during the Progressive Era is the children's literature of that period. A number of the books about orphans and half-orphans that were written during these years are now considered classics and are still read by children today, such as *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903), *Pollyanna* (1913), *Understood Betsy* (1916), and *The Secret Garden* (1911). Others were popular during their time, but for a

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variety of reasons have not remained part of the contemporary children's canon, such as
Captain January (1893), Freckles (1904), Thistledown (1903), The Little Citizen (1902),
and 'Tilda Jane (1901). In contrast to the angelic child of mid nineteenth century
fiction, who modeled an admirable sense of character, stories written during this era
feature willful, plucky, ambitious children. Indeed, these fictional orphans and half-
orphans exhibit the very traits that self-help writers of the period were recommending – a
strong sense of individuality, including a charming, creative personality that would single
one out from a crowd.

Consider, for example, Kate Douglas Wiggins's Rebecca of Rebecca of
Sunnybrook Farm. Rebecca is a half orphan, the daughter of the late Lorenzo de Medici.
When her mother, Mrs. Randall, receives an invitation for Rebecca's older sister Hannah
to move in with her spinster aunts and obtain an education, Mrs. Randall decides that the
poor household filled with young children cannot run without the reliable Hannah. So
she sends word that Rebecca will be coming instead. During the first couple of chapters
of the book the reader is made acquainted with the kind of person Rebecca is:

Lorenzo de Medici was flabby and boneless; Rebecca was a thing of fire and
spirit; he lacked energy and courage; Rebecca was plucky at two and dauntless at

128 L.M. Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables (Boston: L.C. Page & Co., 1908); K.D. Wiggins, Rebecca of
Sunnybrook Farm (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903); E. Porter, Pollyanna (Boston: L.C. Page & Co.,
1913); Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Understood Betsy (NY: The Century Co., 1916); F. H. Burnett, The Secret
Garden (NY: F.A. Stokes, 1911); L. Richards, Captain January (Boston: Estes & Lauriat, 1893); G. S.
Porter, Freckles (NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1904); C.V. Jamison, Thistledown (NY: The Century Co., 1903);
M.E. Waller, The Little Citizen (Norwood, MA: Lothrop Publishing Co., 1902); M. Saunders, 'Tilda Jane

129 Horatio Alger's Ragged Dick (Boston: Loring, 1868) is an early example of a children's book that
celebrates the importance of having a strong sense of character and a "pull yourself up by the bootstraps"
mentality.

130 See, for example, Carman, The Making of Personality, and Dresser, The Power of Silence, as cited
earlier in the chapter.
five. Mrs. Randall and Hannah had no sense of humor; Rebecca possessed and showed it as soon as she could walk and talk. Her forces of one sort and another had seemingly been set in motion when she was born; they needed no daily spur but moved of their own accord — towards what no one knew, least of all Rebecca herself. The field for the exhibition of her creative instinct was painfully small, and the only use she had made of it as yet was to leave eggs out of the corn bread one day and milk another, to see how it would turn out; to part Fanny's hair sometimes in the middle, sometimes on the right, and sometimes on the left side; and to play all sorts of fantastic pranks with the children, occasionally bringing them to the table as fictitious or historical characters found in her favorite books.\textsuperscript{131}

Above all, protagonists of Progressive Era children’s literature about orphans are creative. And a central outlet for their creativity is an active and lively sense of imagination. How did imagination come to play such a central role in children’s fiction from this era? Although scholars of children’s literature acknowledge that “a vivid imagination” is a key theme during this period, there is no obvious explanation for its prevalence.\textsuperscript{132} This quotation taken from The Little Citizen, a lesser known children’s book from this era, illustrates the role that imagination plays in the lives of these story book characters:

For the one great pleasure of this girl’s life was in "imagining things." She had never had an opportunity to see anything of the world beyond the boundaries of her native country. Two years after her mother died, her father, squire and judge and State's attorney, had married his housekeeper, for what, save for her excellent housekeeping qualities, no one had been able to find out. And when the little girl's father died, a year afterward, there was no one to understand her, no one to care in reality what became of her, except Dan, her father's faithful man of all work, and Uncle Reuben, her father's brother, an invalid for many years, who,

\textsuperscript{131}Wiggin, Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, p. 18. This profile of the character Rebecca is in keeping with the image of girlhood/womanhood that many women authors were in the process of redefining during this period. See, for example, Lucy Larcom’s classic book A New England Girlhood (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1889). The emphasis in this book is on the importance of living a useful and independent life.

with his devoted wife, lived a life of seclusion in their isolated home over the mountain.\textsuperscript{133}

Stories about orphans and half-orphans from this era are stories about overcoming material and emotional deprivation with personal resources. In the case of the above character from \textit{The Little Citizen}, imagination is a way to cope with a dull and confining home life. In the case of other characters, a creative imagination is one important element to surviving or staying out of the orphan asylum.\textsuperscript{134} That is, in keeping with the dominant anti-institutional theme of the period, these stories portray orphan asylums as a dramatic form of deprivation. To maintain a sense of individuality within them, one has to learn to cope through an active mental life. As this quotation from L.M Montgomery’s \textit{Anne of Green Gables} shows, the world of imagination offers an alternative to the stifling reality of asylum life, a mental escape when none other is possible:

Oh, it seems so wonderful that I’m going to live with you and belong to you. I’ve never belonged to anybody -- not really. But the asylum was the worst. I’ve only been in four months, but that was enough. I don’t suppose you ever were an orphan in an asylum, so you can’t possibly understand what it is like. It’s worse that anything you could imagine...They were good, you know -- the asylum people. But there is so little scope for the imagination in an asylum -- only just in the other orphans. It was pretty interesting to imagine things about them -- to imagine that perhaps the girl who sat next to you was really the daughter of a belted earl, who had been stolen away from her parents in her infancy by a cruel nurse who died before she could confess. I used to lie awake at nights and imagine things like that, because I didn’t have time in the day. I guess that’s why I’m so thin -- I am dreadful thin, ain’t I? There isn’t a pick on my bones. I do love to imagine I’m nice and plump, with dimples in my elbows.

This morning when I left the asylum I felt so ashamed because I had to wear this horrid old wincey dress. All the orphans had to wear them, you know. A merchant in Hopeton last winter donated three hundred yards of wincey to the asylum. Some people said it was because he couldn’t sell it, but I’d rather believe

\textsuperscript{133}Wallar, \textit{The Little Citizen}, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{134} Within Porter’s classic children’s book \textit{Pollyanna}, the main character, an orphan named Pollyanna, comes across another orphan who is homeless. Pollyanna goes to great lengths to find a home for the boy within the town where she lives with her aunt. Her creative efforts in the name of keeping the boy out of an asylum are eventually rewarded.
that it was out of the kindness of his heart, wouldn't you? When we got on the train I felt as if everybody must be looking at me and pitying me. But I just went to work and imagined that I had on the most beautiful pale blue silk dress -- because when you are imagining you might as well imagine something worth while -- and a big hat all flowers and nodding plumes, and a gold watch, and kid gloves and boots. I felt cheered up right away and I enjoyed my trip to the Island with all my might.135

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The children's books highlighted here were written during a time that scholars of children's literature have called the period of "democratic idealism" (1880-1920). As American society was in the process of moving from a primarily rural, producer-oriented society into an urban-industrial, consumer-oriented society, there were many unknowns about how children would be raised in such a different world. As scholars have theorized, Americans were anxious about the rapid changes that were underway and this anxiety manifested itself in the children's literature of the period. Authors of children's books tended to idealize their own past, setting their stories in the context of small, rural towns where people were familiar with one another and decisions were made through peaceful, democratic, consensus.136 This nostalgia for a simpler, irrevocable past is an overarching theme of the next chapter on the cottage movement.


CHAPTER THREE

To ‘Cottage and Country’  

“Provide small cottages; furnish them and conduct them like homes – like real homes – and ‘institutionalism’ will lose most of its evil features.”  

Dr. William P. Spratling

The shift from congregate style institutions toward cottage-based institutions was the most talked about advance in asylum life during the Progressive Era. Applying the cottage plan to orphan asylums involved moving children out of the old-style congregate institutions and into cottages of 15-30 children, each run by a mother figure. Providing this more home-like atmosphere was the way that most institutions sought to answer the critiques of asylum life that had been leveled at them from the beginning of the Progressive Era. But even though the cottage-based institutional system was held in high regard by many, it was a difficult and expensive transformation to effect. Often new land needed to be purchased, and a whole new set of buildings needed to be erected. A hefty sum had to be raised.


138 This remark was made by Dr. William P. Spratling, of Baltimore, MD, during the 1909 Conference on the Care of Dependent Children. See White House Conference, p. 51.

Although some asylums did manage to switch to the cottage system fairly quickly, for the majority of asylums that made the switch, it took years, and often progress came in short spurts, with one or two cottages being opened as an experiment along the way toward full transformation. Therefore, the cottage system was an ideal that was held in high regard during the Progressive Era, but could not be enacted in any widespread way during those years, given how difficult it was to make the necessary changes. The cottage ideal was important enough that the 1910 census of benevolent institutions recorded whether or not each orphan asylum operated on the cottage system, and if so, how many cottages existed. This document indicates that 125 of 972 orphan asylums, or 13% of existing asylums, were operating as cottage institutions in 1910. Most institutions that were able to adopt the cottage system did so in the following two decades – during the 1910s and the 1920s.\textsuperscript{140}

What some orphan asylums did in lieu of full-fledged transformation, was to implement a modified cottage system. In other words, if they could not afford fully to adopt the cottage system, some decided to take steps in the direction of providing a more home-like atmosphere. For example, in 1915, the Angel Guardian Orphanage, a big Catholic congregate asylum in Chicago, divided its children into “families” within its congregate dwelling. Each “family” shared a living room, sleeping room, dining room, and wash room, and had a nun acting as its mother – a system that the orphanage’s superintendent felt was a great success, as reflected in his 1920 Annual Report:

The ‘cottage sister’ can give the children more individualized attention; there is a marked improvement in their conduct; they are more contented and they make better progress in school and there is much less sickness...The institutional character has almost entirely disappeared in the living quarters of the children and

a home atmosphere has been created. Pot plants are hanging from the ceilings or are lined up on the window sills, knick-knacks fill the corners of the room, there are shelves lined with toys, there is the family bookcase, the graphaphone and the radio.\textsuperscript{141}

Whether orphan asylums adopted the cottage system or a modified form of it, it was commonly believed that any move in this direction improved life within orphan asylums. Each cottage or “family” contained a smaller number of children, and they certainly received more individual attention than they did in the congregate settings. Siblings were often kept together.\textsuperscript{142} In addition, new buildings with bedrooms for two to four children might offer a closet for each child – a personal space that a congregate institution would not have been able to afford. In addition, along with the cottage movement came more and more opportunities for dependent children to interact with the rest of society. They were not cloistered away behind the walls of the large asylum building. Instead, orphans and half orphans began attending public schools and churches within their communities. Some were lucky enough to take summer vacations. Cottage-based orphan asylums wanted to be different - to set themselves apart from the “old-time orphan asylum.”\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{141} 56\textsuperscript{th} Angel Guardian (1920): 4, as cited in Hasci, Second Home, p.169. The graphaphone was the predecessor to the gramaphone. Of poorer sound quality than the gramaphone, the graphaphone used wax tablets to record music. It was made in 1895 by the Columbia Graphaphone Company and died out shortly thereafter when the plastic or rubber coated disks of the gramaphone were invented.

\textsuperscript{142} Most asylums mixed boys and girls under five years old within the same cottage, but there were a variety of ways that children were segregated after the age of five or six, depending on individual institutions. Some were segregated by age, some by gender, and some by both.

What follows is a discussion of three orphan asylums that implemented the cottage plan during the Progressive Era: The New York Orphan Asylum at Hastings-on-the-Hudson (New York), Mooseheart (Mooseheart, Illinois), and Carson College (Flourtown, Pennsylvania). They were chosen for three reasons. First, they are representative of three different kinds of “anti-institutional institutions” in existence during the Progressive Era: Hastings-on-the-Hudson was a public-operated orphan asylum, Mooseheart was a private institution funded by a popular fraternal society, and Carson College was endowed by one millionaire benefactor. Second, each had a contemporary reputation for being on the cutting edge of progressive child welfare reform. That is, because these institutions were considered to be models, they provide windows into the ideals of the period. Lastly, they were chosen for their ability to illustrate connections between the “new and improved” orphan asylums and relevant figures or theories from the psychological literature.\textsuperscript{144}

The New York Orphan Asylum at Hastings-on-the-Hudson

An Overview

The New York Orphan Asylum Society started as early as 1806 and built its first orphan asylum, a large congregate institution on 72\textsuperscript{nd} Street and Riverside Drive, in 1836. Decades later, when a new generation of trustees “came to realize the patent evils of a congregate plant”, the Society made plans for their asylum to be among the first in the country to transition to the cottage plan. In June of 1902 the children were transported on a steamboat to their new rural home along the banks of the Hudson River. With 40 acres

\textsuperscript{144} My opinion that these institutions were recognized models of the cottage-based system is based on references to them as such in popular articles (such as Neva R. Deardorff, “The New Pied Pipers”, Survey...
of land, ten cottages built around a large central playground, and administrative and
school buildings, the orphanage embarked on a "new era of history."145

The orphanage community at Hastings-on-the-Hudson was made up of about 250
people. The cottages where the "residents" of the orphanage lived were built to house 25
children, but usually between 20 to 22 children constituted one "family." According to
the constitution and bylaws, orphans between the ages of 3 & 10 were eligible for
admission. All children admitted were indentured to the society until the age of 18.
There were no rigid requirements regarding intelligence, but those children who
demonstrated terribly low intelligence in combination with an "incorrigible disposition",
were not accepted. Half orphans were eligible if a convincing case was made that the
surviving parent was destitute, or mentally or physically unable to support his or her
child(ren). In this case, if the surviving parent was the mother, as was typically the case,
this cottage-based institution sometimes took the entire family in, employing the mother
as a member of the staff.146

Within the cottages children of both sexes lived together under the same roof until
the age of six. From age six on, children were housed according to gender. Each cottage
conducted its own planning, cleaning, and sewing. In addition to supervising the
household activities, each cottage mother was to keep in emotional touch with her
charges. From keeping track of their progress in school, to observing and offering help

146 Ibid. Also see R.R. Reeder, How 200 Children Live and Learn (NY: Charities Publications, 1910).
with personal problems, the cottage mothers were there to play a maternal role in the children’s lives.147

An Outspoken Leader

The orphanage at Hastings-on-the-Hudson was hailed as a leading model of reform in large part due to the efforts of its outspoken and longstanding Superintendent, Dr. Rudolph Rex Reeder (1859-1934). A frequent contributor to reform magazines such as The Delineator and Charities and the Commons, author of two books, and an invited speaker at conferences such as the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children, Reeder was a prominent member of the child welfare community. He graduated from Illinois State Normal University in 1883 and taught at the Model School at Illinois State Normal from 1883-1890. He then came East and worked for four years as secretary of the Overman Wheel Company, a bike manufacturing firm in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, before enrolling as a graduate student at Columbia University, in 1894. Apparently Reeder was dually enrolled at Teacher’s College and the psychology department, although information about who advised him in either department is unavailable. He completed his Ph.D. in 1900, with a dissertation entitled “The Historical Development of School Readers and Methods in Teaching Reading.” That same year he took a position as superintendent of the New York Orphan Asylum, where he stayed for twenty years.148


148 The little biographical information I was able to gather about Reeder was available in Walter I. Trattner, The Biographical Dictionary of Social Welfare in America (NY: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp 611-613. I hunted for additional information about Reeder from Columbia University and Hastings Historical Society. Columbia did not have anything available about who served on his dissertation committee, or who his advisor was. The Hastings Historical society had very little to share – only a few recollections about
During his tenure at Hastings-on-the-Hudson Reeder did much to promote this anti-institutional institution, as well as his own philosophy of raising dependent children. In many ways, the themes he emphasized throughout his writings exemplify the ideals that the majority of child welfare reformers associated with the cottage movement. He continually emphasized, for example, the “natural” benefits of rural cottage living, juxtaposing them against the unnatural and “dangerous” elements of congregate style living:

The natural home of the child is the family; the natural environment of the family is the country. Any departure from these conditions is fraught with danger and loss to the child. Institutions are usually located in cities, and the family influence and spirit are wanting; they therefore offer little that is attractive to children...Wholesome and attractive food, freedom and room to play, comradeship of other children and of older people, individual obedience, opportunity to learn and to render helpful service sum up the conditions of a happy childhood.149

For Reeder and his contemporary advocates of the cottage movement, cottage living signified a step in the direction of self-reliance and independence. Whereas “inmates” raised in the congregate asylum were characterized as living a severely limited and sheltered life that kept them dependent on others, Reeder repeatedly told a different story about his cottage “residents.” His children enjoyed a much more integrated and natural life and would be prepared for an independent adult existence, something he and his “child-saving” peers held as critically important.150

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150 This theme is emphasized throughout Reeder’s “To Cottage and Country” series, but particularly within Charities and The Commons, 7 (November 4, 1905): 186-189.
In the name of this commitment to raising emotionally and economically independent orphans Reeder supported the public school system, particularly for the progressive improvements made in recent years, yet he firmly believed that the constituency he represented was in need of a less academic and more experiential education:

On the other hand it may be said that dependent children must have a training somewhat different from that offered by the public schools. The educational problem in their case is much more definite than it is in that of the ordinary child. It is certain that these children must make their own way in the world at the early age of fifteen or sixteen years....Placed out from the institution at such an early age it is certain, also, that they will be obliged to make their way in the world by the work of their hands rather than by their wits....Hence their education must be especially strong on the industrial side; they must learn to do things.151

For the best of the anti-institutional institutions (by this he meant up-to-date, well managed cottage-based asylums) Reeder recommended a special school on the premises that would cater directly to the experiential needs of the residents. This was indeed the policy of Hastings-on-the-Hudson. The children attended school from 8:45 to 3:15 and although academic work was not entirely neglected, the emphasis was on practical knowledge. The girls learned to cook, mend, darn, launder clothes, and take care of young children, whereas the boys learned janitor work, shop-work, gardening, poultry training and other specific skills. Reeder was clearly proud of the educational program that he could offer at Hastings, but he thought that in most cases a public school education would be adequate and desirable for orphans. In his view most asylums were not as progressively-minded or prepared to offer such an alternative educational program

as Hastings did and would therefore be better off enrolling their residents in public
schools, to insure that they received exposure to the outside world.\textsuperscript{152}

There were a number of other positions that Reeder advocated in his writings,
including incentives to motivate dependent children, proper diet, and effective methods
of discipline. One theme in particular he emphasized throughout his writings was the
role of play in a child's life. Play was a subject that Reeder was especially passionate
about:

It is as natural, necessary and beautiful for children to play as for kittens to frolic
or minnows to swim. But even in these days of “child study” and kindergartens
the importance of developing this instinct of children has not yet been generally
recognized by parent and teachers....Successful play will set up aims and through
patience and struggle realize them. It will issue in a feeling of triumph....In these
days of so much sedentary employment and so much ease and luxury, reserve
power carried forward from youth is especially important if we would prevent
physical degeneracy. Boys and girls who indulge freely in all of the healthful
outdoor sports of childhood will on account of it be more active, more dynamic,
both mentally and physically all their days and will have the infinite pleasure of
looking back upon a happy childhood.\textsuperscript{153}

Although Reeder may have been among the first within the orphan asylum world to
emphasize the role of wholesome play in children's lives, a movement to organize and
promote play, particularly for city children, had been afoot for some time before he
arrived at Hastings-on-the-Hudson. This thread is interesting to consider for two reasons.
In the first place, freedom to play in a safe, rural environment was an ideal that advocates
of the cottage movement frequently touted. Secondly, in developing theories to support

\textsuperscript{152} Reeder devoted Number 11 of his “To Cottage and Country” series to this subject, Charities and The
Commons (January 4, 1908): 1359-63. He also emphasized this topic within number 4 of the same series,
Charities and The Commons (March 4, 1905): 551-554.

\textsuperscript{153} Reeder wrote extensively about the importance of play. Within his series the article most devoted to
play is installment Number 4, Charities and The Commons (March 4, 1905): 551. See the series as a whole
their claims, the reformers who advocated for a play program borrowed important concepts from academic psychology.

Academic Psychology and the Playground Movement

R.R. Reeder’s interest in play was by no means an idiosyncratic one. During the Progressive Era “play organizers” — progressive educators, settlement workers and early social service professionals — banded together to try and move city children off of the streets and onto supervised, municipally owned playgrounds. Three of the most prominent play organizers were Dr. Luther H. Gulick, Director of New York City’s public school physical education program at the last turn of the century, Dr. Henry S. Curtis, a student of G. Stanley Hall and the founder and first President of the Playground Association of America (PAA), and Joseph Lee, the second President of the PAA. In an effort to analyze, organize, and control children’s play, these play organizers developed theories about the relationship between structured, supervised play and children’s development. From their perspective, supervised play was an essential medium through which moral and cognitive development was formed. They believed, for example, that team sports for adolescents would provide a perfect outlet for teaching the necessary skills to survive in an emotionally overwhelming industrial society.154

Organizers of the playground movement came from an array of political, social, and disciplinary backgrounds. Their influences were varied as well, as they tended to borrow from any number of contemporary theories that would lend support to their overall thesis about the importance of play. In the process of creating their own ideas

about social training, the play organizers drew selectively from the work of early social scientists, including James Mark Baldwin, John Dewey, William James, Edward Thorndike, and G. Stanley Hall. Clearly these academic social scientists disagreed with one another in significant ways on a number of issues, but it was not important to play organizers to adopt one or two theories in their entirety. They were apt to pick and choose among concepts and theories, adopting one when there was a good fit.155

From the early psychologist James Mark Baldwin, for example, the play organizers borrowed the concept of imitation. Within Baldwin’s theoretical scheme children learned moral values through imitation. As he stated it:

The child finds himself stimulated constantly to deny his impulses, his desires, even his irregular sympathies, by conforming to the will of another. This other represents a regular, systematic, unflinching, but reasonable personality – still a person, but a very different person from the child’s own. Here is a copy which is a personal authority or law. It is “projective” because he cannot understand it, cannot anticipate it. And again it is only by imitation that he is to reproduce it, and so to arrive at a knowledge of what he is to understand it to be. So it is a copy. It is its aim – so might the child say, were he an adult – and should be mine – if I am awake to it – to have me obey it, act like it, think like it, be like it in all respects. It is not I, but I am to become it. Here is my ideal self, my final pattern, my “ought” set before me. Only in so far as I get into the habit of doing and being like it, get my character moulded into conformity with it, only so far am I good.156

To the playground organizers, the playground served as a crucial environment because it provided a setting where children could explore their own skills, compare them with the skills of others, and learn to confront their own strengths and weaknesses. Throughout


this process, children would be learning to conform to the values of their social group, in keeping with Baldwin’s theory of imitation.

Like Baldwin, the philosopher and educational theorist John Dewey believed that play was an important mediator between the child and society. One of Dewey’s most famous concepts is that the classroom is a “miniature community”, wherein children assume on miniature scale the social roles and activities of adult society. For Dewey, play was a very serious feature of this “miniature community.” Through play activities children had the opportunity to act out ideas – to learn by doing. In contrast to reading and listening, play afforded children the chance to internalize societal concepts and roles by actively trying them on. In fact, Dewey believed that the playground was a superior environment to the turn of the century classroom because on the playground social organization occurred “spontaneously and inevitably”:

....the school itself shall be made a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons....A society is a number of people held together because they are working along common lines, in a common spirit, and with reference to common aims. The common needs and aims demand a growing interchange of thought and growing unity of sympathetic feeling. The radical reason that the present school cannot organize itself as a natural social unit is because just this element of common and productive activity is absent. Upon the playground, in game and sport, social organization takes place spontaneously and inevitably. There is something to do, some activity to be carried on, requiring natural divisions of labor, selection of leaders and followers, mutual cooperation and emulation. In the schoolroom the motive and the cement of social organization are alike wanting.157

Philosopher/psychologists William James and Edward Thorndike each contributed to another concept that was important to the play movement, the concept of habit formation. For James, who popularized the concept in the late 1880s and early

1890s, habitual responses happened without conscious attention and allowed “our higher powers of mind” to be “set free for their own proper work”:

The great thing, then, in all education, is to make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy. It is to fund and capitalize our acquisitions, and live at ease upon the interest of the fund. For this we must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can, and guard against the growing into ways that are likely to be disadvantageous to us, as we should guard against the plague. The more of the details of our daily life we can hand over to the effortless custody of automatism, the more our higher powers of mind will be set free for their own proper work. There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision, and for whom the lighting of every cigar, the drinking of every cup, the time of rising and going to bed every day, and the beginning of every bit of work, are subjects of express volitional deliberation.158

Thorndike, who had studied with James at Harvard, emphasized that significant moral functions could be physiologically inscribed through physical exercise. Using stimulus-response techniques, Thorndike believed it was possible for desirable moral habits, such as obedience to parents, to be stamped into children’s nervous systems through rigorous physical play.159 This was obviously useful to the play organizers, who were advocating for organized and rigorous physical play. In their view, this physical activity could help serve as an antidote to the morally questionable elements of industrial, city life.160

Although Baldwin, Dewey, James and Thorndike each contributed to the rise of the playground movement, the social scientist who most influenced play organizers was psychologist G. Stanley Hall. Hall made a strong case for the connection between morality and physical activity as part of his recapitulation theory. This theory, though never well respected by Hall’s academic colleagues, was widely known in and outside of


the academy, especially during the height of the child study movement (1890s). Hall believed that the child’s psychological and physiological development “recapitulated” the human being’s “racial history.” Grounded in his own understanding of evolutionary theory, Hall’s recapitulation theory held that as primitive human beings adapted to their environments they developed habits that became ingrained as instincts. The instincts, which passed from generation to generation, came to exist as hierarchical “zones” in the human psyche. As the child moved through stages of development, the psychic zones were activated within him/her. For example, Hall thought that the sense of adventure and restlessness displayed by most ten and eleven year olds corresponded to the nomadic period in our species’ history, whereas the peer-driven world of the adolescent corresponded to the clannishness of tribal life. In this way, Hall explained (alluding to Wordsworth’s famous phrase) “the child is father of the man in a new sense.”

According to Hall, what modern people did with their minds and inventions, primitive people did with their physical beings and instincts. Although the modern adult was primarily a thinker, the modern child, whose development followed the evolutionary path of our forebears, lived a more primitive, physical existence. The child’s way of thinking and moralizing was with his/her muscles and instincts. Therefore, muscular conditioning was the means to mental and moral health and development, for both children and adults, but particularly for children. As Hall put it:

The trouble is that few realize what physical vigor is in man or woman, or how dangerously near weakness often is to wickedness, how impossible healthful energy of will is without strong muscles, or how endurance and self-control, no

161 G. Stanley Hall, Adolescence (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904) v. 1, p. x, and pp 44-57. The phrase, “the child is father of the man” was first introduced by William Wordsworth (1770-1850) in a poem he published in 1802, entitled “My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold.”
less than great achievements, depend on muscle-habits. Good moral and physical
development are more than analogous; and where intelligence is separated from
action the former becomes mystic, abstract, and desiccated, and the latter formal
routine.\textsuperscript{162}

Hall’s theorizing formed a significant backbone of the play movement. But in
addition to having a strong theoretical connection to the movement, he had personal
connections to the people responsible for establishing the Playground Association of
America. The idea of establishing such an association started with a student of Hall’s,
Henry S. Curtis. Curtis, who graduated from Clark University in 1898 with a degree in
child psychology, was appointed to a position as director of New York City’s playground
system. Curtis teamed up with Luther H. Gulick, director of NYC’s public school
physical education program and also a friend of Hall’s, and together they invited a
number of well known social reformers to join forces with them: Jane Addams, Lillian
Wald, Jacob Riis, Graham Taylor, Mary McDowell, and Joseph Lee. During the spring
of 1906 an organizational congress was held in Washington D.C. and the new
organization was formed. Their goals were indeed very broad, including nothing less
than contributing to the foundations of democracy, as illustrated by this amendment to
their statement of purpose:

Dependency is reduced by giving men more for which to live. Delinquency is
reduced by providing a wholesome outlet for youthful energy. Industrial
efficiency is increased by giving individuals a play life which will develop greater
resourcefulness and adaptability. Good citizenship is promoted by forming habits
of co-operation in play. People who play together find it easier to live together
and are more loyal as well as more efficient citizens. Democracy rests on the
most firm basis when a community has formed the habit of playing together.\textsuperscript{163}


\textsuperscript{163} Cavallo, \textit{Muscles and Morals}, p. 37.
Although it is unclear how formally connected R.R. Reeder was to the playground movement, given his high degree of involvement in child welfare reform efforts, he certainly would have been well aware of the Playground Association of America and their efforts. His own writing about the importance of play in the lives of dependent children suggests that he was influenced by the ideas of the play organizers, and the social scientists whose theories were so useful to them.

Rather than focusing on how organized play or supervised municipal playgrounds could improve the moral and cognitive development of city children, Reeder chose to lead his dependent charges out of the city and into the country. In the country, play was safer and more “wholesome.” For Reeder, the freedom to play was associated with a country setting, and a country setting was associated with family life. Therefore, by moving to Hastings-on-the-Hudson and implementing the more family-like cottage system of living, he could bring his dependent children all that they would need to thrive, both as individuals and as members of a larger social community. By taking these steps, and by publicizing the transformation of the institution in the way he did, he established himself and his institution as a positive example for others. Under his leadership, the New York Orphan Asylum Society was at the forefront of orphanage reform.

**Mooseheart**

**An Overview**

Mooseheart Children’s Institution was founded by the Loyal Order of Moose, a fraternal order with a large population of manual laborers. Perhaps because of its size alone, it is ironic that this gigantic institution would have been a trailblazer of progressive
era child welfare and educational reform. Stretching over 1023 acres of land in Northern Illinois, Mooseheart included over 140 structures. The institution had its own schools, hospital, church, and post office, and operated its own heating, water, and lighting systems. Including staff and children, there were over 1500 people living on the grounds of Mooseheart by the end of the Progressive era. Opening when it did, in 1912, Mooseheart was well poised to incorporate the leading progressive theories, and there is ample evidence that the governors had some of these principles in mind upon founding and developing this institution.164

A significant player in the popularization of the Loyal Order of Moose and the creation of Mooseheart was U.S. Labor Secretary James J. Davis. A former iron worker in Alabama, Pennsylvania, and Indiana, Davis had close experience with the issue of dependency, as he noted the growing numbers of children and widows of men killed in mines and mills. He joined the Moose in 1906 and went on to lead an effort to successfully increase membership from 247 in 1906 to over 500,000 by 1918. His view that “fraternal organizations cannot succeed in America unless they stand for something more than mere social pleasure” is said to have been a motivating factor behind the Loyal Order’s sponsorship of Mooseheart.165

The idea of Mooseheart was proposed during the 1910 Baltimore Convention of the Loyal Order of the Moose, when delegates from the Muncie, Indiana lodge proposed the founding of an educational institution for dependent children and a committee was formed in order to research and develop the idea. During the 1911 Detroit Convention


the committee proposed that the institution be funded by asking each member of the Order to pay $1 per year to the effort. Further research into land and location was undertaken, and during the 1912 Kansas City Convention it was decided that land in Illinois would be purchased and construction would begin. On July 27th, 1913, Mooseheart was formally dedicated by the then Vice President of the United States, Thomas R. Marshall. In addition to the individual support that each member paid annually, local lodges gave toward the building fund and sometimes sponsored a building or a group of buildings.166

Children from all parts of the United States were admitted to Mooseheart, often in sibling groups. Any physically and mentally normal children of a man who died as an “upstanding member” of the Loyal Order of the Moose could be admitted from before they were born, and could stay until they had obtained their high school diploma. According to an Annual Report published in 1922, one quarter of the children came from Pennsylvania alone, another quarter came from Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, and the remaining half came from the rest of North America, including Canada. Although many children were admitted to the institution alone, Mooseheart did make an effort, like the New York Orphanage at Hastings-on-the-Hudson, to employ mothers of these children, employing about 80 of the possible 440 mothers of Mooseheart boys and girls. With the exception of the infant years, however, mothers were not assigned to take care of their own children, and visiting privileges between children and their mothers, and between siblings, were monitored carefully.167

166 Fuller, Loyal Order of Moose, pp. 9-15.

Mooseheart adopted the cottage system in 1916, three years after it opened. Cottages varied in size from the large halls that housed up to 45 children, to smaller cottages that housed 12-20 children. Mooseheart prided itself on providing a home-like atmosphere. According to its own promotional literature it was “not an orphanage in the common sense of the term.” It emphasized the absence of institutionalism and the preservation of individuality - the very concerns that the cottage system of living was designed to address. This sense of Mooseheart as an anti-institutional institution is captured by the following description written by a visiting reporter for a popular magazine:

The absence of institutionalism is explained in that there are no uniforms, no repetition in the weekly menus, since 1916 no central dining room, but instead, cottage dining rooms with small tables. Great stress is laid on preserving the child’s individuality, on the control of the children by methods of kindness and love, on the abolition of corporal punishment, on discipline through supervised self-government with a system of merits and demerits and the deprivation of privileges, and on grouping of boys or of girls ranging in age from four years up, into one “family.” Although the children sleep in dormitories, they are permitted to accumulate individual possessions of various sorts. Most of the children have a locker or closet or shelf for their very own, just as in a small family a child may have a room to him or herself.\footnote{Ibid, p. 41.}

The leaders of Mooseheart believed in the importance of vocational education for their residents. The idea that orphans should be trained in a skill or trade was a view that many child welfare reformers held in common during the Progressive Era and it was part and parcel of the widespread commitment to train dependent children for life outside of the institution. It also made sense given the identity of the Loyal Order of the Moose, a large number of whose members were manual laborers. The high school on the premises was accredited by the University of Illinois, West Point, and Annapolis, but the emphasis
of the on site schooling that the children received was practical training. Mooseheart
students were offered training in commerce, agriculture, painting and decorating, sign
painting, drafting, machine-shop practice, cement work, printing, domestic science, and
instrumental music. Facilities on site included a farm (with machinery and greenhouses),
a printing press, a cement plant, and Industry Hall, a three story factory which housed the
shop trades. This industrial, or vocation emphasis was one of the two main thrusts of
education at Mooseheart. The second was fostering a connection with the natural
world.\footnote{Fuller, \textit{Loyal Order of Moose}, pp. 56-80.}

\section*{The Power of The Natural World}

At the same time that Mooseheart was preparing its students for an independent,
industrial-based life by developing and honing their practical skills, it clearly did not
want its charges to lose touch with the natural world that surrounded them. That is, this
anti-institutional institution billed itself as a place that took full and deliberate advantage
of its rural setting. In addition to the vocational emphasis there was equal emphasis on a
natural, or country-based, education. In an article about life at Mooseheart, Matthew P.
Adams, an early Superintendent of Mooseheart, quoted Bishop J. L. Spalding's book
\textit{Education and the Higher Life} because he felt Bishop Spalding's words summed up well
the values held dear at Mooseheart:

\begin{quote}
To run, to jump, to ride, to swim, to skate, to sit in the shade of trees by flowing
water, to watch reapers at their work, to look on orchards blossoming, to dream in
the silence that lies amid the hills, to feel the solemn loneliness of deep woods, to
follow cattle as they crop the sweet scented clover - to learn to know, as one
knows a mother's face, every change that comes over the heavens from the dewy
freshness of early dawn to the restful calm of evening, from the overpowering
\end{quote}
mystery of the starlit sky to the tender human look with which the moon smiles upon the earth — all this is education of a higher and altogether more real kind than it is possible to receive within the walls of a school; and lacking this, nothing shall have power to develop the faculties of the soul symmetry and completeness.170

The idea that a country life — a life led with and in nature — could provide an “education of a higher and altogether more real kind” than a bookish, traditional school environment was a familiar theme among those who promoted cottage-based orphanage programs. Throughout this literature the positive effects of a cleaner, fresher, and healthier environment were heralded. It was no longer necessary to keep dependent children cloistered away behind the asylum walls to protect them from the big city. Instead, their sense of individuality would be nurtured within the cottage setting and they would be free to partake of the healing and restorative powers associated with the natural world. Even visitors to cottage-based orphan asylums were likely to sound this theme, as illustrated by this excerpt taken from an a reporter who had visited a cottage-based orphan asylum in Westchester, New York:

On three sides of each large room, close set windows admit sunlight, the clear air of Westchester, and a view over woods and meadows to the hills beyond. If bad behavior is the result of tired nerves — and how often it is! — a boy or girl must be indeed incorrigible who cannot find rest and sweetness in the call of a robin or savor of the new cut grass; who can look out at night from the security of a little white bed to the star-sown sky and the solemn, moonlit woods.171

This same theme can also be found in the fictional children’s literature about orphans published during the progressive era. One book notable for this theme is M.E. Waller’s novel, The Little Citizen. In this book published in 1902, Mr. Waller tells the

170 Spalding, Education and the Higher Life, as quoted in Fuller, p. 46.

story of Miffins, an injured New York "newsboy" (these city-based orphans were paid a small wage to sell newspapers and were injured frequently while on the job). In a work-related injury Miffins had permanently dislocated his hip so he was helped by a New York-based society to find a home on a farm in Vermont. After only two days at his new home with the Foss’s, a childless couple who had applied to participate in the program, Miffins was feeling significantly better. He could not tell if it was the "bracing mountain air" or the "wholesome food" or the "excitement of the prospective circus" but he knew he felt like "another boy."  

Throughout this story, the benefits of Vermont farm life are promoted as simpler and healthier. Those who come to visit Miffins from New York City are much improved by the experience. And Miffins himself develops into a shining star. As explained in a 1902 New York Times review of the book: "Under judicious training the New York street arab becomes the best of boys, and distinguishes himself by saving the country from the dangers of a flood, and so gains the proud title ‘The Little Citizen’."

Even in light of a somewhat melodramatic ending, this story is helpful in illustrating the broad ideals that Progressive Era anti-institutional orphan asylums such as Mooseheart had in mind. By removing dependent children from city environments and providing them with more home-like, cottage-style orphan asylums set in the country, they sought to raise "little citizens" who would be armed with a trade, a sense of individuality, a feeling of social responsibility, and a wholesome relationship with the natural world.

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172 For a brief overview of the life of a newsboy see Frank Hunter Potter, "Helping Street Boys," The Outlook, 112 (March 22, 1916): 683-692; Waller, 1902.


This mix of ideals – preparation for an independent life in an industrial-based economy and connection to a natural world that was diminishing in size – is characteristic of this period in American history. As historians of the era have shown, many progressives were ambivalent about the meaning of progress as it was tied to scientific and industrial development.175 Historian Raymond Jackson Wilson has argued, for example, that a number of philosopher/psychologists at the turn of the century were actively trying to capture the values learned in the small town homes of their childhood, and to adapt them in light of the tremendous changes that the country was undergoing. Wilson holds that G. Stanley Hall’s life and writings aptly symbolize the ambivalence that many social scientists expressed during these years. On the one hand, Hall’s theories, particularly his recapitulation theory, presupposed societal progress. And as a leader in the effort to professionalize academic psychology Hall certainly promoted the promise of science and what it could do for humankind. On the other hand, Wilson has argued that Hall’s confidence that society was improving was always shadowed by his doubts about whether the changes he was witnessing in the American landscape were evidence of advancement or regression.176

Late in his life Hall responded to his disillusionment with World War I by writing a utopian tale entitled “The Fall of Atlantis.” Before Atlantis had fallen, as an inevitable result of the inherent shortcomings of industrial capitalism, it was a model society. The cities were perfectly clean, physical and mental disease were unheard of, children were


176 Raymond Jackson Wilson, In Quest of Community, pp 115-129.
brought to the country and raised in “groves”, school curriculums were designed in keeping with up-to-date psychological research, and scholars enjoyed a highly respected place in the social hierarchy. A sense of community service prevailed and selfishness was considered evil in any form. It may be an imaginary vision, yet Hall’s musings sound familiar on some level. Many of the ideals espoused in Hall’s utopian tale of “The Fall of Atlantis” can be found in the promotional literature of these model cottage-based orphan asylums, where all the modern needs of dependent children would be met.

Carson College for Orphan Girls

An Overview

In contrast to Mooseheart, a private institution funded by the annual individual donations of many, Carson College for Orphan Girls was founded and endowed by one generous benefactor, Robert N. Carson. When this Pennsylvania railway and traction magnate died in 1907 he left the better part of his estate, which was valued at three and a half million dollars, to the care of orphan girls. Carson’s will specified that the girls who were eligible to be admitted needed to be full orphans, poor, white, of at least average mental capacity, in good health, and between the ages of six and ten. They had to stay until they turned 18. In addition to such specifications about who could be admitted, Carson also stipulated in his will that the girls should be housed in cottages.


178 Unnamed author of an article “Putting Ten Million Dollars to Work”, The Survey, 35 (November 6, 1915): 123. Before and around the time that Robert Carson died, leaving 3.5 million dollars to found an orphanage for girls in his name, a handful of other high profile wealthy individuals had done the same. Just in the Philadelphia area alone Charles E. Ellis left 4.5 million dollars for fatherless girls under age 13, John Edgar Thomson left a fund of 1.8 million for girls whose fathers were killed in discharge of their duties,
In the summer of 1915 the Trustees of Carson College held a competition to choose an architect for the orphanage, to be constructed in Flourtown, Pennsylvania. Among other community structures, there were to be eight cottages, each equipped to house 25 girls. Robert Carson’s will stated that each cottage would include two classrooms, a playroom in the basement, a dining room that could seat 30, and a living room that could be divided in two. In addition, each cottage would sit on two acres of land, three-quarters of which would be used for a play area and the remaining quarter as a plot for a vegetable garden.

The winner of the competition was architect Albert W. Kelsey. Kelsey was an “associationist” in the tradition of the British art critic and social reformer John Ruskin (1819-1900). Working from the perspective that buildings could affect emotional states by causing people to “associate” certain feelings and values with the structure they were beholding, Kelsey went about designing cottages which became famous for their symbolism, style, and beauty. For the fantasy village he wanted to create Kelsey chose an English Tudor Gothic style, a style that many colleges and universities were adopting around the same period, as were wealthy members of the middle and upper classes who were beginning to migrate to the suburbs, escaping from city life. Kelsey’s cottages were designed to be low, rambling buildings with shiny, colorful tiles, handsome peaks and gables, and decorative, fanciful carvings. Named after individual flowers, the

cottages were meant to embody a feminine character, in keeping with Kelsey’s own Victorian and romantic ideal of womanhood. Construction began the following year, in 1916.180

Even in 1916, seven years after the 1909 White House Conference and in spite of much talked about models such as Hastings-on-the-Hudson and Mooseheart, the decision to organize an orphanage around the cottage plan was considered enlightened. On this score Carson was often favorably compared to its Philadelphia neighbor, the orphanage called Girard College. Organized around the older congregate model, Girard College fed hundreds of children in one gigantic dining hall, housed the orphans in huge dormitories, and generally followed procedures and policies in keeping with large scale living arrangements. Carson College, similar to Girard and a few other institutions that owed their existence to one wealthy benefactor, promised to be different from Girard on every other score.181

From the beginning, the trustees of Carson College had hoped to make an arrangement with the public schools in Flourtown that would allow the Carson girls to attend local schools in exchange for specialty services that the private institute could offer. But much to Carson’s disappointment, this plan was not acceptable to Flourtown. Therefore, out of necessity Carson organized its own school, modeled after high quality day schools. The teacher-to-child ratio at Carson was 1 to 10. It was hoped that by offering an attractive salary, well qualified teachers would be drawn to work at Carson.


181 For a discussion of the way Carson was challenged to set itself apart from congregate style institutions of its era see “A Four Million Dollar Blunder”, Charities and The Commons, 19 (November 23, 1907): 1088-1091. For an overview of other institutions founded by wealthy benefactors, see Note 177.
Despite the fact that a cooperative educational arrangement was not reached, the children of Carson College did have other opportunities to interact and play with the local children of Flourtown. Carson extended playground and gymnasium privileges to local children, and Carson College girls became members of local churches. In addition, Carson helped to support a community library and health center, and its teachers helped to operate a summer school within one of the public schools. The girls at Carson were not required to wear uniforms or wear their hair in any special fashion, with hopes that a "normal" appearance would help them to feel less singled out for their orphan status.182

As was the case at Hastings-on-the-Hudson and Mooseheart, practical, vocational training was emphasized at Carson College. Under the guidance of the housemothers, the girls played an integral role in the running of the cottages. They also participated in the running of the farm on campus – including harvesting crops, feeding the animals, and preserving a variety of fruits and vegetables. During the summer months the older girls were encouraged to take jobs both on and off campus. On campus they did things such as work in the laundry or the school office, or assist the swimming instructor. Off campus they apprenticed at a weaving school, assisted in a city hospital, and worked in offices or as mother's helpers. Later, during the 1920s, Carson opened its own nursery school for children under the age of six, in order to give the girls experience taking care of young children. The nursery school was a great success, well known for a progressive curriculum that was in keeping with the overall educational philosophy and plan at Carson.183 If Carson was known for being an enlightened, progressive orphanage it was

183 For a discussion of the vocational offerings at Carson see Contosta, Philadelphia's Progressive Orphanage, pp 107-109. For more on the nursery school at Carson, see Clarice Madeleine Dixon, Children

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due to the capable efforts of its longstanding President, Elsa Ueland, and the support of a close-knit band of professional female friends who followed her to Flourtown.

**Elsa Ueland and her Cohort**

Carson opened in 1918 under the leadership of its first President, Elsa Ueland. Ueland came to this new post as a young, but already very accomplished, up-and-coming progressive reformer. She had studied in New York City at the New York School of Philanthropy, and had become involved in many reform causes, including suffrage movement activities, labor strikes, supervising youth clubs for boys and girls, and working at the Richmond Hill Settlement House. While in New York she worked closely with Alice P. Barrows (1877-1954), a student of John Dewey’s at Columbia, on a survey being conducted by the Vocational Guidance Association of New York. Ueland and Barrows, who became one of the most vocal supporters of progressive education in the United States, struck up a friendship that would be lifelong.¹⁸⁴

Barrows was a strong supporter of the ‘Gary Plan’, an exciting educational program that was being implemented in the public schools of Gary, Indiana, under the leadership of Superintendent William Wirt (another one of Dewey’s students – this time while he was at the University of Chicago). In 1914 Ueland decided to join the program as an English teacher. The principles behind the ‘Gary Plan’ were a direct outgrowth of Dewey’s educational philosophy. As mentioned earlier, Dewey’s philosophy was that schools should not operate in an isolated fashion, kept apart from the everyday life.

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¹⁸⁴ Contosta, Philadelphia’s Progressive Orphanage, pp 57-58.
Rather, they should be integrated into a vibrant living community. If not, children would come to understand education as something that existed outside of reality, and they would not learn to apply their schooling or be able to solve realistic problems. Dewey held strongly that children were naturally curious about the world, and that this curiosity would be put at risk if children were continually bombarded with too much rote learning about topics that were removed from their lives. Respecting students' individual needs and opinions was of utmost importance. This show of respect would fortify children's sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Dewey believed that educators should do their best to connect children to the world, so that they would not develop a sense of themselves as someone living outside of it and without the means to effect change.185

The four parts of the educational program that William Wirt implemented in the 'Gary Plan' included play, exercise, intellectual study, and special work. In order to establish better connections with the outside world, the children were often led off site, on fieldtrips. Vocational education was also emphasized, as another means of establishing less of a sheltered classroom existence and less of a division between school and the outside community. Ueland became "devoted" to the Gary Plan, publishing articles about it in academic journals and popular magazines while she was an English teacher and while she served as an assistant to Wirt for a short while. It was in this position as Wirt's assistant that she became known to the Carson College trustees, who successfully recruited her to be president of Carson College at the young age of 28.186


Ueland and her friend Katherine Tucker (1884-1957) moved to Flourtown in 1917. Elsa and "Kate" had become friends in New York, where Kate, a trained nurse and a graduate of Vassar College, worked as director of the Social Service Department of the New York State Charities Association. At some point during 1915 or 1916, Tucker had moved from New York to Philadelphia to become head of the city's Visiting Nurse Association, a progressive organization with branches reaching across the nation. It had developed, as so many social programs of that era did, out of the settlement-house movement. Elsa and Kate maintained a life-long friendship, sharing a house most of the time until Kate's death.187

Ueland and Tucker were the first of a handful of professional unmarried women who settled in Flourtown and developed into an exceptionally close group, notable for its ability and supportiveness. All members of the group came to work in some capacity for Ueland at Carson College. During the spring of 1921, Jessie Taft and Virginia Robinson, two pathfinders in the social work profession, joined Ueland and Tucker in Flourtown. Taft and Robinson, each nationally prominent in social work education, met in 1909 in their twenties.188

Taft earned a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Chicago. While Ueland was in New York City, Taft had been the Assistant Superintendent of the Reformatory for Women at Bedford Hills, New York. In 1918 she served as Director of the new Child Study Department and Mental Hygiene Clinic of the Children's Bureau of Philadelphia.

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187 Contosta, Philadelphia's Progressive Orphanage, p. 73.
188 Ibid, pp. 75-77.
and Children’s Aid Society of Pennsylvania. Afterward she became Professor at the Pennsylvania School of Social Work, which was later incorporated into the University of Pennsylvania. Taft went on to be widely praised as a trailblazer in child psychology; her numerous articles and books were well received among her peers.\textsuperscript{189}

Robinson (1883-1977) was a graduate of Bryn Mawr College and earned a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania. She taught at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Social Work and also served for some time as its Associate Director. Robinson became Taft’s main biographer, but she also authored many articles and books on social work – with a particular focus on its connections to the field of psychology. Jessie Taft and Virginia Robinson are also notable as Otto Rank’s (1884-1939) closest American colleagues. Rank had been one of Freud’s most cherished and accomplished followers, but in the late 1920s he broke with orthodox psychoanalysis, much to Freud’s chagrin. It was at this same time that Taft and Robinson met Rank and became his principle advocates in the United States. They helped to translate his major works into English and organized American lectures and discussion groups for him. Taft herself became a chief member of the “Rankian school” and made Rank’s “will philosophy” an essential part of the program at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work. In contrast to Freud’s great emphasis on the unconscious and subconscious in explaining human behavior, Rank’s “will therapy” placed a focus on conscious will.\textsuperscript{190}

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid, pp. 75-77.

Taft was struck by Rank from the day she met him, while attending the June 1924 meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association in Atlantic City. Rank was elected as an honorary member that day and gave a talk on “The Trauma of Birth, in its Importance for the Psychoanalytic Therapy.” Taft later reported in her diary that she felt immediately that Rank was someone she could trust. She went on to become Rank’s first patient, then his student, his colleague, and finally, his biographer. Ueland, who was prone to depression and suffered acute periods that she recorded in her diary, also went to see Rank on and off beginning in the late 1920s. Although concrete evidence is unavailable, it is certainly possible, probably even likely, that there was a certain degree of Rankian influence at Carson, given the important role that he played in the lives of Ueland and her cohort.¹⁹¹

Each of the close friends who settled in Flourtown with Elsa Ueland were either employed at least on a part-time basis by Carson College, and/or served as an informal consultant to Ueland in her work. In other words, these friends were actively involved in Carson College. Jessie Taft worked on a part-time basis administering psychological tests and consulting on difficult cases. Virginia Robinson was Carson’s first social worker, supervising admissions and discharges. Kate Tucker, Ueland’s housemate, was a close consultant and confidant, observing and making suggestions for individual girls.¹⁹²

Another notable feature of these women’s lives is that each of them had personal experience taking orphans into their own homes. On two different occasions (1918 and 1919) Elsa Ueland took a different little boy into her home for an extended period of

time. Around the same time period Kate Tucker took in her orphaned eight-year-old niece by marriage. Jessie Taft and Virginia Robinson legally adopted two children, first Everett and then Martha Taft. Although Taft and Robinson were not the only female pair to adopt children in those days, it was not terribly common either. Many years after adopting the children Robinson once reflected:

Good child-placing practice today would not have approved this placement of two children with two professional women but I think we survived this experience without harm to any of us. Grown up now, the boy with a good marriage and three children of his own, the girl with a responsible job as chief dietician in a big hospital, would not repudiate their unorthodox childhood experiences nor did we as adopting parents ever regret our experience in living with children we loved whose problems of growing up became our own to learn from, to help with as best we could.193

There is no question that Ueland and her close-knit cohort of single women were trailblazers within professional and personal domains. Clearly her friends were very supportive of Ueland and her professional commitment to running a school for dependent girls. They were involved in the world of Carson as professional employees and/or interested observers and they made personal commitments to dependent children by taking orphans into their homes. The four of them seemed to share in common a passionate commitment to the progressive programs they pursued within their respective fields. Ueland’s own passion for her work is evident in the many talks and papers she gave on the subject of how dependent children should be raised.

Raising the ‘Strawberry Child’

192 Contosta, Philadelphia’s Progressive Orphanage, pp 75-77.

Ueland's thoughts about running an orphanage for girls are available through the numerous venues in which she shared her ideas. Especially during her early years at Carson, Ueland participated in interviews for newspapers and magazines, she wrote articles for the popular press, and gave talks at professional meetings and for the Carson staff. One theme that runs throughout these articles, interviews, and talks is a concern for the "immaterial needs of each child." Ueland was not claiming that material beauty and spacious shelter were insignificant in providing for the emotional development of children. Instead, she was arguing that too many child-care institutions accentuated their physical plants and other material necessities at the cost of less obvious but very critical components for healthy development. In a paper that she gave during the 1924 meeting of the Children's Division of the National Conference on Social Work, she announced, "We are more and more evaluating our work (today) in terms of nonmaterial...standards. We are thinking less of our front lawns and bronze gateways, - thinking even less of our infirmary equipment, - and more of the subtler, non-material, emotional needs of children."\textsuperscript{194}

In an article entitled "Celery Child or Strawberry Child", published in the popular progressive magazine the \textit{Survey}, Ueland detailed what she took to be the five most important emotional needs of all children, including those living in institutions like Carson. The first was "a need for mother, or for some person who feels like mother." At Carson, they attempted to meet this need through the employment of cottage housemothers. Second, the child needed "a place that feels like home." At Carson children were allowed and encouraged to decorate their own bedrooms and rearrange the

\textsuperscript{194} Elsa Ueland, "A Re-evaluation of Methods of Child Care: The Case of Children in Institutions," a paper presented at the Children's Division of the National Conference on Social Work, June 26, 1924.
furniture until the room suited them and felt like their own.” The third need, the
necessity of “economic experience”, was closely connected to this feeling of belonging to
a homelike place. At Carson, children were given the authority to help make decisions
about how the cottage budget would be spent, which solidified their sense of belonging to
the cottage community, and also helped to teach them about living within one’s means.
Ueland saw the fourth and fifth needs, that of “freedom” and “adventure” as being
interconnected.195

In terms of freedom, Ueland meant a sense of autonomy and independence, linked
with a sense of civic responsibility. This important element of every family unit was
achieved at Carson by permitting each cottage family a certain amount of flexibility in
planning life at home as well as outside of home, within the Flourtown community. On
the other hand, a child’s need for adventure was related to individual freedom and self-
initiative. It was crucial, Ueland argued, not to be overprotective of children, but to allow
them to explore the world on their own as much as possible. At Carson, there was a
conscious effort to do just this. In her concluding remarks about adventure, Ueland
summarized the piece by likening the act of raising children with the act of nurturing two
distinctly different types of plants. One could raise the “celery child” or the “strawberry
child”:

The celery type of young girl may be very attractive (made tender and delicate by
being shut away from contact with the elements), she cannot fight her way alone
in a stormy world at the age of eighteen. The strawberry grower hardens his
plants by exposing them to the cold before the final transplanting from the hot bed
to the garden. It takes more courage to expose growing children to the blasts of

195 Elsa Ueland, “Celery Child or Strawberry Child: Handicaps of Institutional Life for Children,” Survey,
(February 15, 1924).
outside experience than to expose strawberry plants. But such a course may be
the best assurance for a strong and hardy future.¹⁹⁶

There is a striking similarity between the philosophy of this article by Ueland and
the underlying message of a classic children's book that was published a few years
earlier, Understood Betsy. The author of the book, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, earned her
BA from Ohio State University and her Ph.D. in romance languages from Columbia
University. Living in New England, Fisher became an active member of her state board
of education, showing a particularly fervent interest in the Montessori educational
movement. Not surprisingly, the story Understood Betsy is illustrative of certain values
that were important to the Montessori method of education, such as self-reliance.¹⁹⁷

Fisher set the scene for her first and most well recognized children's book on a
farm in Vermont. The story features the orphan Betsy, raised by her Aunt Frances, whom
a New York Times book reviewer colorfully described as "a maiden lady past her first
youth who has deluged the child with love and anxiety and determination to 'understand'
her." Therefore by the age of nine, when the story opens, Betsy, to quote the same
reviewer, "has been 'understood' into an anemic, morbid, neurotic, egotistical condition
that saps her rightful enjoyment of childhood and undermines the promise of useful
womanhood." At this point she is what Ueland would call a "celery child." After a
sudden change in Aunt Frances's life, however, it is necessary for Betsy to be sent to live
with some relatives on the other side of the family, who live on a farm in Vermont. On

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Understood Betsy (NY: The Century Co., 1911). For more on the life of
Fisher see Ida H. Washington, Dorothy Canfield Fisher: A Biography (Shelburne, VT: New England Press,
1982). On Fisher's ideas about the Montessori educational movement see her two books: A Montessori
Mother (NY: Henry Holt, 1916), and The Montessori Manual for Teachers and Parents (Cambridge, MA:
the farm, her life changes dramatically. No longer is Betsy treated like a helpless child. Her new relatives do not try to “understand” her, but treat her as the capable and self-reliant girl they expect her to become. Although she takes her new responsibilities and different treatment hard at first, after a number of months Betsy transforms into a responsible and independent young woman, what Ueland would call the “strawberry child.”

Betsy may have started her life off as a “celery plant” – “made tender and delicate by being shut away from contact with the elements.” But an ultimately fortunate turn of events caused her to be taken in by those who were not afraid to “expose” her to “blasts of outside experience”, thereby insuring for her a “strong and hardy future.” That is, through the story Understood Betsy, Dorothy Canfield Fisher made an excellent case for raising the “strawberry child” a few years before Ueland offered the metaphor. Through different mediums, both Ueland and Fisher advocated for nurturing hardiness and self-reliance in children rather than overprotecting and excessively coddling them.

Ueland was certainly committed to this goal and she worked hard to implement it and other ideals of the era, throughout her long tenure at Carson. Under Ueland’s direction this residential school for orphaned girls flourished into the 1920s. With the onset of the depression things took a turn for the worse at Carson but Ueland remained on and saw the school through some difficult financial years. As times changed, the original mandate as set forth in Robert Carson’s will was adapted and Carson accepted more and more girls with behavioral problems. Ueland was at the helm of the institution until the year after the death of her friend and housemate, Kate Tucker. In 1958 Ueland turned 70

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years old and decided that it was time to step down from the post she had inhabited since
was 28. 199

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In a sense, cottage-based communities such as Hastings-on-the-Hudson, Mooseheart, and Carson College presented a new collectivist vision, as discussed in Chapter Two. They felt justified in billing themselves as model communities because they were not clinging to an outdated congregate system; they were harbingers of the new approach to group care for orphans. All the criticisms that reformers directed at the congregate orphan asylum had been addressed, and more. These new communities (including the children within them) would benefit from a respect for individuality, informed educational policy, a hands-on approach to training that would not cripple the asylum child as an "institutional type" but equip him/her for an independent life, and an irreplaceable sense of connection to the natural world.

199 Contosta, Philadelphia's Progressive Orphanage, Chapters 5 & 6.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE NATURE AND NURTURE OF PLACING OUT

"Who are the homeless and neglected children? Why are they homeless? And why should any child be neglected?" ²⁰⁰

Henry H. Goddard

As highly regarded as the cottage system was in comparison to the congregate orphan asylum, most child welfare reformers considered it to be second choice. The best alternative, the majority of reformers agreed, was the most individually tailored one - for dependent children to live within families. Preferably, public and private assistance would make it possible for half-orphans to stay at home with their surviving parent, usually the mother. This important story of the successful efforts reformers made to institute ‘mothers’ pensions’ (funds to keep mothers at home with their children rather than placing them in alternative care) has been the subject of some excellent historical scholarship. Less investigated are the circumstances surrounding efforts to institute home-based care for children who could not be kept at home with a biological parent. For these children reformers touted the superior benefits of ‘placing out’: placing needy children directly into families who were willing to care for them on either a temporary or permanent basis. ²⁰¹


Throughout the Progressive Era most states relied on either a state-wide orphanage system or a county orphanage system. The few full-fledged placing out programs that were in existence, therefore, received the widespread attention of reformers. One state-sponsored placing out system that was highly acclaimed was Michigan's. Michigan collected all dependent children in one location, a state school located in Clearwater, and then placed them out into family homes as soon as possible. A few other states bypassed the central location and worked to put children directly into family homes from the start. Of the three states that took this approach, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, Massachusetts was by far the most acclaimed.

There are a number of reasons why this strongly recommended policy of family based care was not widely implemented right away. Political and organizational obstacles were clearly significant factors and they are certainly worthy of more scholarly attention. This chapter, however, explores the role that the cultural climate played in the placing out movement. At the same time that reformers were making their best case for placing dependent children out into family homes, the Eugenics movement was at the peak of its popularity in this country. Heightened concerns about the power of nature challenged people's faith in the restorative capacity of nurture.

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This context is important to consider for two reasons. First, the cultural climate was of utmost importance to the placing out movement because the public’s involvement was an integral element of the plan. Without willing families, there could be no placing out programs; a certain level of popular support was necessary. Second, the cultural context of the placing out movement is interesting to explore in light of psychology’s key role. Throughout the Progressive Era, cross-fertilization between psychologists and biologists combined to fuel the American eugenics movement. Not only were psychologists involved in adding to the mounting concerns that the eugenics movement raised about dependent children, they were also associated with creating the tools that were used to address those concerns. That is, by the close of the Progressive Era, the services of the new applied psychologists were recommended as placing out programs integrated mental testing into their diagnostic tool kit. In order to provide a context for this discussion, the chapter begins with a brief history of placing out practices in America.

A Brief History of Placing Out

Early American practices of caring for dependent children were derived from the British settlers. In England, from the thirteenth century onward, there were primarily two common mechanisms of providing for orphaned and dependent children: “putting out” and apprenticeship. Apprentices were orphaned or “extra” children who went to work in another family and received room, board, and clothing, but were not paid, and were forbidden to marry. They had to remain obedient to their host family, and were completely dependent on them until the age of 21. Putting out, on the other hand, was
something almost all children in 16th century England experienced beginning at about the age of six to nine. Parents would move their children out of the house for a period of time to learn the manners or the trade of another head of family. The idea was that children would learn more swiftly from an unrelated adult than they would from a parent. This form of educational practice was common among all classes, although the poor preferred to send their children along to the rich where they were likely to be well instructed and cared for.203

Even in light of these common practices, legal historians have been curious about why the early framers of English common law did not accept any form of the early Roman law of adoption.204 The typical reason given is England's extraordinary strong reverence for blood lineage and great concern over inheritance rights, as summarized by Glanville's well-known quotation, "Only God can make a heres, not man."205 Whether or not Glanville's statement accurately epitomized English sentiment toward adoption, given the practical character of the English common law it seems probable that there was no great need for adoption or else it would have been written into English law by the late


204 Although the practice of taking in orphaned children can be traced back to the ancient Babylonians, Egyptians, Hebrews, and Greeks, it is the Romans who left behind the most advanced early law on adoption. Records indicate that the Roman adoption law changed over the course of the empire, but consistently served two main purposes: to prevent the extinction of the family, and to preserve the family's religious rites of worship. Early on in the history of the empire, when children were adopted under ancient Roman law they became subject to patria potestas, or the complete "parental power" of their adopted father, including power over life and death. Therefore, it was the adoptor, rather than the adoptee, who most benefited from the adoptive relationship during ancient times. There was no great concern for the unwanted child per se. Indeed the Romans are known to have indulged in infanticide, in keeping with the practices of the ancient tribes before them. Over time, however, the tremendous significance of patria potestas was diminished; under the ruling of later emperors it shrank to a father's rights to any property or acquisitions of anyone under his power. Stephen B. Presser, "The Historical Background of the American Law of Adoption", Journal of Family Law, 11 (1972): 443-516.

Middle Ages. This strong reverence for blood ties is important to note, however, because historians of adoption have argued that American cultural attitudes toward the authenticity of adoptive family connections carries vestiges of English preference for blood lineage.

As mentioned, practices of apprenticeship and putting-out were brought to the American colonies by the English immigrants. One hypothesis made by historians of the New England Puritans is that the Puritans continued the practice of putting out the children of one family to another because they were afraid they might spoil their children with too much affection. They believed that this was something that another family, who could be more neutral, would be less likely to do. In addition to voluntary putting out, early laws of the colonies held that the state could take children away from parents and place them in another’s home whenever a child became “rude, stubborn, and unruly.” In other words, a form of state-supported foster care was implemented as early as the colonial period in this country.

Although it was common for all parents to put out their children as a way of providing them with an education from another head of household, apprenticeships and putting out became the model for early American treatment of dependent children.

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206 There is some discussion as to whether the English were as opposed to a non-blood-related heres as is commonly thought. See F. Pollock and F. Maitland, The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I (Cambridge: The University Press, 1998) p. 254; and Presser, “The Historical Background,” p. 449. Adoption was not legalized in Britain until 1926, but some of the magazine articles published during the Progressive Era discuss the history of British sentiment toward adoption. Two in particular that offer interesting commentary are: J.H. Macnair, “The Case for Adoption,” Contemporary Review, 105, (May 1914): 704-711, and “The Epidemic of Adoption,” Living Age, 294 (1917): 632-634.


208 Ibid, p. 5.
Typically, instructions for what to do with children in the event of parental death were left in a will, and most frequently the children were to be left with a relative. Even when there was no will available, it was customary to make arrangements for children to move in with relatives and/or godparents. Very often it was expected that the success of these arrangements would rest on the power of strong religious values. In the case of orphans without blood relatives, these children were sometimes “bound out”, as it was termed during the seventeenth century, and taken in by families largely for economic reasons. For all intents and purposes, such orphans were indentured servants and maltreatment was not uncommon.209

In early colonial America, therefore, it was customary for children of one family to spend time with another family in order to learn a trade, or to benefit from the host family’s social standing and good manners, etc. When children were orphaned they were either brought into the fold of living blood relatives, who typically felt a religiously motivated responsibility for raising them, or bound out to work in exchange for their keep. Indenture, apprenticeship, and informal family-based ‘adoption’ remained widely used means of providing for orphaned children in America until the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1830 new laws were passed to provide indentured orphans with fundamental rights, including a measure of protection from maltreatment. These laws, in combination with the burgeoning number of dependent children who were without stable family connections, led to non-family based systems of caring for them. The almshouse was an early option, but in these settings dependent children were typically mixed in with criminals and mentally ill adults. As described in the first portion of Chapter Two, the

orphan asylum was considered a positive step forward and became the alternative of choice for most of the nineteenth century.

One early and influential critic of the nineteenth century orphan asylum was Charles Loring Brace, Sr. As discussed as part of Chapter One on the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children, Brace was an early promoter of the placing-out method. As part of a larger child welfare program, he organized and implemented a system of transporting New York-based dependents westward. As illustrated in Chapter One, Brace’s orphan trains drew much criticism by the turn of the century. Progressive Era reformers believed the system had gone awry for a number of practical reasons. And, as a group, the majority of reformers from this period rejected the premise that Brace’s orphan train movement rested upon. Brace held fast to the belief that dependent children should be “saved”, and therefore separated from, the original, tainted stock from which they were born. Individual stories of the orphan train riders confirm this, as attempts that they made to stay in touch with their families of origin were thwarted.210

As the 1909 White House Conference indicates, by the first decade of the twentieth century child welfare reformers were focused on trying to keep dependent children together with their families of origin as often as possible. When children could not be kept at home with blood relatives, they were to be placed with families willing to provide them with a home, and were not to be considered indentured servants, as many of Brace’s orphan train riders were ultimately treated. Therefore, reformers promoted keeping dependent children at home with a surviving parent, or placing them in another

family home. In principle, the majority of them shared Brace’s belief that any bad habits dependent children had learned from their family of origin could be addressed and improved upon as the result of future, positive experiences. In other words, through the power of an improved environment, dependent children were capable of reform. This position, however, met with a hostile cultural climate that questioned whether ‘bad stock’ could ever be altered. By the 1910s a common view among hard-line eugenicists and those who summarized their views for popular digestion was that newborns carried a largely immutable ‘germ-plasm’. If the plasm was not sound, the problem was with the individual forever, and with society as well.

**The American Eugenics Movement**

During the early decades of the twentieth century, at the same time that child welfare activists were heavily promoting environmentalist-based reform, the American eugenics movement gained momentum and peaked in popularity. A core assumption of this social, political, and scientific movement was that heredity was the determining factor governing human development. Nature, therefore, was deemed far more powerful an influence than nurture. American eugenicists spanned the political spectrum. As a combination of men and women identifying with the political left, right, and center, it is no wonder that the eugenicists had difficulty agreeing on a unified agenda. Because they believed that heredity was the key to human betterment, they all subscribed to some form of social control, supporting varying levels of government involvement. Despite the
different legal and political issues that divided the eugenicists they shared in common an
overarching belief in the power of heredity and the promise of hereditary manipulation.211

The roots of American eugenics can be traced to Britain, where Sir Francis Galton
coined the term during the 1880s. In collaboration with Karl Pearson, Galton founded the
field of biometrics, the statistical study of inheritance. Galton and Pearson collected
descriptions of physical and mental traits of related and unrelated people and tried to
show, through statistical correlation, that mind and body must be inherited because there
was a higher positive correlation between physical and mental characteristics among
related individuals than among unrelated individuals. They popularized the view that the
mental and moral nature of human beings was inherited in just the same way that
physical traits are passed on. Galton and Pearson were optimistic that the science of
biometrics would enable eugenicists to predict the inheritance of all mental, moral, and
physical traits through future generations.212

By the end of the 1890s, the movement had crossed the Atlantic, and had gained
widespread interest among educated Americans. One of the key developments that gave
the movement strong momentum into the turn of the century was the rediscovery, in
1900, of the research of the Moravian monk, Gregor Mendel. During the 1860s Mendel
had conducted a series of breeding experiments with a variety of peas, showing that when

211 There is a large literature on the American eugenics movement. I relied most heavily on Mark H.
Haller, Eugenics: Hereditary Ideas in America (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963);
Dunn, Genetics in the Twentieth Century (New York: Macmillan, 1951); Hamilton Cravens, The Triumph
of Evolution: American Scientists and the Heredity-Environment Controversy, 1900-1941 (University of
Pennsylvania Press, 1978); Marouf Arif Hasian, Jr., The Rhetoric of Eugenics in Anglo-American Thought
(GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1996); Charles E. Rosenberg, No Other Gods: On Science and
American Social Thought (MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Daniel J. Kelves, In the Name of
Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity (NY: Knopf, 1985); and Steven Selden, Inheriting

212 See Cravens, The Triumph of Evolution.
he cross-fertilized pea plants certain traits were inherited by future generations in predictable mathematical ratios. Mendel’s exploration of dominant and recessive ‘elements’ (the term ‘gene’ was not coined until 1906) gave way to a very simple and seemingly reliable formula for determining the probability of inheriting traits. The naive scientific leap that American Mendelian eugenicists made was to apply Mendel’s work with the physical traits of a variety of peas to all human traits – including the most complex. If all complex traits were largely determined by heredity, that obviously left little room for the effects of nurture, or environment. Although most eugenicists acknowledged that nurture was not without any role, they relegated the role of the environment to a very minor position, holding instead that once a person is born genetically unfit, there was very little that education or religion could do to replace the defective “germ-plasm.”

The eugenics movement was a reform movement that sought to improve society at the same time that it sought to control it. Historians have noted that eugenicists believed that this new scientific understanding of the all-powerful effects of heredity would lead toward the betterment of society. The key would be guiding and/or legally mandating individual reproductive behavior, for the good of society. Why did this message resonate with so many Americans at the turn of the last century? Historians have argued that the theory, upheld as scientific fact, capitalized on the anxiety that the new professional and business classes (largely made up of White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants) felt about the social, cultural, and demographic changes transforming the country. That is, the momentum of the eugenics movement benefited from the latent and overt concerns

213 “Germ-plasm” was the term that eugenicists used to describe the heredity material that guided one’s development. Selden, Inheriting Shame, p. 2.
that the educated classes felt about the growing underclass and the burgeoning immigrant population.\textsuperscript{214}

Like most reform movements, proponents of the eugenics movement were in search of popular support. Although there is some disagreement among historians as to just how popular the movement was, the majority of historians appear to agree that eugenics had a far-reaching impact on the reading public. There is certainly abundant evidence to suggest that it was the subject of many books, lectures, and articles written by doctors, social workers, and other intellectuals. Eugenics became part of the college curriculum – by 1914 there were 44 universities offering courses in eugenics. On the political and legal front, beginning during the Progressive Era eugenicists were influential in persuading state legislatures to pass compulsory sterilization laws – between 1907 and 1931, 30 states had passed such laws. In addition, eugenicist literature was disseminated through means as various as popular women’s magazines such as \textit{Good Housekeeping}, and \textit{Cosmopolitan}, and through secret organizations such as the Klu Klux Klan.\textsuperscript{215}

As the historian Marouf Hasian has pointed out, one prominent way in which concern about eugenics was translated into everyday behavior was the responsibility that eugenicists and their supporters put on parents, particularly mothers. The women’s magazines, for example, frequently sent the message that responsible and worthy parents were meant to be cautious. They were to check their children’s potential mates’ ancestry

\textsuperscript{214} See Rosenberg, \textit{No Other Gods}, and Haller, \textit{Eugenics}.

and hereditary background in order to be as confident as possible of safe decisions.216

This quotation from an article published in a July 1913 issue of Cosmopolitan, by Stoddard Goodhue, illustrates the kind of message that popular writers were sending about the importance of exercising discretion in choosing marriage partners:

Consider the families of your neighbors. More than likely some of them include children that are congenitally crippled or scrofulous or “backward” or vicious and depraved. You have supposed that this was an unavoidable misfortune; an inexplicable “interposition of Providence.” You are wrong. The seeming misfortune that is bringing the head of your neighbor in sorrow to the grave is really of his own choosing. He predetermined that his child should be neuropathic or epileptic or deformed or congenitally blind or deaf or morally depraved when he selected the mother of that child. You will invite the same disaster if you act with like lack of foresight.217

Although it was considered within one’s power to make a careful, well-examined choice about a marriage partner, clearly the eventual effects of the choice were immutable. The marriage decision was considered so important because once it was made and one gave birth to a child with a certain hereditary make-up, it was thought impossible to make a significant impact on his/her existing germ plasm. Indeed, believers held that one’s own germ plasm was beyond alteration:

In a word, then, each of you is the bearer of a message from your ancestry to your posterity. You stand at the meeting point between galaxies of ancestors and other galaxies of prospective progeny. In your system lies the bit of germ-plasm that — miracle of miracles! — conveys the potentialities of good and evil of the past — the epitome of the racial history of all your myriads of ancestors. Nothing that you can do will change the character of that germ-plasm. Its potentialities are fixed irrevocably. In a sense it is not a part of you; it is a heritage placed temporarily in your stewardship. But it is open to you to decide whether you will be a true or false steward.218

216 Hasian, The Rhetoric of Eugenics, p. 84.


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Clearly, eugenicists and their supporters held that potential parents, in search of a mate, held their own fate (as parents), the fate of their children, and the fate of the nation in their hands.

As it turns out, eugenicists showed significant interest in the issue of dependency during the first decade of the twentieth century. They centered their attention on the poor, the 'feeble-minded', and the 'defective' members of society whose behavior, they thought, posed a threat to the stability of the urban industrial social order. Although a handful of psychologists were involved in the development of the eugenics movement from the beginning, one of them in particular, Henry H. Goddard, made highly prominent contributions to the public's understanding of dependency during these years.

Eugenics, Psychologists, and the Dependent Child

The American eugenics movement spawned a fair amount of cross-pollination between biologists and psychologists. Charles Davenport, whose name signaled tremendous prestige within the scientific community at the turn of the century, is the biologist most closely associated with the movement. From 1907 onward, Davenport made eugenics the centerpiece of his own research and organizational efforts. He published many scientific papers on Mendelian inheritance in human beings and he corresponded at great length with other scientists who shared his enthusiasm for the science of eugenics.219 His correspondents included three psychologists: Edward Lee Thorndike of Columbia, who became famous for his research in mental measurement;

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Robert M. Yerkes of Harvard, the animal psychologist who became famous for developing the Army mental testing program during World War I; and Henry H. Goddard of the Vineland Training School, who published the earliest adaptation of the Binet-Simon test in America.220

Early psychologists were particularly inspired by the scientific contributions of Galton and Pearson, whose work was considered to be scientifically rigorous and sound. Historians of psychology have drawn many interesting connections between Galton and Pearson's early work with mental measurement, and the fascination, enthusiasm, and drive that early American psychologists exhibited with respect to mental testing. Most who were drawn to the new psychology of mental capacity firmly believed that the Simon-Binet test, which became available in America as of 1908, measured innate capacity, uncorrupted by the effects of environment. The prospect of what this precise scientific measurement could do simultaneously for society and the new discipline of psychology was enormously promising. As a result, a number of the most prominent early American psychologists, including James McKeen Cattell at Columbia, G. Stanley Hall at Clark, Edward B. Titchener at Cornell, and Hugo Munsterberg at Harvard, encouraged the study of mental capacity by their graduate students. Some of these students came to play leading roles in the American mental testing movement, including Munsterberg's student Robert M. Yerkes, and two of Hall's students, Lewis Terman and Henry H. Goddard. But of all the early psychologists who flocked to the new science of

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220 See Cravens, The Triumph of Evolution, Chapter One.
mental capacity, it was Goddard who became most concerned and associated with issues of dependency.2

Henry Herbert Goddard was born and raised in the small Maine town of East Vassalboro. His father, who had been earlier injured in a farm accident, died when Goddard was nine years old. With the loss of the family’s breadwinner, Goddard’s family suffered from extreme poverty. But due to the family’s strong connection with the Quaker religion, their poverty was considered respectable and they were recipients of charity from this close-knit religious community. Goddard spent much of his childhood with his married sister because his mother, who became more and more involved with the religion following her husband’s death, traveled frequently on behalf of church related activities.2

At age 12 Goddard received a scholarship to attend the Friends School in Providence, the most prestigious Quaker boarding school in the area. At 17 he received another scholarship to attend the Quaker-affiliated Haverford College, where he entered as a sophomore. Goddard went on to study for his master’s degree at Haverford, graduating in 1889 with a degree in mathematics. In August of the same year, at age 23, he married a 24-year-old Maine woman, Emma Florence Robbins. For the next few years Goddard worked as a principal of a Quaker school in Damascus, Ohio, and then as a schoolteacher in his hometown of Vassalboro. It was while he was teaching in Maine


222 Zenderland, Measuring Minds, Chapter One.
that he went to hear G. Stanley Hall address the Maine State Teachers Association in Lewiston. Hall’s passionate message of reform infected Goddard and he decided to spend a year studying with Hall at Clark, eventually borrowing enough money that he could complete his doctorate, graduating in 1899 with a dissertation on “The Effects of Mind on Body as Evidenced in Faith Cures.” After seven years teaching at a Pennsylvania Normal School, in 1908 Goddard took a position as Director of the Vineland Training School of New Jersey, a private institution for the mentally retarded. It was while affiliated with this post that Goddard became known as a champion of the eugenics movement.

Goddard’s most famous contribution to the movement (though he never used the term ‘eugenics’ in it) was a book written for the general public entitled The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness. Published in 1912, this book traces the history of an eight-year-old girl who had come to Vineland in 1897. “Deborah”, the daughter of an unwed mother, had come from living at an almshouse. Because she was not doing very well in school it was thought she might be feeble-minded. From the time that Goddard had arrived at Vineland he had been studying the different levels of feeble-mindedness among the residents, and keeping records regarding the children’s mental capacity. Using the records kept by her teachers, Goddard explained that although Deborah’s progress in certain skills and tasks (e.g. wood carving, gardening, sewing) steadily improved, her academic progress was barely noticeable.

Goddard’s ideas on the subject were popularized through his widely read book The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness (New York: Macmillan, 1912).
When he tested the 21-year-old Deborah on the Simon-Binet test in 1910, she scored at
the level of a nine-year-old. The reason for this lack of progress: bad stock, or heredity.224

In The Kallikak Family Goddard went on to trace Deborah's heritage. He and his
research assistants had assessed the mentality of all 480 of Deborah's family members by
visiting them, in some cases, repeatedly. Each member was certified as "normal",
"undetermined", or "feebleminded." What Goddard reported was that there were two
distinct sides of the family. The source of Deborah's family line was Martin Kallikak, a
member of a respectable and professionally successful family who was legally married.
He took a second lover, however, whom Goddard certified "feebleminded", and had an
illegitimate child with her. Goddard believed that he and his assistants had made a
crucial discovery. Whereas the descendents of Martin and his lawfully wedded wife were
deemed "normal", each one of the descendents from his unlawful affair, including
Deborah, were deemed "feebleminded", with only one exception.225

Goddard based what he believed was a very carefully researched study on the
premise that the environment of all these individuals had been constant. "Both lines," he
wrote, "live out their lives in practically the same region and in the same environment
except in so far as they themselves, because of their different characters, changed that
environment." His conclusion, that "no amount of education or good environment can
change a feeble-minded individual into a normal one, any more than it can change a red-
haired stock into a black-haired stock" sent a stark message. As long as the members of
this family continued to reproduce, their bad stock would continue to infiltrate the good

224 Ibid.
stock of other family lines. As for Deborah, Goddard argued that she should be kept safely institutionalized, so as to protect society from the negative consequences of her reproducing, and to protect her from being used by others with immoral motives.  

The Kallikak Family made a significant impact on the American reading public. Its message clearly raised important issues in light of the agenda of child welfare reformers. Reformers who were focused on de-institutionalizing dependent children and raising them in cottage settings, or placing them out into family homes, had to address concerns such as the ones Goddard posed. In light of the apparently immutable forces of genetics, what kind of chances did families take when they welcomed an orphan, half-orphan, or otherwise needy child into their home on a temporary or permanent basis? Goddard addressed such concerns himself in an article he published in the Survey – characterized as “the social work journal which perhaps best captured the spirit of progressive reform” - just months before The Kallikak Family was published in 1912.

In “Wanted: A Child to Adopt” Goddard explained that a friend had recently asked him “to make an application of scientific facts to the problem of adopting a child.” His friend’s question led Goddard to respond with questions of his own: “Who are the homeless and neglected children? Why are they homeless? And why should any child be neglected?” “These questions”, Goddard argued, “ought to be satisfactorily answered by anyone thinking of taking a neglected child into his home.” Knowing his position on the

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226 Ibid, pp. 52-53.

227 Zenderland, Measuring Minds, Chapter Five.

228 Ibid, p. 222.
Kallikak family, it is not surprising that Goddard believed that "in many cases", children in line for adoption were born of

profligate parents, of families who are unable to maintain their footing in the community, or even provide for the necessities of life. And this is the condition not only of the parents, but also of the other relatives of the family. In other words, these children have no relatives who are sufficiently endowed with self respect and intelligence to enable them to make a living for themselves, or to have interest enough to care for their own kin. ...in view of the hundreds and thousands of children that are annually placed in good homes and brought up practically as members of the family, and in view of the further fact now coming to be understood that disease and mental deficiency and possibly crime are transmitted from parents to children, grandchildren, and even to the fourth generation, it is not only wise but humane for us to consider the fact and perhaps revise our practice.229

Goddard went on to write about "a bright-looking well-developed girl of about twenty" who, "to the casual observer, would appear to be "a normal child." In fact, she was "distinctly feeble-minded, with no power of self-control" and "no consistent plan or ideals of life" (it may very well have been "Deborah Kallikak" he was alluding to). "Without the protecting walls of the institution," he argued, "she would rapidly degenerate into a criminal or a prostitute." Because the record indicated that "these people" almost always marry, Goddard expressed concern that his feebleminded female resident would meet an "intelligent, respectable young man" who would fall in love and marry her. And there "the foundation for another race of mental defectives, perhaps worse than the present" would be laid.230

How, according to Goddard, could such a situation be avoided? At least part of the solution lay in investigating thoroughly "the family history of every homeless and


neglected child.” Indeed, “no pains or expense should be spared to get all the information that can possibly be had.” It was crucial to provide prospective host families with as much information as possible about the children in question, “so that they may guard not only their own children if they have them, but other children from any alliances that are dangerous from a hereditary standpoint.” Recognizing that this might have detrimental effects on the numbers of families agreeing to accept dependent children into their homes, Goddard claimed that it was society’s duty to care for such children “in colonies.” This approach would be well worth it, he argued, because “charitable organizations, even the state, can well afford to do this rather than run the risk of contaminating the race by the perpetuation of mental and moral deficiency.” Although we may feel a sense of “humanity”, or “pity”, or “sympathy” for the homeless child, Goddard cautioned that we not let such feelings “drive us to do injustice to and commit a crime against those yet unborn.”

The eugenics movement threatened the reform program for dependent children because eugenicists’ understanding of the power of nature suggested that dependency was no accident. Goddard and others were arguing that very little distinguished dependents from defectives; in most cases, they were one and the same. Goddard’s own poverty had been intense, yet it had also been considered respectable because of his family’s heavy involvement in the Quaker community, and their lack of involvement in socially unacceptable behavior. Such a distinction between a respectable form of dependency and a socially unacceptable form (defectiveness) clearly introduces the element of moral judgment. From an eugenicist’s point of view, a needy child coming

231 Ibid, pp. 1005-1006.
from a morally upright family would have a dramatically improved chance of climbing out of the dependent status. He or she may have fallen on hard times, but was essentially from good stock. Historical evidence suggests that, in response to general suspicions about the inherent defectiveness of dependent children, child welfare workers implementing and advocating the placing out system felt under pressure to separate out “true dependents” from “defectives”, and sometimes relied on such moralistic judgments in the process.

**Nature, Nurture, and the Placing-Out Movement**

Although the eugenics movement peaked in popularity during the Progressive Era, the heavy focus on the power of heredity was certainly challenged by those promoting different views. As Chapter One, on the 1909 White House Conference indicated, child welfare reformers were strongly advocating an environmentalist perspective – such a perspective is clearly inherent in all three of the conference themes highlighted by this dissertation. But especially in light of the above discussion of the nature-focused eugenics movement, it is important to draw out the nurture-focused arguments that champions of the placing-out movement were making during the same period. Therefore, I will next discuss the environmentalist theme that was also being sounded, especially among child welfare reformers, during the Progressive Era. I will then focus on one placing-out program in particular: the Boston Children’s Aid Society (BCAS). At the time, Boston was considered to be at the forefront of child-welfare reform. The BCAS’s placing-out program was hailed widely among reformers as the
Finally, I will describe an environmentalist theme found in popular sources of the period, emphasizing the positive effect that dependent children could have on formerly childless couples.

A Case for the Environment

One of the tensions that existed among child welfare workers during the Progressive Era was the issue of political awareness. For those politically active reformers who attended the 1909 White House Conference, it only made sense to work toward more organized systems and central forms of communication. Because they were committed to moving in this direction, these reformers were often frustrated by the activities of private "baby bureaus" - small placing-out services run by individuals who did not participate in larger local or state-wide organizations. Reformers worried that these entities, held accountable by no one, and often idiosyncratically run, could do harm to the larger political movement. It no doubt frustrated reformers to see these individual baby-bureaus, often operated simply out of private homes, profiled as often as they were in popular magazines and journals. But despite the fact that these kinds of entities received probably much more attention than reformers wanted them to, the people who ran them were, for the most part, fully dedicated to an environmentalist perspective on child development. For example, The Literary Digest published in 1916 a celebratory account of Mrs. Judson's work "doing private placement of children from her home into adoptive families." Her goals, as discussed in the article were:

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See discussion of Proposition 13 of the 1909 White House Conference on Dependent Children, in Appendix A.
To give to our country more of the best class of American citizens. Our forebears, through toil and struggle, often gained ideals, culture, refinement, and beliefs which have built up this nation. So many families where such inheritance obtains are childless. If a child is adopted and these ideals and beliefs passed down to it, we create another American citizen, guided by the same uplifting faiths as held and helped our forefathers.\textsuperscript{2, 3, 4}

Although Mrs. Judson's rationale clearly implies an environmentalist premise, most individuals drawn to this private work, typically conducted out of their own homes, were more explicit about their views. For example, when one writer was interviewed about his own work placing babies from his home into private homes, he offered in 1913:

Some people worry themselves unnecessarily about heredity. If the child inherits a healthy body I believe it is all they should ask. It is my theory that environment amounts to a great deal more in the proper raising of a child than does heredity. .... Once we supplied a baby to a home, and when the new little mother undrest the new little baby she found a little note in its stocking: 'I am giving you my baby! I don't know who you are, I can never know who you are. That is my punishment. But, oh, can you not, will you not, arrange through the ones from whom you get my little girlie so that I may make it little clothes and things from time to time? I do not ask to know where my baby is, not even to know how it is getting along, just to know that it will be permitted to wear the things that my hands make and that my tears have fallen upon.' Do you imagine there would be anything to fear from heredity in the case of that child?\textsuperscript{2, 3, 5}

Despite the friction that existed between the politically astute child welfare reformers and the non-networked independent baby bureaus, generally speaking they shared an environmentalist perspective. For example, one medical doctor, with a long history of working in orphan asylums, published an article in 1916 in The Outlook, directly addressing the public's concerns about adopting dependent children, concerns such as the ones Goddard raised in his article. Joseph Kerley, M.D. wrote that he was


\textsuperscript{234} (Anonymous author) "Training Babies for the Golden Spoon," The Literary Digest, 52 (April 8, 1916): 1020.

\textsuperscript{235} (Anonymous author) "A Humorist's 'Baby Bureau'," The Literary Digest, July 19 (1913): 101.
aware “of many who feel the desire for parenthood” but “are deterred from taking a step in the direction of adoption for fear of that great bugaboo, hereditary influences.”

Kerley argued that “all children, regardless of their social status, were “very much alike at birth.” Born “dependent” and “immature”, human children did not “actually become adults before the seventeenth or eighteenth year of life.” Therefore, there were many years of “growth and development” necessary. But “in the lower animals”, “the reverse” was true. In the case of lower animals “the period of dependency of the young upon the parent lasts but a very short time”, therefore, “the matter of heredity is a much greater factor” for them. In contrast, in human beings “environment is of much greater import than heredity” because of our “immaturity, dependency, and prolonged development.” Since a “long, plastic, impressionable period of sixteen years” exists in human children Kerley argued that adults could “mold a child largely as we will.” Most importantly, he believed that “the fashioning and the molding, whether it be done well, indifferently, or badly, depends more upon the molder and the child’s associations than upon the material worked upon.”

Kerley based his perspective on the malleability of children on his twenty-seven years as resident or attending physician at children’s institutions. He had seen “many hundreds of children” be “adopted or otherwise sent out into the world” and had “cared for these unfortunate children in large numbers.” Having seen children from deprived origins be taken into institutions and later “adopted or otherwise placed in good homes”, Kerley observed that they had, “in every way....taken and maintained their place with

237 Ibid, p. 100.
those who had the advantages of everything that is desirable, both as regards birth and environment.” If, on the other hand, these children had “grown up in the more or less careless environment of their birth, they would have developed as their surroundings determined.”238

Having made numerous such observations over the years, Kerley had concluded that “in large degree”, “we make our criminals and the otherwise undesirable of both sexes.” In words reminiscent of the behaviorist psychologist John B. Watson, Kerley argued that “if two infants of equal vitality, one born in the palace and one in the poorest tenement, were exchanged on the day of birth, each would work out his destiny along the lines of his environment.” “Brilliant exceptions” existed, but for the most part, Kerley thought we tended to forget “in blaming crime, degeneracy, and alcoholism to heredity, that the child lived and grew and got his impressions from that vicious association.”239

In short, strong opinions about the role of nurture certainly existed among child welfare reformers throughout the Progressive Era, as they worked to implement changes to systems of caring for dependent children. But what were they up against? With all the concerns raised in the wake of the eugenics movement about the power of heredity, was there a clear distinction in the public mind, if you will, between dependency and defectiveness? How could child welfare workers successfully address fears about the risk people embarked upon when they took foster children into their homes? Relatively speaking, earlier themes explored herein - anti-institutionalism and the implementation of the cottage system - were movements aimed at the child welfare community and the


239 Ibid, p. 106.
proper government officials and bodies. But with respect to this goal of placing children out into community based families, child welfare workers had a much wider audience to reach; unless they could find willing volunteers, the placing-out movement would not succeed.

Of all the placing-out systems at work during the Progressive Era, the one most often highlighted as the best model was the department run by the Boston Children’s Aid Society. Directed by the well-known child welfare reformer Charles Birtwell, the placing-out department of the BCAS was the first in the country fully to replace institutional care for dependent children. Although the BCAS records after 1900 are sealed, an analysis of their public records, together with placing-out cases from just before the turn of the century, suggests that during the Progressive Era the BCAS was indeed struggling with the public’s perception of dependent children. The case of the BCAS provides an interesting window into the way child welfare workers grappled with broad issues of nature, nurture, and diagnosis in this era before the arrival of the Simon-Binet test. Ultimately, this test would come to serve as the tool that made the determination between defective and normal, or “healthy” dependents.

The Case of the Boston Children’s Aid Society

It was under the leadership of Charles Birtwell, who became the General Secretary of the organization in 1885, that the BCAS fully converted to the method of placing needy children out into family homes rather than institutionalizing them. Birtwell was very proud of this transformation, as is indicated in the comments he made during an address to his Board of Directors in 1890:
Here is an “institution” of no ordinary character: it shelters 60 children, yet you cannot find it; its beauty – ay, and its efficacy – lie in its concealment. Will you insist on knowing its location, and going to see it? You must learn half a hundred addresses and travel many a road. But, if you visit it, you will surely come back a convert to the doctrine that for neglected and homeless children home life is far preferable to residence in an institution.240

The child-placing department was one element of the BCAS; as a whole, the organization served as a bureau of information. Anyone was welcome to come to the BCAS’s central office to discuss the case of a needy child, including parents looking for advice, ministers reporting suspicious situations, and officials from other organizations in need of help with a particular child. Under certain circumstances, when it was clear that a child needed to be removed from his or her current situation, the child would be referred to the placing out department of the BCAS. This department acted quickly. They had a battery of homes lined up to accept children on a number of different bases.

Periodically the BCAS advertised for people in and outside of Boston to provide adoptive homes, free homes (where children could stay free of charge on a nonpermanent basis), boarding homes (children could stay in exchange for a fee), and emergency homes (they could stay for a short time while other arrangements were made). The placing-out process that the BCAS followed is perhaps best illustrated by a genuine example.241

The BCAS first learned about a five-year-old half-orphan named Sidney Ericson when a representative from the Blank Home for Children came to the Bureau of Information on December 22, 1897, in search of advice.242 Sidney, a resident at the

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240 The archives of the Boston Children’s Aid Society (hereafter referred to as BCAS Archives), University of Massachusetts at Boston. Annual Report of the BCAS, 1890, p. 15.

241 BCAS Archives, Illustrative Cases and Forms Book, 1899-1900.

242 It is my understanding that the “Blank Home” was the actual name of this orphanage, and that the term “blank” was not used in place of the actual name.
Blank Home, was “unruly and troublesome” and they did not know what to do with him. His mother had had him admitted because she was reportedly unable to care for his needs. The boy had been deemed “abnormal” because he was “very dull”, had “very bad personal health”, and was “fond of being by himself”. The boy’s father, the BCAS learned, was deceased, and had been of ‘questionable’ character. According to her landlord, Sidney’s mother, who was 24 years old and a hairdresser, was “faithful” to Sidney and his three younger siblings. The BCAS agent who did the intake reported that she “suspected [that] adenoids” factored into Sidney’s condition. She called in Charles Birtwell, the General Secretary, to offer another opinion.

Birtwell recommended the BCAS agent take Sidney to see Dr. Femald, Superintendent of the School for Feeble-Minded to “learn if the boy is mentally deficient.” He also instructed the agent to take the boy to a medical doctor, as, in his own opinion, ‘if he is not feeble-minded now, he will soon become so unless he has proper medical attention’. Dr. Femald at the School for Feeble-Minded agreed that Sidney had an adenoid growth in the back of his mouth “which may account for all his defects; he is undersized and undernourished.” Dr. Femald also thought Sydney’s eardrum was perforated. Dr. Goodale of Children’s Hospital agreed with Dr. Femald’s assessment of Sidney’s condition and an operation was scheduled. It was reported that Sidney’s mother was notified of the situation, and fully consented that the operation be done. In the meantime, the boy continued to stay on at the Blank Home.

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243 Handwritten notes compiled and fastened into a large scrapbook entitled *Illustrative Cases and Forms Book, 1899-1900*, p. 16.

244 Ibid.
In January of 1898 the adenoid growth was removed and following a short recovery period, Sidney was sent back to the Blank Home. Two weeks later a BCAS agent who visited him noted “marked improvement”, but by early February it was reported that he had “fallen back in some measure.” At this point, Sidney was referred to BCAS’s placing out agency. Before losing any more ground, BCAS determined that he should be boarded out with a “private family in the country.” In preparation for these new arrangements, the BCAS agent investigated whether Sidney’s mother was capable of contributing anything toward the cost of boarding him out, and determined, after speaking with her landlord again, that she was not. Again, it was noted that the landlord believed Sidney’s mother to be a poor but very respectable woman who did as well as she could by her children. Sidney was sent to live in the country home of a Mrs. Hunt who promised to “watch him carefully” even at night – when he slept next to her bed. The BCAS settled upon an arrangement whereby Mrs. Hunt would be paid $2 a week by the Blank Home.245

A couple of weeks after Sidney moved in with Mrs. Hunt his mother came for an overnight visit and was “much pleased and very grateful.” Agents of the BCAS visited him regularly and escorted him to and from his scheduled medical exams. At the end of March, 1898 a new development was noted: his ears were deemed “very defective” and a month later he underwent operations on both ears. Following the procedure it was determined that his right ear would indeed improve, but his left probably would not.246

245 Ibid.
246 Ibid.
By June, Sidney’s medical doctor noted improvement and recommended that Mrs. Hunt continue to “teach him simple reading and writing.” A month later the CAS agent reported that he had made steady physical gains but was “still nervous and restless; lacks concentration and purpose.” On the other hand, she also noted that he “looked very neat and seemed perfectly happy.” By September his medical doctor was “well pleased” that Sidney knew his letters and could recite verses. Throughout the fall of 1898 and into the beginning of 1899 Sidney continued to receive positive reports and in May of that year his doctor recommended that he be “kept in the country and sent to school in the fall.” In October of 1899, shortly after he’d started school, his doctor said that he was “doing splendidly” and that he thought the “adenoid growth was the cause of the whole trouble” in the first place. His doctor predicted then that Sidney would “develop into a normal boy.”

A few months later, in January of 1900, it was reported that the Blank Home questioned whether they could keep paying the $2 per week for Sidney’s board and clothes. In light of this, the BCAS agent had a discussion with Mrs. Hunt and discovered that she had “become so much interested in him that she offers to clothe him herself if he can remain.” The BCAS agent then persuaded the Blank Home to continue to pay his board, sharing the overall costs of caring for him with Mrs. Hunt. Given that all case materials from 1900 onward are closed to the public, these were the last notes of Sidney’s case that were available, save for one letter written by him on January 22, 1900. In crooked block letters he wrote to his BCAS agent: “Dear Mrs. Stone, I was glad you wrote me a letter I hung up my stockings They was full and a lot they could not get in. I

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247 Ibid.
think it pays to be a good boy I have a sled I slide on the ice and have a good time. I am well. I send my love to you. From Sidney Ericson."248

The case of Sidney Ericson is interesting for a few reasons. First, it raises the question of how doctors and child welfare workers thought about feeble-mindedness at the turn of the century and suggests that they did not think about it in strictly hereditary terms. Feeble-mindedness could evolve as the result of environmental conditions and/or medical conditions. Once Sidney’s adenoids were operated on, he returned to the Blank Home and started to improve. The operation helped his situation, but not enough – soon his progress started to wane and the BCAS agent decided to remove him to a country home where he would receive much individual attention from Mrs. Hunt. Clearly, the BCAS agent felt that feeble-mindedness was a danger, but it was a danger that could be helped and addressed through medical and environmental improvements – assumptions that appear to have borne out.

Another interesting issue that Sidney’s case raises is the extent to which child welfare workers made moral judgments about the surviving and deceased family members of children with whom they worked. When the BCAS agent went to Sidney’s mother’s landlord to inquire as to her reputation and learned that she was considered a loyal and faithful mother, the information appears to have benefited Sidney’s case. One wonders what would have happened if Sidney’s mother’s behavior was considered immoral – would Sidney have been welcomed by Mrs. Hunt? Would it have been harder to have found a home to board him out? His mother’s presence and involvement appears to have been solicited and openly accepted from the beginning. Indeed, although BCAS

248 Ibid.

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clearly took the lead with the arrangements, all parties appear to have stayed involved throughout – including Sidney’s mother, the Blank Home, the BCAS agent, the medical doctors, and Mrs. Hunt.

Given the inability to examine BCAS case records after 1900, any changes in the way BCAS agents approached the issue of feeble-mindedness are not readily available. But BCAS public records from the turn of the century onward suggest concerns about feeble-mindedness may have reached a kind of turning point a number of years later, in 1914. In the 1914 Annual Report, the first one that included any mention of feeble-mindedness, one headline read: “How The Poor Child Who Comes To Us is Mis-judged Because We Must Also Care For Defectives.” The short blurb following the headline read:

After a community has had several bad experiences with feeble-minded children from child placing societies it is prone to consider a great many of the children sent out to family homes as being queer, and to spread the word that “You want to watch it when you take a child from the children’s societies, for they are likely to send you a crazy one.” This is an unjust reflection on normal children whose mother or father is sick or dead – but this is exactly what is happening.\(^\text{249}\)

The same Annual Report included a table that reported, by gender, the “Mental Condition of Parents” according to four categories: Extremely eccentric (9 Mothers, 6 Fathers), Neurotic (14 Mothers, 4 Fathers), Insane (6 Mothers, 3 Fathers), and Feeble-minded (38 Mothers, 4 Fathers).\(^\text{250}\) A year later, in 1915, the Annual Report indicated that “11% of children received this year were either feeble-minded or suspected of being so.”\(^\text{251}\) How these diagnoses were determined was not mentioned. Although those with medical

\(^{249}\) BCAS Annual Report, 1914, p. 22.

\(^{250}\) Ibid, p. 36.

degrees were listed among the consultants and staff members affiliated with BCAS, there was no evidence that a psychologist had been employed at any time during the Era in question. Two years later, in 1917, as the Progressive Era was coming to a close, the BCAS Annual Report noted that:

The importance of the schools for feeble minded and the Psychopathic Hospital in diagnostic work becomes more pronounced every year. The shortage of physicians with training for this special work indicates the need of centering it so far as possible in hospitals such as the Psychopathic.252

Soon, in the next couple of years, it would be social workers and applied psychologists who would arrive "with the training for this special work." As the Progressive Era was coming to a close, these new professions were on the rise. Also in 1917, the BCAS Annual Report made reference to this rising class of professional social workers who would come to play such an important role in the child welfare movement in the years ahead:

Who can do social work? No-one can do good social case-work, either as professional or volunteer, who does not possess certain qualities. The minimum is good character; good educational preparation, although not necessarily college training; experience in understanding people; personality; sympathy balanced with judgment; the ability to gather and interpret facts without bias, and also the ability to know when not to gather them; the guarding of confidences and the keeping abreast of the developing literature of social work. The importance of the training given in the professional social work schools is very great indeed.253

Among the training manuals that the professional social work schools were using was Child-Placing in Families: A Manual for Students and Social Workers, written by W. H. Slingerland, A.M., D.D.. To my knowledge, this manual, published in 1919 by the Russell Sage Foundation, with an introduction by the well known child welfare reformer

253 Ibid, p. 11.
Hastings H. Hart, is the first to make passing reference to the role of the applied psychologist in testing and diagnosing dependent children.²⁵⁴

Diagnostic work was important for child welfare workers such as those working for the BCAS because it would help them to distinguish between dependents and defectives. On the one hand, child welfare agencies such as the progressive BCAS were committed to keeping dependent children out of institutions. On the other hand, by the final few years of the Progressive Era the BCAS was turning to institutions for help with the number of defective, or feeble-minded, children in need of their help. During the turn of the century, when the BCAS was working with children such as Sidney Ericson, who showed possible signs of being feeble-minded and possible signs of the capacity to improve, they had the latitude to give him the benefit of the doubt. But by the final few years of the Era, the tide had shifted and the feeble-minded diagnosis took on a more powerful, permanent, and nature-based meaning. As the 1914 Annual Report indicates, the BCAS was frustrated with the way that their work placing out dependents was being thwarted by the public’s fear of defectives. A diagnosis would make things clearer for child welfare workers: Feeble-minded children could go to the School for the Feeble-minded, children troubled with mental disorders could go to the Psychopathic Hospital, and dependent children could be safely housed in private homes. Applied psychologists trained in mental testing would find their services in demand in the field of care for dependent children.

Placing Dependent Children with Childless Couples: Nurture’s “Trickle Up” Effect

One angle that Progressive Era child welfare reformers took in promoting child adoption was to emphasize the positive effects that adoptive children had on formerly childless couples. The experienced orphan asylum doctor, Charles Kerley, made this case clearly and colorfully:

It is generally assumed that the benefits derived from adoption are all on the side of the child. This is a general belief and always an error. What possible role could the adopted child or adopted children (for many adopt more than one) play in a family that would accrue to the benefit of the adult members of the family? It is this: they postpone old age. The presence of young children and young people in the home means that the adults are kept young. To be mentally youthful means a postponement of physical age. Has the reader ever been in a childless home, a home that has been childless, we will say, for fifteen or twenty years? If so, you will agree with me that there are signs of age, very definite signs; that the passing years have left their indelible footprints. Everything is painfully precise. Every chair and piece of furniture stands stiff and prim and proper. The home of these old young people characterizes the occupant, and the occupants now demand order, quiet, and creature comforts. Even the family pets take on the characteristics of the home; the dog, the cat, and the parrot are grave, dignified, comfort-loving, and resent intrusion or disturbance of their daily routine.

Place a child in a home as described above, and what a change takes place, not only in the home, but in the occupants! I have repeatedly known the advent of an adopted child in a childless home to cure neurasthenia, despondency, and habitual grouch, particularly in men. I am able to give a very effective prescription against premature old age, and the prescription calls for constant association with youth, which means youthful environment—and environment is the great determining factor in human existence, not excepting heredity....The adopted child or children of the old young people will have friends and associations of similar age. By this association the parents are permitted to see the world through the eyes of youth. There are the surroundings of activity, happiness, and noise. There are the everyday plans and surprises. The old young couple again become young and are drawn together by means of a vital interest in something outside of their own little narrow sphere with its magnified cares and troubles.255

Kerley believed that adoption of children “postpone(d) old age” in formerly childless couples. The presence of an adopted child would cure a variety of ailments in

Kerley’s view – even “habitual grouch” in men. Through “the surroundings of activity, happiness and noise”, “the old-young couple” would be “permitted to see the world through the eyes of youth.”

This perspective was not an idiosyncratic view of Kerley’s. Beginning toward the end of the Progressive Era and on into the 1920s, a number of articles published in popular magazines sounded this same theme, with titles such as “Are You Afraid to Adopt?” and “Cradles, Not Divorces.” Interestingly, in the popular novels about orphans and half-orphans published during this first decade of the twentieth century, the point is also well illustrated. Although the story lines in these books emphasize the way the environment changes the orphan protagonist, the orphan protagonist also changes her environment, as noted in the lives of supporting characters. In *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) for example, Marilla Cuthbert was bitterly disappointed when her brother, Mathew Cuthbert, arrived home from the train station with Anne, rather than the orphan boy they had requested. But after a few weeks Marilla’s views had changed:

“Twill say it for the child”, said Marilla when Anne had gone to her gable, “she isn’t stingy. I’m glad, for of all faults I detest stinginess in a child. Dear me, it’s only three weeks since she came, and it seems as if she’d been here always. I can’t imagine the place without her. Now, don’t be looking I-told-you-so, Mathew. That’s bad enough in a woman, but it isn’t to be endured in a man. I’m perfectly willing to own up that I’m glad I consented to keep the child and that I’m getting fond of her, but don’t you rub it in, Mathew Cuthbert.”

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256 Ibid.


At the same time that Manila confessed to her brother that she was “getting fond” of Anne, other characters, such as the town school teacher, noted that Manila herself was changing as a result of Anne’s influence: “I thought Manila Cuthbert was an old fool when I heard she’d adopted a girl out of an orphan asylum,’ she said to herself, ‘but I guess she didn’t make much of a mistake after all. If I’d a child like Anne in the house all the time I’d be a better and happier woman’.”

Indeed, rather than the kind of short-tempered frustration that Manila showed at the beginning of her relationship with Anne, she becomes more thoughtful and empathetic as the novel progresses.

Other children’s books from this era echo the same theme. When half-orphan Rebecca of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903) moved in with her two elderly aunts, she tested them on any number of fronts. But the author, Lucy Montgomery, also emphasized the way that Anne’s presence humanized her elderly aunts, particularly Miranda:

> A certain gateway in Miranda Sawyer’s soul had been closed for years; not all at once had it been done, but gradually, and without her full knowledge. If Rebecca had plotted for days and with the utmost cunning, she could not have effected an entrance into that forbidden country, and now, unknown to both of them, the gate swung on its stiff and rusty hinges, and the favoring wind of opportunity opened it wider and wider as time went on. All things had worked together amazing for good.

Rebecca’s presence and influence opened a “gateway” to her aunt’s soul.

Unbeknownst to Rebecca, this passage had been closed for years. Living vicariously through Rebecca’s youthful successes and mistakes, her aunt came to feel things she had

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not felt in a long time. One important message of the book is that Rebecca’s presence in her aunt’s life caused her aunt to become a warmer, more loving person.

This same point is perhaps most poignantly captured by the following quotation from *Pollyanna* (1913). Having come to live with her aunt following the death of her father, Pollyanna had been oblivious to much of her aunt’s displeasure with her existence. She showed enough awareness, however, to query the housekeeper Nancy as to whether her aunt liked having her in the house. Luckily for Nancy, by the time Pollyanna asked the question, Nancy had observed enough changes in Pollyanna’s aunt that she could answer the question with honest enthusiasm:

Nancy threw a quick look into the girl’s absorbed face. She had expected to be asked this question long before, and she had dreaded it. She had wondered how she could answer it honestly without cruelly hurting the questioner. But now, now, in the face of the new suspicions that had become convictions....Nancy only welcomed the question with open arms...

“Likes ter have ye here? Would she miss ye if ye wa’n’t here?” cried Nancy indignantly. “As if that wa’n’t jest what I was tell’ of ye! Didn’t she send me posthaste with an umbrella ‘cause she see a little cloud in the sky? Didn’t she make me tote yer things all downstairs, so you could have the pretty room you wanted? Why, Miss Pollyanna, when ye remember how at first she hated ter have—“

With a choking cough Nancy pulled herself up just in time.
And it ain’t jest things I can put my fingers on, neither,” rushed on Nancy breathlessly. “It’s little ways she has, that shows how you’ve been softenin’ her up and mellerrin’ her down — the cat, and the dog, and the way she speaks ter me, and —oh, lots o’ things. Why, Miss Pollyanna, there ain’t no tellin’ how she’d miss ye—if ye wa’n’t here,” finished Nancy, speaking with an enthusiastic certainty that was meant to hide the perilous admission she had almost made before. Even then she was not quite prepared for the sudden joy that illumined Polyanna’s face.261

These Progressive Era children’s novels about orphans were published during the height of the American eugenics movement. In effect, they are stories about placing out; each orphan or half-orphan protagonist was placed out into the home of a stranger or

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blood relative. In some of the novels, particularly *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903), there is evidence of the concerns about the way that an orphan's hereditary-based "stock" would take effect. But for the most part, these stories support environmentalist themes of the kind child welfare reformers were promoting during this era. In these coming of age novels, it is not only the orphans in question who blossom. Other people are changed for the better, as a result of knowing them.

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The placing out movement received passionate attention from reformers during the White House Conference. Unlike other positions on care for dependent children that emerged from this Conference, the placing out movement would require a strong degree of public support to fully succeed. But at the same time that child welfare agencies were searching for good homes for their dependent charges, the eugenics movement was at the height of its popularity in the United States. The popular writing of scientists such as psychologist Henry Goddard heightened the general public's concern about the meaning of dependency. Records of the Boston Children's Aid Society suggest that the public's fear of opening their homes to "defectives" jeopardized support for the placing out movement. By the end of the Progressive Era psychologists trained in mental testing would begin using the Simon-Binet test to help social workers and other child welfare workers to separate "defectives" from dependents.
CONCLUSION

Historians agree that the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children was a critical turning point in the history of child welfare. This study began with an analysis of key discussions that took place during that conference concerning the proper care of dependent children. These discussions, which were carefully planned and orchestrated by leading child welfare reformers, set the scene for the chapters that followed, each one being a more detailed examination of a topic grounded in the Conference. All three of the themes highlighted from the White House Conference were related to the individual needs of dependent children. Reformers argued against further use of the institutional orphan asylums, in favor of rural, cottage-style living, and in strong favor of keeping dependent children at home, or placing them in alternative family homes.

In the chapters that followed I explored the anti-institutional movement, the cottage movement, and the placing-out movement, including each one’s history, contemporary cultural context, and any connections to figures or theories from academic psychology. As explained in the introduction, Progressive Era reformers concerned with the needs of dependent children were focused on generally different goals than early academic psychologists. Whereas reformers were largely embroiled in applied, child saving activities, psychologists were heavily involved in professionalizing activities. There is certainly ample historical evidence to support the existence of these two basic trends, but upon closer examination, connections were noted, some direct and others indirect, between Progressive Era reformers and psychologists.
The anti-institutionalism that the majority of reformers exhibited throughout this era was explored within the context of a society that was becoming more and more preoccupied with individuality. Examples of the importance being placed on individuality were drawn from scholarly books, adult self-help literature, and children’s books about orphans and half-orphans. Plucky, imaginative protagonists from popular children’s books about orphans, for example, exhibited the importance of being an individual, including having a distinct “personality.” Within this context, the criticisms reformers leveled against orphan asylums, such as the inability of asylums to provide their charges with individual attention, make greater sense. The orphan asylum was perceived as an abnormal environment that stamped out any sense of individuality and could not provide its charges with the means to survive outside its walls. Although this was the official view of orphan asylums as expressed by the Committee on Resolutions at the White House Conference, there was a minority view that represented a more collectivist perspective. Some managers and directors of orphan asylums, frequently with religious affiliations, believed that the orphan asylum provided an oasis from the harsh, hostile world outside. To these people’s minds, life within the orphan asylum should not mirror life outside the asylum – life within the asylum should instead stand as the model.

During this same period it was shown that early American psychologists, including James Mark Baldwin, James McKeen Cattell, and Edward Thorndike, were forging new ground and working to establish the boundaries of their new discipline by exploring the concept of individual differences. It is not, therefore, that reformers and psychologists expressed a common view on the continued widespread use of the
congregate orphan asylum; no evidence that psychologists expressed a view on orphan asylums was found. But a mutual interest in individuality ties them both to a greater cultural and societal movement that was taking place.

In a sense, the cottage-based communities examined in this study - Hastings-on-the-Hudson, Mooseheart, and Carson College - presented a new, more acceptable and stylish collectivist vision. These “anti-institutional institutions” felt justified in billing themselves as model communities because they were not clinging to an outdated congregate system; they were members of the new vanguard. All the criticisms that reformers aimed at the congregate orphan asylum had been addressed. These new communities would benefit from a respect for individuality, informed educational policy, a hands-on approach to training that would not cripple the asylum child as an “institutional type” but equip him/her for an independent life, and an irreplaceable sense of connection to the natural world. Progressive reformer Elsa Ueland used the metaphor of ‘a strawberry child’ to describe the kind of hearty young woman she hoped to raise at Carson College. Ueland wanted her charges to be strong, independent, and prepared for the potentially harsh world of adult society - the same qualities embodied in the heroine of Dorothy Camfield Fisher’s popular novel, *Understood Betsy*.

Exploration of the cottage movement revealed another connection between reformers and psychologists. Director of Hastings-on-the-Hudson R.R. Reeder and a number of other reformers were enthusiastic about the benefits that the rural, cottage setting could provide for dependent children, including the space and freedom to indulge in wholesome play. As Reeder’s own writings suggest, he believed in the connections between physical and cognitive and moral development that early psychologists such as
G. Stanley Hall were promoting, and he promoted them himself, sometimes with very similar language. Hall's ideas about the impact of physical exercise on cognitive and moral development helped form the backbone of the playground movement and one of Hall's own graduate students, Henry Curtis was an important leader within it. That is, through the playground movement, the ideas of Hall and other academic psychologists appear to have influenced Progressive Era reformers, such as R. R. Reeder.

Although reformers believed the cottage-style orphanages were a significant improvement over the congregate style, the majority believed that keeping dependent children in family homes, preferably the home of a biological parent, was the best alternative of all. If mothers' pensions were not available, dependent children would do better if placed out with another family than if put in an orphan asylum. The placing-out movement received passionate attention from reformers during the White House Conference and afterwards. Unlike other positions on care for dependent children that emanated from this Conference, however, the placing-out movement would require a strong degree of public support to fully succeed.

The case of Sydney Ericson suggests that parents, medical doctors, and less formally or professionally trained child care workers were all involved in early forms of the placing-out system at the turn of the last century. At least with respect to those considered "worthy" of services, the placing out system was a more fluid, open system than what we know today. After the turn of the last century, however, psychologists contributed to a new wave of cultural concern about the cause and meaning of dependency, during the rise of the American eugenics movement. That is, at the same time that some of the more progressive child welfare agencies were searching for
appropriate family homes for dependent children, the eugenics movement was peaking in popularity within the United States.

Driven by a strong faith in the science of eugenics, psychologist Henry Goddard contributed heavily to the eugenics movement. This connection between the reform agenda and academic psychology was the most direct and significant of those explored herein. Goddard’s ideas about dependency were promoted through his best selling book *The Kallikak Family*, and through articles published in journals and magazines, such as “Wanted: A Child to Adopt.” Given his very prominent role in the rise of the American eugenics movement, Goddard’s views on the meaning of dependency significantly contributed to the cultural context of the placing out movement. As records of the Boston Children’s Aid Society suggest, the public’s fear of opening their homes to “defectives” jeopardized support for the placing out movement by the middle of the 1910s.

At the same time, social workers and psychologists continued to professionalize, and applied psychologists emerged with a resource that would come to play an important role in the lives of dependent children: the mental test. The Simon-Binet test promised to help separate out dependents from defectives, a distinction that became much more important due to heightened concern about the possible immutability of dependency. By the end of the Progressive Era psychologists trained in mental testing would begin using the Simon-Binet test to help social workers and other child welfare workers to separate “defectives” from dependents. This study documents the years before professional social workers and psychologists came to play such a prominent role in the lives of dependent children.

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Despite the fact that congregate orphan asylums were denounced so definitively during the 1909 White House Conference, new institutions continued to be established throughout the Progressive Era. Congregate style asylums continued to have a central place in the lives of dependent children until the 1930s, when the Great Depression closed many orphan asylums and Aid to Dependent Children became more widely available. The cottage-style ideal was very costly to implement, but many of the institutions that had made this transition in part or in full transformed themselves into new kinds of institutions during the 1930s and 1940s – becoming centers for emotionally disturbed children, foster care agencies, or residential treatment centers. Today, both Carson College, now called the Carson Valley School, and Hastings-on-the-Hudson, now called The Graham School, cater to populations of emotionally disturbed children. Mooseheart continues to serve orphans, half-orphans, and other children whose families are deemed unstable for a variety of reasons.

By the end of the Progressive Era the term “foster care” was beginning to supplant the term “placing out”, and permanent child adoption was becoming more widely accepted. Evident at the close of the Progressive Era are the modest beginnings of the rise of modern adoption. Whereas the first U.S. modern adoption law was enacted in the middle of the nineteenth century in Massachusetts (1851), and 25 states followed suit by the turn of the last century, adoption was not very popular in America until the post-Progressive Era period. Historians have argued that this is due to Americans’ deep preference for blood relationships, captured by the phrase “blood is thicker than water.”262 Within the specific context of the Progressive Era, lack of support for child

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262 For background on the history of adoption see Carp, *Family Matters*, pp. 1-35. Classic sources on controversies within the history of adoption include H. David Kirk, *Shared Fate: A Theory and Method of*
adoption was a product of the emphasis reformers placed on keeping biological families together whenever possible. The argument in support of mothers’ pensions rested on a strong belief in the power of biological ties. Placing out was an alternative that reformers could endorse more heartily than adoption because it was not permanent. Like the temporary assistance that orphan asylums had provided poor families in need of short term relief from child care responsibilities, the placing out movement promised to give poor families the same measure of temporary relief, leaving open the option of a future family reunion.

Increased interest in adoption during the post-Progressive Era years is reflected by increased discussion of adoption in popular magazines, including articles such as Dr. Kelsey’s, touting the view that adopted children improved the lives of formerly childless couples. There was also increased concern with matching personality traits of dependent children and potential adoptive parents. During the Progressive Era, if there was any concern over matching prospective families with dependent children it was over religious affiliation. The moral conduct of the child’s parents’ was certainly taken into account, but emotion and personality were not given attention. In the years that followed, however, there was a burgeoning interest in matching children and adoptive parents on a variety of emotional qualities. Take, for example, this quotation from an article written by a representative of the Minneapolis Child Guidance Clinic, published in 1919:

Physical factors and the financial and moral standards of foster homes have long been carefully considered by the workers in child placement, but evaluation of the emotional setting, determined by such factors as the personality of the foster


parents, their intelligence, their age, the presence or absence of other children in the home, is a relatively recent innovation in this realm. We feel that the age, intelligence, personality, social heritage, and environment of both the child and the foster parents should be carefully considered, if suitable and successful placement can be made.264

In the years following the Progressive Era, the pendulum swung away from biological determinism and toward environmentalism. There was a newly invigorated interest in crafting the best possible environmental fit between dependent children and adoptive parents, which in turn created an important niche for psychologists with their mental tests.

Scholars who have concentrated on the history of child welfare during the 1920s and 1930s have argued that the ideals and strategies of the Progressive Era prepared the way for America's second period of great reform – the decade of the New Deal. For example, historians Robyn Muncy and Molly Ladd-Taylor have argued that the emphasis Progressive Era reformers placed on the biological, nuclear family influenced New Deal policies affecting dependent children and their families. In other words, the view endorsed by the 1909 White House Conference, that the best place for dependent children was the biological family home (rather than congregate orphan asylums or even cottage based institutions) would be incorporated into the first federal legislation regarding the treatment of dependent children.265

The Social Security Act of 1935 was the first declaration of national responsibility for dependent children. As part of the Social Security Act, ‘Aid to Dependent Children’ (ADC) significantly increased the numbers of dependent children receiving aid. Before

1936 about 300,000 children were receiving aid through mothers’ pensions programs. Although mothers’ pensions were administered in all states, residency and citizenship requirements and local variation in management made for a very uneven system of administration. By 1939, three years after ADC was instituted, the number of dependent children receiving assistance had climbed to 700,000.\(^{266}\)

The ADC model of assistance was based on many of the same assumptions that mothers’ pensions had been based on. Progressive reformers placed great importance on the nuclear, biological family and both mothers’ pensions programs and ADC would pay widows a meager wage to stay home with their children. Some historians have critiqued both systems for maintaining traditional family roles, and keeping women and children in a dependent status. The system, it is argued, did not encourage mothers of dependent children to become economically independent since ADC (later renamed AFDC for ‘Aid to Families with Dependent Children’) benefits were reduced for those who tried to supplement their income by working outside of the home. In addition, over the years the system suffered from a variety of inequities in the way it was administered. For example, because eligibility was based on professional assessments of “suitability,” it is no surprise that unmarried mothers and women of color were not considered as “worthy” of aid as were white widows.\(^{267}\)

\(^{265}\)See the Introduction of Robyn Muncy’s *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1900-1935*, and the Conclusion of Molly Ladd-Taylor’s *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994).


Events of recent years suggest we have moved beyond certain concepts still alive during the Progressive Era. In the mid-1990s, for example, when then Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich proposed that the orphanage system be revisited, the suggestion carried no momentum. That is, as a society we seem to have reached some consensus about the limitations of the orphan asylum, and in keeping with the recommendations of the 1909 White House Conference, we do not consider it acceptable as a primary mechanism for serving dependent children.

On the other hand, even as social and political trends have continued to shift over the past century, many of the core issues that gripped Progressive Era reformers continue to play a central role in contemporary concerns surrounding care for dependent children. How does our view of dependency, for example, color our faith in the current foster care system? Do we think of poverty as a problem that many families face on a circumstantial basis, or as a more enduring, entrenched frame of mind? Can our current foster care system successfully provide temporary relief to needy families? If “defective” was a socially acceptable term today, where would we draw the line between “defectives” and “dependents”? Are some families more “worthy” of child welfare services than others? Are family relationships based on blood ties more “real” than adoptive ties? Through the lens of the 21st century, we may have a greater sense of the complexities involved, but we are still grappling with the same concerns that Progressives Era reformers addressed with such bold confidence.
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APPENDIX A

DESCRIPTIONS OF PROPOSITIONS 1-3 & 7-13

DEBATED DURING 1909 WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON CARE OF

DEPENDENT CHILDREN

**Proposition 1**

Should there be established in one of the federal departments a National
Children's Bureau, one of whose objects shall be the collection and dissemination
of accurate information in regard to child-caring work and in regard to the needs
of children throughout the United States?²⁶⁸

The first person to speak on this topic was Mr. Owen R. Lovejoy, the General
Secretary of the National Child Labor Committee. This Committee had put forth a bill
for the creation of a Bureau of Child Welfare. Mr. Lovejoy briefly stated the main
purpose for the Bureau: that of a fact-finding entity, a bureau of research and publicity.
The Bureau would gather information about such things as how many children were
working in jobs that could be harmful to them, under what conditions they were laboring,
and what effects those conditions might have on them. After the National Government
gathered the facts and distributed them, it would then be up to individuals and
organizations to decide what to do with the information.

No one rose to speak against the idea of such a Bureau, though two more
individuals rose to speak on its behalf. Dr. Edward Devine, of New York City,
anticipated for the audience what he considered to be the chief objection to the bill, with
the aim of informing them and asking for their help in debunking the objection, which he
considered to be invalid. The objection was that everything specified for the new Bureau could fall under the mandate of the already existing bureaus, such as the Bureau of Labor, the Bureau of Education, or the Bureau of Vital Statistics. Dr. Devine’s response to this objection was that these other bureaus were not currently addressing the issues that the Bureau of Child Welfare would address, and that the funds that Congress had appropriated for these other bureaus would not make it possible for them to extend their work. Moreover, it would make sense for all the information relating to the welfare of the child to be united and kept track of within one bureau.

The final person to speak on behalf of the Bureau was Dr. Samuel McCune Lindsay, Professor of Social Legislation at Columbia University. Professor Lindsay encouraged all of the bill’s supporters to come to the hearing of the bill, during an upcoming House Committee meeting. He went on to speak about how much the work of everyone at the conference would improve if it was possible to turn to a central body such as the proposed Bureau, that would be responsible for conducting research and disseminating knowledge.

The Committee on Resolutions summarized discussion of Proposition 1 by stating that the Conference showed wholehearted support for the proposed Federal Children’s Bureau: “In our judgment, the establishment of such a bureau is desirable, and we earnestly recommend the enactment of the pending measure.”

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264 White House Conference, p. 37.
Proposition 2

Should the State inspect the work of all child-caring agencies, including both institutions and the home-finding societies?  

Two speakers gave prepared talks on this proposition: Mr. Amos W. Butler, Secretary State Board of Charities, Indiana, and Mr. Hugh F. Fox, President of the State Board of Children's Guardians, New Jersey. Mr. Butler made a careful argument in support of inspection based on the public nature of the agencies:

It seems to me that where such organizations, institutions, or agencies are engaged in doing a service for the public, and where, as in some cases, they are incorporated and receive thereby a franchise or charter from the State, it is right and desirable that at least certain classes of them should be licensed or certified, and that all of them should be subject to inspection....It should be understood that this inspection, visitation, and licensing should be done by proper persons and in the proper way.  

Mr. Fox spent more time exploring the reasons leveled against inspection that had been bandied about for the past 15 years. He was sympathetic to those who opposed State inspection based on "fear of official fussiness and red tape", and agreed that inspection would not entirely prevent cases of abuse and neglect. Ultimately, however, Mr. Fox agreed with Mr. Butler, and stated that:

Personally, I believe that every child-caring agency should be chartered by the State, and under the terms of their charter the agencies should be required to make an intelligent annual report to the State. The State should have the right to suspend or abolish the charter after thorough investigation and a hearing, and the State should have the right to order such an investigation and compel the

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270 White House Conference, p. 37.

271 Ibid, p. 58.

attendance and testimony of witnesses. At the same time the State’s inspection should be carefully defined and limited, so that the evils and abuses of officialism could be avoided.²⁷³

Because Proposition 2 was similar to Proposition 3, the Chairman decided to group them. He tabled discussion of Prop 2 and moved on to those who had prepared remarks on Proposition 3.

**Proposition 3**

Should the approval of the state board of charities (or other body exercising similar power) be necessary to the incorporation of all child-caring agencies, and to an amendment of the charter of an existing benevolent corporation, if it is to include child-caring work; and should the care of children by other than incorporated agencies be forbidden?²⁷⁴

In short, this proposition addressed government regulation and control of child-caring agencies. At the time, states had their own policies (or lack of policies) regarding who was eligible to take dependent children into their homes and care for them. There were any number of individuals and private, religious-based organizations tending to the needs of dependent children. This proposition raised the question of whether or not a state board of charities should have the power to approve an agency, and whether or not unapproved agencies should be allowed.

Again, two speakers had been nominated to prepare remarks on this subject: Mr. Robert W. Hebberd, Commissioner of Charities, New York City, and Mr. Timothy D. Hurley, President of Visitation and Aid Society, Illinois. Mr. Hebberd’s speech was short and to the point. He spoke in favor of the proposition, citing his own state’s laws

²⁷³ Ibid, p. 60.
on the subject. In 1898 New York State had enacted chapter 264, entitled ‘An act to prevent evils and abuses in the placing out of children’. The law made it unlawful for any but incorporated societies or poor-law officers to place out children without the consent of the state board of charities. In Hebberd’s opinion, the law had worked well in New York State: “The old abuses have substantially disappeared and child-caring work is being carried on, whether it be in the form of institutional activities or in the placing out of children, on a higher plane and in a more progressive manner than ever before in the history of our state.”

Mr. Hurley took more time during his remarks to put the proposed policy into context. In his opinion, the proposition was a “broad, far reaching subject” that was “revolutionary” in scope. Under attack were all the private “eleemosynary” and religious affiliated child-caring agencies that were not incorporated. Hurley argued that anytime that a child became

A truant, neglected, dependent or delinquent within the meaning of the law, it is the duty of the state to insist that any person or association undertaking to exercise control over such should be subject to state supervision and control. All such associations should be incorporated and should be subject to such supervision and subject to like control. 276

In other words, Hurley advocated for state supervision of any person, group, or organization that was involved in helping to find a home for any child in need of one. Hurley believed that such mandated supervision should only apply to agencies engaged in “placing-out” work; private schools and orphan asylums that were involved in educating children or taking care of children whose parents or guardians had placed them there


should be exempt from state supervision. This came down to Hurley’s guiding principal: that one should never lose sight of the right of the parent to exercise control over the child.

When Propositions Two and Three were opened up for discussion eight people spoke exclusively in support of state supervision. They did not support Mr. Hurley’s caveat that private institutions engaged in child-caring work should not be required to be supervised by the state. For example, the Honorable Myron T. Herrick of Cleveland, Ohio called for inspection of all private and public institutions and homes for dependent children. What matters in the end, he argued, was that the inspections be wise and that they have power behind them. He suggested that the institutions be compared in some way so as to “bring into prominence the merits and faults of each.” Some people rose to give support of their own state’s system of supervision, such as Mr. John Barrett Montgomery, Superintendent of the Michigan State Public School. Others rose to speak about the efforts currently underway in their state to enact laws requiring supervision, such as Mrs. Frederic Schoff, resident of Pennsylvania and President of the National Congress of Mothers. Still others spoke on the perils of working with dependent children in a state that required no supervision, such as the Reverend C. C. Stahmann, State Superintendent of Missouri Children’s Home Society. In every case the merits of state supervision were highlighted. By the eighth favorable speech, the Chairman asked if anyone could speak against supervision and no-one replied.

Not surprisingly, the Committee on Resolutions reported that the conference members were agreed that:

The proper training of destitute children being essential to the well-being of the State, it is a sound public policy that the State through its duly authorized
representative should inspect the work of all agencies which care for dependent children, whether by institutional or by home-finding methods, and whether supported by public or private funds.277

The report went on to state that results of “thorough” inspections, performed by “trained agents” should be made available to the respective agencies themselves, but otherwise remain confidential and “not to be disclosed except by competent authority.”278 Therefore, for unclear reasons they did not advocate for the public to have direct access to such reports. In addition to recommending that a state board of charities have the power to approve all those with adequate funding and “suitable character” to take care of dependent children, the Committee resolved that those who did not pass inspection would be “forbidden” to “engage in the care of needy children.”279

Proposition 7

Should the state educational authorities exercise supervision over the educational work of orphan asylums and kindred institutions?280

The first to speak on this topic was Dr. Elmer E. Brown, Commissioner of Education, Washington, D.C.. Dr. Brown’s speech was largely in favor of state supervision. He began with the observation that: “While physical and spiritual care are both indispensable, we now regard the education of the head as equally indispensable,

277 Ibid, p. 194.
278 Ibid, p. 194.
279 Ibid, p. 194.
280 Ibid, p. 38.
and all three are found to be so intimately bound together that if education suffers all other interests of childhood suffer with it."\textsuperscript{281}

Dr. Brown called for the state to enforce reasonable requirements for qualifications of teachers, hygienic conditions, and the actual instruction of students. He argued that state supervision of these matters could take place without interfering with the rights of private institutions.

Mr. William B. Streeter, Superintendent of the North Carolina Children’s Home Society reiterated and supported the points made by Dr. Brown. He put forth that the State should not have anything to do with the religious instruction of dependent children, but should indeed supervise their secular education. He moved that with regard to the education of dependent children in private institutions, the State should require: a) that teachers with the same level of expertise as required for public schools be hired, b) that the local superintendent visit and supervise the work, c) that the same course of study be followed, and d) that the same textbooks be used.

When this proposition was thrown open for discussion, one person rose in opposition to it. Mr. Michael Francis Doyle, Vice-President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, argued against any right of the state to regulate the education of children in orphan asylums unless they were asylums that were fully maintained and supported by the State. He cited his strong belief that the right of education belonged to the family and not the state, and said that in his opinion some of the greatest educational institutions of his time were prospering without any state supervision. Mr. B. Pickman Mann, President of the Board of Children’s Guardians, spoke against Mr. Doyle’s view, and in favor of

\textsuperscript{281} Ibid, p. 152.
State supervision, stating that it was supervision and not control that was being advocated. Mrs. William Einstein, President of the Federation of Sisterhoods, warned that although standards were certainly welcome and important to maintain, an enforced uniformity of education would be terrible because it would “kill initiative.”282 It appeared that most of the Conference attendees agreed with this notion of educational supervision by the State – supervision but not control or uniformity.

The Committee on Resolutions recommended that because “destitute children at best labor under many disadvantages and are deprived in greater or less degree of the assistance and guidance which parents afford their own children”, it is crucial that they be given an education “equal to that of the community.” Such an education would help them to become self-sufficient and prepare them for “the duties of citizenship.” To this end, they recommended that dependent children “in orphan asylums and other similar institutions or placed in families should be under the supervision of the educational authorities of the State.”283

Proposition 8

Should child-caring agencies aim to cooperate with each other and with other agencies of social betterment for the purpose of diminishing or removing altogether the causes of orphanage, or child destitution, and child delinquency?284

The obvious benefits of cooperation among agencies of social betterment were not debated during the discussion of this proposition. This was considered a given.

284 Ibid, p. 38.
People did have interesting points to make, however, regarding the goal of diminishing or removing the causes of child dependency. Two people prepared talks: Professor Charles R. Henderson, PhD, President of the National Children's Home Society, and the Honorable Thomas W. Hynes, President of the Superior Council, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Brooklyn, NY. For Professor Henderson, the matter of diminishing child dependency boiled down to taking better preventative measures. That is, he argued strongly that our country could do vastly better than it was currently doing for the poor, through providing better compensation and insurance to combat the main problems the poor faced: disease and industrial accidents. Comparisons between benefits in the United States and those in England and France made us look very bad indeed.

Mr. Hynes, on the other hand, argued that there would always be a need for orphanages because there would always be a certain number of parents of young children who would die. As for delinquent fathers, Hynes suggested that the representatives of child-caring institutions present at the conference supported the suggestion that fathers who refuse to financially support their families be committed to a penal institution and be bound to labor, the proceeds of which would go to their dependent children. This was his main thrust – that child-caring agencies should cooperate on this matter and bring it to their own state legislatures.

Six people participated in the discussion of this proposition, criticizing the U.S. social welfare system as it currently existed. Judge William De Lacy of Washington D.C., for example, argued on behalf of better laws to hold delinquent fathers responsible for their children's well being. The Reverend William White of New York spoke about the country's "undeveloped social conscience", Judge Charles Neill, U.S. Commissioner
of Labor, argued for better compensation for victims of industrial accidents, and George Wilder, President of the National Child-Rescue League, made a case for enacting an employer's liability law.\textsuperscript{285} Each of these causes was cited as an example of issues around which child-caring institutions should cooperate.

As part of the report issued by the Committee on Resolutions, it was resolved that because “the most important and valuable philanthropic work is not the curative, but the preventive”, it was crucial that society continue to study the causes of dependency and how they can be remedied. In their report they urged “all friends of children” to promote legislation and any other relevant measures to “improve the conditions surrounding child life.” They mentioned issues such as tuberculosis, blindness, the prevalence of injuries due to hazardous occupations, the need for child labor laws, and compensation for family members when the breadwinner was unable to work due to sickness or death. Toward such ends, they urged and applauded “efficient cooperation with all other agencies for social betterment.”\textsuperscript{286}

**Proposition 9**

Would it be helpful and desirable if some permanent committee or organization comparable to the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis, the National Child Labor Committee, etc., could be established for the purpose of carrying on an active propaganda with a view of securing better laws in relation to children, better organization of child-caring agencies, and better methods of relief and aid to children throughout the United States?\textsuperscript{287}

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid, p. 77.

\textsuperscript{286} Ibid, p. 193.

\textsuperscript{287} Ibid, p. 38.
This proposition sounds very similar to the proposition regarding the creation of a National Children’s Bureau, for which a bill was pending before the U.S. Congress during the time of the Conference. What the organizers of the Conference wanted to debate, however, was the merits of having an additional organization in place, a private committee, eligible to accept private funding, such a committee would complement the work of the Governmental Bureau that would hopefully come to fruition.

The subject of establishing such a committee in addition to a Federal Children’s Bureau was hotly debated. Mr. Charles W. Birtwell, General Secretary of the Boston Children’s Aid Society, opened the discussion by questioning the need for such an organization and warning “we must beware lest we be organized to death.”\textsuperscript{288} Fourteen others then spoke their minds, nine in favor of the private committee, three against it, and two others who preached caution and shared their confusion over the lines of demarcation between this organization and the Federal Children’s Bureau.

The first to speak against the idea of an additional new organization was Lillian D. Wald, Member of the National Child Labor Committee and the person who was most responsible for speaking on behalf of the Children’s Bureau. Her main concern was that attention focused on a new society would take attention away from establishing the National bureau. The other two who spoke against the private society echoed Wald’s concerns that such a movement would weaken the drive for a Children’s Bureau, and spoke about not understanding what the function of this new society would be.

But support for establishing such a private organization or society was in no short supply. In reply to the concerns raised by Wald and others, some of the key people in the

\textsuperscript{288} Ibid, p.166.
dependent child movement spoke up. These spokesmen included Mr. Homer Folks, an organizer of the Conference and the Secretary of State Charities Aid Association, James E. West, Secretary of the National Child Rescue League, and Edward T. Devine, Editor of *Charities and the Commons*. Each of these people spoke strongly in support of the voluntaristic society, arguing that the Federal Children’s Bureau would need such an outside group, and that the group would benefit from the National Bureau. The main point was that a private agency would do the promotional work that would not be proper for a federal body to engage in. For example, as Homer Folks put it:

> Assuming that there should be such a voluntary association and that it had funds with which to work, I believe the federal bureau would be strengthened thereby. Its possibilities would be greatly enlarged by the existence of a voluntary group of citizens, free to express their views on all subjects at all times, and thereby to make possible the molding of public opinion which later on would permit official action and official expression, which might not safely be taken at an earlier date.289

Support for a nationally based private agency to act in concert with the proposed federal bureau seemed to prevail, and this consensus was reflected in the report made by the Committee on Resolutions. Because decisions about the care of dependent children were being made all the time in every state, the Committee argued that “each of these decisions should be made with full knowledge of the experience of other States and agencies.” To this end, they recommended “the establishment of a permanent organization to undertake, in this field, work comparable to that carried on by the National Playground Association, the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis, the National Child Labor Committee, and other similar organizations in

289 Ibid, p.173. Homer Folks was an accomplished and high profile leader within the child welfare movement. His book *The Care of Destitute Neglected & Delinquent Children* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902) is well cited in the child welfare literature of his day, and serves as a good example of his thinking.
their respective fields.” They argued that such a “permanent voluntary organization”, committed to “broad-mindedness and tolerance” would be “desirable and helpful” were it to be well funded.290

**Proposition 10**

Should every child-caring agency: a) Secure full information concerning the character and circumstances of the parents or surviving parent or near relatives of each child admitted to its care, through personal investigation by its own representative, unless adequate information is supplied by some admitting agency? b) Inform itself by personal investigation, at least once each year, of the circumstances of the parents or surviving parents of children in its charge, unless this information is supplied by some other responsible agency. c) Exercise supervision over children leaving their care until such children become self-supporting, unless such children are legally adopted or returned to their parents? d) Make a permanent record of all the information thus secured?291

Discussion of this proposition was relatively short. At stake was the issue of accountability, and this was an issue that most, if not all, conference attendees favored. Better records of dependent children, their surviving natural parent(s), and their subsequent whereabouts following release from the asylum, is what this proposition concerned. The Chairman, after reading the proposition, opened discussion by saying that some of the points seemed so obvious that unless anyone wanted to speak against them, they would be “considered as the sense of the meeting.” A few people, however, did wish to speak to the issues. Charles Birtwell, the General Secretary of the Boston Children’s Aid Society, was against the wording in part (b), where it was stated that each child caring agency should personally investigate the circumstances of the parents or

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290 White House Conference, p. 196-197.

surviving parents "at least once a year." Birtwell thought the time frame too specific, and would have preferred that agencies do this research more frequently. Birtwell explained that he refused to take a child in until he knew all that there was to know about the child's background.

Birtwell's comments led to a short discussion of how hard it was for those involved in placing children out into adoptive homes to obtain information about the background of their charges, when frequently the orphan homes had no information available about the history of the children. Orphan home managers, on the other hand, complained that foundlings were often brought to orphan homes with no history to relate. The Rev. Walter Reid Hunt, President of the Children's Aid and Protective Society of Orange, NJ, responded that Birtwell "pictures the ideal conditions. We face the actual conditions." In conclusion to the discussion, the Rev. C. Eissfeldt, the General Superintendent of the Lutheran Kinderfreund Societies, suggested that the wording should be changed to "as full information as possible." The Chairman clarified that this was what was meant by the original proposition, and Eissfeldt responded that he thought everyone present could agree to that.

The committee on resolutions reiterated this view. In its formal report it held that in order to make a proper decision about how long a child should be kept in an asylum it was necessary to have as much knowledge "of the character and circumstances of his parents or surviving parent, and near relatives" as possible. The committee also acknowledged that the record of biographical information on individual dependent

children had been historically “scanty” at best. The group challenged institutions and home finding agencies to keep better records of their charges from the point of arrival onward. They recommended that every child-caring agency should:

(a) Secure full information concerning the character and circumstances of the parents and near relatives of each child in whose behalf application is made, through personal investigation by its own representative, unless adequate information is supplied by some other reliable agency.

(b) Inform itself by personal investigation at least once each year of the circumstances of the parents of children in its charge, unless the parents have been legally deprived of guardianship, and unless this information is supplied by some other responsible agency.

(c) Exercise supervision over children under their care until such children are legally adopted, are returned to their parents, attain their majority, or are clearly beyond the need for further supervision.

(d) Make a permanent record of all information thus secured.

Propositions 11 & 12

These two propositions were read together during the Conference. Number 11 read:

“Should the sending of children to almshouses and their care therein be forbidden by law?” And number 12 read:

Should all agencies for placing children in families make a thorough investigation of the character and circumstances of all applications for children, including a personal visit to each family before placing a child therein. Should all such agencies exercise close and careful supervision over all children placed in families, such supervision to include personal visitation by trained agents, and careful inquiry as to the physical, mental, moral, and spiritual training of each child.

The rationale for reading and opening discussion on both of these propositions at the same time is not absolutely clear. Because time was growing short, the Chairman

\[293\] Ibid, p. 195.

\[294\] Ibid, p. 195.

\[295\] Ibid, p. 38.

\[296\] Ibid, p. 38.
was likely looking for ways to tighten the discussion, and it certainly appears from the minutes that he was working under the assumption that the conference attendees would all agree with both of these propositions. For example, when the Chairman asked the Secretary to read these two together he said he “almost felt like apologizing” for Proposition 11 but when the committee had learned that there were over 8000 American children in almshouses, they decided it was “wise” to include a protest. In other words, the committee included Proposition 11 in the agenda for political reasons, not because they expected that it would attract serious debate.

The Chairman first called for anyone who was willing to speak against these propositions, and when no one responded he said that he was willing to hear from two people who wanted to speak on the affirmative. Dr. Charles F. McKenna, the Secretary of the Catholic Home Bureau in New York City, spoke very briefly in support of proposition number 12, stating that the principles therein “are the only principles upon which placing out should be done.” The second and final speaker, Mrs. Frederic Schoff, President of the National Congress of Mothers, made an even briefer statement, this one with regard to the issue of children and almshouses. She made the point that with the establishment of juvenile courts and laws forbidding children awaiting hearing to be confined alongside adults in police stations or prisons, many states were providing special accommodations for children. Such a system, she thought, might offer a solution to the problem of placing children in almshouses.

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297 Ibid, p. 162.

298 Ibid, p. 163.
Interestingly, when the Committee on Resolutions issued their report, there was no mention at all of almshouses. In fact, neither of these propositions generated an official resolution. Perhaps it was decided, in the end, that any mention of almshouses would be unwise and draw undue attention. With respect to Proposition 12, it appears as though a resolution to it was encapsulated, in part, by the Resolution to Proposition 11. Part C of the Resolution to Proposition 11 reads that child care agencies should “exercise supervision over children under their care until such children are legally adopted, are returned to their parents, attain their majority, or are clearly beyond the need for further supervision.” Although the question of investigating prospective adoptive and foster parents remained ignored, Part C did address the issue of following the development and progress of children who were placed out of orphan asylums and into homes. As a rule, the conference organizers and the majority of the attendees were in full support of increased accountability within their profession.

**Proposition 13**

Should there be close cooperation between all child-caring agencies in each community, in order to promote harmony of action in regard to the admission of children, the relations of child-caring agencies to the parents or surviving parents of children admitted to their care, and the subsequent supervision of children leaving their care?299

No one in particular was asked to prepare remarks with respect to this proposition, so discussion of the topic was immediately open. Seymour H. Stone, General Secretary of the Boston Children’s Friend Society and Secretary of the Massachusetts State Conference of Charities, was the first to rise. He spoke highly of the system that Boston

had in place, whereby three children’s societies worked very closely together by using a central bureau of registration. In addition to the three children’s societies, about another 60 charitable agencies of all kinds registered with the central bureau. This system saved individual agencies a great deal of time and effort, because they could access research that other agencies had already conducted with respect to a specific child or family. 

A total of nine other conference attendees spoke very briefly to this issue, some in praise of the system that Boston had in place, and others in praise of childcare workers as a group. Childcare workers were said to be “the most anxious of all charity people to work together”, and their organizations were said to be bereft of any “jealousy or rivalry.” \(^{300}\) In general, the overriding tone of this discussion was very positive, with one exception. David F. Tilley, member of the State Board of Charity in Massachusetts, made the point that the “excellent” system in Boston did not currently include cooperation with Catholic child care societies, but stated that he hoped that that would eventually come. Otherwise, all those who spoke were pleased with the level of cooperation that they felt from their colleagues, and vowed to cooperate more.\(^{301}\)

When the Committee on Resolutions issued their report they emphasized the “great benefit” they believed could be gained from “a close cooperation between the various child-caring agencies” in each city, or central location. They drew specific attention to the importance of developing “harmonious relations” between agencies themselves, and between agencies and the natural parent(s) with whom the agencies worked. Lastly, the Committee strongly endorsed “the establishment of a joint bureau of

\(^{300}\) Ibid, p. 182 & 183, respectively.
investigation” contributed to by “all the child-caring agencies of each locality.” In short, the Committee was highly supportive of any and all means of cooperation between the various child-caring agencies in a particular area.

301 An explanation for this lack of cooperation between the central agency and the Catholic child care societies in Boston was not offered during this discussion.

302 White House Conference, p. 196.