FUTURE CITIZENS:
Wards of the State at the Monson State Primary School,
Massachusetts
1866-1895

Thesis submitted for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Ann Kirson Swersky

Submitted to the Senate of Tel Aviv University

September 2005
This thesis was supervised by

Dr Haggai Hurvitz – Tel Aviv University

Professor Aviam Soifer – University of Hawaii
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>Wards of the State: God's Stepchildren</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>Monson: From Almshouse to Primary School</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>Indenture: Exploitation or Training?</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Visiting Agency: The Unwalled Institution</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>Rhetoric and Reality</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The field of the history of childhood has come a long way since Aries’ claimed in *Centuries of Childhood*, that the concept of childhood as a particular state did not exist prior to the seventeenth century. Bremner provided the raw material for studying childhood in America with his collection of documents, *Children and Youth in America*, that remains a major source of information thirty years later. In *American Education*, Cremin studied the role of education in society from colonial times to the present. In *The Child and the Republic*, Wishy demonstrated how child nurture changed during the nineteenth century, from the child who could be redeemed by society to the child who would redeem society. Studies such as Gordon’s history of family violence, *Heroes of Their Own Lives* and Pleck’s *Domestic Tyranny* dealt with the child as victim in his or her own home. Brenzel in *Daughters of the State* showed how girls were “protected” by the state in the first reformatory for girls in America. Sutton dealt with delinquency in *Stubborn Children*, Hacsi with orphanages in *Second Home*, and Crenson with the emergence of social work in *Building the Invisible Orphanage*.1

---

The purpose of this current study is to look at those children in Massachusetts who were considered the dregs of society, the most underprivileged and unfortunate of all children, the paupers who were declared Wards of the State and placed in the Monson State Primary School. What measures did the Commonwealth take to Americanize these wretches and equip them for their role as future citizens of the New Republic? To what extent did the State succeed? By looking at the rights and protection guaranteed these underprivileged pauper children, can we gain an insight into what were regarded as the basic rights of all children in all social strata in mid-nineteenth century America?

The Monson State Primary School in Palmer, Massachusetts, was neither an orphanage nor a reform school. Established by an act of the legislature in 1866, its declared purpose was to provide an education for the pauper children of Massachusetts (largely the children of immigrants) who were found in the three state almshouses - Monson, Bridgewater and Tewksbury. The children were classified as “pupils” rather than “paupers” for two reasons. First, it was widely believed that a child could not in fact be indigent through his or her own actions but only passively as the result of the neglect or incompetence of the parents. Second, a child could hold his or her head high as a pupil, similar to pupils in
common schools throughout the Commonwealth, and self-esteem is the basis of self-respect and personal success.

The study is based on the papers of the Monson State Primary School in the Massachusetts State Archives - annual reports of the School and the Board of State Charities; case histories of the children in the School and those placed out in families; correspondence between the parents and the School, the children and the school, with potential indentees, and with officials of the Board and the trustees; indenture contracts; record books; visiting agent reports and trustee minutes. The Legislature established the school in 1866 and closed it in 1895. During these 29 years the character of the school changed from an institution dedicated to providing an education for the least privileged children in the Commonwealth to a holding institution and labor exchange to provide child workers for farmers and householders.

The nineteenth century was a period of great change - in America in general and in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in particular. The homogenous and stable rural agrarian society of the eighteenth century, with its sense of community and hierarchical family structure, faced the challenges of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. Urbanization and industrialization were drawing workers from their own fields into the factories and the cities. Large-scale immigration changed the homogenous face of society. The modern
republican family emerged,\textsuperscript{3} diminishing the traditional role of the father as \textit{pater familias} and glorifying the role of the mother as the main influence on the next generation. Massachusetts passed path-breaking legislation in two fields affecting children – the adoption law of 1851 and the compulsory schooling act of 1852. The adoption law legalized state intervention in placing children in families and instructed judges to consider the welfare of the child rather than the rights of the father in making such a decision.\textsuperscript{4} The compulsory schooling act legalized the role of the state in educating the future citizens of the Republic.\textsuperscript{5} Horace Mann, the “father” of the common school, explained that the state must be involved in the education of children to provide them with the basic knowledge necessary for their future prosperity and the basic morality necessary to protect society.\textsuperscript{6}

When the State Primary School at Monson opened its doors, the legislators, trustees, inspectors, and staff of the school expected that the self-image of the children would improve and contribute to their transformation from paupers to citizens by means of separation and education. When they moved in


\textsuperscript{5} Brenzel, \textit{Daughters of the State}, p.25

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid. p. 25 n. 29
to the school building, the children would be separated from the unsavory influence of their pauper parents and other adult paupers in the almshouses. In addition the children would receive a proper education, similar to that offered in the regular common schools, which would socialize them as good Americans and prepare them for their future lives of industry and citizenship.

Separation and education were two sides of the developing welfare triangle. The third side was indenture – which did not mean the same thing in the nineteenth century as it had in colonial times. The Puritans indentured their children as apprentices in the homes of their neighbors with the dual purpose of providing the children with an education and an occupation and of sparing them the possible interference of parental love. By the time the pupils of the Monson School were indentured to the farmers and householders of Massachusetts, the colonial craftsman basically no longer existed. Labor had moved into the factories and virtually no worker produced an entire product from beginning to end. The purpose of the Monson indenture was as much to defray the expense of maintaining the children in the school as it was to provide for their future by

---

7 Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, Chapter V.

8 In colonial America apprenticeship “was a system of education and job training by which important practical information was passed from one generation to the next; it was a mechanism by which youths could model themselves on socially approved adults; it was an institution devised to insure proper moral development through the master’s fatherly responsibility for the behavior of his apprentice; and it was a means of social control imposed upon potentially disruptive male adolescents . . . From the Revolution to the Civil War, amid the growth of cities, factories, and immigration, the craft apprentice gradually disappeared . . . It first lost its traditional economic and social functions, then for a rime remained an empty façade caricaturing its former self, and by 1865 was, except for odd semi survivals, moribund.” W.J.Rorabaugh, *The Craft Apprentice: From Franklin to the Machine Age in America*, New York and Oxford, 1986 p. vii.
ensuring the acquisition of basic skills. Furthermore, the skills the children acquired actually prepared them only for life as laborers on the lowest rungs of the social ladder.

The State Primary School was a unique institution in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as it was not a private or religious charitable organization. The Commonwealth took upon itself the responsibility of educating needy children and ensuring their socialization as Americans. Throughout America there were orphanages set up by churches or charitable societies.9 There were houses of refuge for petty criminals.10 There were reform schools for juvenile delinquents.11 But the primary school was different because originally all the children were what we would define today as “status offenders” – by virtue of their status as neglected or abandoned or deprived children - who had committed no crime. These children had come before the courts because they were homeless or neglected or abused, passively but not actively in contravention of the law. They were the victims of the poverty or intemperance or the indifference of their parents. They became wards of the State, committed by the courts to the care of the Board of State Charities, and remained as such until their majority. The State undertook responsibility for these children and acted in loco parentis during the

---

9 See for example Crenson, Building the Invisible Orphanage and Timothy A. Hacsi, Second Home.


11 See for example Brenzel, Daughters of the State;
formative years of their lives. In order to fulfil the responsibility it had assumed, the State created two path-breaking institutions:

(1) The Visiting Agency, to provide the children both with a friend in Court, because their parents had clearly failed to protect them, and with supervision and protection once the children had been placed out in families.

(2) The Justices of Probate, who specialized in handling juvenile cases almost thirty years before the first juvenile court was established in Illinois in 1899.

The special status of these children was undermined when the School was compelled through legislation to accept juvenile delinquents from the reformatories – girls from Lancaster and boys from Westborough. These children actively had broken the law. They were juvenile delinquents. They could not be defined as status offenders.

The first chapter describes the emerging problem of poverty in Massachusetts as a result of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. The English Puritan tradition – the ways the State had tried to solve the problem under the common law, through poor laws and by establishing almshouses – was replaced by the recognition of the importance of the fact that children were the future citizens of the New Republic. The approach to welfare that emerged tended to emphasize the education and socialization of poor children as a
necessary step towards a stable and prosperous capitalist society. The result was a determination to get the children out of the institutions and into families – through indentures or fostering – as soon as possible. Institutional life was not a suitable training ground for developing the character traits necessary for the individualistic society developing in America in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The second chapter describes the school, the hopes pinned on the institution by its founders and managers, and the extent to which those hopes were realized. The trustees, inspectors, superintendents and principals of the school over the years aimed to instill in the pupils a sense of personal responsibility and integrity. Yet the very nature of the school and its terms of operation doomed it to failure. There was constant tension between providing the best training and education for the children and cutting the costs of the program to the State. These “future citizens” were expected to pay their own way at a much earlier stage in their lives than the more fortunate pupils of the regular common schools.

The third chapter describes the indenture agreements utilized. It analyses the basic rights guaranteed the children sent to work on the farms and the households of Massachusetts. The children were entitled to food, clothing, housing, vocational training, and education – both religious and secular. Their
only obligation in the contract was to stay in their places until the indenture expired. They were also paid a small sum of money when the time was up.

The fourth chapter describes the innovative State Visiting Agency, established to protect the children when they were placed outside the school. Children who were too young to work were placed in foster families, who received a monthly payment in return for looking after the children. Children old enough to work were indentured to families and worked in return for their board and education. Within the terms of the 1869 act establishing the Visiting Agency, the visitor had four tasks: visiting the wards of the State when they were in the homes of private citizens; investigating applications for release of children from the various State institutions; actively seeking out suitable homes for fostering and indenture; and protecting the children's rights in court. The State Visiting Agent was a paid professional, the precursor of the modern social worker. These were *de facto* juvenile courts in which the Visiting Agent appeared as a friend of the child and they preceded the *de jure* juvenile court of Illinois by almost thirty years.

The concluding chapter deals with the extent to which ideology matched the practice of childcare in the Monson School. On the one hand, the legislators and the officials of the School set out to build the character and self-esteem of the poor children by defining them as State pupils and providing them with an education on a par with that provided more fortunate children in the common
schools. On the other hand, the need to find an economical solution to the cost of caring for the poor led these same men to make every effort to place the children in families under indentures or in foster care. The Visiting Agent was a friend to the children under his care but treated them as commodities when “supplying” the needs of the farmers and householders. The types of homes in which the children were placed and the work they were expected to do did not prepare them well for the industrialized society in which they would need to earn their livings.
1. Wards of the State: God's Step-children

The original colonists in Massachusetts brought from England the laws and customs to which they were accustomed, including the 1601 43rd Act of Elizabeth, in which the Parliament of England appropriated two hundred thousand pounds for the support of the aged, blind, impotent and sick; for the employment of children whose parents could not maintain them; for the apprenticing of poor children; and for setting the idle to work.¹

In 1639, the Court of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay ordered that any shire court, or any two magistrates out of court, shall have power, to determine all difference about the lawful settling, and providing for, poor persons; and to dispose of all unsettled persons into such towns, as they shall judge to be most fit for the maintenance and employment of such persons and families, for the ease of this country.²

The courts had the power to move the poor from a town in which they had no settlement – and no employment – to a town where there were greater opportunities. The towns were responsible for the support and relief of the paupers within their jurisdiction. The situation changed when the Indian wars of 1675-1676 disrupted the lives of the colonists, often forcing them to move to towns in which they did not have the right of settlement and in which they may not have relatives who could undertake their support. An Act of the General Court in 1675 created a new class of paupers – state paupers – for whom relief was provided from the

---

¹ Charters and General Laws of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay, published by order of the General Court, 1814, p.173 and quoted in House Document #1, Report of the Commissioners appointed by order of the House of Representatives, Feb. 29 1832, on the subject of the Pauper System of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, (Boston: Dutton & Wentworth, State Printers 1833) p.6

² Ibid. p.7 (My Italics)
public purse on a state rather than a local level in such circumstances. In 1691 Massachusetts established the office of Overseers of the Poor, an office already established for a hundred years in England. "In 1692 relatives were obliged by law to support each other, and a few years later power was given to justices of the peace to bind out poor children." 3 Starting in 1701 very stringent settlement laws applied in Massachusetts and an immigrant needed a period of one year - not the previous three months - to acquire residence in a town. In 1702, new legislation added a provision demanding the express permission of the authorities in granting settlement. 4 Residence was no longer automatic. There were severe penalties for vagrancy and the towns were empowered to move those without settlement out of the town and back to the town in which the vagrant previously had residence. By 1775, the State provided for this large group of "unsettled" poor at its own expense and Massachusetts had built almshouses in various towns to provide poor relief.

The early nineteenth century saw an influx of immigrants to Massachusetts from Great Britain and Europe that changed the balance from one immigrant in twenty residents in 1840, to one in six in 1850, one in five in 1860 and one in four in 1876. This meant that more than four hundred thousand of the one million six hundred and fifty two people living in Massachusetts at that time "were either born in a foreign country or the children of foreign parents." 5 As a result of this massive immigration public charity was called upon to provide the necessary services.

3 Ibid. p.7
4 Ibid. p.8
5 Ibid. p.9
The State chose to provide for the poor by establishing institutions – almshouses, orphanages, reformatories, and a State Primary School. Providing poor relief was not going to solve the problem of poverty, which had grown to dimensions beyond anything imagined by the early settlers. It seemed clearly necessary to take special care of the children and provide for their future through education.

The emerging concept of the modern family in America - between the Revolution and 1830 - focused its resources on rearing children. This was primarily a middle class phenomenon, but the legislators who were dealing with the problems of poverty and pauper children brought their personal worldviews to bear on the problem. These children needed to be educated by the State and not by their parents because their parents were so often foreigners and could not be expected to share American values. The legislators placed the poor in almshouses and identified as “Wards of the State” the children of parents who could not provide for them.

In the period following the Civil War, the upheaval caused by the conflict and by fathers and sons going off to fight, often left the women without financial support. These factors combined to create a volatile society in which the women and the children were the main victims. They found themselves in the almshouses or out on the streets, not as a result of the “evils of drink”, though there were many of these women who also drank to excess, but as a result of their subordinate

---

6 Carl N. Degler, At Odds, Chapter 1.

status in society. Sometimes a mother would put her children into the Primary School as a temporary measure, an institutionalized child-care service, while she went into domestic service to earn money. She would come back to take the children home when she was back on her feet and able to provide for their needs - or when the children were old enough to go out to work and bring in additional funds. The children worked out of necessity to help provide for the family; otherwise the parents would have had to be supported as paupers by the state. Therefore a balance had to be struck between the economic needs of the family and the educational needs of the child. The same balance had to be struck in the case of the children at the State Primary School and those out on indenture. They had to be given an education in order to guarantee their future, but it was widely believed that they also needed to be provided for by the Commonwealth in a fiscally efficient fashion.

Other children became pupils of the primary schools because they were abused by their parents or neglected and found running around the streets unsupervised, often sleeping outside at night. Some of these children had committed petty thefts in order to survive; others might have taken a horse for a joy ride or perpetrated some other minor offense. They were technically criminals but the majority belonged to a category of what is now known as “status offenders”\(^8\). This is a special group of "criminals" who have in fact committed no significant crime other than being homeless, vagrant, neglected, or abused.

Hattie May Belle Swetland was typical. She appeared before the Police Court at Springfield on June 22, 1889 on charges of neglect. She was born on May 9, 1884 in Amherst, which meant she was five years old at the time of her court appearance. The whereabouts of her father Charles were unknown. Hattie’s maternal grandfather, Mr. Shumway, was a shoemaker in Hadley and her mother Mary had the right of settlement in that town. However, Mary had frequently been provided with aid and charity by the city of Springfield for the previous thirteen years. Hattie was found with a woman named Emma Brown who had been arrested in Springfield as a vagrant on June 21. Hattie’s mother was arrested the same night, and both women were sentenced to Bridgewater. Mary Swetland appealed her sentence but went to “jail” because she could not post bail. (It is interesting that Bridgewater, an almshouse, was defined as a jail in the register.) The women “had been tramping about from place to place and child was very filthy and covered with vermin.”

The “crime” of the mother, for which she was committed to imprisonment, was nothing more than homelessness. With no place to live and as someone clearly unemployed, Mary had been wandering from place to place together with a friend, making do as best she could. She may have left Hattie with Emma Brown while she went off to find food and shelter. The absentee husband is perhaps the key to the relationship between Mary Swetland and Mr. Shumway. Despite having a father with a trade and a home in Springfield, Mary was unable to make bail. And so five-year-old little Hattie, a neglected child, found herself registered at the

---

9 Orders of Admission and Transfers (1889) in the papers of the Monson State Primary School, Massachusetts State Archives.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.
Monson School. She had been taken under the protective wing of the State, acting *in loco parentis*, and provided with the home and education to which she was entitled as a member of society. She would be fed, clothed, disciplined, and educated “in accordance with her station” and also provided with the rudiments of religious instruction. She might find herself in a foster family at an early age; otherwise she would be indentured to a family and probably initiated into the secrets of the “art of housewifery”. As we shall see in the agreements in the chapter on indentures\(^\text{12}\), these rights were her guaranteed her as a child in nineteenth century Massachusetts. Even a homeless and neglected little girl with a vagrant mother, an absent father, and an apparently uncaring grandfather was entitled to minimal social and human benefits – an education, food, shelter, clothing, and vocational training. All this came about by virtue of her status as a future citizen of the United States of America - albeit in her case a non-voting citizen because women still did not have the right to vote.

The secretary of the Board of State Charities, in his report in 1869, had described the origins of juvenile delinquency and vagrancy in the following terms:

A very large proportion of juvenile delinquents have the misfortune to be the offspring of indigent and vicious parentage; many are fugitives from drunkards' homes; many are orphans and homeless; many become stubborn and ungovernable under the neglect and ill-treatment of step-fathers and step-mothers, upon whose trivial complaints scores are committed to the Reformatories; many are forced into the streets for beggary and theft, to provide their natural, or rather *unnatural*, guardians with means for vicious indulgence, - neglect, hunger and abuse being often their only reward for the degrading service, which is too frequently encouraged by misplaced charity, and by the numerous facilities for the disposal of stolen articles; while many

\(^{12}\) Chapter 3
more are the victims of their own acquired or inherited tendencies to perverseness and crime.\textsuperscript{13}

Another group of children at Monson were habitual truants from school, even though truants were supposed to be handled within the local social welfare systems of the towns and placed in special truant schools under the supervision of local truant officers.

The last group of children at Monson got there through the care of the state under the strange and draconian Stubborn Child Law\textsuperscript{14}. Enacted in Massachusetts in 1646 as part of a general movement to codify the laws of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, this law remained on the statute books until 1973. It appeared in The Book of the General Laws and Liberties Concerning the Inhabitants of Massachusetts as capital law number fourteen.\textsuperscript{15}

If a man have a stubborn or rebellious son, of sufficient years and understanding (viz.) sixteen years of age, which will not obey the voice of his Father, or the voice of his Mother, and that when they have chastened him will not harken unto them: then shall his Father and Mother being his natural parents, lay hold on him, and bring him to the Magistrates assembled in Court and testify unto them, that their son is stubborn and rebellious and will not obey their voice and chastisement, but lives in sundry notorious crimes, such a son shall be put to death.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{13} Sixth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, pp. 14-15.
\bibitem{14} Sutton, John R. Stubborn Children: Controlling Delinquency in the United States, 1640-1981, Chapter 1.
\bibitem{15} Ibid. p.19
\bibitem{16} Ibid. pp.10-11. The Puritans took the text almost verbatim from the biblical source Deuteronomy 21:20-21. The Talmud (Sanhedrin Chapter 8) included this verse in those punishments that would never be carried out. The period of time during which a son (never a daughter) could be declared as stubborn was narrowed to such an extent that it was almost irrelevant – from the onset of puberty until the child turned thirteen – at which stage he became a man and was no longer the responsibility of his parents. The other justification for the law in the Talmud is that it is a cautionary
\end{thebibliography}
Parents could accuse their children of being "stubborn" when their children were insubordinate, rude, cheeky or arrogant and refused to be governed by their parents. The ultimate penalty was death, though there is no record of such a sentence ever having been passed or carried out in more than three hundred-year history of the statute. Nevertheless there were many children at the Primary School who had been sent there by the courts as a result of a complaint by the parents to the local constable that the child was unmanageable, stayed out late, or all night, mixed with questionable company, and refused to attend school. Thus a parent could come to the Court for redress of the wrong caused him by a recalcitrant son or daughter, handing over to the State the responsibility for disciplining and educating, clothing and feeding this little "criminal".

Such was the case of two-year-old Charles Smith. Born on July 21, 1887 in Northampton, he came before the District Court of West Hampden, Westfield, on June 20, 1889, accused of stubbornness. His home was not regarded as respectable and his parents, Joseph and Sarah, were recorded as having a bad reputation. No details were provided, though usually this terminology referred to intemperance. The record states that Charles's previous character was "not very bad" but that he frequently quarreled with his father. On these occasions, both the toddler and his father used "profane and vulgar language". The child refused to obey his father. Because he was not a bad child "a few weeks of discipline and

tale. The intrinsically evil child would be a threat to the very fabric of society and should be dealt with before he contaminates his soul with evil acts.

17 Orders of Admission and Transfers (1889) in the papers of the Monson State Primary School, Massachusetts State Archives.
separation from his surroundings will no doubt correct his faults and fit him to be placed out."18 A recalcitrant two year old19

Charles’ parents had declared him “stubborn” at the age of two because he quarreled with his father, a profane and vulgar man, and refused to obey him. The mind boggles at the thought of a two-year-old being committed to the Monson School by a justice of the District Court on the grounds of disobedience. Perhaps the Court was taking advantage of its authority and the opportunity provided by circumstances to take the child away from his profane and vulgar parents and to give him a better start in life as a ward of the State. In 1872, the Ninth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities contained the following lyrical statement:

A beautiful thread of tender regard for children runs through the whole tangled mass of the legislation of Massachusetts, which is creditable to the humanity of our lawmakers.

“In the olden time, when the beginning and end of legal enactment was, thou shalt, thou shalt not, the Puritan Fathers passed stern enactments for upholding justice and punishing crime; but the iron hand of the law, while it gripped the criminal by the throat, merely held in caressing restraint the juvenile offender. This thread of tenderness may be traced in the general provision for the instruction of all children; and in careful provision for special measures for the protection of special classes, who were practically deprived of parental guardianship.20

18 Ibid.

19 The Rev. Francis Wayland, President of Brown University and a well-known minister and educator, wrote a letter, anonymously, to The American Baptist Magazine in October 1831. He described how he had disciplined his fifteen-month-old son, forcing him to accept the authority of his father: to accept food from his father rather than his nurse, and to hug his father in gratitude for the harsh treatment he received. He was starved of food and left alone in a locked room to cry for 36 hours. Finally the infant accepted the food, came to his father, and kissed him – and anyone else – on command. See William G. McLoughlin, “Evangelical Child Rearing in the Age of Jackson: Francis Wayland’s Views on When and How to Subdue the Willfulness of Children” in N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes, eds. Growing up in America: Children in Historical Perspective, University of Illinois Press, 1985, pp. 88-107.

20 Board of State Charities, Ninth Annual Report, 1872, p.1
The report went on to emphasize the medieval principle of *parens patriae*\(^{21}\), the right of the state to interfere in the management of children.

It led to the adoption of the principle that the State is in a certain sense the guardian of all children; that its consent is necessary to the validity of any contract made by or for them; that even the control of the parent is limited; notably that he may not have their services to the neglect of their education, and may be punished for neglecting to furnish means necessary to that purpose.\(^{22}\)

Throughout the records of the Monson School there is a constant theme of complaint about the questionable character of these children who were presumably showing the effects of a lack of parental guidance and proper upbringing.\(^{23}\) One also gets the impression, however, that many of the children were simply high-spirited youngsters, cheeky and insubordinate and in actual fact no different from the natural children of their masters and mistresses. Yet the assumption was that these children were bad, because otherwise why were they in the Monson School to begin with? Each example of high jinks typical of children therefore was considered a potential first step on the very slippery slope to a life of crime.

To Charles Loring Brace, founder of the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, “this dangerous class has not yet begun to show itself as it will in eight or ten years, when these boys and girls are matured...They will have the same rights as ourselves … They will poison society.”\(^{24}\) Therefore, it was in the

---

\(^{21}\) cf. Sutton, note 4.

\(^{22}\) Board of State Charities, *Ninth Annual Report*, 1872, p.1

\(^{23}\) This appears in the case histories, the reports of the Visiting Agents, and the correspondence between the School and the indentees.

self-interest of society to provide an education - moral and practical - for these future citizens.

This theme of the dangerous classes echoed throughout, expressing the tension between integrating the vast number of immigrant children into society and Americanizing them, accompanied by the fear that they might ultimately overwhelm the "native" New England population rather than being absorbed into it. It was hoped that education, positive example, and immersion in the New England way of life could overcome whatever "natural propensities" the children inherited from their parents.

Any one who will visit this institution, and survey the happy and well-trained group of children here assembled, and witness their exercises in the week-day school, and the Sabbath school, cannot but see a striking contrast between them and the children of the foreign population in our cities and large places, living with parents whose habits of life are low, groveling and vicious.

. . . There is another consideration on this point that ought not to be overlooked. Children of foreign parentage, by being constantly and exclusively associated with Americans in relation of matrons, teachers, &c., generally soon lose, in a great degree, their earlier habits, peculiarities and associations as foreigners, and become assimilated to those under whose influence and instructions they are placed. Thus they grow to maturity, like the children of our own citizens, educated in the spirit and principles of our institutions, and prepared to take their positions, at full age, as intelligent and worthy members of our community.25

In 1859, John Brewster, the superintendent of the Monson School, wrote in his report:

---

Hundreds of children, kept annually from the temptations of vice and crime, are embraced within the fostering arms of the State, and taught to be industrious, honest, truthful, virtuous and happy, and educated to feel that they must be something and do something, and thereby prepared to become respectable members of society.26

More sinned against than sinning, the wards of the State found themselves within the framework of the Courts. They were relegated to the guardianship of the Board of State Charities and placed, for their own protection and for the protection of society, in institutions.

In the first half of the nineteenth century27 legislators placed great faith in the value of institutions and in their power to solve social ills. Later, the professionals who dealt directly with children began to favor foster homes over institutions. At a time when child rearing had become the central preoccupation of the bourgeois family, many officials argued that homes provided a better environment for the child because families were the natural building blocks of society. Institutions were unnatural, developing a dependency in the children, who become accustomed to having all their needs provided. In addition, this was a better deal for the state financially. The sum of money paid a foster family was far less than the sums expended to provide for children in institutions. Throughout the sources for this research,28 there is a golden thread of cost: what is most economical, what is commercially worthwhile, and how the best results can be attained at the lowest price.

According to the common law, parents were entitled to the labor of their children. When a child was injured or killed in an accident, the claim for

26 Sixth Annual Report, State Primary School at Monson, October 1859, p.18


28 Every annual report dealt with the cost of maintaining the children in school and weighed the results of the services provided against the costs incurred.
compensation was based on the loss of current income to the family from the child’s labor and from the future income of the child, who would have been expected to provide for his or her parents in their old age. These wards of the state no longer provided for their parents, as their parents no longer provided for them. Instead the state, acting in loco parentis, still had the right to put the children to work to cover the costs of their maintenance and education. Moreover, according to the official rhetoric, the state thereby also provided these children with a future means of livelihood as they usefully learned a trade.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{29} See chapter 3 on indentures.
2. Monson: From Almshouse to Primary School

Introduction

By 1855, there were three state almshouses in Massachusetts: Tewksbury, Monson, and Bridgewater. Originally the almshouses provided shelter both for adults and for children, the men working the land belonging to the almshouse or doing maintenance or working in the workshops, the women providing the traditional services of cleaning, cooking, laundry, and child care. In addition, the children went to school, either at the local district school or, as in Monson, within the institution.

In 1855, the General Court enacted new legislation sending all children in the three state almshouses to Monson for schooling in order to separate them from the adult paupers, who were considered an evil influence.¹ The legislators regarded as a sacred trust the provision of a proper education for these pauper children so that they could assume their responsibilities as adults in a democratic America. To quote the Monson Inspectors in their 1855 annual report,

It is now emphatically, as denominated in the statute, a State Pauper School, whose primary object is to take care of and educate those children of the State who have none beside the State to care for them.

The principle which is the basis of the new law is of unquestionable soundness and importance. To separate the young from the contamination of vice and corruption, and from exposure to virulent disease, and place

¹ “An Act providing for the classification of State paupers,’ May 19, 1855, quoted in the Second Annual Report of the Inspectors of the State Almshouse at Monson, December 1855, Senate Document No. 7 (February 1856)
them in a position where all the surrounding circumstances and influences will have a tendency to invigorate their physical constitutions, and improve and elevate their moral natures, with the view of making them hardy, intelligent, and virtuous American citizens, is certainly an aim important enough for the interposition of the State, and worthy of earnest and persevering effort. Indeed, it seems to us, that the engrafting of this feature into the system of supporting the poor will do more than anything else towards insuring success to its results, and commending it to public favor.  

A year later this act was repealed because the supervisors of the almshouses at Tewksbury and Bridgewater objected. They complained that many of the children were only placed in the almshouses temporarily while their parents were imprisoned or unable to care for them and that it would be a great expense and inconvenience for the parents to have to collect the children from an institution so far away. The supervisors also felt that it would be difficult to find indentures if the children were all concentrated in one place and they complained further that the cost of keeping all the children in one school was greater than that of providing a special school building in each of the almshouses for the couple of hundred children who were in the almshouse at any time. These men had no faith in economies of scale.

The annual report of the Board of State Charities for 1864 recorded a dispute between the supervisors of the various almshouses, and it quoted James Phillips Kay, “an eminent English authority”, who had used similar language in 1838:

---

2 Annual Report of the trustees of the State Primary School at Monson, 1855. (My italics)

3 First Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, (January 1865) p.274
A child should not be degraded in his own estimation by being a member of a despised class. A child cannot be a pauper in the sense in which the term is commonly understood; that is, he cannot be indigent as the consequence of his own want of industry, skill, frugality, or forethought, and he ought not, therefore, to be taught to despise himself.4

It took another ten years for the General Court to pass new legislation,5 establishing a State Primary School at Monson and gradually phasing out the almshouse. The adult inmates of Monson were eventually transferred to Tewksbury and Bridgewater. Under this act, the children became "state pupils" rather than "state paupers", a semantic difference of great importance in the eyes of the concerned adults who felt that the mere fact of being defined as a pauper was destructive of the character and self-esteem of the children.

The 1855 attempt to concentrate all pauper children between the ages of six and fifteen in one school and to provide them with an education that would prepare them for their future role as American citizens relied on a belief in the utility of classification of the poor. Separating pauper adults from the children provided a salutary environment in which the children could be redeemed – “a State Pauper School, whose primary object is to take care of and educate those children of the State who have none beside the State to care for them.”6 The act of 1866 took a further step by making the defining factor in the identity of children their status as subjects of education rather than objects of redemption. They were to take pride in their status as pupils just as other pupils in the compulsory common schools of the Commonwealth did, because their school was defined as

5 Chapter 209 of the laws of 1866
6 Ibid.
a State Primary School and not a State Pauper School. This would build the characters of the children while providing them with a basic education.\(^7\)

The School also received neglected, abandoned, abused, or truant children who were committed by the judges of probate to the guardianship of the Board of State Charities that then placed them in the School or directly in families.\(^8\)

In reporting to the trustees of the School in 1877, the inspectors defined the main purpose of the School as building character and explained what they meant by character:\(^9\)

Character should be the paramount end sought. It should be inscribed on the flags of the school; on its walls, doors, and everywhere, until it left its impress ineffaceably on every soul that comes under the shadow of its enclosures. But what is character, analyzed?

1. Habits of, and love for, daily systematic industry.
2. Freedom of lawful action under personal convictions.
4. Individuality.
5. Naturalness.
6. Common sense.
7. Personal self-reliance.
8. Personal responsibility.
10. Cleanliness.

---

\(^7\) Massachusetts passed the first compulsory schooling act in America in 1852.

\(^8\) See Chapter 3

\(^9\) Twenty Fourth Annual Report of the State Primary School at Monson, October 1877, p. 6.
11. Carefulness in handling tools, household wares, and property generally.
12. Frugality.
13. Promptness, punctuality, energy.
15. Obedience to authority of its kind.
16. The higher qualities of course are to have their appropriate place, - such as virtue, reverence, veneration, truthfulness, honesty, sincerity, principle, justice, mercy, forgiveness, and benevolence.

This is what the inspectors of the School expected to achieve by incarcerating underprivileged, neglected, dependent, and sometimes delinquent children in an institution dedicated to their education. And if the list were not sufficiently daunting as it is, all this should be achieved within a year because a long sojourn in any institution is counter-productive. The children should be placed out in families in the country as soon as possible because that was the natural order, the family being the basic building block of society.

If the trustees and officers of the school, and the legislators of the Commonwealth, were looking to educate the future citizens of the Republic to be moral and upright citizens with independent minds and judgment, they might have put the “higher qualities”\(^\text{10}\) higher on their list of what constitutes character. Subordination and discipline rank much higher, which seems to support the theory of social control as the purpose of the legislation.

\(^{10}\) See the definition of character at the beginning of this chapter.
The original Puritan settlers of the Colony believed that the less fortunate members of society could be provided for in the homes of the more fortunate.\textsuperscript{11} By the early nineteenth century, the asylum had become the solution of choice for all problem groups from the mentally handicapped to the vagrants and paupers on the fringes of society.\textsuperscript{12} However, throughout the period during which the State Primary School functioned, there was a constant appeal by the trustees to the legislators to provide the means whereby more children could be placed in families and fewer kept in an institutional framework. However proud they were of the achievements of the School, the trustees believed that the natural framework for children remained the family. What could be gained from living in even the poorest family setting would be of greater benefit in the child’s future life than what could be achieved through discipline and education in any institution, however well run or successful it may be. “A poor home in a family is better than to be an inmate in the best managed institution in the world.”\textsuperscript{13}

**History**

According to the First Annual Report of the Inspectors of the State Almshouse at Monson, published in December 1854, males and females over the age of fifteen were regarded as adults. This definition continued to help to explain why the State Primary School, when it was first established in 1866, only

\begin{footnotesize}


\textsuperscript{13} Twenty Fourth Annual Report of the Monson State Primary School, October 1877, Inspectors report p. 8.
\end{footnotesize}
accepted children under the age of fifteen and found it difficult to "supply" children for indenture to farmers who needed stronger children for farm labor. 14 At the time the report was written, there were 356 children in the care of the almshouse, 212 boys and 92 girls; plus ten boys and two girls bound out, 14 children on trial, and 17 marked as "unclassified." 15

The almshouse provided schoolbooks and a school that operated regularly in two daily sessions – the first in the morning and the second in the afternoon - run by a principal teacher, Mr.H.W.Stickney, and an assistant teacher, Mrs. Weston. There were 175 children registered in the school but on average only 150 attended classes at any given time. The discrepancy in numbers arose because sometimes children were ill and children who were out on trial in families prior to the signing of a formal indenture were still registered as pupils of the school but did not attend classes.

The children generally appear to love the schoolroom, and manifest a remarkable interest in their studies, and their proficiency is better than is usually found in our District Schools in the country. The school is under admirable discipline, and is thoroughly taught; pains are taken, not only to instruct them intellectually, but to train them morally, and cultivate in them all those habits of virtue, of subordination, of industry and neatness, that will make them worthy and useful citizens. 16

14 See Chapter 3.

15 This is a strange definition and one of the reasons the Visiting Agent spent his first year in office tracking down all the children who were supposed to be under the care of the School. See Chapter 4.

16 First Annual Report of the Inspectors of the State Almshouse at Monson, December 1854, p. 12. The section of the By-Laws Governing State Almshouses relating to teachers, appearing in this same report, the following sections appear on p. 47:
And here we have in a nutshell the definition of a "worthy and useful citizen," including subordination. We are left to wonder to whom or to what? To those in authority at the almshouse? To the masters into whose service the children would be placed in terms of the indentures? To the laws of the State? Perhaps, as Foucault claimed, the institution was indeed "a perfect representation of the modern state . . . The confinement of the mad represented nothing less than the victory of reason over unreason in western culture, and the confinement of the criminal, the ultimate triumph of the bourgeois state."17

The goal was to separate the children from other paupers and from evil influences of what seemed akin to a communicable disease, i.e. the unbroken pattern of pauperism.18 In the effort to provide for these future “American citizens,” who were cast on the charity of the State through no fault of their own, the citizens of Massachusetts needed to provide a more salubrious atmosphere in which the children could grow up and be educated. The legislators decided that the answer was a special school. In 1852 Massachusetts had passed the first compulsory school attendance law in America, requiring children between the ages of eight and fourteen to attend school at least twelve weeks a year. Six weeks had to be consecutive.19 Regular education was regarded as the key to

"Section 1. The Inspectors shall provide instruction for the children in the house of suitable age to attend school in the elementary branches of education.

"Section 2. The Teachers shall use their best efforts to advance them in the knowledge best fitted to enable them to make their way in life, and likewise to impress upon them, by all proper means, the duties of temperance, frugality, honesty, and the ruinous consequence of the opposite vices."

17 Rothman, The Discovery of the Asylum, p.xv
socialization at a time when public schools, known as common schools, were opening in Massachusetts. The common schools developed on the basis of “native Protestant ideology” that saw the origins of poverty in flaws of individual character and the principles of Protestant Christianity as identical with the principles of republican democratic government. Proper environment was the key to social reform and education. Common schools “trained children to be good citizens, they developed moral character and work habits, they drew people into a common culture based on native Protestant ideology, they spread literacy, and they offered opportunities for individual advancement.”

The children at the Monson almshouse certainly were not going to receive an education suited to the future citizens of America as long as they were exposed to the negative influence of the pauper population.

The inspectors did not fail to point out that the new arrangement brought with it the need for an increased budget. The school needed more teachers, more schoolbooks, "and other educational means." Healthy young children eat more than infants and infirm adults and they wear out their clothes more rapidly so they need more food and clothing. Hired help had to replace the adult pauper inmates who had provided maintenance, farm labor, housekeeping and cooking. Additional buildings had to be planned and erected and steam power introduced.

---

21 Ibid. pp102-103
22 Ibid. p. 102
The number of teachers employed at the school increased immediately - from one female assistant to the principal in 1854 to six assistants in 1855. There were 336 boys and 100 girls registered in the school in 1855. Average attendance was 421. The school was not divided into grades in the regular way, despite vast differences in age. According to the inspectors, the children were all uneducated and therefore they could all be taught the same material. There was one “school” under the tutelage of the principal and one under an assistant teacher that was attended by the older and more advanced pupils. One hundred and fifty children attended school regularly, 120 boys and 30 girls divided into six classes. They were taught reading, spelling, writing, geography, "and other branches usually taught in our common schools." The inspectors claimed that the level of both teaching and learning was no lower than that of the district schools and that the children were so anxious to learn that there was seldom need for punishment. The aim was to train them in such a way that they should become "intelligent and worthy members of the community".24

There was another significant change in 1866 when the children from the Monson Pauper School became pupils in the State Primary School at Monson. The name of the institution was changed to reflect a basic change in philosophy. No longer were the children of Monson to be regarded as paupers simply because their parents were paupers. From 1866 on, they were pupils in a state school, and to that extent no different from pupils in the regular common school system. The new Primary School opened with 345 pupils transferred from the register of the Monson Almshouse

24 Ibid. p. 11.
With full and happy hearts they accept the change. God grant that these children of the State may love and honor Massachusetts, and long live to accomplish the good which she so much desires and expects them to do...25

The Act26 establishing the Primary School contained three sections that sought to differentiate the new Primary School from the Pauper School of 1855:

Section 4 provided for the transfer of children from Tewksbury and Bridgewater "for the purposes of instruction and employment" on condition that they would be in the Primary School for at least six months. In this way the legislators dealt with the objections raised by the superintendents of those almshouses in 1855. The other children admitted to the school were classified as neglected, abandoned, or orphaned - the status offenders. They were children who, through no fault of their own, had been committed to the guardianship of the Board of State Charities by the courts as wards of the State by virtue of their status as neglected or abandoned children. These were the children of whom the Superintendent of Monson had written that they had committed no crime other than the crime of having been born into pauper circumstances. 27

25 Thirteenth Annual Report of the Monson State Primary School, 1866, presented by the Superintendent to the Inspectors. p. 19. The superintendent did not explain how he knew what was going on in the hearts of these newly designated pupils or how he determined the change in their perceptions of themselves.

26 An Act to establish a state primary school 1866 chapter 209 sections 4 to 6.

27 Ibid. "Section 4. For the purpose of instruction and employment there shall be transferred to the state primary school from the state almshouses at Tewksbury and Bridgewater, from time to time, such children as are of suitable condition of body and mind to receive instruction, and at the same time are likely to continue for a period of six months under the care of the state; and especially such as are orphans, or have been abandoned by their parents, or whose parents have been convicted of a crime, or come within any of the descriptions of persons contained in the General Statutes, chapter one hundred and sixty-five section twenty-eight."
Section 5 defined the powers of the Board of State Charities and reiterated that the children were to be admitted, transferred and discharged only through and at the discretion of the Board, thus underscoring the status of the children as wards of the State.28

Section 6 provided for the transfer to Monson of children committed to Westborough Reformatory for “trivial offences” provided that they “do not appear to be depraved in character, or to need the restraints of imprisonment.” This provision challenged the superintendent and made him feel the necessity to cope with and discipline the juvenile delinquents who now became a regular component of the population of the school.29 It also was the first step leading to the ultimate closure of the School almost thirty years later.

In 1870, the Monson almshouse still existed alongside the Primary School. The inmates – who were regarded as such an evil influence on the children that a separate school had been established - still provided services for the school. The inspectors did not approve of this arrangement and kept suggesting that the almshouse should be closed to avoid the negative influence of the paupers on the children.30

28 Ibid. “Section 5. Such transfers of children shall be made by the board of state charities, who shall have full power to make such other transfers of children as they may deem necessary from the state almshouses; and the power of admission and discharge shall be vested in the said board of state charities, together with the other powers now vested in said board in relation to state paupers in almshouses and hospitals.”

29 Ibid. “Section 6. It shall be the duty of the board of state charities, upon consultation with the trustees of the state reform school at Westborough, as often as once in three months, to examine into the sentences and the conduct of the pupils in that institution; and when they shall find pupils there residing who have been committed for trivial offences, and do not appear to be depraved in character, or to need the restraints of imprisonment, the board of state charities shall furnish lists of such pupils to the governor, who may, under his warrant, direct the removal of such children to the state primary school at Monson, and such removal shall suspend their sentence of confinement at Westborough, during the good behavior of such pupils”.

30 Seventeenth Annual Report, 1870, Inspectors, p.5.
As a result of a change in the Visiting Agency law, the profile of children sent to the school changed radically in 1870. Originally the children were mainly status offenders - vagrants, neglected or abused by their parents, combined with a certain percentage of petty pilferers who stole mainly to eat - all of whom had been taken under the wing of the State purportedly for their own good. In terms of the amended law, judges of probate started sending minor offenders between the ages of six and fifteen to the Primary School rather than to the reformatories. This caused a significant demographic change in the population of the School. The Superintendent pointed out that the school had not been built as a reformatory because the children for whom it was established had committed no offence other than being born poor. Thus there was not sufficient security to prevent the "juvenile delinquents" from running away, which they frequently did. The Superintendent attributed the "smartness" of "rogues" to them. This meant that they raised the level of intelligence in the classroom, he claimed, but they also seriously challenged the disciplinary procedures of the School. However, the Superintendent regarded the absorption of these boys into

31 See Chapter 3

32 An Act relating to the state visiting agency and juvenile offenders 1870 chapter 359

"Section 10. The judge of the probate court or commissioner, before whom a child is brought on any complaint aforesaid, upon request of said agent may authorize the board of state charities to take and indenture, or place in charge of any person or in the state primary school, such child till he or she attains the age of twenty-one years, or for any less time. And said board may provide for the maintenance of any such child so indentured or placed in charge of a person, in whole or in part, at a cost to the state not exceeding the average cost of the support of children at the state primary school. Amended 1871 chapter 365: Section ten of said chapter is hereby amended by inserting after the words "state primary school", in the fifth line, the words, "or if the child prove unmanageable to transfer and commit to the state reform, nautical or industrial school, subject to such conditions of sex and age as are now defined by law for admission to said schools."

33 Seventeenth Annual Report, 1870, Superintendent Horace Wakefield, pp. 36-7.
the regular framework as a challenge that could be handled, so long as the numbers were not too great. 34

The Superintendent went into some detail about the system of self-discipline that had been introduced into the school in order to cope with the change in composition of the school population. It would make many a teacher envious today. 35 No headmaster of a public school in England could have wished for more: a monitor system whereby the trustworthy boys were put in charge of making rules and reporting offenders, but not empowered to punish; peer discipline, as “it became popular to do right” and new boys soon fell under the spell; and no blatant plans for escape. The boys even curbed their language and their quarrelsome natures. But we know from the annual reports that there were still runaways.

The Superintendent also served as the spiritual leader of the school. In his capacity as chaplain he claimed that the continuation of the program led to a situation whereby corporal punishment was rarely required.

[A] society of the children was formed, denominated the "Band of the Tried and True", whose name indicates the character of the boys and girls who compose it. Each member is pledged to abstain from lying, stealing, swearing and kindred vices, and also not to use intoxicating drinks or tobacco. They bind themselves to do right, and uphold the right by

34 There is a critical mass, which cannot be exceeded if integration is to be successful between two different populations in a school.

35 “Some of the most trustworthy boys were selected, and placed in charge of sections of the school, with power to promulgate rules, admonish, and report offenders to the principal, but with no authority to punish. Rewards were offered for exemplary conduct, and positions of trust given to those who especially deserved such honor. The plan worked well, so far that the general order was improved, and the necessity to resort to severe punishment became less frequent. A healthy public sentiment was generated. It became popular to do right. The new boys soon found this out. After two or three attempts, they ceased to talk openly about running away, even if they secretly meditated the plan. Some of the more prevalent bad habits, such as swearing, quarrelling and the like, were also suppressed in this way. Seventeenth Annual Report, 1870, Superintendent p. 37.
discountenancing evil. They are admitted to the privileges of membership, by a form of initiation prepared especially for the purpose. Associated with the "Band" is a Council composed of the teachers and officers of the school, and all cases of the violation of pledges are brought before a standing committee on discipline. The penalty is deprivation, for a time, of the privileges of membership.36

During the Depression that swept the country in 1873, there was little work for adults and virtually no employment for children. Truancy increased. An Act concerning truancy and absenteeism37 attempted to deal with the problem. Once again the Primary School became the designated depository for these truant children, subject to the consent of the State Board of Charities. Not strictly speaking status offenders but also certainly not criminals, these children had broken the by-laws by not attending school or not being gainfully employed, and they often wandered the streets. The courts sent them to truant schools in their various counties or to the State Primary School at Monson. The city or town that had sent them paid for children admitted to the School.


37 An Act concerning truant children and absentees from school. 1873 chapter 262
"Section 1. Each city and town shall make all needful provisions and arrangements concerning habitual truants and children between the ages of seven and fifteen years who may be found wandering about in the streets or public places of such city or town, having no lawful occupation or business, not attending school, and growing up in ignorance, and shall also, make such by-laws as shall be most conducive to the welfare of such children, and to the good order of such city or town; and shall provide suitable places for the confinement, discipline and instruction of such children: provided, that said by-laws shall be approved by the superior court, or a justice thereof, or by the judge of probate of the county.
"Section 7. Any city or town may, with the assent of the board of state charities, assign the state primary school at Monson as the place of confinement, discipline and instruction for persons convicted under the provisions of this act, instead of the truant schools heretofore mentioned; and shall pay for the support of such persons committed thereto, such sum as the inspectors of said school shall determine, not exceeding two dollars per week for each person. Any minor so committed may, upon satisfactory proof of amendment, or for other sufficient cause, be discharged by the board of state charities."
An 1882 Act dealing with neglected and indigent children designated the State Primary School as one of the places in which such children could be placed when they fell on the charity of the state through the negligence of their parents. In all these statutes that deal with juvenile offenders and neglected and dependent children, the children were committed to the custody of the Board to the age of 21. However, the age of indenture had been lowered to 18 because older children ran away without completing their obligation to remain with the indentee. At that age they could earn a higher wage than had been guaranteed by the indenture. The Visiting Agent therefore retained responsibility to watch out for these wards even after they had completed their indentures and gone to work on their own account, unless the Board discharged them from its custody. Prior to 1882, juvenile offenders were placed in the custody of the Board of State Charities on a temporary custody or support basis. After 1882, they were placed in permanent custody immediately. Beginning in 1890, both the juvenile offenders and the neglected and dependent children were immediately placed in

38An Act relating to indigent and neglected children. 1882 chapter 181
"Section 2. The state board of health, lunacy and charity shall make all necessary provision for the care and maintenance of all poor and indigent children in need of immediate relief, between the ages of three and sixteen years, having no lawful settlement in this Commonwealth, at the state primary school or elsewhere, and for that purpose shall have the same authority to commit such children to the state primary school as overseers of the poor have to commit them to the state almshouse."

"Section 3. Whenever it shall be made to appear to any court or magistrate that within his jurisdiction any child under fourteen years of age, by reason of orphanage, or of the neglect, crime, drunkenness or other vice of his parents, is growing up without education or salutary control, and in circumstances exposing him to lead an idle and dissolute life, or is dependent upon public charity, such court or magistrate shall, after notice to the state board of health, lunacy and charity, commit such child, if he has no known settlement in this Commonwealth, to the custody of the said board, and if he has a known settlement then to the overseers of the poor of that city or town in which he has such settlement, except in the city of Boston, and if he has a settlement in said city, then to the directors of public institutions of said city until he arrives at the age of twenty-one years, or for any less time; and the said board, overseers and directors are authorized to make all needful arrangements for the care and maintenance of children so committed in some state, municipal or town institution, or in some respectable family, and to discharge such children from their custody whenever the object of their commitment has been accomplished."

39 See Chapter 3.
the custody of the Board, and then either committed to reformatories, or to the Primary School, or placed directly with families.

In the 1880s there was a further major change in policy at the State Primary School. The Board of State Charities and the School increased the number of children they indentured, placed out, and later boarded out. These children then came within the sphere of influence and responsibility of the Visiting Agent. Although officially pupils of the Primary School, many of these children actually spent very little time on the premises. Instead they were placed in homes almost immediately upon being admitted to the School. On July 14, 1880, the trustees of the State Primary held a meeting at Monson and passed a set of regulations governing the placing out of children from the school.

40 See Chapter 4.

41 Appended to the Annual Report of the State Primary School, October 1880, p.11. Compare with the indenture agreements in Chapter 3.

"1. The price per week for board and clothes shall be determined by the age of the child, but shall not exceed $1.50 per week, and such supplies of clothing as may be deemed necessary, or its equivalent in money, except by a special arrangement with the Superintendent and the Monson Committee. Payments may be made quarterly. No compensation shall be paid for the support of any child over ten years of age except in cases of infirmity or deformity, by the express permission of the Trustees.
2. Children before leaving the institution shall be examined by the physician, and a certificate given stating their physical condition; any physical defect, such as the loss of an eye, partial deafness, or any deformity, shall be mentioned, and a similar examination and certificate shall be required when the child is returned to the school. The result of both examinations shall be added to the record of the child.
3. Histories of children shall not be given, except as to whether or not they are orphaned. Illegitimacy shall not be mentioned.
4. A distinct understanding shall exist that persons taking children are to treat them, so far as possible, as their own, and place the children in a condition of equality with the family.
5. When there is a probability of future adoption, applicants may be allowed preference in selecting a child, but otherwise the selection shall be by those having the children in charge.
6. Not more than two children, unless brothers and sisters, shall be boarded in one family.
7. Brothers and sisters shall be placed in the same neighborhood whenever practicable.
8. Cases of illness shall be immediately reported to both the Visitor and Superintendent.
Children affected with diseases assuming a chronic character may be returned to the institution.
9. Children from six to ten years of age shall attend school the entire school year established in the town where they reside; shall have the usual religious privileges of church and Sabbath-school; shall be taught the care of their clothing and other personal effects; and girls shall be trained in household duties, knitting, sewing, and mending, according to their strength.
10. No child shall be boarded out of State."
How much money should be paid to the family accepting a child, to cover the cost of food and clothing until that child turned ten? No more than $1.50 per week, which would be approximately $25 a week in today’s dollar. Nothing would be paid beyond the age of ten, unless the child was ill or deformed. By then the child was assumed to be able to perform the same tasks as an indentured servant and therefore to pay for his or her keep.

A physician examined every child who left the School, and once again when the child returned. A record of any physical defects was entered in the child’s file. This practice provided the basis for continued payment for children over the age of ten only if they were deformed or ill. It also served to protect the child from unscrupulous foster families who might have sought to harm a child in order to continue to receive financial assistance.

No information about the background of the child - and specifically if there was a question of illegitimacy - was available to the boarding families, other than whether the parents were alive. Parents were a constant thorn in the side of the system. As soon as the parents found work and regained financial security, they had the inconvenient habit of turning up and demanding to have their children returned to their custody. This was particularly so when the child was of an age to go out to work to help support the family. Potential foster families

42 Ibid., section 1
43 Calculated according to Consumer Price Index (CPI) Conversion Factors to Convert to Dollars of the Year 2000 published by Robert C. Sahr, Political Science Department, Oregon State University, Corvallis OR 97331-6206, appended to this chapter and available on line at http://www.orst.edu/Dept/pol_sci/fac/sahr/sahrhome.html.
44 cf. note 40. Section 2
preferred to take an orphaned child who would remain in the household for a longer period of time after acquiring necessary skills.

The foster family was expected to treat the child as one of its own, on an equal footing with the natural-born children in the household. The family in charge of the child also had the first option to adopt that child if and when any possibility of adoption arose. The child could only be offered to other families if the foster family had chosen not to adopt. No more than two children could be placed in one family unless they were siblings. This prevented families from becoming child farmers making a living out of taking children into their homes. Every effort was supposed to be made to place siblings in the same neighborhood, so as to maintain a family connection as much as possible. The files of the school contain many heart-breaking letters from children asking after their siblings and requesting to be reunited with them.

All cases of illness had to be reported immediately both to the Superintendent and to the Visiting Agent to ensure that children received adequate care. A child developing a chronic illness could be returned to the School, presumably because both the financial and emotional burdens would be too great on the host family.

45 Ibid. Section 3
46 Ibid. Section 4
47 Ibid. Section 5
48 Ibid. Section 6
49 Ibid. Section 7
50 Correspondence files of the Monson State Primary School in the Massachusetts State Archives.
51 cf. note 40. Section 8
The education requirements\textsuperscript{52} included compulsory schooling all year in whatever educational facility the town provided where the children lived. The children also had to attend Sunday school and church for religious education. The weekly attendance at Sunday school and church also meant that children appeared in public on a regular basis. If the children were being abused in the foster home, the members of the congregation would see the damage. This served as a further protection for such children. They could not be abused silently and in secret without being seen. Learning how to care for their own personal hygiene and their clothing was a basic socialization skill for which families were responsible. In addition, girls were to be taught household skills – sewing, knitting, and mending “according to their strength.”

Finally, no child was to be boarded out of State.\textsuperscript{53} The Commonwealth assumed responsibility for these children through its legal system and committed them to an institution until their majority. It would not possible to fulfill this obligation if the children were removed to a different jurisdiction. There were no trains West for the Monson Primary School pupils.\textsuperscript{54}

These requirements were intended to protect the children and to provide for their needs. The trustees requested a special appropriation to facilitate the boarding out of not less than fifty children per year, which at a rate of $1.50 ($25

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. Section 9

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. Section 10

today) per week came to $4200 ($70,000 today) a year. This was not a very high price to pay for what the trustees had come to believe was the best system for the welfare and future socialization of the child - as well as being the most financially beneficial to the state. The trustees justified their arguments for boarding out by explaining that institutional life breeds dependence and not responsibility. A child will expect to be fed and clothed and kept warm if he or she only lives in an institution. A child in a family will know that there is no food on the table if the vegetables are not picked, the cow milked and the poultry slaughtered. There will be no heat without gathering wood. And there will be no clothes if they are not sewn and laundered. These matters would be learned in the natural way - by experience and not by preaching - in the natural environment of society, namely the family.

By 1895 when the School closed down the legislators had concluded that whatever work previously had been done by the School had been superceded either by reformatories or by placing children in families, so that there was no longer much need for a separate State institution.

55 cf. note 42 above on p. 38 for calculation.

56 Reviewing ten years of boarding out, the trustees published in their Twelfth Annual Report (Public Document No. 18) in October 1890 (p6) the following summary:

"First child placed at board in January, 1881
Total number boarded to date, Sept. 30, 1890 446
Of these,
Returned to State Primary School, 13
Died, 8
Placed in free homes, including 40 legally adopted, 53
Otherwise provided for, 3
Discharged to friends 56
Remaining at board 213"

57 An Act relative to children in the care of the State Chapter 428 passed on May 16, 1895: "Section 1. The state primary school at Monson shall on the first Monday in July in the year eighteen hundred and ninety-five cease to exist.
Section 2. The trustees of the state primary and reform schools shall hereafter be known as the trustees of the Lyman and Industrial Schools, and shall retain all their present duties, except so far as same may be affected by the state primary school ceasing to exist."
The Institution

In his report to the Trustees in 1877, Superintendent, J.H. Bradford presented his list of “wants” for the Primary School. The School needed a suitable supply of water; pure air through proper ventilation of the rooms, which had not been built for the needs of a school but were converted from the old almshouse; and a proper chapel for prayer, entertainment, social gatherings, and singing lessons. Superintendent Bradford also emphasized the need for a playroom and wash room above ground because "a cellar is no place to keep human beings three or four hours a day".

In addition to the physical requirements of the School, there were administrative needs. Superintendent Bradford made an impassioned plea for what he called "classification." He did not want to lump together under one roof children who came from very different sources. There were paupers who still arrived despite changes in the law, but they served as a bad example within the impressionable minds of the children. The disabled babies and young children would never be able to leave the institutional life and needed different training. Twelve-foot walls were an insufficient deterrent for what he called the "court" boys - but the disciplinary rules imposed because of them were a burden on the other children. Bradford did not think different groups of children should be separated entirely, but he demanded that they be classified, without explaining

---

58 The choir of the School gave concerts that raised the self-esteem of the choristers and provided an income that was an integral part of the income of the institution.

what the consequences of classification entailed. His final appeal was for the right to indenture the School children directly without going through the Board of State Charities and the Visiting Agent. "When a man wants merchandise, he goes to a seller, examines, and obtains it. Why should not children be obtained from those who have care of them?" Stark commercial language like this will be encountered again in the next chapter on indenture.60

In 1881, however, the trustees admitted that their fears of the influence of the "court boys" had been unfounded. There was no longer a need for high walls and fences to contain these boys, as they stayed of their own accord. Furthermore, the characters of these juvenile delinquents had not had a negative influence on the other children. The trustees felt that the officers attending the court sessions accepted for guardianship by the Board only those minor offenders who would not unduly upset the delicate balance maintained by the administration. In fact, these children were probably not really criminals but had been defined as such by society and a legal system with an intensifying fear of vagrancy and truancy, as well as a desire to educate future citizens of America.61

60 See Chapter 3

61 Annual Report of the Monson State Primary School, October 1881, Trustees report, pp.5-6. "We have reason to believe that, as the school is now carried on, our fears were groundless; the result of the year's experiment have been to show that while good influences so preponderate the experiment may be safely continued. It must be remembered that great pains have been taken by the officers attending the courts to take into the care of the Board only those whom they judge not to be in need of the discipline of the reform or industrial schools, but those who need only to be checked and set on the right track."
Education

The various classes at the Primary School\textsuperscript{62} were labeled "schools" and numbered backwards. The first school had the oldest and most advanced pupils. The eighth was the Kindergarten. The curriculum included subjects traditionally taught in the regular State schools - reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography. Once a month there was a session devoted to letter writing and occasionally a lesson in composition. There were requirements for promotion from one school to another based solely on intellectual achievement, not on age. Promotions took place twice a year after examinations.

One problem facing the School was the fact that the student population was volatile. On average, a child remained in the School only two years. There was also constant coming and going as a result of children going out on trial and returning and then going out again, until they finally found a permanent and suitable place. Another reason was the great difference in ability among the children, especially the mentally handicapped admitted to the School but not able to handle a regular learning load. They hampered the progress of the other children but could not be excluded from the schoolroom.

In all the annual reports, the principals emphasized the moral education of the children, who had lessons in deportment with an emphasis on veracity; guided reading in the library; poetry evenings and theatricals; and music as an integral part of both their secular and religious education. This was an extremely

\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Annual Report of the Monson State Primary School}, October 1880, Principal's report, pp. 48-51. At this time the principal was a woman, Genevieve Mills.
rich educational program if the children were indeed receiving the reported diversified training.

**Labor**

The State Primary School was dedicated to the education of the children both in the classroom and through physical labor. The day was divided between work and study, which is why there were two shifts in the classroom every day. Those who worked in the morning studied in the afternoon, and vice versa. The boys worked on the farm and in the bakery, the girls in the kitchen and at sewing and household chores. Maintenance of the institution was considered an integral part of the children's education. It was not regarded as an extra activity, nor even promoted as training for the future. Whether the children grew up to be farmers or seamstresses was not relevant. What was considered essential was the internalization of the principles of industry, responsibility, and the benefits of hard work. These principles needed to become an integral part of the children's characters as a result of constant practice and training. The children also learned the virtues of cleanliness and responsibility for their own clothes and surroundings. The pattern did not change from year to year. We can repeatedly find descriptions of busy little bees happily pursuing their daily chores with interest and pride in their work.63

---

63 "The day begins at half past five; breakfast at half past six. At half past seven both boys and girls, with the exception of those who are to attend the morning school session, take part in the housework or outside work, under the direction of the officers. Some make beds, others wash dishes and assist in the different departments of washing and cooking; some scrub floors in sleeping-rooms, dining-room, and halls; and others assist in the nursery. More than fifty boys work on the farm and garden and about the barn.

"The girls in the sewing-room and the boys in the tailor's shop, four of whom are lame, are kept heartily interested, besides accomplishing excellent seams and buttonholes. The boys sit cross-legged on a large table. When a boy has learned to make himself a whole suit, he is allowed to put in a pair of additional pockets." *Annual Report of the Monson State Primary School, October 1881, Trustees Report, p. 4.*
In addition to these daily activities, the School introduced various special projects over the years that generated income, such as finishing stockings for a hosiery company, weaving the seats for chairs, running a printing press, and washing silk.

"Our silk-industry is a very pleasant feature to visitors. I think the State of Massachusetts could well afford to promote such an industry by erecting proper buildings and supplying machinery, as it gives those who work at it a trade by which they can earn a good living."64

When Gardener Tufts became the superintendent in 1880, however, he closed down the silk industry, which brought in such a small amount that he did not consider it worthwhile, and the seat weaving, which brought in nothing at all. He justified his actions by arguing that the benefit of the labor was much less than the time wasted that could be better spent on schooling. The children were sufficiently employed and learned the values imbued by regular work when laboring at the maintenance of the School. In his opinion, the children needed no further work activity.

Amos Andrews became the superintendent in 1887 and introduced carpentry to the School, not as a trade but as a skill. He believed in manual training to develop hand-head co-ordination. He wrote that all the boys in the School gained a basic knowledge of reading, writing, arithmetic and geography, but very few of them would pursue academic studies in the future. He believed in

---

64 Annual Report of the Monson State Primary School, October 1878, Superintendent's Report, p.23.
the positive effect on general problem-solving skills of learning to work with one’s hands.65

If the boy can be taught to think, and led to give expression to his thoughts by forming something with his hands, his education becomes a broader one because of it. He may not pursue such a line of work when sent away from the school, but he is better fitted for the work to which he may be called because of the knowledge he has gained in forming something.

And what is the work to which he may be called? The Monson School did not see itself as a training ground for the future leaders of the country. It saw itself as the training ground for the future laborers of society.

Conclusion

The Monson Almshouse became the State Pauper School and then the State Primary School within a period of forty years. Each decade saw its own changes as the legislators followed the trustees of the institutions and the members of the Board of State Charity in their quest to provide for the pauper children of Massachusetts - those who were neglected, rather than criminal. Christian charity demanded that the defenseless and dependent be cared for by the better placed in society, at the expense of society. In the long run, this would also benefit of society. Civic responsibility demanded the education of pauper children who were the future citizens of Massachusetts and the United States. As citizens, they would bear the responsibility, together with their more fortunate brethren, for the development and growth of the New Republic. And for this task

65 Annual Report of the Monson State Primary School, October 1888, p.3.
the children needed to be socialized, Americanized, and taught necessary values.

The divisive Civil War years increased the number of children in the School. Hard times and the death of parents forced more families to turn to the state for assistance - one aspect of which was placing their children in the care of the School until the parents were able to re-establish themselves and provide for the children within the family household. Widows forced to work also had to have arrangements for their children. Men out of work during the Depression could no longer provide for their families.

The children of the many immigrants who flocked to the shores of Massachusetts in the second half of the nineteenth century formed a large proportion of children in need of State care, acculturation, and preparation for their task as adult Americans.

The question for the trustees and for the Legislature is, "How can these children, not defective in body or mind, yet the offspring of the classes who form a standing menace to the State, be transformed into law-abiding, self-supporting citizens?" The policy that will best further that end is the policy that Massachusetts is bound to accept, by her own enlightened traditions.66

The theme of the dangerous classes echoes throughout - expressing the tension between Americanizing the vast number of immigrant children and absorbing them into society, and the fear that they might ultimately overwhelm the "native" New England population rather than being absorbed by them. It was

66Fifteenth Annual Report -Trustees-State Primary and ReformSchools.1894. p.14
hoped that education, positive example, and immersion in the New England way of life would overcome whatever "natural propensities" the children had inherited from their parents.

. . . There is another consideration on this point that ought not to be overlooked. Children of foreign parentage, by being constantly and exclusively associated with Americans in relation of matrons, teachers, &c., generally soon lose, in a great degree, their earlier habits, peculiarities and associations as foreigners, and become assimilated to those under whose influence and instructions they are placed. Thus they grow to maturity, like the children of our own citizens, educated in the spirit and principles of our institutions, and prepared to take their positions, at full age, as intelligent and worthy members of our community.67

The changes in the School reflected changes in social philosophy. During the great age of the asylum, incarcerating the so-called abnormal elements of society seemed the best way to handle those who deviated from the norm – the mentally ill, the physically ill, the poor and the vagrant. At that time the State Primary School flourished and often had more inmates than it could successfully handle. The constant tension between two needs - the need to provide an education for these special children and the need to do so in the most financially prudent way – meant that the trustees constantly sought to lower costs. The trustees justified placing children in families as soon as possible because they claimed this was the natural order of things and would produce the best adjusted children socially. In the next breath, however, they emphasized the economic advantage - only $1.50 ($25 today) per child week as against $1.58 ($26.30 today) in the School. Eight cents ($1.30 today) a week per child, given the

67 Ibid.
68 cf. note 42 above for calculation
hundreds of children passing through the School at that time, added up to a
substantial saving to the state.69

This school has a double duty to fulfill: 1st, toward the children, many of
whom know no other home, who cannot be fairly treated unless their bodies
are provided with healthful food, air, and exercise, and their minds daily
filled with healthful interests; 2d, toward the tax-payers, by whom the school
is supported who have a right to demand that these children be prepared at
a reasonable cost to become, so far as possible, honest, self-supporting
citizens, never to drift back and become again a burden on the State.

And in this quest, the trustees and the legislators ultimately reached the
conclusion that the State Primary School was no longer of service to the state,
having been replaced by the dual solutions of reformatories and direct placing out
in families.

---

69 Annual Report of the Monson State Primary School, October 1881, p.4.
3.
Indentures:
Training or Exploitation?

Introduction

An indenture is a contract binding one party into the service of another for a specified term. Such contracts were the basis of placing children from the State Primary School in the homes of citizens of Massachusetts and the surrounding New England states. Usually the boys served as farmhands and the girls as housemaids. Placing children in private homes predated the practice of placing them in institutions - almshouses, schools, and reformatories - and once again became the preferred method to provide for the needs of destitute and neglected children when the limitations of institutionalization became apparent. The family was regarded as the natural basic unit of society. Socialization within a family framework generally seemed superior to socialization in an institution. As early as 1869, the Board of State Charities declared:

The Board has often and earnestly urged, that the policy of placing out the children of all the reformatories as soon as places can be found for them, should be substituted for the prevailing policy of retaining them in the central establishment, with a view to teaching and reforming them by its discipline. If this policy is persistently followed in the State Primary School, the effect will be to place the children where they are needed; and where they have the best chance of becoming good men and women; and to keep reducing the numbers in the central establishment until it shall become a mere receiving and distributing station. . .

1 Webster’s Dictionary (1828 edition) defines indenture (noun) as “a writing containing a contract” and indenture (verb) as “to bind by indentures; as, to indenture an apprentice.” From the online edition provided by Christian Technologies, Inc.

2 Sixth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, 1869 pp. cv-cvi
It was obviously not a simple matter to achieve this purpose, and in 1874 the Board once again reported:\(^3\)

The means of classifying and separating the pupils at Monson are not all that could be desired; and though the general results of the Primary School are satisfactory, and, in most respects, better and better from year to year, it is still possible to improve them. And we believe it not only possible, but very practicable, to place the children there more rapidly in good families, and thus to train them, under good influences, to an earlier and more complete recovery of that position in the community which is the birthright of every American-born child, however unfortunate his parentage; but which these poor children may lose beyond recovery by long residence in a public establishment . . .

However, when the State Primary School finally closed in 1894, it was not because the purpose of serving as a receiving and distributing station had been achieved, but because the children being sent there were no longer the neglected and destitute. They were young criminals who could better be dealt with within the frameworks of the reformatories. Beginning in the mid 1880’s, the School also underwent a change from its role as an institution dedicated primarily to the education of the future citizens of the United States to becoming an employment agency for the young people who came under its care.

**History of Indenture**

In 1639, the Court of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay ordered

---

\(^3\) *Eleventh Annual Report of the Board of State Charities*, 1874 pp. xxxv-xxxvi
that any shire court, or any two magistrates out of court, shall have power, to
determine all difference about the lawful settling, and providing for, poor
persons; and to dispose of all unsettled persons into such towns, as they shall
judge to be most fit for the maintenance and employment of such persons and
families, for the ease of this country.  

This practice of indenture is traceable at least to the English Poor Laws of
Elizabethan times. It derived directly from the 43rd Act of Elizabeth, by which
Parliament appropriated two hundred thousand pounds for

the support of the aged, blind, impotent and sick; for the employment of children
whose parents could not maintain them; for the apprenticing of poor children;
and for setting the idle to work.  

In Puritan New England, indenture provided for the needs of the poor. Many
colonists arrived as indentured servants as a condition of their immigration in order to
pay for their passage. Regular families often chose to educate their own children by
placing them in the home of another family where the tendency of parents to indulge
their own children could be avoided. Thus indenture had a long history and was one
of the ways the Monson State Primary School provided for the children brought into
its care.

There were two other means for placing the children of the State Primary
School in families. Those over fifteen often were placed by verbal agreement when
the inspectors of the Board of State Charities felt that families would be unwilling to

---

4 Charters and General Laws of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay, published by order of
the General Court, 1814, p.173 and quoted in House Document #1, Report of the Commissioners
appointed by order of the House of Representatives, Feb. 29 1832, on the subject of the Pauper
System of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, (Boston: Dutton & Wentworth, State Printers 1833)
p.6

5 Ibid. p.7

6 Demos, John, A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony, 1970
sign a formal indenture agreement. As all children were indentured to the age of eighteen, older children would remain with the family for no more than three years. Their labor over such a short period would not compensate the indentees for the expense incurred in feeding, clothing, educating and training these children.

Indenture was unsuitable for very young children who remained in the institutions longer than was desirable because they could not work for their keep. In 1874, the State Board of Charities recommended that very young children be placed in foster homes for a fee until the age of twelve. Although these children were too young to provide service, the trustees of the School hoped that the families would become attached to them and would then either continue with a formal indenture or adopt the child as a member of the family.7

As a general rule, the persons who now take children into their families from the State institutions, do so primarily for their own advantage, and only secondarily, if at all, for the good of the child; but it frequently happens that the child who was taken as a servant secures a place in the affections of the family taking him, and so the connection ceases to be a mercenary one. These cases, however, do not form the rule, it is to be feared, and this for the reason that the better families in the State - that is, the families of the most virtue and humanity and wisdom - do not generally apply for pauper children to be brought up in their houses.8

The success of this policy was limited, Apparently the good citizens of the Commonwealth did not willingly fulfil their Christian duty to provide for these children

---

7 Eleventh Annual Report of the State Board of Charities, 1874 p. xcvi “Recommendations: 2. That a small appropriation be made, to pay the board in good families of some of the younger pupils of the State Primary School."

8 Fifth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, 1868, report of the Secretary, p.45.
for the greater benefit of the society. In 1878 the inspectors expressed their regret to
the Board that there had not been a greater success.⁹

“The inspectors express regret that a larger number have not been placed in
homes, and say that measures are under consideration to secure greater
efficiency in this important feature of their work; and the superintendent remarks
that the system of putting out should be revised, so as to bring the producer and
the consumer into close communication with each other.”

The use of such commercial language was not uncommon in many matters dealing
with the children of the Primary School. They were often spoken of in terms more
suited to commodities¹⁰ than people - supply and demand, producer and consumer,
seasonal demand according to the need for farm labor, planting, harvests.¹¹ These
terms are harsh to our modern ears, but perhaps they were understood differently at
the time. The following is the text of a handwritten letter found amongst the indenture
agreements in the Massachusetts State Archives.¹² It is quoted primarily for its
language, namely the "use" of the boy for which he receives remuneration:

Rochester Vmt. 1879

I hereby agree to board, suitably clothe, and care for P....E...M.....¹³- a boy

---
¹⁰ See Mary Sarah Bilder, “The Struggle over Immigration: Indentured Servants, Slaves, and Articles
¹¹ Sixth Annual Report of the State Board of Charities, 1869, report of the Visiting Agent, p.177.
¹² This document was found in the files of the State Board of Charities - Department of Out-Door
Poor. On the back appear serial number 2271, the name of the indentee and the rubber stamp of the
Visiting Agency with the date April 2, 1879.
¹³ At the request of the Archivist, the names of the children have either been changed or designated
only by initials.
in the guardianship of the Visiting Agent of the Board of State Charities of Mass - until the 16th day of May 1880 - to send him to school during the winter - and have him properly clothed for a boy of his age - at that time - and to pay to the Visiting Agent of said Board- at that time - for the use of said M..... - the sum of twenty dollars -

W..... S.....H......

In 1869, the trustees were empowered to cancel indenture agreements at their discretion, even when the indentee had not violated the terms of the indenture, if the trustees deemed this cancellation to be in the best interests of the child. The legal status of the children as wards of the State did not change when the indenture was cancelled, however. The intention of this clause apparently was to provide the means whereby the trustees could return a child to the custodianship of its parents if the circumstances of the parents had changed in such a way as to make such action seem desirable. The Secretary of the Board criticized this policy. He argued that the court had previously exercised this power, although the inspectors of the Primary School had always framed their indentures in a manner that provided only for conditional indentures. The Secretary thought this power would weaken the demand for children because the indentees would be unwilling to enter into a contract that could be cancelled unilaterally without any breach of contract on their part.

An indenture loses its force if it can be annulled without previous violation of compact, and worthy people will be slow to subject themselves to such a liability. That families can still be found to take children even on the condition in

14 Acts of 1869, Chapter 302
15 General Statutes, Chapter 111, Section 11
16 Sixth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, 1869, Secretary, pp.42-4.
question, indicates at once a well-grounded confidence in the discretion of the trustees, and a great want to be supplied. . . While this law tends to make masters more considerate, it also tends to create an unsettled feeling in both master and child, unfavorable to the work of reformation designed.

Boarding out was also encouraged for physically and mentally disabled children who would never find a home under the regular terms of indenture and would otherwise find themselves institutionalized for the rest of their lives. Besides considering the financial burden to the state, the inspectors must be credited with a desire to provide a better standard of living for these unfortunates.

The Purpose of Indenture

In their annual report 17 of October 1861, the inspectors of the Monson School wrote the following:

Three schools with an average attendance of three hundred and twenty five children have been kept by competent and faithful teachers. The number of pupils is large in each school, and the necessity of adding another branch to this department is apparent. As the little girls and boys are fitted for indenturing by their teachers, receiving impressions of a permanent character, we consider the schools an important feature of the institution.

This is as clear a statement of intention as one might wish to find. The school provided a framework for disciplining and educating the children, but the real purpose was to prepare these children for life in the outside world; ostensibly to make them self-supporting and thereby to break the cycle of poverty - in fact, to fit them for their proper station in life.

17 Eighth Annual Report, Monson State Primary School, October 1861, Public Document No. 30, p.4
The report continued with a statement about the numbers of children indentured. This confirmed the economic nature of the indenture agreements and their close connection to the economy of a country involved in a bloody Civil War:

The number of children indentured and put out on trial during the year is eighty-nine. This is a smaller number than were indentured in each of the two preceding years, and is owing, no doubt, to the unfortunate condition of the country.\textsuperscript{18}

There may have been a shortage of working hands on the farms but the families were also economically strapped and could not take on the responsibility for further mouths to feed.

Furthermore, the question of indenture preoccupied the inspectors. They were concerned that the system had to work successfully for all concerned:

The binding out of children is a source of constant solicitude to the Inspectors. While the larger portion bound out prove satisfactory, in some instances the guardian makes a bad bargain, and after keeping the child several months, and in some cases three or four years, the Inspectors are called upon to annul the indentures and take the child back. The complaint is usually that the child has developed a stubborn disposition and become unmanageable. The fault is sometimes on the other side, and to ascertain the real state of the case, to do what is best for the child, and deal justly by the guardian, is no enviable undertaking.

This “binding out” was a continuation of the practice of apprenticeship by which young people had been educated and taught a trade going back to early

\textsuperscript{18} Eighth Annual Report of the Inspectors to the State Board of Charity, 1861.
Puritan New England. The parents took responsibility for the welfare of their children, supervising the treatment of their children and ensuring that they were not abused. This practice of apprenticeship among families had nothing to do with the 1639 Puritan ordinance that provided for the indenturing of pauper children so that they would not become a burden on society. It was a means of education undertaken voluntarily and by choice by the parents. The ultimate responsibility for the welfare of the children remained with the natural parents.

In the same way, the indenturing of Primary School Children was specifically not an extension of the indenture of pauper children. As the inspectors wrote in 1866,

> Under the regulations of the school, no child is to be bound out to service in the manner prescribed for indenturing paupers. This custom is superseded by a more humane and desirable system. Children admitted to the school, become State pupils during their minority, or until they are discharged by the Board of State Charities. They may be placed in families for a term of years, and a written agreement between the Inspectors and the persons taking them provides for their education, their treatment, and proper training. They are to remain under control of the State authorities, subject to visitation from an agent of the board of State Charities, the Inspectors, and Superintendent, and may be removed at any time when the Inspectors consider it advisable.

The legal status of these children was clear. They were under the care of the State until their majority. They had been placed in that situation by a decision of the courts and placed in the Primary School by mittimus, a document issued by the court, stating the terms under which the child was committed. The main difference was that

---

the parents were no longer the legal guardians of these children, having lost that right by neglecting to provide the care necessary for the well-being of the children. The State, acting *in loco parentis*, assumed responsibility for the education, health, and general welfare of these children and discharged that responsibility through the State Primary School and the practice of indenture. Supervision of the children outside the walls of the School now fell to the Visiting Agent.21

**The Nature of Indenture**

What was the nature of indenture in the period under consideration? According to the Ninth Annual Report of 1862,

> The business of binding our children grows upon the institution every year. Since the opening of the almshouse, 622 children have been furnished with homes among the farmers and mechanics of New England. 454 of this number have been indentured since October 1, 1858. The utmost care is exercised in ascertaining the character of homes to which children are to be bound, before they are allowed to go from the charge of the Superintendent. Then they remain one month on trial before the Inspectors and Guardians sign the indentures. As might be expected, occasional difficulties arise which render it necessary to take children back, but such instances are few in comparison to the number indentured. We have the satisfaction of knowing that many of those indentured in the early history of the Institution have grown up respectable young men and women, while many others are promising equally well.22

20 *Thirteenth Annual Report*, Monson State Primary School, October 1866, pp 7-8

21 See Chapter 4.

22 *Ninth Annual Report*, Monson State Primary School, October 1862, p. 5
Undoubtedly, these reports are somewhat rosier than the reality\textsuperscript{23}. When the Visiting Agent began his task of tracing all the children placed out from the school, he found that many had run away and quite a few had disappeared. In later years, when the system of supervision had been developed more fully, the Visiting Agent’s knowledge of the whereabouts of the children improved. It is clear, however, that many children were shunted from one position to another time after time until they finally settled down. As for how these children grew up and what happened to them, there is no organized record. The correspondence files contain letters from some who mention that they are working in shops or hotels or trades. Some of the girls write to say they are married. The records of the School do not contain material that makes it possible to trace the history of the children from indenture to adulthood. Once children left the system, they disappeared from the record.\textsuperscript{24}

**A Typical Indenture Agreement**

Let us look at the terms of a typical indenture agreement.\textsuperscript{25} I have chosen as my main example an indenture signed in 1865\textsuperscript{26} concerning a thirteen-year old girl. This form has been printed in the feminine voice. (Usually, the forms had an “h” followed by a space in which the clerk filled in “him” or “her”.)

\textsuperscript{23} By 1869 the trustees were bemoaning the declining numbers of households willing to take on these children. See note 18 above.

\textsuperscript{24} The usual methods of tax records and city directories cannot help in these cases because we do not always know the real names of the children ad very often they were recorded only as case numbers. If there was a key, I did not find it amongst the papers of the school in the archives.

\textsuperscript{25} The indenture agreements are in the Massachusetts State Archives in the Monson School collection. The example quoted in this section is not the same as the example appended to this chapter.

\textsuperscript{26} Chapter 275 of the Acts of 1852.
The preamble, as in standard legal documents, first states the law under the authority of which the contract is made - in this case the Act of the Legislature of the State of Massachusetts of 1852, Chapter 275. It next specifies the parties to the agreement, namely the Inspectors of the State Almshouse at Monson and the indentee.27 Then the subject of the contract is mentioned, namely the child, including her name and age, and a description of the form of apprenticeship, in this case housekeeping, the date on which the apprenticeship begins, and the period through which it is binding - to the age of eighteen.

The most striking fact about these indenture agreements is that the only obligation imposed on the child is to remain the full period of the indenture. There is no stated requirement of obedience or diligence or application to the task demanded of the child. Perhaps this is understood, but in a document that lays down in such detail the list of obligations undertaken by the indentee,28 this omission is glaring. Beyond instructing her in the business of the said apprenticeship, the indentee guaranteed to provide her with schooling so she could learn “spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, and the several branches of other things usually taught in our common schools”. He also undertook to provide her with a moral and religious education. He would “allow and require her to attend public religious worship on the Sabbath”, providing her with suitable clothing for appearing in public. He was expected to act as a father to her, providing the kindly care and control that would protect her morals and keep her from “vicious habits and practices.” His mandate was to “train her up in such a way that she will become virtuous, intelligent, and

27 The term “indentee” is that used in the indenture agreements and refers to the person undertaking the indenture and the consequent care of the child.

28 The indentee was usually a man, though there are some instances of women indentees who may have been widows.
useful.” In addition, he must provide suitable board and clothing and must provide for her in sickness and in health “so that in no event shall the State or any town therein be at any expense whatever.”

He had to furnish a written report, at least each January, or at any other time as required by the Inspectors, “concerning the character, behavior, and condition” of the child. Furthermore, the Inspectors had the right to annul the agreement at any time, provided they stated their reasons in writing, if it should appear to them that the continuance of the indenture was “prejudicial to the moral interests and well being” of the child.

Finally, if the child remained for the full period of the indenture, the indentee was to pay her a sum of money (usually fifty dollars). He would also provide “two full suits of clothes, one for the Sabbath and the other for working days, and also a cloak and shawl, and will also give her a Bible.”

This contract is illuminating. Its format remained basically the same from 1854 to 1894. After 1866, the indentee was further obliged to provide the materials and opportunity for the child to correspond with the Superintendent and Trustees. After 1880, the schooling clause was changed to an obligation to send the child to school three months a year, to comply with the Commonwealth’s new compulsory education statute. There was also a new obligation to provide clothes for work (instead of the general statement that the child must be suitably dressed); there was

---

29 The basic format had probably not changed for centuries though I did not find indentures dating earlier than 1815.

30 Acts of 1866, Chapter 209.
no longer any mention of a Bible on completion of the contract, and also no mention of avoiding expense to the State.

As far as the text of the agreements is concerned, some of the differences between the requirements for boys and girls are noteworthy, though not surprising. For example, the boys usually received one hundred dollars after the end of their term. As they were bound, in the earlier years, to the age of twenty-one, this larger sum may have reflected the extra time they served and the fact that their labor was probably relatively more valuable in the final three years. They were provided an overcoat instead of a shawl. They usually did farm labor, but sometimes became shoemakers or blacksmiths.

Basic Children's Rights

The courts had appointed the trustees to protect the interests of the children. These agreements demonstrate a genuine concern for the welfare of the child based on the fact that the trustees had accepted the legal and moral responsibility for the well being of these children.

The earlier agreements did not provide an escape clause for the indentee if he was not satisfied with the child. In practice, however, the agreements frequently were annulled when the child did “not suit” or had become “stubborn” or was of “weak
moral character” - which usually meant the child was lazy or told lies. In the later agreements there was a clause that allowed the indentee the right to return the child at any time if the arrangement proved unsuitable. This clause can also be read as being in the interest of the child. A child forced to stay with an unwilling indentee would probably have risked maltreatment.

A further protection for the children was the requirement for public worship that sought to guarantee not only that the children would receive a religious education, but also that they would be seen at weekly meeting, which would presumably help protect them from abuse. If they had to appear in public, they would be properly dressed and presumably properly fed and cared for as well.

All the children were guaranteed an education - not exactly preparation for admission to Harvard College. At least the children would acquire sufficient literacy to enable them to realize their right to correspond with the trustees of the Monson School in the first instance and to enhance their position in society in the long run. This direct access to authority was put to use. There are letters from the children to the School, asking for information about siblings, complaining of their treatment, giving positive reports about their lives, or asking for a change of place.

31 The records of the Monson Primary School in the Massachusetts State Archives contain several files of cancelled indentures. In some cases the allotted time had expired, and in others the contract had been annulled. The reason for cancellation does not always appear on the form but, when it does, it usually is a question of incompatibility between the indentee and the child.

32 Later, there were regular visits by the Visiting Agents carried out four times a year, not at prearranged times, so that the children could be seen in situ unexpectedly and without special preparation (see Chapter 4).

33 D. K. of East Hampton, Mass. wrote on February 17, 1866. She left the almshouse in 1861 and wrote a long and impassioned letter pleading for information about her younger sister Mary, of whom she had promised her dying mother that she would take care. She now has a job in a button shop, earning $3 a week, and feels she can accept responsibility for her sister. She mentions a brother, Henry, but it is not clear whether she knows where he is or is in contact with him. He fought in the war, apparently. She accuses the State of relating to its wards as slaves and not caring for the human
The children who were indentured from the State Primary School could in no way be considered privileged. The basic rights they were guaranteed cover all the basic rights widely accepted today - including a roof over their heads, adequate clothing and food, medical care, an education, the means of earning a living, and spiritual comfort. In fact, the children were matched to the religion of their indentees - Catholic children going to Catholic homes and Protestant children to Protestant homes.\footnote{In all the lists and various records of the Primary School I found only two Jewish children - both boys. This does not mean that there were not more, but I did see the records of several thousand children over the period between 1854 and 1895. I have not investigated the reason for this but would hazard a guess that the Jewish children were cared for by the Jewish community.} The indenture agreements are remarkable documents in the modernity of their guarantee of Rights of the Child.\footnote{These letters appear in the files of correspondence of the Monson School and the Board of State Charities.}

Clearly the indentees did not always fulfil all the terms of the indenture agreements. Many masters abused and exploited the children, despite the efforts of the Visiting Agent and his assistants. However this does not override the main point which is that these rights were assumed in nineteenth century Massachusetts to be basic for the welfare of even the Commonwealth’s most unfortunate citizens - the children of paupers and the wards of the State. They are assumed to be basic in the world today and accepted as such by all signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.\footnote{At the end of this chapter I have included a short comparison of these rights with the rights of the child stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations on November 20, 1989, as yet not ratified by the United States.} The lawmakers of Massachusetts were feelings of poor people who also want to maintain family contacts. In the correspondence files of the Monson State Primary School. There was no response on record.\footnote{See section on the Convention at the end of this chapter.
remarkably modern in their approach - or else the lawmakers of today have not progressed very far in the past 150 years.

**Indentees**

The following is a standard form used by the Primary School and filled in by the potential indentee. The use of a form simplified the processing of the indenture applications and ensured that all the necessary information would be provided to both parties at the outset. The following form was found in a box containing material from the 1870s, but it is typical of applications throughout the period under consideration. Although the standard format includes an undertaking to take care of the child in sickness and in health, there are numerous cases in the Visitors Reports where children were sent back to Monson because of illness or injury, or the family with whom they stayed was reimbursed for the expenses incurred. All indenture recommendations were sent to the school at the very outset of the placing out procedure.\(^{38}\) It seems clear that the interested families were aware of their obligation to take on the full financial responsibility for the child. All the letters in this box are dated prior to the practice of placing children out on board.\(^{39}\)

Two Overseers of the Poor and the local Pastor signed the application. These men recommended the moral character of the applicant and his financial standing. They also mentioned his desire to provide the child with an education and proper

---

\(^{38}\) Some of the applicants were responding to advertisements in the local press such as the advert in the *Ploughman* of March 9, 1867 entitled "Homes for Children" and similar adverts in the *Congregationalist* and *Connecticut Courant*. In the correspondence files of the Monson State Primary School.

\(^{39}\) The families boarding children, who were too young to work, were not expected to incur the medical expenses of the child. They were also paid for the cost of his or her board and provided with clothing from the School.
care. They concluded by stipulating that this care would be provided both in sickness and in health.40

When the Visiting Agent went out to check on the applicants and verify the statements made in the application, it often turned out that the signatories had never met the person they were recommending. Sometimes the signatories were recommending an applicant who was related to someone who worked in their businesses or their homes. In such cases, it was the task of the Visiting Agent to speak to the neighbors of the potential indentee and to make whatever other enquiries were necessary to guarantee as far as possible that the child was being sent to a suitable home - Christian, financially stable, and of suitable character to care for a child.

Who were the applicants? What sort of child were they seeking? For what purpose? A rundown of a random selection of applications for 1872 and 1873 will give us some idea.41

- The Deacon of the Baptist Church in Amherst Village wanted to replace the girl who was then in the family as she was about to be married. He mentioned that there were three members in his family.
- Humphrey Prescott of Carlisle, Massachusetts was looking for an American or German girl between the ages of twelve and fourteen for his farm. He had two sons, so the girl was needed for the housework.

40 Form reproduced at the end of this chapter.

41 All these cases are in the records of the Monson State Primary School for 1871-4 in the Massachusetts State Archives.
• Elias Smith, a farmer in New Hampshire, lived near a Church and was willing to take an eleven-year old girl, though he would prefer a girl of twelve.

• Mrs. Wade of Wayland, who wanted a girl of thirteen or fourteen, was unusual in that she was a woman applicant.

• Thomas High, a carpenter in Marblehead with a little land, was looking for a boy aged twelve to fourteen. We can assume Mr High would be required to teach the child his trade.

• James Congdon of East Abington specifically mentioned that he wanted to train a boy of twelve to fourteen to be a shoemaker.

• Mrs. Dennie of Concorde was unhappy with Marjorie Bell the first time around but was willing to give her a second chance. The Visiting Agent marked this application as “an excellent place” so Marjorie probably went there.

• Joshua Bowman, a farmer in West Falmouth, did not mind whether the twelve-year old girl was white or colored, American or foreign, as long as she was good.

• Mr. Stoddard, a cashier at the Plymouth National Bank, needed a “stout boy” of fourteen or sixteen to work around the house as well as take care of and drive a horse.

• N.F. Bryant was looking for two boys to work on his new farm in Vermont. They should be “American boys, fourteen or sixteen not vicious, or intemperate, strong and healthy and without parents”.

---

42 The names of all the children in this chapter have been changed in accordance with the requirements of the archive.
• In 1872, Seba Howard, an elderly man with a great deal of property, wanted a boy who would not need much discipline. In 1873, his wife applied for a girl who could serve at the table but not sit at the table. She specified that the child should have “wholesome” good looks.

• Lemuel Haskell asked to adopt a girl – not Irish - between the ages of five and ten.

• Warren Chamberlain of West Dedham, Massachusetts had a forty-acre farm and needed a fifteen-year old to help him. He had three young children of his own and “an excellent wife”. His brother Geoffrey Chamberlain had a boy from the school called Peter Stevens.

• Charles Bliss expected “an honest, truthful girl” of twelve to do light work around the house and care for three little children under the age of six.

• John Gloucester of Milford, Massachusetts was willing to teach a colored boy to be a barber.

• Winslow Arnold of Marlboro was looking for a boy for his laundry whom he could teach to run an engine.

• William Earle of Needham was blind. James Murphy was “supplied” to lead him around, read and write for him, and provide for his other needs.

• Owen Emerson of Chelmsford was willing to pay wages to a “first class girl” aged seventeen or eighteen who would do general housework.

• William Phillips of Marblehead looked for an American boy of fourteen to work on his milk cart in the mornings and go to school in the afternoons. He “supplied himself”, not through the school.

• John Cason and his wife who lived in Lawrence were colored. They wanted to adopt a little three-year old orphan called Lily Steele.
Mrs. Franklin wanted to bring up a boy aged seven to eleven who had no parents. She had two little girls of her own, three and ten months.

Mr. Fiske wanted to teach a “steady, ingenious boy” or twelve or fourteen to be a turner.

Herman Leonard of Elmwood wanted to teach a boy of fifteen or sixteen to be a carpenter but he also wanted a girl of thirteen or fourteen for housework.

V.A. Green of Marblehead looked for a twelve to fourteen-year-old boy to take into his shoe manufacturing business.

The Honorable H.P. Hunton of Bethel, Vermont – a State Senator, bank president, and “lawyer by profession” - wanted to bring a girl of twelve to fourteen into his family.

William B. Stone, “a member of the House from West Brookfield,” also wanted such a girl for his family.

Henry Boynton of Augusta Maine looked for a girl to include in his family to “replace” his only daughter who had died a few months before.

Some of the applicants had had children from the School before and wished to replace someone who was leaving - having completed the period of indenture. There were those who wished to adopt a child - without parents - because they had lost their own or wished to increase the size of their families. When a family was Negro, this was specifically mentioned. Many disliked Irish and Italians and preferred American children. Some specified the wish to teach the child a trade or to have the assistance of the child in the home or the business. The desire to pay wages may have been based on a reluctance to undertake the limitations and obligations of indenture. The question of character and honesty was raised in many applications.
The applicants knew where the children came from and many were considering adoption in the long run.

This pattern remained fairly constant until the 1880s when the tone of the applications became far more clearly commercial. The terminology of the market was in constant use. The trustees talked of "supplying" a child for the "use" of the indentee. The "demand" for children rose or dropped in accordance with the condition of the economy and whether adults were looking for the type of positions the children might fill at times when unemployment was high. They regretted their inability to "supply the demand" because the children at the Primary School were by definition younger. The School only accepted pupils under the age of fifteen. Reading the correspondence one cannot avoid feeling that the high-minded tone of the trustees and other office holders of the School had been superseded by the clearly commercial commitment of a specialized employment agency striving to provide the best service to its clients - the indentees - without the same level of concern for the best interests of its true clients - the children at the Primary School.

When it came to assessing the children, there were complaints about their honesty and their willingness to work. Sometimes expectations were much higher than would have been expected of the natural children of the same families. However, an indentee sent the following report in 1857, when Monson was still an almshouse and the children were treated as State paupers rather than State pupils. It is probably the sort of report that warmed the hearts of the trustees and renewed their belief in a system that they had so ardently advocated:

---

43 This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 4.

The time has almost expired that I am, according to agreement to write to you respecting the appearance and conduct of the boy that I took from your place last spring. I am as well pleased with him as I expected to be, he seems to have a desire to please when I can make him understand what I want of him he is industrious and faithful as can be expected of one of his age. He attends school has the privilege of 3 1/2 months this winter I am somewhat disappointed in the proficiency he is making he has learned to read better than I had any idea he would have done at the expiration of the term. He readily commits to memory his lessons. I think if he could have had the benefit of an early education he would have been a first rate scholar. But he is not without fault like others of his age he is rather quick to resent anything that does not agree with his view. We hope by a steady hand and good example to cultivate his disposition, improve his morals and turn his mind into the right channel which will safely waft him along the current of time to respectability and good citizenship.

This assessment related to the boy as a teenager and not as a pauper or delinquent. It went into detail about his education and his achievements without much emphasis on labor and chores. The fact that he was like other boys of his age and needed a firm hand and guidance was not a problem. Mr. Warren regarded this as a challenge.

**Conclusion**

Indenture and the related policies of boarding out and placing out were the direct descendents of the English Poor Laws and the Acts of the Court of the Colony of Massachusetts, updated to suit the period under consideration. Although the policy of institutionalizing vagrant, neglected and abused children led to the founding of the State Primary School at Monson, the trustees did not abandon their preferred philosophy of providing for children within a family framework. They believed the best way to do this was threefold:
1. to bind them out through indenture agreements, in the cases where the children were of an age to be of service in the farms and households of the citizens of Massachusetts;
2. by placing out under verbal agreements when the children were over the age of fifteen and did not have more than three years to serve, so that the master would be unwilling to take upon himself the many requirements of a formal indenture:
3. and by boarding out and paying a fee to the fostering parents when the children were too young to be of service.

Over the years the commercial nature of these agreements seems to have superseded the philanthropic aspects. The correspondence reflects the work of what apparently had become a specialized employment agency more concerned with its indentees than its children, although the wording of the indentures remained the same and the Visiting Agent continued to maintain a watching brief.
Indenture Agreement

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
THIS AGREEMENT,
Made this.......day of...............A.D.187...between the Trustees of the State Primary and Reform Schools in said Commonwealth, under the authority of the laws of said State, namely, Chapter 89 of the Public Statutes , of the first part; and...................of...........................in the County of.......................
State of.........................of the second part, witnesseth:

That the said Trustees, by laws thereto duly authorized, do agree that
..............................................................................may receive into his service and
employment...............................................................................
a minor of the age of...........years, now a member of the said Primary School;
and that the said.....................shall remain with the said............................ in the business
of......................(the same being suitable to the age and ability of said minor,) from the date of this
agreement until the...............day of......................18...., when the said...............................will have
arrived at the age of eighteen years.

And the said.......................in consideration of the premises, doth hereby covenant and agree with said
Trustees, and their successors in office, that he will thoroughly instruct said.................or cause him to
be instructed in the business of.....................that he will give him suitable opportunities in the public
schools, so that he may thoroughly learn the several branches of spelling, reading, writing. arithmetic,
geography, grammar, and other things usually taught in them; that he will give him, or cause to be
given him, proper Moral and Religious Instruction, and allow or require him to attend public religious
worship on the Sabbath, providing him with suitable apparel therefor; that he will treat him kindly,
exercising over him a parental care and control; that he will watch over his morals, endeavoring by all
means to guard him against vicious habits and practices, and train him up in such a way that he will
become virtuous, intelligent, and useful.

The said.......................further covenants that he will furnish the said minor with suitable board and
clothing, and provide for him in all other respects in a suitable manner, both in sickness and health,
during said period; so that in no event shall the State or any town therein be at any expense whatever
on account of said minor during said period. And the said.......................further covenants that he will
once at least each year during said period, viz: in the month of January of the same, and also at any
other time when required by the Trustees of said Primary School, make and return to the said
Trustees a written and particular report concerning the character, behavior and condition of said
minor. The said............... also agrees to furnish writing materials for said minor, that he may at any
time correspond with the Trustees and Superintendent of said Primary School.

And if the said minor shall remain with the said.....................as aforesaid, the said............... covenants that he will pay the Trustees, or their successors in office, the sum of...............for the
benefit of said minor, and provide him with suitable wearing apparel, including an overcoat and a
Bible.

But if at any time, it may appear to the Trustees, or their successors in office, that the further
continuance of this agreement will be prejudicial to the well-being of the said...............they, or a
majority of them, may annul the same by giving written notice to the said............... of their intention
to do so, stating the reasons therefor, and may forthwith remove said minor from the care and keeping
of said..................

The said.........................may also be given up at any time by consent of the Trustees, but in such
case the said............... shall return the said minor as well clad as when received, and pay for his
services such sum as the Trustees may consider just and proper.

In Witness Whereof, we hereby set our seals to this and one other Instrument of like tenor and date
the day of the year first above written.

........................}                     \}Trustees
U.S.                                                                    
Internal                                         }........................}
Revenue                         In Presence Of                          
Stamp                                                                          }........................}
To the Inspectors of the State Primary School, Monson:

Gentlemen - This certifies that the bearers,

Mr and Mrs ..................................................................are residents of this ......................

with whom we are personally acquainted, and we can and do hereby cordially recommend

them to be temperate, industrious, and worthy citizens.

They are regular attendants of the................................. Church in this ............ on the Sabbath, and are suitable persons morally to be entrusted with the care and
education of a child, and are in competent circumstances to provide for the support of a child

in sickness and health.

......................................................................

......................................................................

......................................................................

Overseers of the Poor

I hereby certify that I am acquainted with the above named parties and believe the

statements made in reference to them are true.

......................................................................

Pastor of the.........................Church in .................

The above should be signed by two or more of the Overseers of the Poor, and by the

Pastor of the Church where the said parties attend meeting.
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child④⁵

The Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations on November 20, 1989 has not been ratified by the United States. Nevertheless, it is a valid indication of what the international community considers to be the inviolable basic rights of children as children, no matter where they live. It is a benchmark even where it is not binding in law. This is not a study of the implementation of the Convention. It is a comparison of the rhetoric of the texts and the intentions underlying the Convention – a contemporary legal document - and the indenture agreements of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts – drawn up more than a century ago.

The Convention begins by defining a child as "every human being below the age of eighteen years"④⁶. The indenture agreements of the Primary School bound the children for the duration of their minority, namely to the age of eighteen.④⁷

Children have "an inherent right to life".④⁸ The children at the State Primary School had the right to be treated as pupils and not as paupers - to be indentured as such under special terms and not under the rules of the almshouses. The right not to be separated from their parents - except when the competent authorities, subject to

---


④⁶ UN Convention. Part I Article 1 p.246

④⁷ The almshouse indentures bound the boys to the age of 21 and the girls to the age of 18. The superintendent criticized this policy when the almshouse became the Primary School. He felt that the boys ran away before the indenture expired because by the age of 18 they felt they could earn more on the free market and were being exploited under the terms of the indenture.

④⁸ UN Convention Part I Article 6 p. 247
judicial review, determine that "such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child"\textsuperscript{49} - also applied to the children of nineteenth century Massachusetts. The Visiting Agency was established with a special mandate to ensure that the “best interests of the child” would prevail in all circumstances.\textsuperscript{50}

In terms of the Convention, children are guaranteed the right to express their views "freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child".\textsuperscript{51} The indenture agreements provided a clause obliging the indentee to provide the means for the child in his care to correspond with the Superintendent, trustees, and the Visiting Agent at any time the child may choose.

Freedom of religion\textsuperscript{52} may not be the correct way to define the terms of the indenture, but the right to moral religious instruction and to participate in communal worship was guaranteed to all indentured children. They were also entitled to suitable clothing for the purpose of appearing in public at the house of worship so that their right to religious practice would not be compromised by their outward appearance.

The State is obliged "to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{49} UN Convention Part I Article 9 p. 248
  \item \textsuperscript{50} See Chapter 4
  \item \textsuperscript{51} UN Convention Part I Article 12 p. 249
  \item \textsuperscript{52} UN Convention Part I Article 14 p. 250
\end{itemize}
exploitation". The agencies of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts responsible for wards of the State were charged with similar responsibilities. Furthermore, the Convention states that "a child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State". The Acts providing for the establishment of the State Primary School at Monson dealt with exactly the same issues.

The Convention also guarantees the rights of the disabled, the right to a high standard of health care, an adequate standard of living, and an education. The right to an education includes "the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential". Children are protected from labor injurious to their health or development and assured representation and protection when charged under the penal code. All these rights were guaranteed the indentured children of the State Primary School, including a friend in Court in the person of the Visiting Agent.

53 UN Convention Part I Article 19 p. 251
54 UN Convention Part I Article 20 p 251
55 UN Convention Part I Article 23 p. 253
56 UN Convention Part I Article 24 p. 253
57 UN Convention Part I Article 27 p. 255
58 UN Convention Part I Article 28 p. 255-6
59 UN Convention Part I Article 29 p. 256. See Chapter 2 for the education of children at the Primary School.
60 UN Convention Part I Article 32 p 257
61 UN Convention Part I Article 40 pp. 259-60
62 See Chapter 4.
Introduction

Within the framework of institutional care for State wards, the Legislature established the Visiting Agency to cater to the needs of children in the "unwalled institution" of boarding out and indenture. Some of these children had been in the Monson State Primary School for a period of time before being either boarded out or indentured. Some had been sentenced by the courts either to the Industrial School for Girls at Lancaster or the Lyman Reform School for boys, and had then been indentured, usually to farmers for work in their fields or their homes, or to tradesmen or shopkeepers. Others had been committed by the courts directly to the care of the Board of State Charities (and from 1879 to its further incarnation as the Board of Health, Lunacy and Charity) for the duration of their minority and had been placed in families by the Visiting Agency.

Orphanages and homes for destitute children had volunteer visitors occasionally going from home to home and checking on the welfare of the children placed out. The State Visiting Agency, however, was a unique statutory institution.¹ It grew out of the experience gained in the early years at Monson when the trustees felt that their responsibility to the minor children

¹ "Massachusetts, it is believed, is the first instance in history of a state which has ever established, as part of the government, such an institution for the protection and proper nurture of the children of the State . . . the Visiting Agency, as a system established by the government for the uniform and periodical visitation of the wards of the State, with a view to their proper nurture and protection, has not a precedent in history." Report of the Secretary, Julius J. Clarke, Seventh Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1870, pp. 81-82
under their care extended beyond finding them a place to live and work and signing an indenture contract. The trustees remained the guardians of the children boarded out or indentured outside the school and such children remained legally under their care. The trustees felt they could not fulfil this responsibility simply by relying on the indentee to file an annual written report and allowing the children to write whenever they felt the need for advice or assistance. It was necessary to visit these children regularly, see them in situ in their new homes, and assess the level of treatment and care which they enjoyed.

When the Commonwealth decided in 1869 to establish a visiting agency that would report to the Board of State Charities, additional tasks were imposed on the State Visiting Agent. He would represent the children in those cases where they appeared before the courts after investigating the charges against the child and recommending treatment after conviction. He would also actively seek homes in which to place these children. This may be directly from the courts, after the children had been placed in the care of the Board of State Charities as wards of the State, or after they had spent a period of time at the State Primary School, or at one of the two State reformatories. In 1875, the Visiting Agent turned to the juvenile judges for an assessment of the value of the presence of the Agent's representative in court.\(^2\) By 1870 a de facto juvenile court system had developed in Massachusetts, many years

\(^2\) On July 20, 1875, Gardiner Tufts wrote to the judges, asking them a series of questions about the functioning of the visiting agency. He received fifty replies of which only seven were negative. These letters are on file in the Massachusetts State Archives. The questions and replies are dealt with at a later stage in this chapter.
before the first juvenile court was established *de jure* in Illinois in 1899\(^3\). During the second half of the nineteenth century Massachusetts was regarded as a beacon of progressive thinking in the field of child care both in the United States and in England.\(^4\)

a. The History of the Visiting Agency

In 1864 and 1865, in the first and second annual reports of the Board of State Charities, the members recommended the establishment of a visiting agency

"for the purpose of protecting the children placed out by the State institutions from abuse or neglect, of harmonizing any disturbed relations which might grow up between them and the persons to whose care they should be intrusted, of finding places for other children, to be afterwards removed from the State institutions, and also of investigating the results of the State Reform School system upon its beneficiaries . . ." \(^5\)

In September 1866 the Board appointed Gordon M. Fisk\(^6\) to supervise the children placed out from the State Primary School at Monson. In February


\(^5\) *Seventh Annual Report of the Board of State Charities*, October 1870, p.82

\(^6\) Fisk was a member of the staff of the Monson School. Despite his proven success as the first visiting agent, when the State Visiting Agency was established, he was not appointed to the post but became the first assistant to the new Visiting Agent, Col. Gardiner Tufts. See Matthew A. Crenson, *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A prehistory of the American Welfare System* (Cambridge MA, 1998) p.175
1867, the Board extended his mandate to include boys from the State Reform School at Westborough and girls from the State Industrial School at Lancaster. His mandate was further extended to cover children from the almshouse at Bridgewater and George P. Eliot cared for the children from Tewkesbury Almshouse. The State Visiting Agency was established by the Act of 1869. Fisk continued to visit the Monson children after the Governor appointed Col. Gardiner Tufts as the first State Visiting Agent.7

The State Visiting Agency was established as a result of the positive experience of the Visiting Agent appointed by the Board of State Charities. The declared purpose was to protect the rights of dependent and delinquent children - in the courts, before they were committed to one of the institutions of reform or declared wards of the State under the aegis of the Board of State Charities, and in the homes of indentees, after they had been placed out, indentured, or put on probation. The rhetoric of the various reports, both by the trustees and by the visiting agent, indicates a clear intention to put the good of the children first. No less clear is the constant reference to the economic benefits resulting from the lower cost of maintaining a child in a private home rather than an institution. There was a tension between considering the good of the child - and hence the good of society into which this child must be integrated as an adult and a citizen - and the financial cost of educating and providing for the child. This is obvious throughout the reports.

7 A resident of Lynn, Tufts had been responsible for the welfare of sick and wounded soldiers from Massachusetts during the Civil War and remained in Washington afterwards as state military agent dealing with applications pending with the Bureau of Petitions. See Crenson, Invisible Orphanage, p. 175
of the various professionals who bore the responsibility for the welfare of the wards of the State.\textsuperscript{8}

In the Monson Annual Report of 1864, for example, (two years before the State Primary School was established by statute) both the Superintendent and the Inspectors recommended the appointment of a special visitor. He would be responsible for maintaining contact with the children placed out from the almshouse, in addition to the annual written reports submitted by the indentees. Only an independent observer who appeared unannounced and would be able to question the neighbors as well as the children themselves could determine the real condition of the children. The Superintendent also thought that the children would be comforted by the fact that someone was coming to see them on an ongoing basis and showing an interest in their affairs.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{8} “Now, although the almshouse schools have done much, they have fallen far short of doing all they might for these children. They should be maintained, without so much regard to cost, for the purpose of preventing their pupils from becoming paupers or criminals. They stand intermediate between the common school and the Reform School, and are quite as important as either. Allow me once more, gentlemen, to remind you of our duty, and the duty of the Commonwealth to these poor children.” Secretary of the Board in the First Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, January 1865 pp.304-305.

\textsuperscript{9} “Though it may seem somewhat novel, and with nearly a thousand children indentured from this institution, I wish, gentlemen, to invite public attention, and respectfully suggest the importance of an arrangement by means of which all these children, as far as may be practicable, shall be visited, and satisfactory information obtained as to their real condition, and the circumstances under which they are placed. Is it not a duty of the State, during the period of their minority, to know that the obligations of the bond are faithfully observed in each individual case? For an appointed agent to visit them at their homes and report the result of his visitations to the proper authorities, I am inclined to believe would be a benefit to the families having them in charge, and also a great comfort and encouragement to the children. With nearly seven years’ experience in the administration of the affairs of this institution, and having found during this period homes for so many hundreds of children, and daily receiving and answering so many letters in regard to them, I cannot but feel justified and strongly confirmed in the belief that something should be done to protect the indentured orphans, and guard against their being neglected or abused.” Superintendent's report. Monson State Primary School, Eleventh Annual Report, October 1864 Public Document No. 26, p.17
The inspectors\textsuperscript{10} believed that with the increase in the number of children boarded out - eighty in 1864 and 728 since the almshouse had been established ten years earlier - the workload of the inspectors had increased beyond what had been originally planned for men who held their positions on a voluntary basis. The time had come to professionalize this aspect of child welfare through a paid, full-time employee. In 1866 the Board of State Charities appointed one of the inspectors of the school, Gordon M. Fisk of Palmer, as the visitor for the Monson School. Two years later the Board suspended this position because of lack of funds. The inspectors of the school continued it, however, until the post of visitor of the Board was replaced by the establishment of the State Visiting Agency in 1869, with much broader powers than those previously allowed the visiting agent.

The inspectors described the main benefits of the work of the visitor in their report of 1868 - finding more and better homes for the children, less abuse and neglect, fewer runaways and a greater familiarity with the needs and wants of the indentured children.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} "The care of these indentured children increases from year to year, demanding more time of the Inspectors than was originally contemplated in the duties of their office. Hundreds of these children, scattered all over New England, look to the authorities of this almshouse for protection against abuse, and for the fulfillment of the agreement made with their guardians. The latter are required to make a detailed report to the institution once a year, for which purpose blanks are sent them. But this is not sufficient. Somebody should go to them in their homes and learn beyond a doubt how they are cared for. In a previous report we recommended that an agent should be appointed for this purpose, and we now renew the suggestion. The children indentured from this and other charitable institutions of the Commonwealth would occupy the entire time of one person, and their welfare deserves this attention." Inspectors' Report, ibid. p6

The final report of Gordon Fisk's activities in 1869 gives a good general picture of the form and extent of his work prior to the establishment of the State Visiting Agency.\footnote{Third Annual Report of the Visiting Agent of the Board in \textit{Sixth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities}, October 1869.} He explained that the bulk of his work encompassed the care of children from the State Primary School and the Almshouse at Monson, since children from other institutions were cared for in other ways. He also mentioned that the extent of his work was limited by the fact that he was not empowered to employ assistants. (This was one of the matters corrected when the State Visiting Agency was established.) From May 1, 1854 to August 1, 1869 a total of 1268 children had been placed out. By October 1868, 651 children had been released from their indentures as they had come of age and 617 remained in the care of the agent. The girls were indentured to 18 and the boys to 21, based on a principle unclear to the agent, as he did not feel that there was any reason for this differentiation. To his mind there were boys of 18 as able to care for themselves as the girls, and girls of 21 still unable to care for themselves. One of the girls had bound herself to her former mistress for a further four years in return for board and clothing with no wages whatsoever, a state that Fisk regarded as no better than slavery. He also found a boy who had bought his freedom nine months early by allowing the indentee to pay him $70 instead of the $100 written in the contract. It turned out that the boy had in actual fact turned eighteen four months before he made this arrangement and he should have been free. Fisk acquired the full payment. This apparently was not a unique case. Doctoring the age of the children was one of the tricks used by the masters to save themselves money or to benefit at the expense of the child. In other cases
they trumped up charges of assault or theft in order to justify dismissing the child before his time and not paying him his full wages. These were exactly the situations the agent sought to prevent or to correct.\textsuperscript{13}

There were also families that had treated the children with great kindness, caring for their chronic and genetic illnesses, providing for their needs, and forgiving their many transgressions. Interestingly enough, this care and attention was regarded as worthy of praise, rather than as simply the proper fulfillment of the obligation the families had taken on themselves in return for the child's labor. Lack of abuse was treated as the exception to the rule rather than the rule itself.

The visitor mentioned that there were very few children from Monson who turned to crime - in fact only three in the ten months covered by his previous report. "It is remarkable that among so many children, cast out upon the world without friends to protect and guide them, so few fall into vicious habits and become criminals."\textsuperscript{14} As far as the education of the children was concerned, there was a great improvement over the previous year, with only ten cases in which their education had been neglected as against 43 in the previous year. This is assumed to be a direct result of the fact that the masters know they are being watched and will have to account for the children's schooling. He concludes by mentioning that seven girls were married and one died, he having attended one of the weddings and the only funeral.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. p.148
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. p.149
During his visits, the visitor came across 83 children who had been placed in families by the overseers of the poor in various towns or by institutions both inside and outside the State. These children were not properly cared for or supervised as the Boards of the Overseers changed every year and there was no procedure for maintaining contact with the children. He recommended that the visitors be given authority to care for all the children placed out in the State, no matter what their origin. This too was provided for in the 1869 statute establishing the State Visiting Agency.15

The children and their families corresponded with the agent as a matter of course, explaining their situation, their joys, their fears, their successes and their failures. He received 933 letters in a period of ten months and replied to them all. One wonders why he felt the need to stress this point, as it was clearly his duty to do so. But then the fulfillment of duty was often something to marvel at, as in the case of masters who cared properly for their wards. The letters16 from the children talked of their homesickness or their happiness with their families, the clothes and toys they had received, their success in fitting in or their difficulty with the new "parents" or masters. Sometimes the masters wrote to say how well the child had grown up and how much like one of their own children he or she was. Or they asked the visitor to come and reason with a child who is not settling in. Or they explained that they had taken children from Monson before and would like to do so again. In one case "a child of the State Almshouse" who was now married wanted to give a little

15 Ibid. p.152
girl from Monson the chance she received herself. Occasionally a parent wrote to say that their children had finally all returned home from wherever they had been placed out and were settling in.  

The language of the visitor who was seeking homes for the children was purely commercial. Like a travelling salesman, he took children with him and always found them homes on the same day. In fact he recommended this as good marketing because the families were more likely to take a child brought to the door than they were to travel to Monson to fetch one. This was economically a good deal, even though it may cost a little more, seeing that in this way it is possible to dispose of the children a dozen at a time.

The number of children at Monson could be reduced from 300 to less than 100 in a single year, and then, with a House of Reception for poor children, to be under the charge of the Board of State Charities or Visiting Agent, the State Primary School could be dispensed with, and the State Almshouse be cleared of pauper children.  

This idea was proposed to the Board of State Charities in 1869, more than two decades before the school was finally closed in June 1895. Fisk did not see any benefit to the children of Monson in their being institutionalized. He was certain that any family was better than any institution. With a visiting agent to protect the interests of the children and to provide them with the

---

16 Ibid. pp. 152-154

17 Orphanages and almshouses had become a part of the lives of the poor in their struggle to survive “the vagaries of weather, accident, disease, and economic downturn” (Judith Dulberger, "Mother Donit fore the Best": Correspondence of a Nineteenth-Century Orphan Asylum, Syracuse University Press, 1966 p.2. See also Catherine Ross, Society’s Children: The Care of Indigent Youngsters in New York City, 1875-1903, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1977.

18 Ibid. p.155
necessary support and friendship, they would flourish and grow up to be respectable members of society, without the contamination of restraining or reformatory frameworks. It took the good citizens of Massachusetts a long time to reach the same conclusion - when they finally closed Monson in 1894.

After one year of activity, the State Visiting Agent Gardiner Tufts summed up his work in the following flowery fashion:

Your agent has given nearly his whole time and his entire heart and thought to the interests of those wards of the State. It has been his privilege to bring together brothers and sisters long separated, and, in some instances, forgotten by each other; to restore to parents their long-lost children; to be as a father to the fatherless and a friend to the friendless; to rejoice with them in their joy, to sympathize with them in their sorrows; to be their counselor and help in misfortune; to visit them when sick or in prison, and to follow some of them to the portals of the tomb. The more he has done for them, the more there has seemed for him to do. Every mail brings the request of some child or master; every day brings new responsibilities, new anxiety, and this anxiety is always urgent, -

'It says, Go, pilgrim, on thy march; is more Friend to the friendless than thou wast before.' 19

Once all the wards of the various institutions had been accounted for and visited for the first time by the Agency, the extent of the work to be done became clear. Over the years the Visiting Agent appointed additional assistants with responsibility for the different geographical areas in which the

19 Fifth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1868, p 198
children were placed. After 1879, a virtual army of women was appointed as auxiliary visitors. These women were the exception to the professional rule in the sense that they were unpaid volunteers who lived in the areas to which the children had been sent. Their task was to visit the children regularly four times a year. Women were perceived as the "natural guardians" of children, with an instinct for what is right and wrong in relation to their care and education. But it was thought there was no need to remunerate them for their

20 "That there are some practical difficulties in the way of securing this outside life for the children at Monson, is conceded; but with an improved system of finding homes, of visitation, and of supervision, which the Trustees desire to see inaugurated, and in which they hope for the co-operation of the Central Board, it is believed much may be done to make this work easier and more effective than it has been. The success of the Hampden County Aid Society, with that of private effort in the same direction, augurs well for similar effort. The present system of visitation, under the direction of the agent of the Board of Health, Lunacy, and Charity, seems inadequate to the work to be done, because it is improbable that the large number of children can be visited by so few individuals with any frequency; because this necessary infrequency precludes the possibility of any actual acquaintance with the children, or of those who have the charge of them, and because only men are employed for this work. It may be added, that, with the present workers, there is little or no time to seek out suitable homes. Those who desire the services of the boys or girls make application for them; the success of the arrangement is always a matter of doubt.

"Women are the natural guardians of children, and have an instinctive sense of right and wrong as done to them, and a sensitiveness to cruelty not always granted to men. They have, too, knowledge of domestic affairs, and are thus better qualified to judge of the ability, as to size, strength, or age, of the children for the duties assigned them. It is conceded, too, that women have quicker perceptions, and are therefore, perhaps better judges as to the fitness of persons to take charge of these defenseless ones, while counsel, encouragement, and instruction come more naturally from their lips.

"It is believed, that in every New-England town there are women who are fitted for this work of visitation, supervision, &c., and who would gladly engage in it; while the fact that such persons, invested with the authority a formal appointment would give, are to be referred and appealed to, will have the effect to protect the children, and to raise the character of the homes thus provided.

"In view of these considerations, the Trustees therefore recommend the appointment of a suitable number of women, in various parts of the Commonwealth, whose service without compensation shall be given to this work, all necessary expenses being, of course, provided for by the State. These services to be in accordance with the needs enumerated; viz., the finding of suitable homes for the children, having a guardian's care of them after they are established in these homes, acting as advisors to the children, and as supervisors to those who assume their charge, reporting delinquencies on the part of the latter, giving prompt notice of all wrongs and abuses, and in every way aiding in the work of humanity begun by the State." Annual Report, by the Trustees to the Board of Health, Lunacy and Charity, Public Document No. 18, October 1879, pp.6-8
work, in view of the fact that charity was regarded as the natural activity of financially secure women and certainly not their profession. 21

b. The Role of the State Visiting Agency

The State Visiting Agency became responsible for all the wards of the State, both criminal and neglected, providing in fact an "unwalled institution" responsible for the education and reform of all wards during their minority - that is all wards who were not incarcerated in one of the walled institutions. Children in an institution could not be released to their parents or guardians without the consent of the Visiting Agent, based on an investigation of the home to which the child would go. The Agency would continue the procedure of visitation after the child's release during the period in which he or she remained a ward of the State. Placing out, boarding out, and indenture were intended as a cost-beneficial way of providing a home atmosphere for the children in accordance with the belief in the effectiveness and moral superiority of the nuclear family over all institutional solutions to the problem of delinquency.

21 "The Visiting Agent is under obligations to several ladies of Boston, who have in many ways assisted girls who are or have been under the care of the Visiting Agency or State institutions; especially to one whose name he is not at liberty to give, who devotes her time and means, which are directed by a cultivated intellect and pure spirit, to "girl-work". Her work is practical, systematic and effective. It goes beyond advice or expressions of good-will, and is positive help, abiding in good results. If other ladies who have time and means at their command would follow her example, there would be fewer records of the relapse and ruin of girls, after passing from official control, who were correct in conduct while therein. The temptations and inducements for such girls to sin are greater than their opportunities or encouragements to do well; and their times of trial are after they become of age, and go from other to self-control. Without salutary home-influences, distrusted by worthy persons, and assailed by bad ones, they, in a peculiar manner, need the friendship which benevolent and charitable ladies can give."
Fifteenth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1878, p 71
When investigating the children of Monson, the question of delinquency is a recurring problem. This was supposedly a primary school and not a penal institution. However, the attitude of the adults responsible for these children was colored by their prejudice against the parents of the children - at best indigent, at worst criminal - through whose neglect the children had fallen under the care of the State. Sometimes the officers assumed that criminality and poverty were inherited defects passed on to children. Sometimes they seemed to believe that a positive environment could overcome heredity if the State intervened to remove the children from the evil influence of the parents and provided them with an opportunity to grow up in a regular household. However, there was a constant undercurrent assuming the children to be bad by birth and prone to criminality, not to be trusted, even when they had come into care through no fault of their own.22

The 1869 statute establishing the State Visiting Agency defined four distinct duties:

(a) Visit the wards of the State when they were in the homes of private citizens.

22 "Nearly all juvenile offenders and dependants are so because they are without homes, or salutary home influences. The offenders' misdeeds were begotten of their wicked parents, and the dependants' burdens are generally an inheritance from vile parents, although some have only those of misfortune. The child of good parents does not often or widely stray from right ways, and it is comparatively easy to recover the offenders who have a good ancestry, even if the good is somewhat remote; but it is difficult to reform the child of generations of vile ancestors; the work is sometimes that of a new creation, greater than human power. As by the absence of home came offence and degeneracy, so by the home and its healthy influences must come recovery therefrom." in Fourteenth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1, 1877, p. 77.
(b) **Investigate applications for release** of children from the various State institutions - the State Primary School at Monson, the State Industrial School for Girls at Lancaster, and the State Reform School for Boys at Westborough.

(c) **Find homes** and actively seek out suitable persons who were willing to adopt, take charge of, educate and maintain children arrested for committing an offence and committed to any State institution, or abandoned or neglected by their natural families;

(d) **Protect the children's rights** when complaint against any boy or girl for any offence was made or pending, to investigate the case, attend the trial, and protect the interests of, or otherwise provide for, the child.23

**Visiting**

There were Massachusetts wards all over the commonwealth and in the neighboring states of New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut and Rhode Island. There were different visitors for the various regions who were supposed to visit each of the children four times a year, using their visits as an opportunity actively to seek out suitable homes for other wards.

The first task of the State Visiting Agency was to organize a systematic plan for visiting the 2,217 children who were on record as having been released from the various institutions by indenture, adoption or probation before July 1, 1869. The records of the Reform School at Westborough, the Nautical Branch and the Almshouses at Tewksbury, Bridgewater and Monson were transcribed and the wards sorted geographically so that they could be
visited regionally and not according to their institutional origin. Visitors traveled by train to a geographical central point and then went from address to address in search of the wards who often had moved, completed their indenture, or run away. The visitors met with a reasonable amount of success and, without investigating Suffolk County, had accounted for 1409 of the children by the time the first report was written in September 1869. There was no doubt that many of the "lost" wards would find their way to Boston and would be "found" when the visitation of Suffolk County was completed.

When the visitors went out to the farms and villages in which the children had been placed, their procedure was to ask after the children amongst the neighbors, at the regional schools and in church. They would arrive unannounced and without previous co-ordination with the indentees so that the children could not be "prepared" for the visit in any way. They could not be provided with new clothes, or better sleeping facilities, or even specially washed and brushed or fed, so as to make a good impression. The idea was to find the child in his or her natural habitat, so to speak, and to assess whether the terms of the agreement were being carried out. It was also important to speak to the children alone and unprepared so that they would be most likely to speak truthfully of their situation and treatment, without fear of retribution. The reports of the visitors tended to be somewhat laconic, but in reading through them it is clear that the visitors were fully aware both of the circumstances in which the children were being kept and of the limitations of the indenture situation. The children were being exploited for their labor - why else would some rural family take into its home an abandoned or

23 Seventh Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1870, p 264
delinquent child? - and thus the situation was problematic to begin with. What was needed was a careful balance between the extent to which basic necessities were provided to these children and the amount of service the children could provide to their families.

Case Histories

It is not easy to follow the life of a particular child through the case histories as they appear in the archives. The records have been copied into the casebooks and the children are identified by numbers, not names. Although there is some sort of index, the numbers are not consistent and sometimes the same number has been used for different children or different numbers for the same child. However, by cross-referencing, it is possible to piece together certain information. An analysis of one or two of these histories may help to give a picture of the role of the visitors, what was expected of the children, and what happened at least to some of them.

1. "Cary Bennet"

Let us take the story of Cary Bennet.24 She first appears in the records25 on September 25, 1884 in her first home with Mrs G.C. in Windsor CT. She remained there until August 1885 despite the fact that the

---

24 At the request of the chief archivist of the Massachusetts State Archives, the names have been changed to guarantee the anonymity of the children and protect their privacy, for the sake of their descendants.

25 This case history has been taken from volumes 5 - 10 of the case history files in the Massachusetts State Archives and covers the period from September 25, 1884 to September 2, 1890.
relationship between Cary and Mrs G.C. was troubled and was not, in the opinion of the visitor, in the best interests of the child.\textsuperscript{26} In September, the report states: "Mrs C. full of complaints about Cary, calls her untruthful and a thief. Has evidently done all she can for her." In December, "She is in school, does not give perfect satisfaction, still they keep her." In March 1885, "I find much complaint of Cary but the C.s are never willing to consider the thing done with. I shall relocate her as it is for her good." In May, "There is the same difference between Cary and Mrs C. that has existed for some time. Yet Mrs C. wishes her to stay and Clara does not wish to go, but believe it would be best to relocate." In August, "Doing about the same. Is high tempered. If Mrs C. and Cary continue so incompatible, she must be relocated."

By September 1885 she had been moved to Mrs P.D. in Boston where "Cary seems to like her new home and Mrs D. is pleased with her. Cary does not want to go to school but Mrs D. promised to send her." At the end of December, "Cary was visited and found that she had been returned to school." The March 13 1886 report pointed out a problem: "Mrs D. is not inclined to allow Cary to attend school. As she was to receive board, clothing & schooling for services, I believe she ought to receive wages if not sent to school." She was visited again on March 23 and "Mrs D. agrees to send Clara to school regularly. She likes the girl and says she is very honest."

\textsuperscript{26} The visitor uses the terminology "I shall relocate her as it is for her good". [p107] March 23 1885. Volume 5 in the Case History Files.
In June 1886 Cary is reported to be staying with Mr F.H. of Yarmouth Port where "Matters thus far going smoothly. Believe with care she will make a good girl." But on October 5 of the same year she was transferred to Mrs H.N.C. of Chatham. She seemed to do well in her new place and in May of 1887 the visitor reported: "Has done remarkably well the past quarter. Is a little uncertain as to her movements. Is shy, and would deceive if she could. Family understand her, and will help the good and hinder the bad." The September visit raised another problem: "Doing fairly well. Requires a good deal of care. Have been obliged to stop a correspondence which might have been hurtful." But by December it is clear that this teenager is developing a mind of her own: "Does not always do as well as she can. Has careful supervision. Is very ladylike and is competent, thinks she ought to have more privileges, which means she must have fewer."

In March 1888 Cary is with Mrs. E.F.S. in East Dennis. "Has improved very much in general housework, making herself useful in that way. Shows excessive fondness for going [out] and a good time generally requiring the holding back which taxes the patience of those in charge." This situation does not improve and in June, the visitor writes: "Cary has excellent qualities and is appreciated by Mrs S. who is one of the best of women. Her greatest fault is in trying to get the "good time" right or wrong. Her privileges have to be taken away or she will abuse them. Is fond of dress and has a good face and appearance." Once again in August, "Has one of the best homes with all the privileges a reasonable girl should require. Mrs S. pronounces her an efficient girl. Is fond of going and a little inclined to do sly things" but there is no detail of what these "sly things" are. Only in November is there a special report
from the Visiting Agent, Mr Wrightington, to the Superintendent of the Monson School, Dr Andrews, which indicates the problem.

I have to report that she has been troublesome in the family of Mrs. E.F.S. of East Dennis. She has been determined to meet a young man who is not safe as an acquaintance. This has been forbidden and now Mrs Sears is sick herself & cannot longer watch her as she should be watched. She was returned to this office yesterday.

The next day Cary was sent to Mrs T.H. in Rockland on trial. In December a special report once again from the Visiting Agent to the Superintendent mentions that she "is quite destitute of clothing. Is contented and work not hard. Family are interested in her. She receives $1.50 per week. She has a good home." In the regular December report, Cary was said to be "doing very well. She is in an excellent place where she is made one of the family. Has not been out except with the family. She seems to have had thorough training in her places at the Cape. Is neat and orderly. She has not yet been to church but can go as soon as she has her winter clothing." But a month later she was returned to the Boston office, "entirely without fault on her part" and was placed a day or two later with another family, Mrs M.A.T. of Auburndale.

The March 1889 report was favorable: "Is capable, neat and respectful but does not take much interest in her work. She seems more contented and happy. Her mind seems to be upon other things; she corresponds with a young man in E.Dennis but the visitor saw his letters and found nothing objectionable in them." But in May " Mrs T. wrote that she desired to have Cary returned as she had been so impudent she could keep her no longer.
Cary was accordingly removed today. She is capable if she chooses to be but is apt to be indifferent and has been disrespectful.

Cary lasted only a month at her next home in Wakefield. In December she was sent to Ipswich and relocated to Newton in January. However in August 1890 she "was returned . . . Mrs J. wishing to take a younger girl and one who would be content with a servant's position. Cary went to the Temporary Home on Shawmut Ave." This is a theme that repeats itself throughout the reports of the Visiting Agency and in its correspondence - its role as an employment agency for minors, which does exactly match its declared intention of putting the needs of the child foremost. Unless the need of the child could be seen as the need to be gainfully employed.

The last entry for Cary in September 1890 reported that she had gone to Chatham to spend two weeks with a friend. The record does not tell us what finally happened to her. However, this chronicle, covering a period of six years during which Cary was placed with ten different families in ten different towns throughout Massachusetts hardly paints a picture of a child being cared for with any great concern for her future. Without the care of the visitor she may have been abused or put on the streets. Or perhaps she would have married the unsuitable young man in East Dennis. Perhaps she did.

Various themes appear in this case history that we find in many of the others. These children are often accused of being sly or dishonest, ungracious, headstrong, lying and stealing. Middle-class teenagers in their own homes were probably little different, but they were not expected to be
grateful for having been taken in from the streets or saved from poverty-stricken homes and the neglect of drunken or indigent parents. The picture is not entirely one-sided. When the tense relationship with Cary’s second indentee seems unacceptable, the Visitor mentions the need to relocate Cary for her own good and also stresses Cary’s happiness and contentment. Attending church services when her winter clothing arrives complies with one of the basic terms of the indenture agreements.

The girls faced a special problem – the possibility of being taken advantage of sexually in the homes where they were supposed to be under special care. In fact they were defenseless against the attentions of the men about the place, relations, hired hands, or even the master himself.

Another point of note in this and similar case histories is the detail with which the visitor fills her reports. The reports of the visitors to the boys are very different: short, even terse, with phrases such as "likes and is liked" to express the relationship between the boy and his master. The visitors to the girls were concerned with their morality and the fear that men in the area or men in the employ or household of the master might lead them astray. On the other hand, the visitors to the boys were more concerned with their schooling and their discipline at work. It was difficult to find a case history of the boys

27 Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Health, Lunacy and Charity, January 1891, p 173

"The cases of wrong-doing, which cannot be prevented by the vigilance of the Visitors, are such as are liable to occur in any community, so long as there is such a lack of honor and such a low tone of social morals that there is no assurance that a penalty commensurate with the offence will be imposed upon betrayers of young and friendless girls, and that the burden of shame, hardship, and suffering will be borne by the man as well as by the woman. It is true that there are among these girls willing victims; but it too often happens that a lonely and helpless condition, instead of exciting chivalrous efforts for protection, tempts to ruin."
that covered such a long period of time. The following covers five years but contains only six entries: 28

2. "Hugh Moore"

On January 6, 1880 Hugh Moore 29 was reported to be with Mr W.C. in Hartland CT, where he is "attending school, full of mischief, hard to learn but appeared bright. Started to run off two weeks ago, but back at night." The next entry is for September 29, 1881. Now he is "discontented & unhappy. Does not give satisfaction. Don't get along well with C.'s hired man. C. burns charcoal & boy is obliged to be up every two hours each night to attend to coal pits, which was not considered right or proper, & at Mrs C.'s request, Mr C. being away, the boy was removed & placed with P.S.M. of Granville Corner.'

On January 19, 1882, Hugh was "not attending school but drawing logs in the woods. Has no underclothing and had no proper clothing when taken to M.'s. I therefore paid $1 in cash to buy necessary underwear. Arranged to return him to the School."

It took the visitor until May 2, 1883 to file his next report. Hugh "did not attend school last winter. Boy says he did not wish to go, because he is so backwards, besides having a sore foot most of the time, the result of chilblains. Is a good boy, faithful and industrious."

28 Case Histories, volumes 1-5, 1880-1885
29 See note 20 above.
Then again on March 23 1885 the visitor reported that "Mr M. has paid $50 and given Hugh a new suit of clothes. He is now with E.H.S. of Granville, [who] will pay $120 and his board to Dec.1st '85."

From this final report we gather that Hugh will no longer be a minor in December 1885 and thus will no longer be under the care of the Board. There does not seem to be much concern that the chilblains were probably caused by working outdoors at night in the winter nor any attempt to provide complementary education to make up for the time lost so that he could rejoin the school system. Hugh was obviously a young man who did not give much trouble, even returning the same day when planning to run away, and perhaps that is why the visitor did not bother with frequent visits.

Reading through the reports chronologically, without trying to trace the histories of specific children, there were certain matters the visitors stressed. There was constant mention of the attitude of the children, whether they are obedient or independent, honest and trustworthy or sly and deceitful. Their clothing is noted, whether it is adequate or threadbare, and in some cases the state of dress is compared to that of the rest of the family. The poor families obviously could not dress the children any better than they dressed themselves. Attendance at school and church are also noted, as are the conditions of labor and the type of work the child is expected to do, whether it is suited to their age and strength or not. The temper and character of the masters also receive attention and whether the children like the homes they are in or whether they put up with them because they have been in worse.
Many, if not most, of the children seem to have been in more than one place as they were shunted from the homes of the more discerning indentees to those of the less discerning indentees, according to the perceived characters of the children in question.

Financial arrangements were very important. Had the child been paid out the full sum of the indenture at the end of the term or had the master tried to cheat the child by making him work longer than the contracted time, claiming the boy was younger than his real age? In these matters the visitors were insistent and forceful, making sure the boys were paid out, as they should be. I mention the boys because there do not seem to have been the same financial problems with the girls. Usually it was a question of whether or not the girls should have free rein over their wages, as they had a tendency to spend them on what the visitors considered "finery" rather than saving their money.

What was the real purpose of this placing out and visitation effort of which the Commonwealth was so proud? The State needed to provide for these unfortunate children in a way superior to internment in an almshouse or school. To quote the Visiting Agent in his 1869\textsuperscript{30} report:

"The State can have but two objects in disposing of its unfortunate children. First, to relieve the State of their support. Second, to provide them with homes in good families, where they will grow up to become respectable citizens."

\textsuperscript{30} Sixth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1869 , p 155
Over the years the belief in the superiority of family life over any form of institutionalization gradually became widely accepted. But the economic need to provide for the dependent and negligent children at the lowest cost to the public purse prevailed nonetheless, and the commercial language employed by the Agency is often jarring. "Exchanging" a dull boy for an more intelligent one, like exchanging damaged or inferior goods from a shop; or "returning" a child who is saucy or disobedient; or even the "trial" of children in the homes like goods taken "on approval" from a store. To be fair it was better for the child to be on trial than to be forced to stay in an unsuitable place.

Although there is no follow-through on a systematic basis to determine what happened to the children when they grew up, in one of his reports the Visiting Agent wrote:31

. . To say that a certain number of children are "doing well" cannot convey any idea beyond the fact that they are steady, temperate, or not brought to the notice of the officers of the law. It cannot show the high degree of moral excellence or worldly prosperity of many of these children, and yet the records of this office are replete with instances of well-doing in young men who, five years ago, seemed doomed to a life of crime; of young women who were then girls lost, apparently, to all feelings of shame, who are now leading virtuous lives, some well married, and with happy households. We cannot show in a column of figures, and it would not be well if we could, the situation of those boys, or young men, who are occupying positions of trust and responsibility, in stores, counting-rooms and workshops . . .

31 Tenth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1873, p 246
Investigating Applications for Release from Institutions

Children were released from the institutions for various reasons. As the Visiting Agent put it:\textsuperscript{32}

Application for children by indenture comes from those who want service; those by adoption for those who are childless; and those for release or discharge from parents or friends.

These applications have to be carefully vetted because those applying for indentures were usually more concerned with the pecuniary value of the service the child would provide than with the education and care of the child. Respectable members of the community often wrote letters in support of these applications though they had no personal knowledge of, or contact with, the applicant. They filled in forms by rote declaring that the applicant was God-fearing or respectable or an upstanding citizen because that was the required formula. Under separate cover, they would sometimes send a personal letter saying the applicant was entirely unsuitable but the form had been filled in to oblige a third party to whom a political or social debt was owed.

Applicants for adoption usually sought orphans amongst the dependent children rather than amongst the offenders. Adopting a poor child was a calculated risk that the potential family probably did not want to increase by taking a child that had already fallen foul of the law.

\textsuperscript{32} Seventh Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1870, p 284
Applications from parents seeking the release or discharge of their children related to both dependents and offenders and were both frequent and urgent. The visitors would check out the situation at home before recommending the release of the child. If the child had come into care as a result of temporary impoverishment and the family had rehabilitated itself financially, there was no problem in releasing the child. The same applied when the child had come into care through its own misdemeanors despite belonging to a good family. As soon as the process of reform had been completed and the child was deemed to have learned the lessons of morality, he or she could be returned to the family. However, if the child had come into care as a result of the depravity of the parents, then the Visiting Agent would not recommend the release. The circumstances in the household that had originally caused the child to commit the offences or to be taken into custody had not changed. Returning the child to the same unacceptable environment would simply guarantee repeat offences or neglect, negating the entire purpose of having taken the child into care to begin with33.

The Visiting Agent did not have the power to release the child from a State institution, but merely to recommend whether that release is advisable or not. The children were actually released by the trustees of the institution or, in the case of the Monson School, by the Board of State Charities. If any institution acted against the recommendation of the Visiting Agent, it was his responsibility to inform the Board of this fact.

33 Ninth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1872, p 230
Finding Suitable Homes

The language of the statute mentions "seeking out" people who are willing to undertake the care of needy children which was to take the place of the former system of "application" by means of which people applied for children for their own needs. In many cases the applicants were unknown and the recommendations, when checked out, often turned out to be written by aldermen or churchmen who had no personal knowledge of the character of the person being recommended. The method was to look for new families while visiting the children already placed out. And what was the Visiting Agent looking for in his search?34

Whether seeking places or investigating the places offered for children, pains are taken to ascertain the construction of the families, their internal methods and arrangements, the character of each member, and the controlling and directing faculty of the heads of the families. There must be, in the person to whose charge a child is committed, a certain kind of ability or tact to govern, a perceptive faculty to detect, and a moral power to appreciate the character of the child, both in its weakness and strength, his or her upward aspirations or downward tendencies. If we can place an erring child with one "who has been touched with the feelings of infirmity," because he has been tempted in all points, has overcome the temptations and obtained the victory, we have secured a guardian who will be both wise and benevolent; the result of commitment to such care is not doubtful. When one discovers in himself those evil tendencies which exist in all, and which crop out into open sin with

34 Seventh Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1870, p 283.
some, he will have gained such knowledge and compassion as will enable him to act wisely and kindly towards all the erring.

He claimed that here was no lack of such fine families. The opportunities offered to able young New Englanders by the changing economy of the time, in industry and commerce, in the cities and also in the West, had left behind in the countryside sturdy New England families with no children and a need to fill the gap. One wonders to what extent this is genuinely a question of providing a good Christian home for a poor unfortunate child, and to what extent it is a need for working hands at a low price on the rapidly emptying farms. 35 He also refers to the "rotary process" by which problem children are moved from family to family until they finally discover a place in which they can settle rather than being returned to Monson.

In 1879 fifty women were commissioned as auxiliary visitors by the Board, through the Department of In-Door Poor, together with three women in New Hampshire and three in Connecticut who were willing to visit girls from Massachusetts institutions in those states. The boys continued to be visited by the men as under the former system. These women began working in December, visiting girls from the State Industrial School at Lancaster, the Primary School at Monson, and those placed directly by the Board, making reports every three months. They were provided with a list of questions to

35 See Chapter 3
guide the visitors in assessing the suitability of prospective homes for the girls under their care.\textsuperscript{36}

1. What information has been obtained, and from whom, as to the character of Mr ____________? 
   As to the character of Mrs ____________?
2. How many members make up the family? 
   What is their sex and age?
3. Are there boarders, lodgers, or persons employed about the place? 
   Are any of these objectionable?
4. How much and what kind of work will a girl have to do?
5. What compensation is offered her? Wages, board and clothing, school?
6. Will she have leisure time? and, if so, will anyone help her to use it well?
7. Will she have a room by herself, or a bed by herself? 
   Who will be her room-mate? 
   Will she have a lock on her door?
8. What church or Sunday school will she be able to attend?
9. What sort of companions will she be likely to meet?

This is a very detailed list of matters that should be taken into account and supports my contention that the women visitors were more thorough in their work than were the men. They did not rely on their instincts as to the character of the proposed master and mistress but looked for specific matters that were likely to be crucial in bringing up a young girl. In 1889 the Board

\textsuperscript{36} Second Annual Report of the Board of Health, Lunacy and Charity, January 1881, quoting Mrs Anne B. Richardson’s address to the Conference of Charities in Cleveland 1880, on Care of Children by the State, p. lxvi.
appointed a woman as visitor-at-large of girls who were wards of the State and recommended that a similar appointment be made for the boys.  

The Visiting Agent took it on himself to find homes for the physically handicapped so that they could learn a trade and provide for their futures. The following case history of David Wallace is an illustration.

In October 1883, the superintendent of the Primary School, Gardiner Tufts, sent a letter to the Secretary of the Board of Health, Lunacy and Charity (formerly the Board of State Charities). He requested permission for David Wallace, born in April 1867, to remain at the school in view of the fact that he was already over sixteen years of age, the maximum allowed by statute without special dispensation. He explained that the child was a cripple who could only walk on crutches until November 1880 when he was admitted to Carney Hospital for treatment. After an operation, he returned to the school in March 1881 able to walk with a cane. He went to school when he was not working in the tailor shop as an apprentice. It was hoped that he would be able to earn a living as a tailor. "He is a quiet good boy and his influence over other and younger boys is for good. I am satisfied that his transfer to the State Almshouse would be destructive to his ambition and desire to become self supporting."  

37 Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Health, Lunacy and Charity, 1888, p 127
38 See note 20 above.
39 Outgoing correspondence of the State Primary School at Monson on file at the Massachusetts State Archives. October 5, 1883.
In mid 1884 Daniel was placed with Mr B, a tailor. In November the visitor reported that "being crippled he was unable to cross his legs and learn to sew or succeed at tailoring and after ten weeks or more . . . gave it up and is now selling periodicals and stationery, said to be well dressed and doing well." In January 1885 he was reported to be at Tewksbury Almshouse, which Tufts had particularly wanted to avoid, because he was unable to support himself through the winter. In July he was discharged from the almshouse and went to Boston where in August he was reported to be doing well, boarding with Mrs.C. in Tufts Street and peddling "pencils, paper, combs &c". The last entry for him in April 1886, when he was nineteen and no longer a ward of the state, tells us that he is "still peddling small wares and doing well" and living with friends in Winter Hill, Somerville.40

Protecting the Children's Rights in Court

Previously the visitors appointed by each of the institutions had carried out the first three duties – visiting, investigating applications for release and finding homes. The main change came about through the fourth duty, which required the active involvement of the Agency in protecting the rights and interests of all children who came before the courts. The courts were required by law to inform the Agency of any case pending against a child and the Agency would appear in court as the friend and the protector of the child's rights and interests. So satisfactory were the results in that limited field, that the law of 1870 enlarged the requirement by enjoining investigation and attendance whenever "a complaint against any boy or girl for any offence is

40 Case Histories, volumes 5 and 6, 1884-1886.
made or pending." The duties of the Agency were enlarged and all types of cases (except violations of city ordinances and town by-laws, and cases having the penalty of imprisonment for life) were brought within the investigation and attendance of the Agency. This was not achieved by admitting the Agent or his assistants to practice in all the courts, but by transferring all cases to judges of probate courts, as soon as it became evident to the presiding magistrates (except in Suffolk County) that the child was under sixteen years of age.41 Thus a de facto juvenile court system was created in Massachusetts in 1870 almost three decades before the juvenile courts were established by statute in Illinois in 1899.42 Gardiner Tufts assessed the effect of this law in 1871, after it had been amended to include children aged seventeen, in the following terms:

They come before magistrates especially selected and fitted to act in such cases, uncalled by the wear of criminal courts or cumbered by dealings with old and hardened criminals, and the children have the full benefit of an examination of their cases and presentation of them at the hearing by the Visiting Agent, who appears as their friend. Is justice done? As surely as ever before. The magistrates before whom they now come are at least equal in character and judicial acumen to any others.43

The jurisdiction in cases of juvenile offenders was further extended in 1872 when the Governor was empowered to commission Justices of the

41 Seventh Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1870, p 264


43 Eighth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1871, p. 245
Peace "as the public interest and convenience may require" to try juvenile offenders. These Justices of the Peace had the same "duties, powers and authority" as the judges of probate and were called "trial justices for juvenile offenders." This amendment dealt with the problem which had arisen as a result of there being only one judge in each county to try juvenile cases without losing the benefits of specialized juvenile courts which dealt with the children in a special way, taking into account their individual needs. It also specified the defendant's right of appeal, which had not been clear in juvenile cases before judges of probate. As a result of this amendment, the number of trial justices for juvenile offenders rose from 18 to 48.

The jurisdiction of the juvenile justices was as extensive as that of justices of the Superior Court. The magistrates had sole jurisdiction in all cases other than those involving imprisonment for life. These courts made decisions that affected the lives of the children during their minority. A child of seventeen committed until his majority would lose his freedom for four years. A younger child could be committed to an institution or indentured under the care of the Board of State Charities for up to fourteen years - a long sentence in any terms and much longer than many imposed on adults who had the full benefit of legal representation in court.

---

44 Ninth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1872, p. 226

45 Ibid. pp. 323-324 "It seems to be forgotten that judicial action and decision may cover and affect the whole formative period of life; that the sentences imposed probably exceed in length, by the very terms of the law, those imposed upon any class of adult offenders. On account of the magnitude of the cases that do or may arise, of the consequences involved, and because those to be tried are children and not adults, - beginners in crime, who may be reclaimed to well-doing, and not old offenders, of whom there is no hope, - should such judicial authority be only conferred upon those of large knowledge, sound judgement and ripe experience; that there may be no hasty or inconsiderate action or unfortunate decisions which a higher court formerly might rectify. It is to be hoped that personal desire or local
The mandate of the courts took into account that children could be educated and molded by positive influences. As their characters were as yet unformed they could be prevented from becoming hardened criminals. The decision of the magistrate would have a lasting effect on their future development. Commitment to an institution or reformatory or to indentures and placing out would determine the future behavior of the child. "With juvenile offenders there is probability of reform; with the adult criminal only the possibility of an intermission of overt acts." It was vital that the men appointed as magistrates in these courts should be of the highest integrity and judicial training. They needed an instinct for and commitment to the interests of the child as well as the interests of the State and society in dealing successfully and economically with the potentially criminal element.

The Visiting Agent did not provide legal representation. He was not in court as the child's attorney but as his friend. Because many cases involved complaints of stubbornness by parents against their children, the visitor was the only person in court who could watch out for the child's interests and prevent a miscarriage of justice. In other cases, such as thefts and vagrancy, the parents were often the reason why the children had taken to the streets or stolen, either to feed themselves or to provide for their families. The parents convenience will not rise above the far greater interest of the child and the State in this matter."

---

46 This is a further example of the tension between heredity and environment. If the children of the poor were inherently bad, there was no point in trying to educate them. If they were inherently good, then they should not be labeled as potential criminals simply because they come from poor families. See Barbara Brenzel, Daughters of the State: A Social Portrait of the First Reform School for Girls in North America, 1856-1905, Cambridge, Mass.1983, pp.23-26.
had failed to provide the children with the basic necessities - a roof over their heads, clothing on their backs and food in their mouths. These parents may even have sent the children out to steal in order to acquire such necessities for the younger members of the family. Such parents were unable to support their children in court. Once again the visitor would provide the necessary backing.

It was not the purpose of the visitor to get the child off but to see that the punishment should fit the crime, to the extent that this was within his power. A less experienced magistrate would welcome the expertise of the visitor who had seen the effects of various sentences on other children. He might therefore venture an opinion as to whether the particular case would be better served by a bout in the reformatory or commitment to Monson and then indenture, or direct commitment to the care of the Board of State Charities and placing out in a family.

The visitor investigated the circumstances of the charges being brought against the child, checked the basic facts of the case and determined the age of the child prior to the court appearance, streamlining the court appearance and placing the child in the proper care as speedily as possible. The period of investigation was generally completed within two or three days and saved both time and expense by expediting the judicial process. Although there was an increase in the number of cases brought before the courts in the year 1871-1872 there was a decrease in the number of children committed to reformatories because of the alternatives offered under the 1871 amendment.

47 Ibid. p. 283
The number of complaints of stubbornness brought against children by their parents dropped. The presence of the Agent in court apparently deterred the parents from submitting such a complaint. The extent of the power of the law was explained to them and they were persuaded to solve their problems outside the courtroom. Families who received children from the Board of State Charities did not always get along with them. Complaining that the children who had been placed in their homes by the magistrates were stubborn was one way of dealing with the problem. The Agency cut down the number of such complaints by more careful selection of families and by regular visitation to forestall the problem rather than dealing with it after it had arisen. In addition, the policy of placing children on probation with friends or in homes chosen by the Agency, together with regular visitation, provided for a number of children who would have come under the care of the Board. The increase in the number of probationers was the result of the success of this policy in providing for first and minor offenders. The Agency constantly urged the courts that this was a more successful solution than commitment to the Board or to one of the institutions. There were 456 children on probation in 1870-1871 and only 39 were rearrested. In 1871-1872 only 36 of 514 on probation were rearrested and only 17 were then committed to institutions. In his 1872 report, the Visiting Agent urged that similar juvenile courts be established in Boston. This would complete the cycle of special juvenile care and secure the benefits of the 1871 law for the justices in Sussex County who heard juvenile cases.48

48 Ibid. p 324
Every year the reports of the Visiting Agent in relation to the court work of the Agency ended with recommendations for amendments to the law in order to improve the situation of the children under its care.

- A request for juvenile courts in Suffolk County;
- that juvenile offenders should never be interred in the "tombs" with the adults when awaiting trial;
- that the pay for juvenile justices should not be related to their case load;
- that towns should be forced by legislation to open truant schools so that truant children should not become a burden on the criminal courts because they had been left out on the streets, exposed to the temptations of petty theft, which was the leading offence amongst juveniles, whether they were tempted by the fruit on the trees in the orchards or food displayed on the stalls in the markets;
- and the wisdom of imposing fines on parents rather than disciplining children was questioned except in cases where the direct liability of the parents was proven.\(^49\)

In a six-year review of the work of the Agency in 1875, the financial benefits of the system were stunning. The annual cost to the State of keeping a child in a walled institution was $160 ($2500 in 2000), as against $4.31 ($67.34 in 2000)\(^50\) per child in a private home, including all the costs of maintaining the Agency.\(^51\)

\(^{49}\) Tenth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1873, p 255

\(^{50}\) See the Consumer Price Index Conversion Factors to Convert Dollars of the Year 2000 provided by Robert C. Sahr of the Political Science Department, Oregon State University at www.orst.edu/Dept/pol_sci/fac/sahr/sahrhome.html
During that period the Agency attended to 9770 cases that arose under the law. A survey conducted amongst all the judges who had been or were still within the juvenile system found only one judge who did not favor the role of the Agent at all and three who had suggestions for changes in the manner in which the Agency operated. Some justices suggested there should be an additional assistant appointed to deal with children on probation in the Boston area since probation had proved such a successful means of keeping first and trivial offenders out of the institutions and off the streets.

Conclusion

The Visiting Agency was a unique institution established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to complement the work of the various institutions for childcare maintained by the state. During the years that it operated, it functioned as an unwalled institution, providing supervision of wards of the state from the time they were committed to the care of the Board until their majority. The children within the State Primary School, the Lancaster Industrial School for Girls and the Lyman Reform School for Boys

---

51 Twelfth Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, October 1875, p 84
52 Ibid. p 82
53 In the records of the Board of State Charities there is a file containing the replies from the judges and the original letter from Tufts on July 20, 1875 which asked the following questions: "Have you in your experience found this attendance of any value to the child - or the State or to any other interest? Have children been disposed of to better advantage for it? Has the presence of the Agency been in any way unpleasant to you personally? Is such presence disadvantageous? What, if any, suggestion would you make, looking to any change in the present law, either in its absolute repeal, or modification."
54 Ibid. October 1875, pp. 83-84.
were under the care and supervision of the superintendents. The children placed out in families, more than the total of all the children in the schools, were under the care and supervision of the Visiting Agent and his assistants. The success of the policy of placing children out rather than institutionalizing them depended on the supervision provided by the Agency. During the period in which the Agency operated, it developed from a small office with one agent and two assistants, to a large organization of professionals who were the forerunners of the social workers of today.

The declared purpose of the Agency was to provide better care for the children and to protect their rights - both in the courts before they were committed to the care of the State, and thereafter - until their majority. During this period these children were at the mercy of the good citizens, who were not always so good, who had undertaken to provide a home for the homeless and a family environment for the neglected. In general this is what the Agency in fact did. If the Agent sometimes became a little pompous about his role in the courts or sanctimonious about his friendship with the children, the fact remains that the system was copied by other states and admired abroad.
Citizenship

The rhetoric of the legislators, child welfare agencies, charitable organizations and educators related to the children brought within the framework of the Monson State Primary School in terms of their future status as citizens of the United States of America. As such there was a need to socialize these children – largely the offspring of immigrants – by educating them in American ways. What exactly these American ways were was not clearly spelled out. The implication was that they must be taught to be hard working, self-sufficient, honest and god-fearing. And of course to respect authority. Whether these are particularly American values and not generally the values of Christian societies of the period is a question. Charles Loring Brace had written of the future role of these children as voters who would determine the government of the republic – ignoring the fact that the girls were certainly not included.

In 1893 the Primary School had held its own Columbus Day celebrations and the apparent "Americanization" of the children was a source of great pride to the superintendent, Walter A. Wheeler:

Columbus Day and Memorial Day were made object lessons in patriotism, the former by flag-raising and appropriate exercises by the children and the latter by the participation of the entire school in the celebration of the day at Palmer. A company of forty boys of the school, well drilled and in uniform, proudly escorted the Palmer Post, G.A.R., in
their march to the various cemeteries in town, and learned for the first time in their lives what Memorial Day means.¹

The principal, Eugenia M. Fullerton, wrote in the same report,

The significance of Columbus year has not been lost on the children. They prepared the exercises of Columbus Day with much zeal, and carried out the program with equal enthusiasm. They have taken great pride in the beautiful liberty-pole and flag given them on that occasion, not forgetting that the flag is their own. When they have been allowed to choose the colors given them as a reward for good conduct, they have, as a rule, preferred the red, white and blue.²

State responsibility

We have seen that the legislators, educators and social workers all expressed a “tender regard” for these lost children. There was a genuine attempt to deal with the results of poverty – if not the root causes. In keeping with the tradition of community responsibility evident from the early days of the Colony, the community accepted responsibility for the unfortunate immigrants who had arrived from abroad to pursue the American dream of freedom and economic independence. They had found neither freedom nor economic independence. The children of those immigrants entered the cycle of poverty. The State intended to break that cycle through education and socialization. It was in the interest of the Commonwealth to get the street children off the streets and to control the petty criminals. In the long run, the community would benefit.

¹ Fifteenth Annual Report - State Primary and Reform Schools, 1894, p.41.
In the eighteenth century, the towns had borne the responsibility for the poor in their jurisdiction, usually by paying individual families to take the indigent into their homes for a limited period. By the nineteenth century the concept of asylums came to the fore. The poor were congregated in almshouses where their own labor kept the institutions going. However there remained the problem of the children. How to prevent them from living out their lives in poverty?

Education was the golden solution. Teach them and they will lift themselves up by their own bootstraps. Send them to school. What was more natural than to establish schools in the almshouses? But the children also needed to be isolated from the negative influence of their unsuccessful parents and the other inmates of the institutions.

[Remove] the children, when quite young, from unfavorable influences, which, if a child be long subjected to them, will always haunt his memory, chill his ambition and dampen his spirits. For nearly all the influences of the adult population in an almshouse are opposed to developing the right character in children, -- such coarseness and deformity in person, such viciousness of habits and rudeness of manners, diversified with relics of intemperance, with idiocy and insanity, cannot fail to affect the child.³

The Trustees continued by mentioning the advantages for physical training and health at Monson and extolled its location as one of the most pleasant and healthiest in the State, “with pure air, abundance of good water, large playgrounds and extensive gardens”. In their opinion, having a large number of similar children together would engender mutual sympathy, kindness and

---

2 Ibid. p. 55.
affection, stimulating them to greater effort in their studies, and making them happier and more contented. Furthermore, this change would allow the children to remain at school for a longer period of time. They could continue in regular classes and would be promoted from one grade to another in the same school. In this way, the school became an educational institution with inestimable effect on the lives and characters of the children. 4

Special facilities, special teachers, proper schoolrooms could all be provided when there were sufficient numbers of children to justify the cost.

No amount of labor or funds should be spared in the education of these children. The best of teachers, and the most approved appliances for educational purposes should be provided for them. Gymnastic exercises are especially adapted to their wants; such exercises are calculated not only to improve their general health but to break up or prevent those habits of indolence and heedlessness, to which such children are particularly liable. Any reasonable expenditure to improve the health and education of pauper children is economy to the State. 5

There was another aspect to the education of the poor children, which tied in with the financial demands of the program. No one doubted that the children had to help to pay their way – not only by doing the housework and farming required to maintain the school – but also by going out to work. The policy of indenture, an integral part of the tradition of care for the poor inherited from seventeenth century England, was applied to the children in the almshouses and afterwards to the children in the primary school. It served a

3 First Annual Report of the Board of State Charities, January 1865, p.xxv.
4 Ibid. p.xxv
5 Ibid p.xxvi
dual purpose – to prepare the wards of the State to take their place in society as working adults after they had finished school and to defray the financial costs incurred by the state in maintaining these children during their minority.

Concurrently, children who were too young to work and therefore could not be indentured were boarded out for the same financial reason. It cost less to subsidize a child within a family than to support a child in an institution. In addition, the trustees of the Monson school consistently favored placing children in families whenever possible because that was the natural order of society. There the child would learn how society works. There would be no food to eat without labor, no clothes to wear without sewing and laundry, no order without cleaning and tidying, and no future without school. This tension between the two needs – to provide a future for the children and to do so at the lowest possible cost to the State – was clear throughout the period under consideration.

Social status

6 “But children need the human family as ordained by God, - the family held together by ties of blood and of sympathy, not imperfect imitations of it, made by gathering together its members for some special purpose. The family must grow; it cannot be made in a day, nor be put together by rule and compass. We may as well try to imitate within a house sunshine and rain, and cloud and dews, and all the shifting scenes of nature, as imitate, in a reformatory, the ever varying influences of family life and social life, with its trials and temptations, its defeats and triumphs, which are so potent to fashion character. We may as well try to teach by precept, or upon a stage, the graces and affections and virtues which grow out of close and long-continued family relations, as teach them in a great household made up of hundreds (or even scores,) of children, of the same class, the same age, the same sex, and, worse far than all, of the same vicious habits. We have, at best, a make-believe society, a make-believe family, and, too often, a make-believe virtue; while what boys need is a real family, real society, real life, even if its virtue is not patent and approved of men.” Second Annual Report of the Board of State Charities. January 1866, p. xlii-xlii
If the intention was to expose the children to a full range of possibilities for their future, the act of indenture really was not designed to achieve that purpose. Even a cursory look at the indenture agreements in the archives of the School shows that the “trades” the children were generally taught were housekeeping and farming. The other possibilities – apprenticeships to blacksmiths and coopers – were rare. The records are difficult to negotiate but there were some exceptions to the rule that served to prove the rule. 7 A rare girl became a teacher or a young man managed to go to Yale. A farmer applied for a boy because he had been at Monson as a child and a housewife explained that she wanted to give a Monson girl the same opportunity she had received herself. On the whole, the system was designed to keep the children in their place, not to extend their horizons. By 1895 Monson had become a manpower organization catering to the needs of the farmers and housewives – and occasionally the tradesmen - of New England.

Commercial Value

7 In the final report before the school closed down in July 1895, Principal Eugenia Fullerton wrote: “One of our boys is now at Yale College. After serving his time on a farm he entered Williston Academy, paying his way by his own efforts, accepting willingly any honorable work that he could secure. Notwithstanding the hindrances of small means and a trouble with his eyes, he succeeded in keeping his place in his classes. Another is now studying at Dartmouth, having graduated from the high school at M. while working for a market gardener. One of our former pupils, who has been at W. since leaving the State Primary School, has an ambition for West Point. Another, having served his time on a farm in Connecticut, is filling acceptably the position of clerk in a Hartford store. He writes to his teacher of still another of our boys, his classmate, who, he tells us, is “doing finely” in a similar situation in G. Many others might be mentioned who are doing equally well. If space would allow, extracts from their letters would be interesting. These boys retain pleasant memories of this school, like to visit it and receive letters from their former teachers and schoolmates. We have now among our number boys and girls whose conduct gives promise for the future of a still larger number of discharged pupils worthy of our affection and respect.” Sixteenth Annual Report of the State Primary and Reform Schools, 1895, p.61.
It would be unfair to accuse the good men of Massachusetts of entirely mercenary intentions when they passed legislation establishing the Primary School or when they signed indentures for the pauper children under their care. Their rhetoric cannot be assumed simply to have been empty and cynical. They probably believed that defining a pauper child as a pupil of the School rather than an inmate of the almshouse would benefit the child’s self-image and therefore his or her performance. The redefinition should also have changed the attitude of those responsible for the care and education of the children. Only in 1889 did the principal of the school decide to call the children by their names and not their registration numbers. 8

This system of personal treatment, of constant recognition of the individual under all circumstances, - formerly almost entirely ignored, - has in some measure counteracted the inevitable consequences of crowding so large a number into one building. These methods of teaching, this acknowledgement of a child’s identity, established by the use of its name, contrast favorably with the old-time recitations in concert of routine lessons, without word or comment outside the textbook, from which the bright child gathered an occasional grain of knowledge, and the dull one dropped out unobserved, gaining nothing, and, - called by its number rather than by its names, - losing in the end all the little individuality it ever possessed. Nowhere in the State are the effect of the kindergarten, of manual training, and the efforts to individualize the children, so apparent in good results as here.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that in their dealings with the potential indentees the language of the officials was instrumental and commercial. The Visiting Agents and the Supervisors related to the children as they would have

---

8 Fifteenth Annual Report of the State Primary and Reform Schools, 1894, pp. 156-157
to goods to be displayed, tested, shipped and guaranteed. The “satisfaction” of the customer – the indentee – was paramount. The quality of the goods – the children – sometimes seemed to be of concern in terms of their commercial value and not in terms of their future happiness or success in their adult lives. Witness the correspondence between Visiting Agent Charles K. Morton and Superintendent Wheeler on two different occasions in 1894. 9

On January 19 Morton wrote:

I enclose a letter containing an application which I approve. I have written the man that you would send him a boy that possessed some of the qualities, that he would have to look in the next world for the rest. If the boy did not suit he could send him back. I presume he will take a fair ready-made article. I have also told him that “we had so many on hand now that we will not [be] making any to order.”

This tone of levity and instrumentality might have been excused as ironic if it were not for the letter he wrote a month later, on February 22.

I enclose the applications which I approve. Will you please offer them something as near as you can to what they want. We can see about shipping this one later. It would seem to me to be easier to fill Mr Young’s order than the other one.

This letter indicates that Morton in actual fact did think of the children in terms of a product to be supplied rather than people in need of care. Even if we take into account that it is unfair to impose our modern sensitivities on a man who lived in a different society more than a century ago, this is commercial language that does not pay even lip service to the best interests

9 Incoming Correspondence files for the Monson State Primary School for 1894 in the Massachusetts State Archives.
of the child. Not even the best interests of society that would benefit from a less instrumental attitude towards its future citizens.

**Children’s Rights – Human Rights**

At the time the institutions of the juvenile Justices of the Peace and the Visiting Agency were established to protect the rights guaranteed the children in the indenture agreements, they were unique to Massachusetts. The juvenile Justices of the Peace predated any other juvenile court by almost three decades. The office of the Visiting Agency was a combination of a modern public defenders office and a social welfare service that served as a model to others, including child reformers in England. The Visiting Agent took his role as friend of the child seriously, performing his duties to the best of his ability.

---

10 The Howard Association has just been furnished (through the courtesy of two of its American correspondents) with the proceedings of a 'Conference of Charities and Correction', held at Cleveland, O., in July, 1880, as published at Boston, U.S. One portion of this document describes the Massachusetts mode of dealing with juvenile offenders, which is the best system in the world, as tested by results . . . This Committee would invite the attention of the public, and especially of persons in authority, to the successful operation, for the last ten years, of the system adopted by the American State of Massachusetts, both for the prevention and repression of juvenile offences, by wise legislative enactments for directing official control and oversight, mainly by the enforcement of parental responsibilities, and to the provision, in the case of helpless and destitute children, of those influences of home and family life, the deprivation of which has been a principal source of the evil in question . . . The Massachusetts system points to the great superiority of the prevention of juvenile crime rather than its repression. It proves that systematic individualization, at home or in selected households, but under authority, is far more effectual for the diminution of crime than either the reformatory, or even the industrial school, or training ship, or the birch, to say nothing of the jail . . . Lastly, this system illustrates a specially successful combination of official authority and direction, with the advantages of voluntary and unpaid oversight of the youthful wards of the State. The disadvantages of the one without the other, in either direction, are in great degree avoided. The boarding-out system, for example, has been a marked success in those parts of Great Britain were suitable provisions have been made for the systematic visitation and oversight of the children (pauper girls and orphans) placed out. But where this essential condition has been neglected, evils have ensued. Massachusetts secures responsible and systematic supervision by unpaid voluntary visitors, but also by their official authority and by their own oversight, in turn, by a responsible State Board. Second Annual Report (1880) of the State Board of Health, Lunacy and Charity, January 1881, pp. lxix-lxx
The indentees’ expectations of the children were remarkably high. They demanded a level of honesty, integrity and diligence of very young children that they may also have demanded of their own offspring but probably were unable to enforce. Perhaps this arose from the fear of the questionable heredity of the children, at a time when pauperism was still regarded by many as an inherited affliction. The cycle of poverty was perceived in personal and not social terms, as were alcoholism and vagrancy. These threats to the fabric of American society were aggravated by the massive immigration from Europe and internal dislocation caused by urbanization and industrialization in the nineteenth century. Most of the children at the Primary School were from immigrant families\textsuperscript{11} who found themselves on the lowest rungs of the social and economic ladder.\textsuperscript{12}

Conclusion

The State Primary School at Monson played a key role in the attempt by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to deal with the problem of poverty and its effects on the future citizens of the United States of America. During this period, in an attempt to guarantee the basic rights of the wards of the State under the care of the Commonwealth, two innovative institutions came into existence – the nascent juvenile court system and the forerunner of modern social work, the office of the Visiting Agency. The gap between the rhetoric and the reality does not detract from the groundbreaking attempt to

\textsuperscript{11} See page 20 above.

\textsuperscript{12} Annual Reports of the Monson State Primary School, 1866-1894.
handle a problem that was there before the school was opened – and remains to this day.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Primary Sources

Massachusetts State Archives

Board of State Charities – Annual Reports 1864 – 1878
Secretary of the Board of State Charities – Annual Reports 1864 – 1878
Visiting Agent – Annual Reports 1868 - 1878

State Board of Health, Lunacy and Charity - Annual Reports 1880 – 1895

State Primary and Reform Schools - Trustees Reports 1891 - 1895

Correspondence:

Correspondence concerning placement applications 1882 - 1883
Responses from Justices of the Peace in the Juvenile Courts in response to a query by Gardiner Tufts, Visiting Agent, 1875
Circular sent by Secretary of State Board of Charities to all children's charities prior to preparation of Thirteenth Annual Report, Part Eight and replies received 1876

Special Reports:

F. B. Sanborn, The Public Charities of Massachusetts during the Century ending Jan. 1, 1876, Report made to the Massachusetts Centennial Commission, Feb. 1, 1876 Under the Direction of the Massachusetts Board of State Charities, Boston, Wright & Potter, State Printers, 1876

Special Report of the Board of State Charities on the Almshouse System, Senate Document No. 28, February 1865

Report of the Commissioners appointed by an order of the House of Representatives, Feb. 29 1832, on the subject of the Pauper System of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. House Document #1, Boston, Dutton & Wentworth, State Printers, 1833

Report of Committee on “Cost of Charities and Reforms” in Senate April 4, 1866 Offered by Mr Stevens of Suffolk

Delinquent and Wayward Children.Methods of Treatment under New Law:

The Law of 1906 (Chapter 413) together with an analysis of the new legislation and the comparison of its features with those of existing statutes, Boston, State Board of Charity, State House, 1906
Statutes:

An Act in relation to paupers having no settlement in this Commonwealth
1852 Chap. 275 Sec. 7
An Act establishing a State Primary School at Monson
1866 Chap. 209 Sec.7
An Act in addition to an act to establish the Board of State Charities.
1869 Chap. 453 Sec.2
An Act relating to the State Visiting Agency and Juvenile Offenders
1870 Chap. 359 Sec. 2 & 3
Act to abolish the Massachusetts Nautical School, and in reference to
commitments to the State Reform School.
1872 Chap. 68
An Act extending the jurisdiction in cases of juvenile offenders
1872 Chap. 358
An Act concerning truant children and absentees from school.
1873 Chap. 262 Sec.7
An Act concerning district, police and municipal courts
1877 Chap. 210 Sec. 5
An Act to create a State Board of Health, Lunacy and Charity
1879 Chap. 291
An Act to define the duties of the Board of Trustees of the State Primary and
Reform Schools.
1880 Chap. 208 Sec.1
An Act relating to indigent and neglected children.
1882 chapter 181

Journal of the House of Representatives 1895 (Debate on the closure of Monson)

Monson State Primary School Records
(in the Massachusetts State Archives)

Annual Reports 1854 – 1890
Case Histories 1863 - 1875
1880 – 1895
Correspondence Placement Applications 1871-1874
Outgoing Correspondence March to November 1880
May to October 1883
May 1894 to June 1895
Incoming Correspondence 1866 - 1869
1880
1883
1889
1894
Discharge Applications  1866 - 1871
Indentures  1856 - 1890
Indenture Book  1874 - 1876
Indenture Evaluations  1856 - 1871
Letters of Recommendation  1866-1871
Orders of Admission and Transfer  1867 - 1894
Pigeon Book  1874 - 1882
Record Book  Vol. 1
Trustee Minutes  1880 - 1894
Visiting Agents Reports  1868 - 1895 (excluding 1879)

B. Secondary Sources

Books


Dulberger, Judith A., "Mother Donit for the Best" – Correspondence of a Nineteenth-Century Orphan Asylum, Syracuse, 1996


Gittens, Joan, Poor Relations: The Children of the State of Illinois, Urbana and Chicago, 1994


Twain, Mark, *Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*, London and Melbourne, 1986


Wilson, Harriet E., *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*, New York, 1983


Articles


Dissertations

Debele, Gary A., The Origins and Early Years of American Juvenile Courts: The Impact of Changes in American Domestic Relations Law and Criminal Procedure from 1880 to 1920

Deluzio, Christa, “New Girls for Old”: Female Adolescence in American Scientific Thought

Dulberger, Judith Ann, Refuge or Repressor: The Role of the Orphan Asylum in the Lives of Poor Children and their Families in Late Nineteenth Century America

Ross, Catherine J., Society’s Children: The Care of Indigent Youngsters in New York City, 1875-1903
Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Yale University, 1977

Rotundo, Edward Anthony, Manhood in America: The Northern Middle Class, 1770-1920
Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1982

Sklern, Harriet Miller, Stubborn Child Law in Massachusetts.
Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1977

Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, August 1970

Steenburg, Nancy Hathaway, “Not of Full Age”: Children and the Criminal Law in Connecticut, 1635-1855


The purpose of this study is to look at those children in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts who were considered the dregs of society, the most underprivileged and unfortunate of all children, the paupers who were declared Wards of the State and placed in the Monson State Primary School. What measures did the Commonwealth take to Americanize these wretches and equip them for their role as future citizens of the New Republic? To what extent did the State succeed? By looking at the rights and protection guaranteed these underprivileged pauper children, can we gain an insight into what were regarded as the basic rights of all children in all social strata in mid-nineteenth century America?

The Monson State Primary School in Palmer, Massachusetts, was neither an orphanage nor a reform school. Established by an act of the legislature in 1866, its declared purpose was to provide an education for the pauper children of Massachusetts (largely the children of immigrants) who were found in the three state almshouses - Monson, Bridgewater and Tewksbury. The children were classified as “pupils” rather than “paupers” for two reasons. First, a child could not in fact be indigent through his or her own actions but only passively as the result of the neglect or incompetence of the parents. Second, a child could hold his or her head high as a pupil, similar to pupils in common schools throughout
the Commonwealth, and self-esteem is the basis of self-respect and personal success.

The study is based on the papers of the Monson State Primary School in the Massachusetts State Archives - annual reports of the School and the Board of State Charities; case histories of the children in the School and those placed out in families; correspondence between the parents and the School, the children and the school, with potential indentees, and with officials of the Board and the trustees; indenture contracts; record books; visiting agent reports and trustee minutes.

The Legislature established the school in 1866 and closed it in 1895. During these 29 years the character of the school changed from an institution dedicated to providing an education for the least privileged children in the Commonwealth to a holding institution and labor exchange to provide child workers for farmers and householders.

When the State Primary School at Monson opened its doors the legislators, trustees, inspectors, and staff of the school expected that the self-image of the children would improve and contribute to their transformation from paupers to citizens by means of separation and education. The children would be separated from the unsavory influence of their pauper parents and other adult paupers in the almshouses when they moved in to the school building. In addition the children would receive a proper education, similar to that offered in the regular common schools, which would socialize them as good Americans and prepare them for their future lives of industry and citizenship.
Separation and education were two sides of the developing welfare triangle. The third side was indenture – which did not mean the same in the nineteenth century as it had in colonial times. By the time the pupils of the Monson School were indentured to the farmers and householders of Massachusetts, the colonial craftsman no longer existed as labor had moved into the factories and no worker produced an entire product from beginning to end. The purpose of the Monson indenture was as much to defray the expense of maintaining the children in the school as to provide for their future by ensuring the acquisition of basic skills. Furthermore, the skills the children acquired prepared them for a life as laborers on the lowest rungs of the social ladder.

The State Primary School was a unique institution in that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, not a private or religious charitable organization, took upon itself the responsibility of educating its needy children and ensuring their socialization as Americans. I discovered that to facilitate this end, Massachusetts established two path-breaking institutions: the Visiting Agency that provided the children both with a friend in Court and with supervision and protection when they were placed out in families, and Justices of Probate who specialized in handling juvenile cases almost thirty years before the first juvenile court was established in Illinois in 1899.
אוצרחים בדבר
יולדים חוסים בביי המיסיון היסודי הממלכתי-
במחוז יוסטס 1866-1895

היבר לשם קבלת חוגר דוקטור לפילוסופיה

נאות
אוגוסט סברסקי

מגמת לסנטה של אוניברסיטת תל אביב

ספטמבר 2005
העבודה נעשתה בהדרכת

דר. חגי הורביץ – אוניברסיטת תל אביב

פרופ. אבי יעקוב סיני – אוניברסיטת הוואי
ילדי חוסים בביוט הפסגות הממלכתי הייסודי מוסñe בتأسيس Stevens
1866- 1895

במחצית המאה ה-19 עשתה מיסיונרים אמריקאיםervice ילדי עניים,־ מרכזים ילדי מחדירה,־ בבחירת האמוריות; ולהם הותרה להכין חינוך נאות栤 את התלמידים אחרים בשירותם. לעדות ולא עインド היגויים, אם כן נ поможет לשלב, חדשים וב走得 횠בה ולבוש במלון אחר. הבאים ממרכזים ומסכים כדי לחפש鉯 ב-removev המרחב
ולמצות נאות栤창ון곬, זוכות ומקומיים. הכספים ל homosex שיפיכו醫生י פמי למעשה. חפץ בבריחה
ולמסתולח אותה מי.
ולא התייחסים אל היהщен שלחלות החלשים. בבריחה, מסכים וסוכנויות ספקдатьرص במחוז וכולו.

ה indefinite בלשוןたち עשה:• הקמת הפנימית התורה שלילדי שירותה ו狹עה על ידי המהינה, ולא על ידי
 Arabים צדפים ואנשיים;

הкמת "יסיבות המקור", תשוקות מתוישה עם ביסוס נרחב ושובב על עזרה
 סוציאלית; למותה מעשה במעל בבית המפגש הרוחני שליער ברוריב, נשבר שפע עם המשקע.

למסתולח חבל ממג חלף ילדי עניים וoystick, וחובה נשאגו שנה לפני הקמת
בית המשפחיה לכל מבניי אילנייה בשנות 1899.

מערה המחקר היא לובשים את общественно שירות ילדי חוסים בהסכם וסיום שנעשה ב
ביי'ם מוסנף בביוגרפייתأسلوب שירות ילדי. על פי הסכמה הבכירה ילדי בדוחות הביסוס
בстольה - ילדי חוסים, תינוק, טיפול רפוא, מגורים, השכלה וחינוך דתייום בeği camer. נסף בבריחה love סוכנויות ספקדרachment ותקומת החסות. בה הממשלה, היא על ילדייום החשרא
אצל המשפחיה על Lawson תקופת החסות, דהiniי וי18 רחבות על 21 לבנים.

על ידי חקר הילדים שחוועקו ילדייום, שוחה בשחיתות הסוכנויות החברתייוס - ילדייום, ברקוב
ידים מח及び, שוחכרו חסבים של המסגרת - קווים למדים על חברת היסוס של ילדייום
שבזכות החבר התארづת בחירת השל המאה ה-19.
 risultati delle ricerche dedicati a loro, sono al tempo stesso è socialmente giusti.

La lettera del servizio, a causa degli elettori, non solo per i bambini, ma anche per i cittadini di tutti i servizi, da una mano, che forniva ai cittadini, e da un'altro che permessero di vedere e pubblicare come il servizio è fondamentale per il manutenzione dell'ordine e della pace nelle aree.

La foto del bambino è un omaggio all'ordine e al diritto, che non è solo per i cittadini e per i bambini, ma per tutti gli esseri umani.

La lettera del servizio, a causa degli elettori, non solo per i bambini, ma anche per i cittadini di tutti i servizi, da una mano, che forniva ai cittadini, e da un'altro che permessero di vedere e pubblicare come il servizio è fondamentale per il manutenzione dell'ordine e della pace nelle aree.

La foto del bambino è un omaggio all'ordine e al diritto, che non è solo per i cittadini e per i bambini, ma per tutti gli esseri umani.

La lettera del servizio, a causa degli elettori, non solo per i bambini, ma anche per i cittadini di tutti i servizi, da una mano, che forniva ai cittadini, e da un'altro che permessero di vedere e pubblicare come il servizio è fondamentale per il manutenzione dell'ordine e della pace nelle aree.

La foto del bambino è un omaggio all'ordine e al diritto, che non è solo per i cittadini e per i bambini, ma per tutti gli esseri umani.

La lettera del servizio, a causa degli elettori, non solo per i bambini, ma anche per i cittadini di tutti i servizi, da una mano, che forniva ai cittadini, e da un'altro che permessero di vedere e pubblicare come il servizio è fondamentale per il manutenzione dell'ordine e della pace nelle aree.

La foto del bambino è un omaggio all'ordine e al diritto, che non è solo per i cittadini e per i bambini, ma per tutti gli esseri umani.

La lettera del servizio, a causa degli elettori, non solo per i bambini, ma anche per i cittadini di tutti i servizi, da una mano, che forniva ai cittadini, e da un'altro che permessero di vedere e pubblicare come il servizio è fondamentale per il manutenzione dell'ordine e della pace nelle aree.

La foto del bambino è un omaggio all'ordine e al diritto, che non è solo per i cittadini e per i bambini, ma per tutti gli esseri umani.

La lettera del servizio, a causa degli elettori, non solo per i bambini, ma anche per i cittadini di tutti i servizi, da una mano, che forniva ai cittadini, e da un'altro che permessero di vedere e pubblicare come il servizio è fondamentale per il manutenzione dell'ordine e della pace nelle aree.

La foto del bambino è un omaggio all'ordine e al diritto, che non è solo per i cittadini e per i bambini, ma per tutti gli esseri umani.
בשנות ממדים אחרית (כנון: ני וירק), מסיעו טוסים מעולות אל שלחה את ילדיה לפי הענה ברכבת.

היתרות מהל الإمונית על ילדיהolatile עם השמתה על המשחתה באמעטשות סוכנות ביקרור - מוסד ייחודי שחלפו במקסיקוסטטוסו היה, הלכשה, את החליפה של מועצת העדות החסידייה הממונה על

כמו. סוכן הביקרור ואבכימרי, לפי שכר, חוף על ביקרור פטור עד לעובץ של

הילידים. הם ראשונים שכנין, אונאי קומודים ואוניוות נסיים מובן המ덱 על פנתל-hero שלידים

ممבלים טובול צאות. כפ, בוקר את הילידים המשחת. סוכן הביקרור היה אחראיה, גם על

בדיקת המשחתה המועמדות למפי השמת הילידים אטלס.

בנוסח,verts טוסי הביקרור לחופי יזויים בניה בתי המשпат שאו הילידים להקות חסות ביבח

הספר מפותח. בת למשпат ואל, וי בתי משпат עליגים משחת, שופטיים קובל מנייה מוחדו

כשופטי ילדיים זניחים. במקומם ריבים והשפות הילידים בבחות כיבים ביבת שמל שיש, כי

שתחפשת החסות ייקה החותמה למתייש מתוחד - 12-15 שלח. בעד שהיה יגע משפחתי

לנובזורי עליון הקטף עם שונים בחורה, הילידים חפşı על ייעון משפחתי. הילאר שחקק חוח טוס הביקרור, כי, השילידיים יכו למוע ציווי משפחתי, אחר, טוס הביקרור

משטעט" בחית המשпат שלכ היליד לבבר בשם היליד,ODY לא שי היות משפטים או סגור

של מיים.

טלוכיס, בתק תسفر הממלכתית מונסון היה יעו דומ המשפות שלימים הם שופטינו

המכורה שלב ואילדי הנוסקים אפורות ממחין בהרי האפריקי. רואית, בכ

שמעדה, - אלו אוגר פורט - לקה על עצמן את האחוריים עלידים הנוסקים. "שית, במקומק מקיא, כי, על מנט לבצני את הה막ד שלקהה על עצман, הקומודה המונדית שיי מוסדות

פרץ יד: סוכנים ביקרור, השוחעת את הדור למסד העדות החסידייה המורדים, בטוח

המסעות החסידיים בהילידים worldly, صلىשיטים שלף_HELPERurses של בית המשпат תודע

ל طويلة באלパソコン: 1899.