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GOTHAM'S WAIFS: FOUNDLINGS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEW YORK CITY

by

JULIE MILLER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2003

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4/14/03
Date

Gerald Markowitz, Chair of Examining Committee

4/12/03
Date

James Oakes, Executive Officer, History Department

Thomas Kessner

Margaret King

David Nasaw

Barbara Welter

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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ABBREVIATIONS

AH - Almshouse *

AHFV-NYHS - Almshouse Foundling Volume, 1838-1841, New-York Historical Society.

AICP - Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor

DAB - *Dictionary of American Biography*

DAMB - *Dictionary of American Medical Biography*

NAW - *Notable American Women, A Biographical Dictionary*

NCH - Nursery and Child's Hospital

NYFA - New York Foundling Asylum

NYIA - New York Infant Asylum

NYNCH - New York Nursery and Child's Hospital

PC - Department of Public Charities *

PCC - Department of Public Charities and Correction *

SCAA - State Charities Aid Association

* From 1784 until 1848 the almshouse was run by a varying number of commissioners. In 1849 the commissioners were replaced by the Board of Governors of the Almshouse (sometimes referred to familiarly as "The Ten Governors"). In 1860 the Governors were replaced by the Department of Public Charities and Correction. In 1895 the department split and a separate Department of Public Charities was created. This was made into the Department of Public Welfare in 1920.

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INTRODUCTION

Everybody knows what a foundling is. A foundling is a baby in a basket deposited on a stranger's doorstep, an infant princess abandoned in a desert, a baby set adrift in a little boat, a newborn deity cast out on a hillside. Moses was a foundling; so were Oedipus, Hercules, Tom Jones, and Harry Potter. Today when we think about foundlings we are most likely to think about characters like these, from the Bible, myths, and stories.

The situation was very different for people who lived in large European cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For them infant abandonment was a reality - and not only a reality but a mass phenomenon. Historian John Boswell estimates that in the second half of the eighteenth century as many as one quarter to one third of children in European cities were abandoned.[1] In the early eighteenth century Thomas Coram, founder of the London Foundling Hospital, was shocked at the number of babies he saw abandoned on the streets of London.[2] Such sights were particularly common in London then, since London, unlike Paris, Florence, Dublin, and other European cities, had no foundling asylum where unwanted babies could be deposited.

When people of Coram's time characterized foundlings they did so in terms that reflected their understanding of the realities that produced them. For them a foundling was an illegitimate baby who had been abandoned by its mother in order to rid herself of the evidence of her sexual downfall. As illegitimates, foundlings were understood to be stained with their mothers' sin and consequently were scorned. Although fairy tales and

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[1] John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 20. Boswell specifies that not all of these children were born in the city, since poor, unmarried women from the countryside often came into the city to give birth to their illegitimate children.

[2] Ruth McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 19.

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myths dwell on the noble or supernatural backgrounds of foundlings, and abandoned babies have occasionally been the children of unmarried women of the upper classes, most people understood that foundlings were overwhelmingly the children of poor women - although their fathers were not necessarily poor men.[3] Thus poverty and illegitimacy, and not the predictions of the Delphic Oracle or a goddess's envy, were behind most infant abandonments in eighteenth and nineteenth century European cities.

In New York infant abandonment did not become a phenomenon large enough to comment upon until the mid-nineteenth century. That was when the city became sizable enough to create the conditions that made the secret conceptions, births, and abandonments of a significant number of unwanted babies possible. These conditions included the arrival in the city of a massive number of immigrants, many of whom were young and on their own, away from the scrutiny, restraint, and also the support of elders. Another factor was the poverty that could make abandonment seem like the only option for a poor, young woman on her own in a strange city. And finally, the size, density, and complexity of the city created the social anonymity that made it possible first to form a secret sexual relationship, and then to deposit an accidentally conceived infant on a stranger's doorstep without being seen or judged (or so these women hoped - in the antebellum city a surprising number of women were observed and recognized and their circumstances reported to the authorities).

New Yorkers' first impulse in regard to foundlings was to treat them as the English did. Since its takeover from the Dutch by the Duke of York in 1664, New York's poor laws had been modeled on those of England. In England foundlings, along with the rest of the destitute, homeless poor, were relegated to the care of the parish - the

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[3] For a fictional example of an upper class mother of an abandoned illegitimate child see Edith Wharton, *The Old Maid (The 'Fifties)* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1924). Even here, though, Wharton makes her heroine a member of a poorer branch of a family that belongs to New York's social upper crust.

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local governmental unit designated to care for the poor who had established residence within its boundaries. According to English law the ultimate responsibility for an illegitimate child rested with its parents. Local authorities sought parents out in an effort to wrest payment from them for their child's care.[4]

Historians call England's system the "Protestant System" of foundling care, comparing it to the very different "Catholic System." In Catholic countries like Italy and France in the nineteenth century, the ultimate responsibility for foundlings was assumed by the state. Foundlings were anonymously absorbed into state-run foundling asylums that were national in scope. The ultimate goal was to preserve the honor of young women and families. To this end, neither mother nor father were pursued, and the use of turntables installed in the walls of foundling asylums assured the anonymity of those who used them to abandon babies.[5]

England had no national foundling asylum. The London Foundling Hospital, founded by Thomas Coram in 1739, was privately-run and never had the capacity to cope with all of London's - or England's - unwanted babies. It had no turntable, and mothers who sought entry for their babies had to submit themselves to a long and humiliating entrance process in which not only their need, but their morality was examined.[6]

During the first half of the nineteenth century New York's poor laws were still

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[4] McClure, *Coram's Children*, 96.

[5] For good descriptions of the Catholic and Protestant systems see Volcker Hunecke "The Abandonment of Legitimate Children in Nineteenth-Century Milan and the European Context," in *Poor Women and Children in the European Past* ed. John Henderson and Richard Wall (London: Routledge, 1994),123 and Brian Pullan, *Orphans and Foundlings in Early Modern Europe* (Reading: University of Reading, 1989), 20-21. These systems are not absolute and there were variations depending upon time and place.

[6] For descriptions of the London Foundling Hospital's admissions process see McClure, *Coram's Children*, 76-78 and 139-144 and R.B. Outhwaite, "'Objects of Charity': Petitions to the London Foundling Hospital," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (1999): 497-510.

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based on those imported from England, including laws related to illegitimate and abandoned children. Babies retrieved from the city's sidewalks and doorsteps were brought to the public almshouse in City Hall Park by the policemen, passersby, and surprised householders who found them. They either remained there, under the care of female inmates of the almshouse, or else were farmed out to the homes of poor women who worked for the city as wet-nurses. Under this treatment, most foundlings died in infancy. Those who were lucky enough to survive went to a special almshouse school and then were apprenticed as children to craftsmen, farmers, housewives, or factories. No New York foundlings have left any memoirs of their experience, or at least none that I have found. An unwillingness to reveal their shameful origins may have made them reluctant to speak.

Despite their reliance on English models, over time New Yorkers necessarily adapted their treatment of foundlings, and also their understanding of who foundlings were and could be, to local circumstances. One of these was the absence of any national social welfare policy at the federal level in the United States in the nineteenth century. This meant that charity was carried out at the local level and private charity played an important role. New York State in particular had developed the practice of delegating public funds to private charities for the care of the poor. As one of the country's most important ports, New York City had more than its share of poor immigrants, private charities of all sorts sprang up to care for them. Most of these charities were run by religious groups. As a result, the care of foundlings in the city - like the care of the poor generally - was always colored by religious values and interreligious competition.

During the first half of the century this meant that the city's private religious charities would not accept foundlings at all. Most charities of this era were permeated with the values of the Second Great Awakening that tore through the city in the late 1820s. The charities that sprang up in the wake of the revivalist movement were dedicated to moral reform. After failed efforts with prostitutes, these antebellum

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religious charities chose their beneficiaries with care, assisting only those they believed they could convert into moral citizens, and rejecting those they felt were ineligible.[7] Foundlings were ineligible, partly because they were ineradicably tainted with their mother's sin, but also because nobody believed that motherless infants could be kept alive. The dire experience of the almshouse made the task seem hopeless.

After the Civil War three private foundling asylums opened up in addition to one run by the city. All three of the private asylums were run by religious groups: the New York Foundling Asylum belonged to the Catholic Sisters of Charity, and the New York Infant Asylum and Nursery and Child's Hospital were Protestant. By this time attitudes toward unwanted infants had softened to the point where these charities were formed to assist them - but religious motivations were still foremost.

In post-Civil War New York Catholic and Protestant charities and schools competed bitterly for dollars and souls. The Catholic and Protestant foundling asylums were vigorous participants in these interethnic battles. When political corruption was added to the mix, the result could be disastrous. The New York Foundling Asylum found this out in 1871 when one of its benefactors, Mary Connolly, wife of city comptroller "Slippery Dick" Connolly, was implicated in the Tweed Ring scandal. Conflicts between reformers, typically members of the Protestant elite, and representatives of the city's poor, many of whom were Catholic, over the issue of spending public money on private religious charities made public funding unstable for all the foundling asylums throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

Because poverty was less severe in the United States than it was in Europe, and because American society offered greater possibilities for social mobility, there were

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[7] See Carroll Smith Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise of the American City, The New York Mission Movement, 1812-1870* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971). The experience of the American Female Guardian Society is particularly relevant.

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never as many foundlings in New York as there were in European cities. As a result, it was only at times of crisis that reformers, city officials and others identified infant abandonment as one of the city's critical problems. Typically, the foundling problem was presented as a symptom of other, more solvable dilemmas. Physicians and sanitarians read the rising infant mortality rates of mid-nineteenth century cities, including New York as a warning about the declining health conditions of urban life. Foundlings, with their devastatingly high death rate - one mid-century almshouse superintendent remarked bluntly of foundlings that "all of them died" - marked the high end of the chart, thus raising the alarm.[8]

The appearance of foundlings in the street was also read by New Yorkers as a sign of the rising immorality of city life - a frightening indication that New York would soon rival London or, particularly, Paris or even "heathen" China as a center of heartless vice. Because foundlings were presumed to be illegitimate, their presence on the city's streets and stoops was visible (and audible, and olfactory) evidence of bad behavior that was otherwise hidden from view. Much of this bad behavior was attributed to women. It was women's weakness that led to their seduction and betrayal, women who gave in to the pecuniary lure of prostitution, and women who demonstrated a deficiency of maternal feeling when they chose to abandon their babies. These behaviors were particularly alarming to a society that was in the process of redefining motherhood as one of the very few legitimate activities of a married woman's life and womanhood as the moral center of a society increasingly ruled by the rough, impersonal values of the marketplace.

Some of the arguments made in favor of a foundling asylum for New York, when one was proposed in the late 1850s, had less to do with the welfare of foundlings - who

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[8] This comment was made to physician Job Lewis Smith who cared for almshouse foundlings at mid century. See J. Lewis Smith, "Hindrances to the Successful Treatment of the Diseases of Infancy and Childhood," *Transactions of the New York State Medical Association* 13 (1896), 95.

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were thought to be doomed, both physically and morally, anyway - than with concerns like these. Physicians associated with the American Medical Association's mid-century antiabortion crusade argued that a foundling asylum would give women a place to deposit their unwanted babies without resorting to abortion. While abandoning one's baby to a foundling asylum was certainly a crime against motherhood, it was less of a crime, these physicians reasoned, than abortion was.[9] Not incidentally a foundling asylum would reduce the clientele of abortionists - with whom physicians were battling at this time. Opponents of prostitution, which had reached epidemic proportions by mid-century, argued that a foundling asylum would save the reputations of fallen women. By relieving women of the products of their sinning act and keeping their secrets, a foundling asylum would give them an alternative to what was seen as the inevitable downward spiral of the fallen woman into prostitution.

Even though the great majority of women who are known to have abandoned babies in nineteenth-century New York were poor, the alarm of reformers, clergy, physicians, and others was directed surprisingly often at women of their own background or class. In reality, as everyone who ran a foundling asylum knew, infant abandonment was as much the result of poverty as it was of illegitimacy. Still, the ability of foundlings to make the invisible visible raised worries about the secret doings of middle-class women at a time when women's behavior was increasingly constricted to conform to Victorian femininity.

None of the city's foundling advocates, including the foundling asylums, made any significant effort to address the problem of poverty as it related to infant abandonment. This poverty was the result of the very limited number of employment choices open to women, and the low wages women typically earned. Poor women on

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[9] For this argument, made by Dr. Alexander B. Mott, see "The Projected Foundling Hospital," *New York Times*, June 9, 1858.

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their own, whether they were single, widowed, abandoned by their husbands, or married to absent soldiers and sailors, had a very hard time making ends meet. The foundling asylums all formulated their programs around the idea that the foundling was the unwanted child of a fallen woman. They all housed maternity wards - or "lying-in asylums" - and all functioned as homes for unwed mothers. The principal goal, particularly for the Protestant foundling asylums, was the reform of the fallen woman. There were other people who recognized the economic inequities women faced and tried to think of ways the problem could be solved, but the administrators of the foundling asylums, preoccupied with sexual misbehavior, did not.[10]

The story of foundlings in New York also reveals several intersecting worlds of women. One is the shared world inhabited by women who abandoned babies and women hired by the city almshouse to nurse foundlings. Women who worked for the almshouse as wet-nurses were among the city's poorest women. Poor, unmarried women who had recently given birth and who could present a reasonably respectable appearance could work as live-in wet-nurses in private families where, as a rule, they earned a top rate for domestic servants. The women who were left to nurse for the city were either less acceptable as residents of a middle-class household, or else were unable to leave their own homes because of responsibilities to a husband - possibly a disabled husband they were obliged to support - or older children.[11] Nursing for the city, whether it was wet-nursing or simply fosterage, was a longterm cottage industry for many women. Since it paid very little - $1. per week during the first half of the century - it served only to

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[10] For commentary on the low wages for working women see: [Foster, George G.], *New York in Slices: By an Experienced Carver: Being the Original Slices Published in the New York Tribune* (New York: William H. Graham, 1848); Virginia Penny, *The Employments of Women: A Cyclopaedia of Women's Work* (Boston: Walker, Wise and Co., 1863); "Woman and Work," *New York Tribune*, December 6, 1853.

[11] For stratification among wet-nurses see Janet Golden, *A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 77.

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maintain poor women in poverty.

As poor mothers the city's wet-nurses and the women who abandoned babies had many things in common. There is even evidence that at times they encountered one another and even illicitly worked together. The records of the almshouse show mothers of foundlings tracking down their children at the homes of their nurses - whom neighborhood contacts probably enabled them to find. There are also cases of mothers and nurses colluding to share the almshouse's paltry nursing fee. These two groups of poor women participated in a kind of joint, quasi-underground economy in which the abandoned children of some provided income to others. The operators of the foundling asylums were also aware that the pool of wet-nurses was essentially the same as the pool of abandoning mothers, and they suspected that some women abandoned their babies specifically so that they could take lucrative jobs as private wet-nurses.

The middle-class women who founded and ran the Protestant foundling asylums and the Sisters of Charity who ran the New York Foundling Asylum formed another set of links with abandoning mothers. Despite the rather crabbed outlook of the women who ran the Protestant foundling asylums there is no doubt that they at least intended to do good, if only on their own terms - and to some extent they did. However the thing that most stands out about their experience is the degree of fulfillment that they themselves derived from their work. The Nursery and Child's Hospital and the New York Foundling Asylum were institutions run entirely by women. In a world in which women's opportunities in the world outside the home were severely limited, reform and charitable activities such as efforts with foundlings gave ambitious and often educated women an unprecedented opportunity to buy and sell property, raise and dispense funds, hobnob with politicians, form relationships with the press, flex their administrative muscles, and otherwise act in the public sphere in a way that married women of this era generally did

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not.[12]

Many of these women also found that their work in the foundling asylums helped to assuage their grief over the deaths of their own children. Infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis and cholera, even infections that set in after routine childhood accidents, could cause death in the nineteenth century and nearly every family had suffered the death of at least one child. The working class women who inhabited the lying-in wards of the foundling asylums were in many ways alien and off-putting to the middle-class women who tried to twist their morals into shape, but many members of these two dissonant groups nonetheless shared the experience of maternal bereavement.

A further factor that shaped New York foundlinghood was the American possibility of social mobility, even personal reinvention, an important possibility for a member of a scorned social group. During one of his stays in Paris in the last decades of the eighteenth century John Adams visited the Paris foundling hospital, known as the *Hopital des Enfants Trouves*. Years later he wrote about the experience in a letter. "I have seen," he wrote,

> in the Hospital of Foundlings, the "*Enfans Trouves*," at Paris, fifty babes in one room;–all under four days old; all in cradles alike; all nursed and attended alike; all dressed alike; all equally neat. I went from one end to the other of the whole row, and attentively observed all their countenances. And I never saw a greater variety, or more striking inequalities, in the streets of Paris or London. Some had every sign of grief, sorrow, and despair; others had joy and gayety in their faces. Some were sinking in the arms of death; others looked as if they might live to fourscore. Some were as ugly and others as beautiful, as children or adults ever are; these were stupid; those sensible. These were all born to equal rights, but to very different fortunes; to very different success and influence in life.[13]

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[12] I owe this interpretation to Kathleen McCarthy. See Kathleen D. McCarthy, "Women, Politics, Philanthropy: Some Historical Origins of the Welfare State" in *The Liberal Persuasion: Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and the Challenge of the American Past*. Edited by John Patrick Diggins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 142-150.

[13] John Adams to John Taylor, Quincy, Mass., April 15, 1814 in John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries

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When he made these observations Adams was not thinking about American foundlings at all. Abigail Adams, who also visited the Paris foundling hospital, believed that foundlings were a typical product of France, "a Country grown old in Debauchery and lewdeness" and the United States, she reasoned incorrectly, would never have to worry about such a problem.[14] Her husband may have shared this view. In any case, what Adams was doing was using the opportunity of his visit to the foundling hospital to muse on an issue that concerned him as the United States was embarking on its republican experiment. In their similar circumstances but varying capacities Adams saw in these Parisian foundlings a paradigm for the limits of opportunity in the new United States. Equal opportunities might be extended to all, but all were not equally able to make the most of them.

Foundlings often gave rise to musings about opportunity or its lack. Much of the imaginative literature about foundlings has to do with how well or badly the individual fares when untethered from inherited limitations (such as illegitimate birth) or advantages (such as royal or magical birth). In nineteenth-century New York, particularly after the Civil War when the booming but precarious economy made paupers into millionaires and millionaires into paupers, and members of the middle class clung nervously to their social rung, anxious about the possibility of being flung back into poverty, foundlings inspired thoughts about the possibilities and limitations of social mobility.

Abraham Jacobi, a pioneering pediatrician who worked in the foundling asylums during and after the Civil War, took a hopeful view. He equated foundlings with immigrants who arrive in the new country with nothing and make successes of themselves. An immigrant himself, he argued that just as "every newcomer is an

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Press, 1969), 6: 452.

[14] Abigail Adams to Elizabeth Smith Shaw, Auteuil, France, January 11, 1785. Richard Alan Ryerson, ed., *Adams Family Correspondence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 6: 58.

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additional means of wealth and power" every abandoned infant had the potential to become a contributing citizen. "Their salvation is the country's good" he insisted, and the atmosphere of opportunity in the United States was what made it possible for foundlings, like immigrants, to flourish[15]

By the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth the newspapers, hungry for crowd-pleasing stories, had developed their own version of this theme. By this time foundlings, although still largely regarded as illegitimates, were no longer uniformly scorned. Instead, newspapers like New York's sensationalizing *New York Herald* printed rags-to-riches stories of foundlings such as the infant picked up on an ashcan lid in 1909 who became a "millionaire baby" after being adopted by a wealthy, Fifth Avenue family.[16]

Everyone who had to do with foundlings in the nineteenth century understood that the word *foundling* was a profoundly loaded term, since it signified illegitimacy. In 1849 the almshouse clerk concluded that *pauper* was a less stigmatizing term than *foundling* and kindly decided to spare as many abandoned babies as he could by simply moving them from one category to the other.[17] By the second half of the century, when the stigma had lifted somewhat although the association with illegitimacy had not, administrators of foundling asylums sometimes played the term for pathos. Thus in 1872 the secretary of the Nursery and Child's Hospital wrote:

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[15] Abraham Jacobi, *The Raising and Education of Abandoned Children in Europe, With Statistics and General Remarks on that Subject* (New York: Bellevue Hospital Printing Office, 1870), 26.

[16] "Ashcan Baby Finds a Home in Fifth Avenue," *New York Herald*, December 26, 1909.

[17] *Annual Report of the Alms House Commissioner for the year 1848* (New York, 1849), 194-195. Annual reports of the almshouse will subsequently be cited as: AH, annual report, 1849.

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> ...how sad the fate of a child who is deserted by its mother - who becomes a foundling. To our minds one of the saddest conditions possible to human life. The orphan attributes to his mother endearing and touching qualities, he has dreams of her manner of expressing her tenderness towards him. But the heart and soul of the foundling are outraged in the relations held most dear by all. How sad the contrast - he can only think of his mother to curse the day and hour of his birth. He has no dreams of tenderness. Deserted at his birth, he has never been loved. The very desolation of their condition makes it more obligatory upon society to protect and shelter foundlings.[18]

These meanings were generally more important to the foundling institutions than accuracy in assignment of categories and reporting of facts and figures. Although accuracy in reporting improved over the course of the century, there were times when the almshouse and the foundling asylums lumped foundlings together with other children in their reports, and times when they separated them out. None of the institutions did this consistently. Because of this I have had to establish my own definition of a foundling for the purpose of this dissertation. According to my definition a foundling is a baby who was abandoned, regardless of the method of abandonment. This means that babies abandoned in the street, babies brought directly to the almshouse or the foundling asylums, babies abandoned with caretakers such as baby farmers (this was a very commonly used method of abandonment throughout the century), and babies born in the foundling asylums or in the city's Charity Hospital then left there by their mothers are all foundlings according to my definition. At one time or another children abandoned in all these ways were identified by various foundling authorities in nineteenth-century New York as foundlings. I have chosen to include all of them in my definition of what a foundling is.

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[18] Nursery and Child's Hospital, *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Nursery and Child's Hospital*, 1872, 11-13, New York Nursery and Child's Hospital Records, New York Weill Cornell Medical Center Archives. Annual reports of the Nursery and Child's Hospital will subsequently be cited as NCH, annual report, 1872.

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As for limiting my definition of foundlings to babies rather than older children, most people in the nineteenth century understood a foundling to be a baby. When babies were abandoned to hide an illegitimate pregnancy it was necessary for mothers to rid themselves of them as quickly as possible. As a result, many foundlings were newborns. In other cases poverty prevented mothers or families from keeping babies very long; rarely were foundlings more than a few months old. Only occasionally was an older child abandoned. In order to most directly confront the central issues of infant abandonment, poverty and illegitimacy, I am sticking to this age restriction.

Finally, I have chosen to tell this story as a story - a chronological narrative of events with some emphasis on individual motivations and personalities. For a subject that is so closely tied to intensely human situations, this seemed like the most appropriate treatment.

Julie Miller
April 3, 2003

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CHAPTER ONE - CHILDREN OF ACCIDENT AND MYSTERY[1]

1. Introduction.

In September, 1810 *The Foundling of the Forest*, a play by the prolific, now forgotten dramatist William Dimond, opened in New York's Park Theater. According to "Hamlet," the theater critic for *The Columbian*, a New York newspaper, the play "electrified the house with all the delicious luxury of woe..."[2]

Dimond's play, which is set in France, is the story of a noble infant, Florian, who is accidentally lost in the forest by his mother during her flight from the family's burning castle. In the confusion, in which the family is separated, Florian's father, the Count de Valmont, finds Florian, "a desolate infant, unnaturally left to perish in the wilderness!" Believing that his wife and son were killed in the fire, and not realizing that the foundling is his own child, Valmont rescues Florian and raises him to adulthood.

At least part of the play's appeal lay in its melodramatic elements, which included an "entangled and intricate" forest, a violent storm in which key parts of the action take place, a virtuous and handsome foundling hero, an evil baron, a madwoman, a love affair, a ribald subplot (Hamlet noted that the "*double entendres* were well accepted" by the audience), and a satisfying ending in which the foundling's mother and father are reunited and his noble birth revealed. All of this thrilled the audience at the Park Theater, producing tears, agitation and, Hamlet reported, "the fainting of a lady in one of the

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[1] Florian: "Merciful powers! What is that I hear? I? The child of accident and mystery - a wretched foundling? - I? -." William Dimond, *The Foundling of the Forest: A Play in Three Acts* (Philadelphia: Thomas H. Palmer, 1824), 35-36.

[2] "Hamlet," review of *The Foundling of the Forest*, by William Dimond, *The Columbian* (New York), September 22, 1810. William Dimond, born in England sometime after 1779, was a theater manager, playwright and poet. Philip Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, date), 4:424. According to the catalog of the New York Public Library Dimond was the author of at least twenty-one plays published between 1806 and 1840, and performed in London, Philadelphia and New York.

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boxes."[3]

For this 1810 audience, in which there must have been some for whom the American revolution was still within memory, the republican theme of the play would also have been pleasing.[4] Florian the foundling proves his virtue and bravery before his noble birth is revealed. When an enemy describes him as a "vile foundling, this child of charity," the woman who will later marry him defends him in a way that the republicans in the audience would have endorsed:

> Hush! The mystery of my Florian's birth is his misfortune, but cannot be his reproach. Our countrymen may dispute his title to command, but our enemies have confessed his power to conquer; and trust me, girl, the brave man's laurel blooms with as fresh an honour in the poor peasant's cap as when it circles princely brows–nay, justice deems it of a nobler growth, for flattery often twines the laurel round a coronet, but truth alone bestows it on the unknown head![5]

The Foundling of the Forest was popular in New York, where it was produced nine times between 1809 and 1826.[6] Hamlet believed that the play demonstrated art's ability to illuminate life:

> No play is better adapted to awaken the sympathy, to direct and fix the attention than *The Foundling of the Forest.* It is and ought to be, as we have before hinted, the great and grand object of plays to unbend the mind

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[3] Hamlet, review, September 22, 1810.

[4] For the continuing reverberation of republican themes in New York City politics in the early nineteenth century see Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[5] Dimond, "Foundling of the Forest," 4, 6.

[6] *The Foundling of the Forest* was performed in New York in 1809, 1810, 1812, 1813, 1814, 1816, 1819, 1821, and 1826. Arthur Hornblow, *A History of the Theatre in America From its Beginnings to the Present Time* (New York: Benjamin Blom, date), 1:310; Joseph N. Ireland, *Records of the New York Stage From 1750-1860* (New York: Benjamin Blom, date), 2:266, 394, 493-494; George C. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), 2:334, 349, 380, 389, 404, 416, 428, 457, 468, 554. According to the publication data on editions of the play owned by the New York Public Library, the play was also performed in Philadelphia, and London.

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> from the plodding pursuits of business, and by holding up to man the painting of distress, remind him that many of his fellows are too surely participating in the sad reality.[7]

New Yorkers may have been more involved with "the plodding pursuits of business" than an aesthete like Hamlet could approve of, but most probably did not need to be reminded about the distress suffered by the city's poor. In 1810, New York was still small, its street and business life intimate, and rich and poor crossed one anothers' paths every day. The Park Theater, located on the southeastern edge of City Hall Park, was in easy sighting distance of the city's almshouse, which was located just a few blocks away on the park's northern border. When the play was over and theatergoers stepped out into the autumn evening, they only had to glance through the trees to see where New York's real foundlings lived. For these children and their desperate, poverty-stricken parents, woe was neither delicious nor a luxury.[8]

2. Real and Imaginary Foundlings.

When New Yorkers first started to think about foundlings, they did so with a set of ideas imported from Europe. In the first decades of the nineteenth century infant abandonment in New York was nowhere near the mass phenomenon it had become in European cities like Paris, Dublin, or Rome. But most New Yorkers were carriers of

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[7] Hamlet, review, September 22, 1810.

[8] For descriptions of New York as a "walking city" in which rich and poor lived and worked together in the same neighborhoods, see Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan For Rent, 1785-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). In this period the Park Theater had not yet gained its reputation as a theater for the elite - all classes attended. This means that the audience for Dimond's play probably contained poor and working people. See "Theater" in Kenneth Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press; New York: New-York Historical Society, 1995) and Mary Henderson, *The City and the Theatre: New York Playhouses From Bowling Green to Times Square* (James T. White & Co.: Clifton, NJ, 1973), 48-50. For the location of the almshouse see I.N. Phelps Stokes, *Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909* (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1928; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1967) Vol. 1, plates 64 (1796) and 70 (1799) and Vol. 3, plate 97 (1826).

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European culture and, as inhabitants of a port city, recipients of a continuous flow of transatlantic information. Dimond's play, which debuted in 1809 simultaneously in New York and at the Theatre Royal in London, is a case in point. Central to these ideas was the notion that infant abandonment, although tragic, even deviant, was also embedded in history, culture, and common experience - thus in a sense, normal.[9] In this way infant abandonment resembled poverty which, before the reform movements of the nineteenth century, was also seen as a normal, ineradicable, even religiously ordained part of life.[10] Over the course of the nineteenth century local circumstances would shape the experience of New York's foundlings, and New Yorkers would come to decide for themselves just how normal infant abandonment ought to be in the United States' most rapidly ascending city.

In a report they issued in 1858, the governors of New York's almshouse, in an effort to put their own expanding foundling dilemma into perspective, commented that: "It is a singular fact in the history of the human species, that infanticide and desertion of

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[9] For the normativeness of infant abandonment in Europe see Hunecke, "Abandonment of Legitimate Children." Hunecke argues that the institutionalization of foundling care actually stimulated abandonment, and that as early as the Renaissance infant abandonment became "socially acceptable," 23. See also Pullan, *Orphans and Foundlings*. Pullan argues that societies that were "deeply penetrated by the custom of wet nursing" like Renaissance Italy and eighteenth-century France were set to accept abandonment at foundling hospitals as a normal practice, 10. According to anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, abandonment and infanticide are also biologically normal. Hrdy argues that mothers decide how much to invest in their infants, and even whether or not to keep them, based in part on a range of evolutionarily determined factors having to do with social status and the infant's chances of survival, and on the effects of its survival on the mother, her other children, and other members of the mother's family or group. See Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature, A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection* (New York: Pantheon, 1999).

[10] For the birth of the idea that poverty is eradicable see Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

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new-born children have prevailed from the earliest ages; and even now characterize, with greater or less prevalency, every nation–civilized or uncivilized–on the face of the earth."[11] To prove their point the almshouse governors looked to the Bible, citing the story of Hagar and Ishmael. They could just as easily have used the story of the infant Moses abandoned in the bulrushes. Or they might have looked to ancient Rome, where fathers had the legal right to decide whether they wanted to keep newborns or to expose them if they felt their families were large enough or contained an excess of girls.[12] According to historian John Boswell, the exposure of Roman infants in designated public places functioned as an efficient method for the redistribution of unwanted children.[13]

Asylums devoted exclusively to foundlings appeared for the first time in northern Italy in the Middle Ages. The first may have been one reportedly established in Milan in 787, or it may have been the one opened in Rome in 1198 by Pope Innocent III after he learned that unwanted newborns were being drowned in the Tiber. By the Renaissance, Florence had three foundling homes, the most important of which was the *Santa Maria*

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[11] Isaac Townsend, Washington Smith, Anthony Dugro, *Report of the Select Committee, Appointed March 17, 1857, by the Board of Governors of the Alms House, New-York, Deputed to Investigate the Claims of the City to the Institution, and Erection of Foundling Hospital*, in AH, annual report, 1858, [xxxiii].

[12] On fathers' right to abandon children in ancient Rome see Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 58-59; James Hastings, ed. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Scribners, no year), "Abandonment and Exposure," and David Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor: Infant Abandonment and the Politics of Reproductive Control* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 8. For more on what it takes to be "an infant worth rearing" see Hrdy, *Mother Nature*, 452-474.

[13] This is the thesis of Boswell's impressive, influential, and controversial book, *The Kindness of Strangers*. For foundlings in ancient Rome, see chapters one and two. Boswell has been criticized for presenting a too optimistic view of infant abandonment in ancient Rome by those who argue that many of these discarded children must have died from the rigors of exposure before they were able to assume their new lives - and that those lives, as slaves, prostitutes, or inferior members of adoptive families, were not necessarily ideal. See David Ransel's critical commentary on Boswell in Louise A. Tilly, Rachel Fuchs, David I. Kertzer, David L. Ransel, "Child Abandonment in European History: A Symposium," *Journal of Family History* 17 (1992), 19-20.

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degl'Innocenti, which opened in 1445. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries foundling asylums began to spread through Italy and the rest of Europe. The *Hopital des Enfants Trouves* in Paris, like the *Innocenti* a substantial and long-lasting institution, was conceived by St. Vincent de Paul as early as 1638, and added to Paris's general hospital system in 1670.[14]

European foundling asylums were instituted for a variety of reasons, not all of which had to do with increases in numbers of foundlings. The way the asylums were run, also, expressed local cultural concerns, not all of which had to do with the saving of infant lives. The founding of Florence's *Innocenti* was an expression of a new trend in which wealthy individuals began establishing charities on their own, thus carving out a direct route to God's favor. By the sixteenth century the Counter-Reformation in Italy led to a movement to regularize marriage and family life and to enforce moral standards. The result was the church's declining tolerance for illegitimate births and a system, continuing until the end of the nineteenth century, in which abandonment of illegitimate children was enforced by the church. The Counter-Reformation had a similar effect in France. In the eighteenth century in both Germany and Russia, Enlightenment thinking had a considerable effect on the founding and administration of foundling asylums. In Russia, for instance, the visionary educational reformer Ivan Betskoi, working under the patronage of Catherine II, used the foundling asylums he opened in Moscow and St. Petersburg as laboratories for his child-rearing and educational theories. In Ireland,

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[14] For the earliest foundling asylums and their spread see Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 415-417 and Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor*, 9-10. For foundlings and foundling asylums in Florence see: Philip Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence: The Ospedale degli Innocenti, 1410-1536* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990); Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), and Richard Trexler, "The Foundlings of Florence, 1395-1455," *History of Childhood Quarterly* 1 (1973): 259-84. For the establishment of Paris's *Hopital des Enfants Trouves* see Rachel Fuchs, *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France (*Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), 8.

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English authorities ignored Jonathan Swift's bitterly wry suggestion to eat the overabundant children of the poor, and instead opened foundling asylums whose secondary function was to convert the abandoned babies of Catholics into Protestants.[15]

It was not until the eighteenth century that foundlings became numerous enough in European cities to cause substantial alarm above and beyond any concerns of social engineering. John Boswell estimates that by then, astonishingly, as many as one out of every three or four children was abandoned in French, Italian, and Spanish cities. Thomas Coram, the founder, in 1739, of the London Foundling Hospital, was shocked at the sight of "young Children exposed, sometimes alive, sometimes dead, and sometimes dying" when he walked through London in the early morning. Between 1781 and 1790 the Dublin Foundling Hospital received the incredible number of 19,368 infants. This trend continued into the nineteenth century. Between ten and twenty percent of babies born in Paris between 1821 and 1852 were abandoned. The situation was comparable in Rome, where in the first quarter of the nineteenth century approximately eighteen percent of all babies born were abandoned.[16]

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[15] Gavotte, *Charity and Children*, 43; Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor*; Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 6-7; Richard Trexler, "The Friendship of Citizens," in *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1980); Otto Ulbricht, "The Debate About Foundling Hospitals in Enlightenment Germany: Infanticide, Illegitimacy, and Infant Mortality Rates," *Central European History* XVIII (September/December 1985): 211-256; David Ransel, "Ivan Betskoi and the Institutionalization of the Enlightenment in Russia," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 14 (Fall 1980): 327-338; David Ransel, *Mothers of Misery: Child Abandonment in Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), chapter 3; Joseph Robins, *The Lost Children: A Study of Charity Children in Ireland, 1700-1900* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1980); Jonathan Swift, "A Modest Proposal For Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland From Being a Burden to Their Parents or the Country, and for Making Them Beneficial for the Public," in Swift, *A Modest Proposal and Other Satires* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995). Remarking on the growing number of vagrant and unwanted children, Swift facetiously proposes cooking and eating them.

[16] Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 20; McClure, *Coram's Children*, 19; Robins, *The Lost Children*, 29; Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 34, 77; Kertzer, *Sacrificed For Honor*, 74-75.

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It is difficult to know exactly why this startling rise occurred, since infant abandonment was an activity that was typically carried out in secret by poor people whose motivations went unrecorded, yet several factors make it possible to speculate. One is the rise in illegitimate births that occurred all across Europe beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing into the nineteenth. In mid-nineteenth century Paris, for instance, approximately one third of all births were illegitimate.[17]

The United States participated in the so-called eighteenth century "sexual revolution." During the second half of the eighteenth century, at the same time that Americans were challenging the authority of kings, young people were challenging the authority of fathers and bringing the rate of premarital pregnancy in the United States up to around thirty percent.[18]

Although not all illegitimate babies were abandoned, most foundlings in most

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[17] Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 70; Peter Laslett, et al, *Bastardy and its Comparative History: Studies in the History of Illegitimacy and Marital Nonconformism in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, North America, Jamaica, and Japan* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), 26-27. For the debate surrounding the causes of the rise in illegitimacy, or the eighteenth century "sexual revolution," as Edward Shorter calls it, see: Cissie Fairchilds, "Female Sexual Attitudes and the Rise of Illegitimacy: A Case Study," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (1978): 627-677; Laslett, *Bastardy*; Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); Louise A. Tilly, Joan W. Scott, and Miriam Cohen. "Women's Work and European Fertility Patterns." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* VI (1976), 447-476. Peter Laslett makes the claim that illegitimacy rose all over Europe, even when and where industrialization and urbanization were not factors, Laslett, *Bastardy*, 26-27. For the supposed loosening of patriarchal authority around the time of the American revolution that may have contributed to a rise in illegitimacy see Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980).

[18] Daniel Scott Smith and Michael Hindus, "Premarital Pregnancy in America, 1640-1966," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6 (1975): 537. Smith and Hindus note the weakening of the control of fathers within families during the revolutionary era, 557. Alexis de Tocqueville also notes the loosening of parental power in American families, as a result of living under a democratic form of government. "Influence of Democracy on the Family," in Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Random House, 1945), II: 200-208.

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times and places have been illegitimate and nearly all were assumed to be. For hundreds of years Europeans primarily understood foundlings to be infants who had been conceived outside of marriage, delivered in secret, then abandoned by their mothers in order to conceal the evidence of their sexual downfall. When the shepherd in Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* finds the foundling Perdita in a chilly desert he speculates lewdly: "this has been some stair-work, some trunk-work, some behind-door work: they were warmer that got this than the poor thing is here." When the housekeeper in Henry Fielding's 1749 novel *Tom Jones* finds the infant Tom abandoned in her employer's bed, she exclaims:

> ...it goes against me to touch these misbegotten wretches, whom I don't look upon as my fellow-creatures. Faugh! how it stinks! It doth not smell like a Christian....it is, perhaps, better for such creatures to die in a state of innocence, than to grow up and imitate their mothers; for nothing better can be expected of them.[19]

The association of foundlinghood with illegitimacy, along with the stigma that traditionally attached to unmarried mothers and bastard children, traveled all the way to antebellum New York. When Philip Hone, a businessman and former mayor of New York, discovered a baby boy abandoned on his doorstep on a winter evening in 1838 he lamented to his diary: "Poor little innocent - abandoned by its natural protector, and thrown at its entrance into life upon the sympathy of a selfish world, to be exposed, if it should live, to the sneers and taunts, of uncharitable illegitimacy!" Hone's assumption that the baby was illegitimate was apparently reflexive, since the note that was pinned to the baby's clothing (and which Hone partially copied into his diary) stated that he was actually the child of a poor widow.[20] The stigma against illegitimates persisted well into

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[19] William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 70-74; Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*, (1749; reprint, New York: Modern Library, 1950), 7.

[20] Philip Hone, *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1927), December 8, 1838, 1: 369-372. The original note is pasted in the back of Hone's diary at the New-York Historical Society.

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the nineteenth century. In 1872 the secretary of one of New York's foundling asylums made the bleak observation that "The unwed mother is the leper of our social life. She is thrown off by her family - disowned by kindred and friends - all shrink from her, as the Jew of olden time did from the leper, and sadder still, the taint clings to the innocent child."[21]

The rise in illegitimate births, and the consequent rise in the number of foundlings, was the product not only of the cultural changes that were generated by the era of Enlightenment and revolution, but also demographic and economic factors. One of these was the massive migration of unattached young people to cities. This pattern started in Europe with the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century, and continued with the enormous European migrations to the United States of the mid-nineteenth century. Many of these people, detached from their families, experienced poverty in the rapidly growing yet fragile wage-based economy they encountered. Young women on their own, with few occupations open to them other then the poorly paid ones of domestic service, the needle trades, and laundry work, were particularly vulnerable to poverty and single motherhood - the two factors that contributed most significantly to infant abandonment. The flood of people who left Ireland for America in the wake of the potato famine in the mid-1840s contained slightly more women than men. Many of these women became domestic servants - the occupation that absorbed the greatest number of women in nineteenth century New York. Domestic servants, who normally lived in the homes of the families they worked for, were typically young, unmarried, and vulnerable to sexual involvements, wanted and unwanted, with their employers or fellow servants. Without family members and church and community leaders to drag laggard or unwilling lovers to the altar, these women sometimes found themselves in the kind of desperate

[21] NCH, annual report, 1872, 11-13.

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circumstances that led them to abandon their babies. In New York, as in London, observers noted that the mothers of many foundlings were domestic servants.[22]

The massive migrations of the nineteenth century led to explosive urban growth.[23] This growth was particularly marked in New York which, as a port city, was a magnet for immigrants. In 1786, a few years after the end of the revolution, New York's population was 23,614. By 1800 it had it had almost tripled to 60,489. In 1810, the year Hamlet reviewed *The Foundling of the Forest* - and despite the depression induced by Jefferson's embargo in 1807-1808 - the population continued to rise, this time to 96,373. In 1850, at the height of the wave of immigration from Ireland and Germany the city's population was 515,394, and in 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, it was 805,000.[24] Just the size and complexity of big nineteenth-century cities like New York created unprecedented possibilities for personal privacy, which may also have led to increasing numbers of

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[22] On migration and accidental pregnancy, see Rachel Fuchs and Leslie Page Moch, "Pregnant, Single, and Far From Home: Migrant Women in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *American Historical Review* 95 (October 1990): 1007-1031. On wages and working conditions for women in this period, see: Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), and Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987). On the migration of Irish women to New York, see Hasia Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1983). For the sexual vulnerability of servants, and servants as mothers of foundlings see Francoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class and Gender in Nineteenth-Century London*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1991); John R. Gillis, "Servants, Sexual Relations and the Risks of Illegitimacy in London, 1901-1900,"*Feminist Studies* 5:1 (1979): 142-169; and McClure, *Coram's Children*, 85-86.

[23] An important study of this phenomenon is Adna Ferrin Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century: A Study in Statistics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963; orig. pub. 1899).

[24] David T. Valentine, *Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York for 1860* (New York, 1860), 432. Hereafter I will refer to this annual publication as *Valentine's Manual*. Also Moses King, *King's Handbook of New York City* (Boston: Moses King, 1892), 45.

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abandoned babies. The anonymity of big cities like New York, London and Paris helped make it possible for unmarried women to form illicit sexual relationships, while unmarried women from rural areas and small towns came to cities to hide their accidental pregnancies.[25] It is no coincidence that foundling asylums throughout Europe and the United States were typically located in big cities. This same urban anonymity provided the cover under which an unmarried woman was able to deposit an infant secretly on a stranger's doorstep.

In New York, as in European cities, urban growth itself was related to the development of infant abandonment as a mass phenomenon. In the small communities of colonial America it was evidently too difficult to leave a baby on a doorstep and get away unseen. Even if a woman managed to accomplish this, village gossip would surely have tracked her down eventually. (Even in antebellum New York, particularly before the period of mass immigration that started in the 1840s, some women were not only observed abandoning babies, but known to their observers and reported to the authorities. This urban intimacy is evident in the case of a baby boy who was found "on the foot walk in Division Street" by a woman named Mrs. Ashdone in May, 1809. The baby was delivered to the almshouse which quickly learned, possibly from Mrs. Ashdone, that he was the illegitimate son of a man named William Lambert and a widow named Eliza Ledworth who worked as a domestic servant for a distillery. Throwing the last scrap of secrecy to the winds, the almshouse clerk recorded the baby's name as William Lambert, after the father who would presumably have preferred to remain anonymous.)[26] Even

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[25] For an example of how a young woman could carry on a secret love life under cover of the bustling urban complexity of nineteenth-century New York, see Amy Gillman Srebnick, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers: Sex and Culture in Nineteenth Century New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[26] Municipal Archives, Almshouse records, Children's Records, volume 214, microfilm reel 30, p.280. The record of William Lambert's case continues in volume 0123, p.11. I will subsequently refer to these records as AH Children's Records. Similarly, when baby Margaret Rorick was abandoned in 1808 a woman named Mrs. Flyn, who lived opposite

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though late-eighteenth-century America experienced the same "sexual revolution" as Europe did, the result was not massive infant abandonment, but shotgun weddings and, in a few cases, infanticide. Infanticide had the advantage over abandonment in small communities, since the murder and secret burial of an infant thoroughly, and tragically, eliminated all traces of his mother's sexual wrongdoing.[27]

Added to these social, demographic and economic factors was a biological one. The eighteenth century rise in illegitimate births came at the same time as a rise in population generally, probably the result of declining mortality due to improved nutrition.[28] This general rise in the population at a time when cities were swelling with rural migrants made the absolute numbers of foundlings visible on the streets of a city like early eighteenth-century London alarming to an observer like Thomas Coram. More than a century later, as New York's population continued to swell, a group of New York physicians eerily echoed Coram when they reported that foundlings on the city's streets "literally crowd our daily walks."[29]

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from Catharine Heyer, the nurse who was caring for Margaret, was able to inform the almshouse that the baby's father was a man named Curran. AH Children's Records, vol.214, p.144.

[27] For the claustrophobic quality of life in colonial America, in which people were frequently familiar with the intimate activities of their neighbors, see Helena Wall, *Fierce Communion: Family and Community in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). For an example of the way marriage was enforced on men who got single women pregnant in small New England towns, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 147-160. Ulrich also describes some cases of infanticide in colonial New England in *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), see, for instance, Ulrich's description of the case of Elizabeth Emerson, 198-201. See also Peter C. Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England, 1558-1803* (New York: NYU Press, 1982).

[28] Thomas McKeown, *The Modern Rise of Population* (New York: Academic Press, 1976). See also: Laslett, *Bastardy*, 27.

[29] The physicians recorded this impression in "A Statement in Behalf of the New York Infant Asylum," [1870] bound together with the New York Infant Asylum, annual report,

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Looking at the rise in the number of abandoned babies in the cities of eighteenth century Europe, some contemporaries argued that foundling asylums themselves contributed to the increase because they institutionalized the practice of abandonment. Those who opposed the creation of foundling asylums, in Europe as well as the United States, described them as places that encouraged illicit sex because they relieved unmarried parents of their illegitimate children.[30]

Some who made this point were thinking about the example of Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who abandoned all five of his children to the Paris foundling home, the *Hopital des Enfants Trouves*. In eighteenth-century Paris the rate of infant abandonment increased twenty-five fold. The causes included poverty and the rise in illegitimacy.[31] But Rousseau's description of how he abandoned his children, as he told it himself in his *Confessions*, reveals a lot about the ease of abandonment that critics complained about, and also about just how normal infant abandonment seemed to Rousseau and members of his Parisian social circle. When Therese Le Vasseur, the servant who was Rousseau's companion for many years, first became pregnant in 1747 Rousseau learned about the service provided by the *Hopital des Enfants Trouves* from some dining companions. Among this group, in which sexual boasting was the common currency of conversation, "the man who best helped to stock the Foundling Hospital was always the most applauded." Rousseau decided to adopt this method of getting rid of his

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1872, 6. New York Nursery and Childs Hospital Records, New York Weill Cornell Medical Center Archives. I will subsequently cite the reports of the New York Infant Asylum as NYIA, annual report, 1872. In 1860 New York's population was 805,000; in 1880 it was 1,206,500. King, *King's Handbook*, 45.

[30] The view that foundling asylums encouraged illicit sex was widely held. See, for instance, McClure, *Coram's Children*, 254 and Ulbricht, "Debate About Foundling Hospitals," 246.

[31] Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 26.

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unwanted baby. "'Since it is the custom of the country,' I told myself,' if one lives there one must adopt it.'" Le Vasseur, whom Rousseau never married, accepted his decision resignedly. "She obeyed with a sigh," Rousseau told the readers of the *Confessions*. Therese's mother, on the other hand, fearing "embarrassment in the form of a brat," actively helped Rousseau in his project.[32] Rousseau left an identifying monogram with this first child, but not with any of the others, and he never attempted to retrieve them. When a friend attempted to do so years later, the foundling asylum was unable to find them.[33]

Rousseau later did come to feel some regret for his actions, but he devotes much more space in the *Confessions* to justifying them. In addition to the approval he knew he would receive from his friends, Rousseau primarily argued that all in all his children would be much better off as wards of the state. "I will be content with a general statement that in handing my children over for the State to educate, for lack of means to bring them up myself, by destining them to become workers and peasants instead of adventurers and fortune-hunters, I thought I was acting as a citizen and a father, and looked upon myself as a member of Plato's Republic." To cap this statement off, Rousseau added: "This arrangement seemed so good and sensible and right to me that if I did not boast of it openly, it was solely out of regard for their mother."[34]

In eighteenth-century Europe and in nineteenth-century New York, the argument that foundling asylums promoted loose morals was countered by the claim that without foundling asylums unmarried parents would resort to infanticide. Despite this counter argument, distaste for the behavior of Parisians like Rousseau strengthened the prejudice

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[32] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J.M. Cohen (1781; reprint, London: Penguin, 1953), 322; 332-333.

[33] Rousseau, *Confessions*, 515-516.

[34] Rousseau, *Confessions*, 333.

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against foundling asylums. New Yorkers would encounter the force of this prejudice when they began to establish foundling asylums after the Civil War.

In order to understand the rise in infant abandonment that started in eighteenth-century Europe or, for that matter, the phenomenon of infant abandonment at all, it is necessary to understand a view of the family and children that is very different from that held by middle-class Americans in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Historian Brian Pullan argues that foundling asylums flourished in countries like Italy and France that were already, as he puts it, "deeply penetrated by the custom of wet-nursing."[35] In other words, in societies in which families were in the habit of sending their infants to the countryside to nurse, sometimes for several years, the idea of separating infants from their parents was far from alien. Even in countries like England and the United States where families did not routinely send their babies away to rural wet-nurses, there were still many commonly used systems for separating young children from their parents. One of these systems, the practice in American slavery of separating parents and children by sale, while normative within the cruel customs of slavery, can be classified as aberrant, and was particularly targeted as such by abolitionists.[36] But most varieties of placing-out - or "putting out" or "binding out," as it was variously called - were not aberrant, but were instead customary practices carried out in families from a range of social classes.

One of these was the practice of sending boys, even very young ones, away to sea. Jane Austen's brother Francis went to sea when he was fourteen, an experience which she fictionalized in her 1814 novel *Mansfield Park*.[37] Another was the use of boarding schools for young children, particularly by the English. Francis Austen liked the sea

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[35] Pullan, *Orphans and Foundlings*, 10.

[36] Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 125-126.

[37] Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen, A Life* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 61.

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enough to rise in his profession and became Admiral of the British Navy, but boarding school was famously a hellish experience for English children. Charlotte Bronte evoked its horrors with what may be gothic excess in her 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*. Just because it was normal to send children away did not mean that they enjoyed the experience or that it was necessarily good for them.

The practice that most often separated parents from young children was placing-out in its many forms. The most common of these was apprenticeship, in which parents sent young boys to work with artisans in order to learn their trades. Apprentices ordinarily boarded in the homes of their masters, where they were subject to their masters' paternal authority. Another was the more amorphous English and colonial American practice of sending children to live as servants in the homes of other families. Sometimes this was a method for redistributing overabundant poor children among their more well-to-do relatives. Fanny Price, the poor girl who is the main character of Austen's *Mansfield Park*, is sent to live with her rich aunt and uncle when she is nine years old. She grows up in their opulent household, where she is treated as only slightly better than a servant, and becomes estranged from her own family. In colonial America local officials typically placed poor children, orphans, or the children of poor, widowed mothers, in the homes of more economically viable families.[38]

Sometimes, however, the children of families that were suffering no particular financial stress were sent away by their parents to work as servants in the homes of families of *comparable* status. The reasons for this are not entirely clear, but historians speculate that it may have been a way for English families - and their New England descendants - to put a little emotional distance between themselves and their children, thereby ensuring good discipline.[39]

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[38] John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth, Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 71-75; Wall, *Fierce Communion*, chapter four.

[39] John Demos credits Edmund Morgan with the idea that families may have wanted to

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A common form of family separation in nineteenth-century New York involved domestic servants. In both English and American cities women who worked as live-in domestic servants were rarely allowed to keep their children with them - particularly if they were unmarried, as most live-in domestic servants were. Baby farmers - women who cared for the young children of working mothers - took in such children in a twenty-four hour boarding arrangement. Mothers surely visited on their days off, but the separation of mother and child was nearly total.[40] Some of these children were no better than foundlings - and some ultimately became foundlings.

All of these methods for removing young children, sometimes for long periods of time, sometimes permanently, from their families reflect an attitude toward children that was more pragmatic than sentimental. It was also a demonstration of fatalism in the face of the commonly experienced scourge of death in infancy and childhood. It was not until the nineteenth century - even as factory work and the health conditions in large cities endangered the lives of poor children - that Anglo-American society decided that sentiment ought to be the sole factor by which society regarded children.

This is not to say that these families did not love their children. By now

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avoid spoiling their own children. Demos, *Little Commonwealth*, 74. Philippe Aries finds the fifteenth-century English explaining that they sent their children into the homes of others so that they "might learn better manners." Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood, A Social History of Family Life* trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 365. Lloyd deMause refers to the many methods by which children were separated from their families - wet-nursing, apprenticeship, boarding school, etc. - as "institutionalized abandonment." *The History of Childhood* (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974), 32.

[40] For domestic servants' inability to keep their children with them see Dudden, *Serving Women*, 205-207; Golden, *Social History of Wet-Nursing*, 46; and McClure, *Coram's Children*, 85, for London. For the controversial practice of baby-farming see Margaret L. Arnott, "Infant Death, Child Care and the State: The Baby-Farming Scandal and the First Infant Life Protection Legislation of 1872," *Continuity and Change* 9 (1994): 271-311 and Sheri Broder, "Child Care or Child Neglect? Baby Farming in Late-Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia," *Gender and Society* 2 (1988): 128-148.

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historians have thrown off Philippe Aries' contention that sentiment, and particularly a unique regard for children, was absent from premodern families. These families clearly did love their children, as their diaries, letters, and, in particular, the sorrowful vehemence of their mourning literature demonstrates. At the same time, particularly in agricultural areas, the function of the family as an economic unit was far more critical to daily existence than its sentimental one. Marriages were contracted and decisions about the placement of children were made not in an absence of sentiment, but with economic concerns necessarily taking precedence. It was only by the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth, when a century of reconsideration of the role of the child led to such legal changes as the introduction of compulsory schooling and the regulation of child labor in the United States, that the economically useless, emotionally priceless child fully emerged.[41]

Ralph Waldo Emerson, who watched this change take place over the course of his lifetime - and who mourned painfully after the death of his own young son, Waldo - observed: "There grew a certain tenderness on the people, not before remarked. Children had been repressed and kept in the background; now they were considered, cosseted and pampered. I recall the remark of a witty physician who remembered the hardships of his own youth; he said, 'It was a misfortune to have been born when children were nothing, and to live till men were nothing'."[42]

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[41] For this view, and a review of the literature on children and childhood, see Hugh Cunningham, "Histories of Childhood," *American Historical Review* 103 (October 1998), 1195-1208. See also Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). The idea of the economically useless, emotionally priceless child comes from Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books), 1981. For pictures of parental sentiment toward children in premodern families see Margaret King, *The Death of the Child Valerio Marcello* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and Steven Ozment, *Flesh and Spirit: Private Life in Early Modern Germany* (New York: Viking, 1999).

[42] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England," in Perry Miller, ed., *The American Transcendentalists, Their Prose and Poetry* (Garden City:

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Whatever the reasons for the rise in the numbers of foundlings in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, and despite the fact that many, perhaps most foundlings died in infancy, one result of the proliferation of their numbers was the creation of a caste of social marginals. Since abandonment was associated with illegitimacy, and illegitimacy was associated with shame, to be identified as a foundling was to live with stigma all one's life. Unlike orphans, understood to be unfortunates pure and simple, foundlings were thought to carry the taint of their mothers' fall from virtue. The London Foundling Hospital, founded by Thomas Coram in 1739, considered changing its name to Orphan Hospital because of "'the general notions of the common people that the name Foundling carrys with it the Idea of contempt, and that of Orphan of compassion.'"[43] Hector Malot, author of *Nobody's Boy*, a popular French children's book about a foundling, has his main character, Remi, explain the drawbacks of his condition: "I felt ashamed to admit that I was a foundling,–a child picked up in the streets! I knew how the children from the Foundlings' Hospital had been scorned. It seemed to me that it was the most abject thing in the world to be a foundling."[44]

The large-scale, state-sponsored systems of foundling care that were typical of Catholic countries (and also of Russia) literally marked foundlings in permanent and quasi-permanent ways with naming practices, identifying clothing, and even permanent marks on their bodies. This made them painfully noticeable, and impeded their successful assimilation into society. Foundlings in these systems were typically placed as infants with wet-nurses in the countryside and then remained there through their childhoods. To keep track of them, several kinds of identifying marks were used.

Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), 5. For the death of Waldo Emerson see Carlos Baker, *Emerson Among the Eccentrics* (New York: Viking, 1996).

[43] As cited in McClure, *Coram's Children*, 173.

[44] Hector Malot, *Nobody's Boy*, trans. Florence Crew-Jones (New York: Cupples and Leon, 1916), 120.

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(Another purpose of these identifying marks was to prevent wet-nurses from defrauding the asylums by switching dead foundlings with their own living children in order to continue receiving payments.) Eighteenth-century Irish and Sicilian babies were branded - a practice more typically associated with the punishment of criminals, not to mention animals. In Italy and France, in select times and places, small gold earrings with identifying markings were permanently soldered into the ears of infant foundlings. Necklaces bearing identifying tags were used in Italy, Ireland, France and Russia. In France and Italy these were permanently fastened with marked lead seals. Hector Malot has his foundling protagonist Remi describe what it was like to be marked by a necklace from the foundling home: "In the village there were two children from the Home....They had a metal plaque hung round their necks with a number on it. They were badly dressed, and so dirty! All the other children made fun of them and threw stones at them. They chased them like boys chase a lost dog, for fun, and because a stray dog has no one to protect it."[45]

European foundlings who lived to grow up often, although not always, became members of a despised underclass.[46] Those who were raised in rural villages in France were limited to agricultural day labor in the surrounding areas. Undesirable as marriage

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[45] Malot, *Nobody's Boy*, 19. For a good statement about the stigma against foundlings, see Pullan, *Orphans and Foundlings*, 5-6. See also, McClure, *Coram's Children*, 9-12 and Nancy Fitch, "'*Les Petits Parisiens en Province*': The Silent Revolution in the Allier," *Journal of Family History* 11 (1986), 132. For the brands, clothing, necklaces, and earrings used to identify foundlings see: Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 122-124; Kertzer, *Sacrificed For Honor*, 100, 115; McClure, *Coram's Children*, 194-195; Robins, *Lost Children*, 16, 25, 57; Ransel, *Mothers of Misery*, 177; On the use of physical disfigurement as a punishment for criminals in England, see David M. Schneider, *The History of Public Welfare in New York State, 1609-1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), vol.1, 45.

[46] Wendy Sigle, David Kertzer and Michael J. White argue that in nineteenth-century Bologna foundlings may have maintained positive relationships with their foster families. "Abandoned Children and their Transitions to Adulthood in Nineteenth-Century Italy," *Journal of Family History* 25 (July 2000): 326-340.

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partners, without even the minimal opportunities and protection a poor family might have been able to provide, some of these "*petits Parisiens*" became vagrants and thieves. In 1766 a French noblewoman complained to the authorities about a community of foundling outcasts in her rural region:

> These children start by watching the flocks, and when they grow up they marry other bastards, girls whom they call their sisters. This tribe, with no property and precious little savings, get themselves cottages on the commons...They all apply themselves to ravaging the communal woods...and if you complain of such behavior they only threaten you with arson.[47]

In Ireland and elsewhere girl foundlings reputedly became prostitutes. Officials worried that foundlings, limited to each other's company, with no first-hand knowledge of family life, would only create more generations of foundlings.[48]

As bearers of European cultural traditions New Yorkers were well aware of what the normal understandings about foundlings were well before they had significant numbers of them on their own doorsteps. The publications that sailed across the Atlantic and into the bookstores, lending libraries, and theaters of New York were among their most potent and influential sources of this information.

Foundlings have populated the imagined world of western culture as far back as the literary record reaches. Moses is the most famous of the biblical foundlings. As we have seen, nineteenth-century New York City officials were also familiar with the story

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[47] Quoted in Pullan, *Orphans and Foundlings*, 14. George Sand expanded on the idea of the unmarriagability of foundlings in her novel *The Country Waif*. Francois, the foundling of the title, explains that he won't marry because he is a foundling. George Sand, *The Country Waif*, trans. Eirene Collis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 102.

[48] On grown foundlings as social marginals see Fitch, "*Les Petits Parisiens*," 132; Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 263; Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor*, 152-153. As prostitutes in Ireland, Robins, *Lost Children*, 58. As creators of a self-reproducing caste in France and Russia, Ransel, *Mothers of Misery*, 72.

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of Hagar and Ishmael, a mother and son pair who, like Danae and Perseus of Greek myth, were abandoned together. The hillsides and waterways of mythical Greece and Rome were littered with foundlings: Hercules, Oedipus, Atalanta, and Romulus and Remus are only the most well-known among multitudes.[49] Folk and fairy tales from around the world include foundlings among their roster of standard characters. In some of these tales, Hansel and Gretel for instance, cruel or impoverished parents or step-parents abandon their children. In other stories abandoned babies are rescued by animals, angels, fairies, princesses, kings, shepherds, goatherds, cowherds, and swineherds. Some turn out to be royalty; others function as underdog tricksters or heroes.[50] *Beowulf* opens with the funeral of a foundling, whose burial at sea resembles his experience as an abandoned infant set adrift in a boat. Shakespeare used foundling characters in several of his plays. Mozart's "The Magic Flute" is a foundling story. Stories about orphans and foundlings are central to eighteenth and nineteenth century novels. Henry Fielding (*Tom Jones*), Charles Dickens (*Oliver Twist*), Eugene Sue (*Mysteries of Paris*), George Sand (*The Country Waif*), Herman Melville (*Billy Budd*), George Eliot (*Silas Marner, Adam Bede,* and *Daniel Deronda*) and Oscar Wilde (*The Importance of Being Earnest*) are among the novelists who played the predicament of the abandoned baby either for pathos or farce.

Looking at the whole ancient and interconnected body of literary work about foundlings, it seems clear that while some elements of these stories originated in the

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[49] There are stories of infant abandonment on almost every page of Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955). For Perseus and Danae see Graves, *Greek Myths*, I: 238.

[50] Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966). See the categories listed under R130, "Rescue of abandoned or lost persons" and S300-399, "Abandoned or murdered children." Under the heading "Unpromising Hero" (L100-L199) Thompson includes the "Foundling Hero" (L111.2). On the foundling as trickster hero see also Robert Darnton, "Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose" in Darnton, *The Great Cat-Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984), 55.

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hopeful or fanciful imaginations of their tellers, others are rooted in historical reality. There have always been communicating doors between the worlds of fact and fiction. If fact appeared to echo fiction, it was because fiction had borrowed a page from fact. The foundling stories in Greek and Roman mythology, for instance, reflect the pervasive practice of infant abandonment in the ancient world. The story of Hansel and Gretel is another instance in which elements specific to a historical time and place shape what appears to be a wholly imagined story. Hansel and Gretel is about that notorious archetype, the cruel stepmother, but it is also, viscerally, about hunger, specifically the hunger of the premodern, northern European peasantry. It is only after the woodcutter worries how he can feed his family during a time of famine that his cruel wife suggests abandoning his children in the forest. Images of food and eating abound in this story: the breadcrumbs Hansel and Gretel leave behind, the edible house the famished children find in the woods, the witch's threat to make a meal out of them.[51]

Some of the stories nineteenth-century New Yorkers knew about from fiction could have happened, and in fact some very like them did happen in New York. This one, for instance: Early on an April morning in 1788 a woman traveling from the outskirts of New York to sell her goods in the city's market discovered a "living infant lying on the ground, apparently but a few hours old, with a bundle of clothes, and a purse containing 50 guineas." The woman's dog called her attention to the baby, who was lying in a field alongside the Bowery. According to a short notice in the *New-York*

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[51] I owe the insight about the connection between hunger and fairy stories to Robert Darnton's essay, "Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose." For more on the connections between fiction and reality see Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 75-100; and Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde, On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994). On the factual basis of foundling stories in the Bible, see Meir Malul, "Adoption of Foundlings in the Bible and Mesopotamian Documents: A Study of Some Legal Metaphors in Ezekiel 1.1-7," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 46 (1990): 97-126. My thanks to Rebecca Jacobs and Molly Karp for pointing me to some of these biblical foundling references.

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Packet, the woman "took up the infant, with its appendages, and conveyed it safely to her home; where, she will doub[t]less humanely treat the little unfortunate innocent, as well on account of the uncommon adventure, as the reward which accompanied it."

Anyone familiar with Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* would recognize the similarities: the loneliness of the spot chosen to abandon the baby, the package of treasure left with it, the humbleness of the baby's finder. The *Packet*'s reporter assumed that the market woman who found the baby would take it home and raise it just as the old shepherd who found Perdita did, although this American foundling was unlikely to turn out to be a princess.[52]

Or this one: On a spring day in 1840 Bridget Brishhan, a New Yorker who made her living selling fruit, left work and returned to the room on Water Street that she shared with her three children. There she found a three-week-old girl "lying in her bed crying." Bridget's children, the oldest age seven, reported that "some strange woman had entered the room and left it there." Bridget Brishhan's story was peculiar but it was not unique. Eliza Ann Oliver of Norfolk Street had had a similar experience two years earlier. Early one morning, while Eliza was out and her eleven-year-old son William "lay asleep on the floor," "some person unknown" crept into her home and left a two- week-old girl.[53]

If the almshouse clerk who took down the testimonies of these two women was more than simply literate but a real reader, the sort who habitually stopped at one of the city's lending libraries on his way home from the almshouse department's office, he might have been reminded of the experience of Mr. Allworthy in the first pages of Fielding's *Tom Jones*. Mr. Allworthy, returning late from a trip to London, "was

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[52] *The New-York Packet*, April 25, 1788.

[53] New York City Almshouse Foundling Volume, 1838-1841, New-York Historical Society (I will subsequently cite this as AHFV-NYHS) #130, Bridget Waters, May 15, 1840; , Hannah Gilmore/Emeline Toby, #14, June 14, 1838. For a similar story from later in the century see "Waif left in a Parlor. Somebody Went Into Mrs. Manson's Flat and Went Away, Leaving a Pretty Baby," *New York Herald*, August 2, 1894.

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preparing to step into bed, when, upon opening the clothes, to his great surprise he beheld an infant, wrapt up in some coarse linen, in a sweet and profound sleep, between his sheets."[54]

Fictional and factual stories about foundlings sometimes crossed paths in the press. In 1843 the New York workingman's newspaper *The Subterranean* published an excerpt from Eugene Sue's novel, *The Mysteries of Paris*. Sue's *Mysteries*, which was serialized in the French *Journal des Debats* in 1842-1843, took readers on a tour through a Parisian underworld populated by castoffs of society - thieves, thugs, prostitutes and more than one foundling, including the novel's heroine, Fleur de Marie. Fleur de Marie, like William Dimond's Florian and Shakespeare's Perdita, turns out to be a lost child of noble birth.[55] The staff of the *Subterranean* knew something about foundlings from their own experience. Only a few months earlier a member of the *Subterranean*'s staff opened the office one morning to find a newborn boy lying on a counter.[56]

Something similar happened in 1859 when the *New York Tribune* ran a prominent advertisement on its front page for a serial, *Azael Kain; Or, the Fortunes of a Foundling*, that was scheduled to run in the *New-York Weekly*. A few pages in, readers of the

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[54] Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 6. *Tom Jones* was first published in 1749. On lending libraries in the United States see Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). There were at least two libraries within walking distance of the almshouse: the Mercantile Library Association at 133 Nassau Street and the New-York Society Library at 348 Broadway. See *Valentine's Manual*, 1842-1843, 252.

[55] "The Punishment," (an excerpt translated from Eugene Sue, *Mysteries of Paris*) *The Subterranean* (New York), November 4, 1843. For Eugene Sue and his *Mysteres de Paris* see Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1987). For the publication of *Les Mysteres* in Mike Walsh's *Subterranean*, see Peter G. Buckley, "Culture, Class, and Place in Antebellum New York," in John Hull Mollenkopf, ed., *Power, Culture, and Place: Essays on New York City* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988), 42.

[56] "A Young Subterranean," *The Subterranean*, July 22, 1843.

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Tribune saw the following real notice: "FOUNDLING.–A healthy female infant, two weeks old, found at 7 o'clock, Tuesday evening, and taken to the Governors of the Alms House."[57]

New Yorkers, exposed to this mix of real and imaginary foundlings, sometimes confused the two. Philip Hone who, as a former mayor of the city should have known better, turned to an example from art to describe his own foundling experience. After observing the foundling he discovered on his doorstep resting on his kitchen table surrounded by family, servants and guests, Hone mused that the scene "would have furnished a capital subject for a painter." A painting on a biblical theme assembled itself in Hone's mind as he imagined "my wife and daughters, standing like the daughters of Pharaoh over the infant Moses in the bulrushes" and his servants and guests arranged picturesquely around the table, each in a characteristic attitude, "all interested, but differently affected."

Hone's ability to place the baby as a recognizable figure from the world of art seems to have limited his ability to feel any real compassion for him. After briefly toying with the idea of keeping him, Hone instead packed the baby - whose name, a note pinned on his clothing stated, was Alfred Godfrey Douglas - off to the almshouse with a servant. Hone, his guests, and his family then continued their dinner, "the game and oysters cold, but our hearts warm; other topics soon engrossed us, and it was near midnight when we broke up." Alfred spent the night at the almshouse offices in City Hall Park, then was sent to the almshouse at Bellevue where, like the majority of foundlings, he probably died within a few months.[58]

Some of the people who dropped foundlings around antebellum New York left notes with their babies, and some of these notes demonstrate a familiarity with literary

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[57] *New York Tribune*, February 17, 1859.

[58] Hone, *Diary*, 371.

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conventions. The person who left Alfred Godfrey Douglas on Philip Hone's doorstep in 1838 was clearly familiar with literary formulas. Her note reads, in full:

> Have compassion upon my poor orphan child its father was lost in the Pulaski - I am a poor friendless widow in a strange city had I kept it - it would have lingered and died with starvation: oh it will drive me frantic - to think I must part with my first and only pledge of my departed Husband but God will forgive me - oh! I do it for the best - but - if God restore my health I would seek for it and labor for its maintenance but - it will never be I am fast hurry to my grave - let it bear the name of its Father – Alfred Godfrey Douglas
>
> I can write no more[59]

The last line of this substantial and firmly written note, "I can write no more," smells more like a convention of literary melodrama than a literal statement of fact, as do the gothic exclamations.

The story the note tells may also be a work of fiction. The Pulaski was a steamboat that left Savannah on June 13, 1838 and exploded off the coast of North Carolina the following night killing seventy-seven of its 155 passengers. In the published lists of passengers, there was no one named Douglas. It is entirely possible that the author of this note was not a widow at all, but an unmarried mother, perhaps a New Yorker who was aware of Hone's wealth and local renown, who believed that a story of poverty and widowhood by steamboat explosion would be more acceptable to a potential benefactor like Hone than one of furtive sex and illegitimate birth. If the note's author read the newspapers, she would have seen the extensive coverage of the Pulaski disaster, which occurred early in Alfred's mother's pregnancy. She could also have counted on Hone to know about it. Like financial panics and cholera epidemics, steamboat accidents were a characteristic and much commented upon, danger of the age. A victim of a

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[59] This note is pasted into the back of the AHFV-NYHS. It is also copied into the volume where the case (#55, December 8, 1838) is recorded, and Hone transcribed part of it into his diary, Hone, *Diary*, 371-372.

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steamboat disaster would be sure to draw sympathy. Whether her story was true or not, one fact that can be relied on is that the person who left Alfred Godfrey Douglas on Philip Hone's doorstep was unable to cope with a baby, and that she tried to assure him - unsuccessfully, as it turned out - a soft landing in a new life.[60]

There is another note from this period that ends with almost exactly the same despondently trailing phrase as the note left with baby Alfred. This note, also unsigned, was left with John Green, a month-old boy abandoned in the sixteenth ward on Twenty-Fourth Street near Tenth Avenue in 1840. The note indicates that this baby was left with his father's father, evidently by his mother. Like the author of the note left with Alfred, the mother of John Green claims to be suffering from poverty, husbandlessness, and illness:

> Mr Green sir this is your sons child[.] it is not but what I love [not] the child that I part with it[,] I have no milk for it[,] I am too poor to put it to nurse and to see it taken from my armes to the alms house I cant stand[.] looke on this little suffer in Mercy and I hope god will bless[.] God I wish you would get it chrisend[,] call it After its father[.] Looke at it and Looke its father[.] it was born the febbuary 22[.] I hope god bless it and forgive me[.] you must give it [laudanum][.] I had to do so to keep it quiet I cant

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[60] *A Minute and Circumstantial Narrative of the Loss of the Steam-Packet Pulaski, Which Burst Her Boiler, and Sunk on the Coast of North-Carolina, June 14, 1838, With Many Affecting Incidents Connected with that Disastrous Event, by which Nearly One Hundred Persons Lost Their Lives!* (Providence: H.H. Brown, 1839). Fanny Kemble described the wreck of the Pulaski in her *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* (New York: Knopf, 1961), 336-342. The *New York Post* reported on the Pulaski on June 22, 1838 ("The Loss of the Steamboat Pulaski"), June 23 ("Further Particulars of the Loss of the Steamboat Pulaski"), June 25 ("Joyful Intelligence from Those Wrecked in the Pulaski"), and June 26 ("Steamer Pulaski"). Lists of passengers in these sources do not mention anyone named Douglas. On June 26 the *Post* protested: "The number of lives lost by steamboat accidents is truly appalling. In less than three years it is computed that about two thousand persons have thus suddenly been hurried to their graves...And is there no remedy for all this?" The anonymous author of the unpaged pamphlet, *A Minute and Circumstantial Narrative* comments similarly: "Disaster has followed disaster, in such quick succession–that before the mind could become tranquil from the sad tidings learned from one, another and yet another would follow..."

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[write] ane more[.][61]

Did the father of this baby drift away, perhaps west or to sea, leaving this woman behind? Did he retreat to the safe haven of his family after a fleeting dalliance in the slums? In 1840 the newly established sixteenth ward, on the west side of Manhattan, north of the built-up section of the city, was still only sparsely inhabited with a mixture of market gardeners and the country retreats of the well-to-do.[62] The grandfather on whose doorstep the baby was left apparently had not seen the baby. The author of the note introduced the baby to his grandfather: "this is your sons child" and asked him to note the resemblance between father and child: "Looke at it and Looke [at] its father," indicating that he may have been the product of an illicit love affair that was not known to the man's family.

The author of this note is clearly less adept at writing than the author of the note left with Alfred Godfrey Douglas. Its artless pathos - particularly the special instructions about how to care for the baby: "you must give it [laudanum] I had to do so to keep it quiet..." - gives it the scent of authenticity. And yet its last line, "I can't [write] any more," so similar to the last line of the note left with Alfred, "I can write no more," hints at a familiarity with the sort of phrases that oozed from the pens of swooning heroines in romantic novels.[63]

The literary tendency continued into the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1870 a note on a small slip of paper left with a baby read: "This is little Augusta Born

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[61] John Green, AHFV-NYHS, #122, March 28, 1840. The note, which is addressed to "Mr. John Green in car [sic] of his father," is pasted in the back of the volume. I have added punctuation to this note to make it more readable.

[62] Edward K. Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840-1857* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 103.

[63] For another instance of mutual borrowings between fact and fiction, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

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Jan. the 30 1870 O, Crule Poverty."[64]

Influential members of society, people like Philip Hone or the author of the notice in the *New York Packet*, were likely to be familiar with the foundling stories that were ubiquitous in novels, plays, the Bible, and other written sources. But were poor women, the group most likely to abandon babies, familiar with these written tales? The evidence of these notes indicates that at least some of them could have been. The literacy gap between men and women that prevailed in colonial America gradually closed between the last decades of the eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth. This was the result of greater efforts to educate women, not so much for their own pleasure or practical use, but to prepare them to become mothers of the informed and responsible male citizens required by the new republic.[65] Despite this rather limited understanding of what education for women was supposed to be for, women proved to be avid consumers of novels, and novels were very often directed at women readers. The eighteenth and early nineteenth century was the period of the gothic novel, whose language the Alfred Godfrey Douglas and John Green notes echo. Seduction themes, used in English novels like Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*; and American ones like the popular *Charlotte Temple*, by Susanna Rowson and *The Coquette*, by Hannah Webster Foster, were also characteristic of novels in this period - and they were directly relevant to the circumstances of the unmarried mothers of foundlings.[66]

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[64] Note #322, Letters, New York Foundling Hospital Archives.

[65] Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) and Denning, *Mechanic Accents*. The concept of the "republican mother" is Kerber's. For the closing of the literacy gap, see Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 193.

[66] For reading, particularly women's reading in the United States in this period see Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, and Kerber, *Women of the Republic*. For the history and popularity of *Charlotte Temple* see Cathy Davidson, "Introduction," Susanna Haswell Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* (New York: Oxford University Press,1986).

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The 1830s was also the period of the creation of the penny press.[67] Novels, like Eugene Sue's *Mysteries of Paris*, were typically serialized in the newspapers or magazines before they were published as books. Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, another foundling story, first appeared in serial form in *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1837-1838.

The fact that an increasing number of women had access to the rich storehouse of literary information about foundlings, and that some of them evidently borrowed its language for use in the notes they left with foundlings, does not take away from the authenticity of the notes. The very act of abandonment is proof enough of real desperation. But it does mean that when a woman who wanted to abandon a baby took up a pen to write a note, the wealth of foundling stories in literature gave her abundant literary models to copy from. She might also have been comforted to know that she shared her predicament, which was so often the product of loneliness and social disconnection, with many imaginary foremothers.

3. How Were Babies Abandoned in Antebellum New York?

While the written word provided many New Yorkers with stories about foundlings, it must also have been true that information and even instructions about infant abandonment was shared in conversations or whispered advice exchanged between neighbors, relatives, and friends, particularly in the densely packed poor neighborhoods of the city. Proof of this lies in the fact that New Yorkers appear to have had a distinct repertoire of methods for abandoning babies, and these methods were consistently used not only in the antebellum period, but over the course of the century. Clearly, there was a normative tradition of infant abandonment in New York. While the whispers that passed from one woman to another have evaporated, documentation of the circumstances in

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[67] For the rise of the penny press see Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History, 1690-1960* (New York: MacMillan, 1962).

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which foundlings were abandoned in antebellum New York were retained in the written record.

The methods New Yorkers used to abandon babies ranged from the careful to the hasty to methods that approached infanticide to infanticide itself. Some babies were warmly dressed and packed in baskets, then placed on carefully chosen stoops.[68] Babies left in baskets: George Church (a "clamb-basket"), AH Children's Records, vol.214, p.142. "A Foundling," *New York Evening Post*, January 25, 1816. AHFV-NYHS, #s 34, 49, 63 (in a "willow market basket"), 106, and 162. "An Infant Starved to Death," *New York Tribune*, February 22, 1854. These abandoners sometimes slammed doors or rang doorbells to be sure that the baby would be picked up quickly.[69] Other foundlings were left near houses, on busy sidewalks, near police watch stations or in other well-frequented places where police officers or passersby would be sure to find them quickly. Thus, George Church, was abandoned in a "clamb-basket" at a night watchman's station in 1808, and on a February evening in 1839, Sarah White was found by a night watchman "on the side walk in a willow market basket." The watchman was assisted by a "coloured maid" who called his attention to the baby. The *New York Times* referred to shopping baskets like the one Sarah White and other foundlings were packed in as "baskets filled

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[68] For babies left on stoops, from AHFV-NYHS, #s12, 27, 28, 38, 39, 49, 100, 102, 113, 150, 163, 169, 180, 181. From AH Children's Records, vol.214, Martha Washington, 1807, p.71; Clarinda Friday, 1808, p.118. For babies left in house entries (a method that became more popular as multiple-dwelling tenements increased over the course of the century): In AH Children's Records, vol. 214, Caroline Monday, 1807, p.92; Melissa Frances Whittey, 1809, p.269; Benjamin Martin, 1809, p.319. AHFV-NYHS, #s 3, 10, 36, 68, 96, 173, 179, 182, 184. "An Infant Starved to Death," *New York Tribune*, February 22, 1854. The best prepared babies were those left on stoops. Those left in house entries were sometimes placed there carelessly or even showed signs of abuse.

[69] Rang doorbells or slammed doors: AHFV-NYHS, #s 49, 55 (Alfred Godfrey Douglas), 60, 61. "An Infant Starved to Death," *New York Tribune*, February, 22 1854 (this baby was also left in a basket). For one example of a later use of this method see "One of the Waifs," *New York Herald*, January 24, 1883.

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with unmarketable freight."[70]

Other foundlings were left naked or barely covered with dirty rags on sidewalks, in alleys, in the entries of tenement houses, and in fields in thinly populated areas of the city.[71] Some were thrust into the arms of strangers. Many were left on the hands of midwives, wet-nurses, baby farmers, and other poor women who cared for children, by parents who stopped payment and disappeared.[72] Some babies, not really foundlings at all but murder victims, were discovered with their heads bashed in, their throats cut, thrown over the walls of cemeteries, drowned in ponds, or tossed into the city's encircling rivers where, their killers must have hoped, they would be washed out to sea with the rest of the city's flotsam.

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[70] George Church, AH Children's Records, vol. 214, p.142; Sarah White, AHFV-NYHS, #63, February 14, 1839. For another baby left with the night watch, see Alexander Burr, 1807, AH Children's Records, vol. 214, p.8. For the comment on "unmarketable freight" see "Foundling Babies, How They Are Cared For," *New York Times*, February 14, 1859. For babies found at or near houses, see: "A Foundling," *New York Evening Post*, January 25, 1816 Jane Palmer, 1835, AH Children's Records vol.0149, p.44. AHFV-NYHS, #s 4,14, 34, 40, 50, 58, 106, 174, 175 (at the basement door), 178. The phrases "at a house" or "near a house," used in the almshouse records and in the press might mean that the baby was left at the door, but this isn't clear.

[71] For babies left in remote areas or dangerous areas and/or poorly dressed or not dressed, see: *The Diary; or, Loudon's Register* (New York), October 30, 1792 (this is an infanticide case in which a woman is seen burying a baby under a stoop); Biddy Doyl, 1808, AH Children's Records, vol.214, p.187; AHFV-NYHS, #s 46, 62, 104,152, 177. In alleys: Mary Sweezy, 1808, AH Children's Records, vol. 214, p. 207; AHFV-NYHS, #s 89, 101, 131. In a vacant lot, AHFV-NYHS, # 112. In a privy, AHFV-NYHS, #136. Near the railroad tracks at 124th Street, AHFV-NYHS, #147. Near the East River, AHFV-NYHS, #183.

[72] For babies left with caretakers - sometimes described simply as "a woman," sometimes with greater information as to their roles as nurses, see: AH Children's Records, vol. 214, John Ball, 1807, p.6, Julian Longman, 1809, p. 301, George Dougherty, 1809, p.351; vol.0123, Stephen Simonson, 1815, p.63. AHFV-NYHS, #s 7, 15, 25, 31, 37, 42, 45, 47, 94, 109, 126, 129, 133, 134, 137, 138, 139, 141, 148, 151, 157, 161, 172. Sherri Broder finds the same phenomenon taking place in late-nineteenth century Philadelphia. She also finds that some paid caretakers abandoned babies for whom they were no longer being paid on the street. See Broder, "Child Care or Child Neglect?," 139-141.

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The abandoners who took great care over the locations they chose to abandon their babies picked houses that were inhabited by people they hoped could give their children better or at least more bearable lives. The person who selected Philip Hone's doorstep was one of these. In 1838, when Alfred Godfrey Douglas landed on his doorstep, Hone lived in a new house at the corner of Broadway and Great Jones Street. His finances had been shaken by the Panic of 1837, but his situation would still have looked secure enough, even sumptuous, to someone desperate enough to abandon a baby. If this woman had peeked in the window before laying the baby on the stoop she would have seen firelight, new furnishings, books and paintings, and servants hovering around a table set with food and surrounded by family and friends. Not unreasonably, she might have deduced that Hone could provide Alfred with a better life than she could.[73]

In 1822 a woman named Mary Anderson made a similar calculation when she abandoned her four-month-old girl. Anderson told a companion that she was looking for a "gentleman's door" because she believed that if she laid the baby there "it would be taken care of." Anderson was a Baltimore-born black woman who had come north after her husband's death. At the time she abandoned her baby she had been living in New York for five years. The baby's father, a black man named J[o]no[than] Battis made childbirth arrangements for her, but supplied no further help. Anderson failed in her attempt to abandon her baby, and she was brought before a court.

Anderson's life in New York appears to have been unsettled. A witness told the court that she lived with a Dr. Jacques on Broadway, possibly as a domestic servant, while Anderson claimed that she was living at Mechanic Hall, as was Battis. Her baby had also led an itinerant life, boarding at different times with a "yellow woman" named Amelia Dawson, and with "two black girls" named Susan Mann and Milley (the witness who identified Milley did not give her last name). Anderson's lack of assistance from the

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[73] Hone, *Diary*, 370-371; Alfred G. Douglas, AHFV-NYHS, #55, December 8, 1838.

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baby's father, and her failure to create a permanent home for herself in New York, might explain what led her to abandon her baby.[74]

Two years earlier another woman also chose her baby's doorstep carefully. At ten o'clock on a spring night in 1820 Bridget McGlone left her baby, Alice, on the doorstep of John Connolly, the Catholic bishop of New York. After putting Alice down, she knocked on the door and ran away. Her method of abandonment demonstrates concern about Alice's physical welfare, while her choice of doorstep reflected her worries about the baby's spiritual well-being. McGlone, who was caught in the act, told the police court that since she was Catholic she did not want her baby to go to the almshouse "as I would not like it to be brought up to the religion the[y] have there." In the note she addressed to Bishop Connolly, McGlone describes the circumstances that led her to abandon her child: "kind Sir," she wrote, it is poverty and hardship that occations my intruding on you." Alice's father (McGlone does not indicate whether she was married to him or not) disappeared before the baby was born, she had no place to live, and couldn't "earn a living for myself and the baby." She had four other children, three of whom were living in the almshouse at the time she abandoned Alice. In addition, a crisis of some kind - whether it was the aftereffects of childbirth or simply the accumulated crush of circumstances, or something else - was overtaking her. Before she was arrested she had intended to go to the country where she hoped "in the course of a few months" to recover. She concluded her note: "I hope the Almighty will pardon me as it was severe hardship that compels me to take this step." Statements appended to McGlone's note by court

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[74] Gilje, "Infant Abandonment," 589-590. Amelia Dawson told the court that Mary Anderson wanted to leave the baby with a "gentleman,"but this is only one of several conflicting statements used as evidence in Anderson's case. Anderson also told the court that she left the baby in a cellar entry so that it would be taken to the alms house where the father would be made to pay for its care. Another witness claimed that Anderson actually left the baby "exposed in the Street." See Gilje, "Infant Abandonment," 589. Mechanic Hall was the headquarters of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen.

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officials confirm her state of destitution. One official wrote: "this woman appears to be reduced to the extreme of wretchedness." They also hint at what may have been the trouble that drove her to the country to recover: "She got a little drunk yesterday on Beer."[75]

In a humbler version of this strategy, some abandoners, perhaps less knowledgeable about who was who in the city beyond their immediate neighborhoods, left babies on the doorsteps of people who did not necessarily possess fame, wealth, or civic power, but who they could see with their own eyes were managing capably for themselves and their families. In 1838 and 1839 babies were left on the doorsteps of, two grocers, a milkman, a dealer in duck for sailmaking, and two lawyers. Thomas Glover, the secretary of the Eagle Insurance Company on Wall Street, was the recipient of two foundlings in the space of three months in 1838.[76]

One of the lawyers was Hugh Maxwell, who had been district attorney in New York a decade earlier. Only two years before one-month-old Agnes Maxwell (the commissioners of the almshouse named her after her finder as was their frequent practice) was deposited on his stoop on St. Mark's Place, Maxwell defended the man alleged to have murdered the prostitute Helen Jewett. The Jewett trial was heavily attended and reported widely, but without more evidence it is impossible to deduce what Maxwell's notoriety would have meant to someone who wanted to abandon a baby. His status as a lawyer, and his residence in a reasonably prosperous area might have been

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[75] Paul Gilje, "Infant Abandonment in Early Nineteenth-Century New York City: Three Cases," *Signs* 8 (Spring 1983): 586-587. See also Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 503.

[76] AHFV-NYHS, Thomas Glover, #s 3 and 28; Hugh Maxwell, lawyer, #12; George Bell, grocer, #38; William Bakewell, "Sailduck," #39; John Van Nostrand, grocer, #46; Thomas Fitzpatrick, milkman, #52; Robert Munn, attorney, 82. Information about these men comes from *Longworth's American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory*, 1837-1838 and 1839-1840 (New York: Thomas Longworth, 1837; 1839).

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enough.[77]

Another baby whose landing place was carefully chosen was month-old Hannah Frost, who was abandoned at the door of a former city alderman in 1809. Hannah's abandonment was also notable for the care with which she was dressed. The almshouse officials who recorded her case recorded that she was "wrapped up in a mantle, well dressed and in every respect well provided with clothes..."[78] Dressing babies in good clothes appears to have been a strategy used by abandoners to draw attention and, they must have hoped, favor. Alfred Godfrey Douglas was also well-dressed, a fact which Philip Hone dwelled on meticulously in his diary entry. According to Hone, Alfred "had on a clean worked muslin frock, lace cap, its underclothes new and perfectly clean, a locket on the neck which opened with a spring and contained a lock of dark hair; the whole covered nicely with a piece of new flannel..."[79]

In the last decades of the century the press began to feature sentimental stories about abandoned babies, and these often contained detailed descriptions of foundlings' clothing.[80] An inordinate number of babies, the press suggested, were abandoned in

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[77] For Maxwell's career and his role in the Jewett case see Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 333. St. Mark's Place was on the western edge of the Seventeenth Ward, closer to fashionable Washington Square than to the immigrant, working-class districts to the east. In 1841 property values in the Seventeenth Ward were assessed at $11 million, more than the poorest ward, the Eleventh, valued at $4 million; less than the richest ward, the Fifteenth (which encompassed Washington Square) at $23 million; and about comparable with the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Ninth wards, where property assessments ranged from $9.8 million to $11 million. Spann, *New Metropolis*, Appendix VIII, table: "Population and Property–By Wards (1840-1855), 432.

[78] Hannah Frost, AH Children's Records, vol. 214, p. 284.

[79] Hone, *Diary*, 370.

[80] The *New York Herald* commented frequently, and in detail, on the dress of foundlings from the 1870s through the early twentieth century: "...tastefully and comfortably clothed...dressed with great care and neatness," "Abandoned Her Babe," April 10, 1878; "The Woman in Black. A Richly Clad Child Abandoned by the Mother, who is Believed to Have Drowned Herself," May 15, 1878; "...their clothing was of the very best," "Twin

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sumptuous clothing. One over-the-top description from 1896 described the clothing of a six-week-old girl found in the entry of a house on West Forty-third Street: "She wore a silk cap, a white cashmere cloak, embroidered and trimmed with cream silk ribbon. Her little frock was of lawn trimmed with lace and embroidery. The waif's clothing and appearance led the police to think that it is the offspring of wealthy parents."[81] The *New York Herald*, which made a specialty of sentimental foundling stories, on more than one occasion implied that foundlings were normally found in expensive clothing. Thus when a two-month-old boy was left in a hotel room on Broadway dressed in flannel underwear, a muslin dress, a "daintily embroidered" white cashmere coat, and a silk cap with a lace ruffle, the reporter who supplied this description asserted that "the baby's clothing was fine, as that of foundlings often is."[82]

People who saw foundlings day in and day out discounted the notion that many babies abandoned in New York wore expensive clothing. Superintendent Blake of the Department of Charities, through whose hands all foundlings delivered to his department passed in the 1890s, debunked the theory firmly. The stories "about handsome raiment and evidences of having come from wealthy surroundings are the flimsiest phantoms."

Babes Were at her Door," September 12, 1891; "...from the cleanliness and texture of their garments it is thought their parents do not belong to the lower classes," "Three Little Waifs," November 30, 1880; "...nicely dressed...a white slip of a fine glossy stuff, two heavy petticoats, a white fleecy hood and pink silk shoes," "Mystery of a Pretty Baby," May 21, 1892; "...so unusually well dressed that it attracted attention at Police Headquarters," "Gave Her Child to Two Boys," September 1, 1894; "...neatly dressed in white, with a pink flannel coat and a lace cap lined with green silk," "Foundling in Fifth Avenue," April 5, 1895; "...nicely dressed in a white silk cap and prettily trimmed cloak of white merino," "Found a Waif on Christmas Eve," December 25, 1895; "Pretty Baby in Silks Deserted by Mother in Department Store," March 29, 1907.

[81] "Baby Finds a Mother, Mrs. Newkirk, of Jersey City, Adopts the Waif in Bellevue Named Annie Wilson," *New York Herald*, March 18, 1896.

[82] "Tiny Waifs Found," *New York Herald*, April 15, 1897. For a similar comment see "Refined Woman Deserts a Babe," *New York Herald*, May 31, 1896.

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Blake told a reporter. "The cases of waifs in swansdown and embroidered flannels, stiff with crests were nonexistent."[83]

Another hands-on witness was Police Matron Webb, whose nursery in the police department's Central Office housed foundlings in the 1880s. "You can always tell something about foundlings by the way they are dressed," the straight-talking Matron Webb told a reporter from the *Herald*. "Rich people don't leave babies in the street. If they want to bring 'em up they pay for their keeping somewhere. All the babies that come here have cheap clothing on. Some may have more than others, but it is all cheap. Some have needle work on their dresses that a gentleman might say was worth $5, when it wasn't worth five cents."[84]

A misinterpretation such as Matron Webb described occurred in September, 1888 when a servant stumbled on a foundling near the basement door of the West Twenty-fourth Street home of the Rev. Dr. Cookman. "The most singular point in the case," the press account of this incident claimed, "is the varied description of the clothing which enveloped the stranger." Mrs. Cookman claimed that the baby was dressed in "clothing of delicate material, costly and of excellent workmanship." But when the baby was delivered to Matron Webb, she argued that to her more experienced eye the clothing was "of common material, badly made and not at all expensive."[85] Jacob Riis, whose camera and pen took him into the slums on a regular basis during the last decades of the nineteenth century, sided with Superintendent Blake and Matron Webb on this point. He commented bluntly: "The stories of richly-dressed foundlings that are dished up in the

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[83] "Abandoned to the City's Care," *New York Herald*, January 14, 1895. For Blake's role as the "godfather" of all the foundlings, see "Seen in Waifland. Life of the City's Doorstep Wards Who Live on Randall's Island," *New York Herald*, October 25, 1896.

[84] "A Pauper Two Weeks Old," *New York Herald*, January 23, 1883.

[85] "Left at a Minister's Door," *New York Herald*, September 17, 1888.

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newspapers at intervals are pure fiction."[86]

These stories may have been fiction, but they pleased readers, as the *Herald* knew very well, and they may also have given ideas to people about how to abandon babies. In 1896, in a case reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a six-week-old boy was abandoned in the waiting room at Grand Central Station. The *Herald* devoted a long piece to the event in its Sunday paper. The article dwelled rapturously on the baby's dress: "The clothing consisted of a blue durah silk cloak, trimmed with lace; a white silk embroidered cap, also trimmed with lace; a large blue flannel silk embroidered cap, and blue kid shoes."[87] In response to this publicity hundreds of people went to visit the baby at Bellevue, where foundlings were routinely taken in the 1890s. Within the week one of these visitors adopted the "Blue Silk Baby." Although many of the visitors wanted to adopt the baby, Mr. Blake of the Department of Public Charities chose a "prosperous merchant, owning considerable real estate, interested in religious and charitable affairs and of good social standing."[88]

This was the best of all possible outcomes for a foundling, and it may have influenced the tactics of another abandoner. On the same day that the adoption of the Blue Silk Baby was reported, another baby dressed in blue silk was abandoned, this time in a department store. His clothing, the *Herald* reported in its Sunday edition, "was of the finest make" and he seemed to be a "child gently reared and apparently of good family."[89] That this may have been a deliberate tactic was suggested by some of the

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[86] Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1890; reprint, New York: Dover Books, 1971), 145.

[87] "Left the Baby a Public Charge," *New York Herald*, October 11, 1896. For the initial brief notice of the baby's discovery see "Richly Dressed Foundling," *New York Herald*, October 10, 1896.

[88] "'Blue Silk Baby' Unclaimed," *New York Herald*, October 13, 1896; "'Blue Silk Baby' is Gone," *New York Herald*, October 16, 1896.

[89] "Seen in Waifland. Life of the City's Doorstep Waifs Who Live on Randall's Island,"

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women who went to visit the Blue Silk Baby at Bellevue. According to the *Herald*, opinion on this matter divided by gender. While the Bellevue doctors believed that the baby was probably accidentally abandoned by "some agitated mother" rushing to catch a train, the women visitors granted the mother greater guile. They argued that the child's dress was "an attempt to make the little waif as attractive as possible before throwing him on the mercy of the world."[90]

When the *Herald* eagerly reported stories of richly dressed foundlings, when hundreds of New Yorkers visited the Blue Silk Baby, and when Mrs.Cookman looked excitedly, perhaps too excitedly, for luxurious clothing when she unwrapped the baby found by her basement door, all were responding to the powerful and well-known myth of the well-born foundling. Hector Malot used baby clothing of cashmere, silk, and lace to reveal the aristocratic birth of his fictional foundling, Remi.[91] Herman Melville's Billy Budd, found in a "pretty silk-lined basket," excites the admiration and jealousy of all who recognize his evident natural superiority. Of Billy Budd's heritage Melville writes: "Yes, Billy Budd was a foundling, a presumable by-blow, and, evidently, no ignoble one. Noble descent was as evident in him as in a blood horse."[92] If the women who visited the Blue Silk Baby at Bellevue are correct, some New Yorkers who abandoned babies were also aware of the myth of the aristocratic foundling, and hoped that by dressing up their babies, they could assure them the best possible future lives.

In the following story, encompassing two generations, not noble birth, but a

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New York Herald, October 25, 1896. For another case of a child dressed in silk abandoned in a department store see "Pretty Baby in Silks Deserted by Mother in Department Store," *New York Herald*, March 29, 1907.

[90] "'Blue Silk Baby' Unclaimed," *New York Herald*, October 13, 1896.

[91] Malot, *Nobody's Boy*, 326.

[92] Herman Melville, *Billy Budd*, in *Billy Budd and Other Tales* (New York: New American Library, 1961), 16.

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baby's racial identity was at stake. In 1808 a baby named John Luke was brought to the almshouse by what the clerk who took down the information described as "a Mulatto Woman." The woman told almshouse officials that the baby was "left at her house by a white woman." The almshouse accepted the baby, and place him with a wet-nurse, as it routinely did with foundlings.[93] Almshouse officials typically indicated when the babies or nurses they dealt with were black - but almshouse records include no such indication next to the names of either John Luke or his nurse. When the almshouse received black foundlings they placed them with black nurses when they were available.[94] The fact that they did not do so here appears to indicate that they believed the mulatto woman's story, and accepted John Luke as white. The infant John Luke remained with his nurse for at least fifteen months, and there is no record that he died, as there is in so many other cases.

On a spring night thirty years later, a black woman named Sarah Jones discovered an abandoned week-old boy in the entry of 49 Laurens Street. On his clothes was pinned a note that said, simply, "John Luke." Laurens Street, today's West Broadway, housed a concentration of African-Americans in the late 1830s and early 1840s. Public School No.2 for black children was located at 51 Laurens Street. Three black women who worked as nurses for the almshouse lived on Laurens Street. So did the, by now adult, John Luke (if it is really he) at number 49. We can only guess what the mother of this

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[93] John Luke, AH Children's Records, vol. 214, p.172.

[94] In the antebellum south it was traditional for black women to nurse white babies, but in northern cities like New York, cross-race wet nursing was not the norm. See: Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing*, 30. For more on cross-race wet nursing in the south, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), especially 151-152 and 315. Golden finds city authorities attempting to match black babies and nurses in eighteenth century Philadelphia, as I do in nineteenth century New York. See, for instance, AHFV-NYHS, Lawrence Black, #10, May 31, 1838; William Shotwell, #72, April 6, 1839; Letitia Finder, #123, April 27, 1840; Maria Moulton, #179, April 18, 1841; Margaret Ann Butler, #180, April 19, 1841.

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baby was thinking when she delivered her son, labeled like a package, to his father's door.

Abandoners who left their babies in rich clothing and silk-lined baskets were mining European traditions about the aristocratic foundling. But the mulatto woman - who was presumably John Luke's mother - was hoping to pass her child off as a member of a particularly American kind of aristocracy - the aristocracy of whiteness. If she had hoped to pass her son off as white, the initial success of her ruse ultimately collapsed. Thirty years later John Luke was living as a black man on a black street. The name the almshouse commissioners bestowed on his putative son, Lawrence Black, is a record of the street where he was left, and their impression of his color.[95]

A frequently practiced way to abandon a baby in antebellum New York was to leave it with a paid caretaker such as a midwife, wet-nurse, or baby farmer, then disappear without keeping up the payments. Poor parents, single mothers and widowers as well as married parents made legitimate use of such caretakers when they needed a place to leave their children, typically in a twenty-four hour boarding arrangement (older children, like Bridget Brishhan's three, in this era before compulsory schooling, were expected to fend for themselves). Many of the foundlings the almshouse ultimately took in were brought by these caretakers after they stopped receiving payments for board.[96]

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[95] Lawrence Black, AHFV-NYHS, #10, May 31, 1838. The three black nurses who lived on Laurens Street, 1838-1841, are: Julia Ann Smith, 35 Laurens Street, #174; Elizabeth Fuller, 45 Laurens Street, #179; Louisa Butler, 49 Laurens Street, #180. 49 Laurens Street is where John Luke lived and where Lawrence Black was left. For Public School No. 2: *Valentine's Manual*, 1842-1854, 81. According to this listing the black abolitionist Maria W. Stewart taught at this school.

[96] For records of nurses or baby farmers who brought abandoned babies to the almshouse after they failed to receive payment, see AHFV-NYHS case #s 7, 15, 31, 37, 45, 47, 94, 109, 126, 129, 133, 134, 137, 138, 139, 141, 148, 151, 157, and 161. For evaluations of the unsavory reputations of "baby farmers," see Arnott, "Infant Death,"and Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing*, 101.

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Some poor parents, particularly single women, may have been simply unable to keep up with the payments. In other cases, this may have been a deliberate method of abandonment. There are cases in which the caretakers served as go-betweens, contracting with mothers to take their babies to the almshouse with stories about unpaid board in return for some reward from the mother. The mother of baby Alexander Clements offered Jane Spear gifts of new dresses, cherries and butter if she would take the baby to the almshouse with a false name and keep quiet about her deal with the mother. Spear may have been a midwife, since both mother and baby stayed with her for three weeks before the mother left for "the country." Spear broke her confidence with the mother because she wanted something better than dresses or delicacies. A woman with no children of her own, Spear asked the commissioners if she could keep the baby "on the same terms as other nurses employed by the Commissioners." The commissioners agreed.[97]

In another scam, mothers colluded with caretakers in order to get the fee the almshouse paid to the wet-nurses who cared for abandoned babies. When Ann Murray reported to the almshouse commissioners that Mary Ann Davis had left a child with her then disappeared, they believed her until she returned and took the baby back. This nervous act made the commissioners start to question the truth of Murray's story. They wrote: "It was presumed that the mother and Mrs. Murray were leagued for the purpose of extortion money for the child's board from the commissioners." The commissioners were apparently so concerned about such cases of fraud that as early as 1830 they made people bringing in foundlings swear an oath guaranteeing the truth of their stories.[98]

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[97] Alexander Clements, AHFV-NYHS, #25, August 11, 1838. This case is also cited by Stansell, *City of Women*, 246, n.56.

[98] Mary Ann Davis, AHFV-NYHS #121, March 24, 1840. For a discussion of foundling fraud, see Stansell, *City of Women*, 57. Stansell describes nurses and mothers colluding in order to collect the fees the commissioners paid wet-nurses. This is what the commissioners believed Mary Ann Davis and Ann Murray planned to do, and their belief

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Oddest and most dramatic of all were the cases in which abandoners deposited babies with strangers, in the street, in stores, even in their homes, then disappeared. Bridget Brisshan's experience - so similar to Mr. Allworthy's in *Tom Jones* - is one example. Bridget's children were passive - and probably amazed - observers of this event, but in several other cases, older children took active part as middlemen. In 1840 a little girl made use of the pandemonium at the almshouse department's offices to hand a crying baby - a sibling? a neighbor? a stranger? - to a woman she did not know and then, as the woman testified to the commissioners, the girl "pushed her way through the crowd and deponent has not seen her since."[99] In a similar case a woman approached a small boy and asked him to take her year-old baby to the almshouse. A "gentleman" later discovered the boy with the baby, heard his story, and brought the baby to the almshouse himself.[100]

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was based, presumably, on experience. Information about the oath comes from Stansell, *City of Women*, 246, n.56. For a case in which there is explicit mention of such an oath see Mary Williams, AHFV-NYHS, #80, April 21, 1839 .

[99] Ann McGann, AHFV-NYHS,, #117, February 26, 1840. For more examples of babies left with strangers, see AHFV-NYHS #s 6, 8, 44, 73, 142, 170. See also Stansell, *City of Women*, 55-56.

[100] John Knox, AHFV-NYHS, #73, April 11, 1839. The woman is identified as Hannah Diamond, who was thrown out of the almshouse. For a similar story from a later period see "Gave Her Child to Two Boys. Directed Them to Take it to the Foundling Asylum and then Disappeared," *New York Herald*, September 1, 1894.

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Such fleeting yet momentous encounters with abandoners could be disorienting, even frightening reminders of the vulnerability of one's neighbors, their children, and, by extension, oneself. Imagine the bafflement, for instance, of Catherine Reed who in 1840 complained to the almshouse commissioners that a woman who gave her name as Mary Mitchell came to her house and asked her to hold an infant for a short time, left, and did not come back. Catherine, the commissioners recorded "really believes [Mitchell] does not intend to return she now prays that the child may be taken to the Alms House to be taken care of." Or of William E. Johnson, who, one autumn evening in 1840, was at the home of a friend at the corner of Hudson and Charlton streets "when a female came up to him, and asked him to take her child which he did, when she immediately absconded, and he has not seen her since." Johnson protested that he had only agreed to take the child temporarily and that he was "wholly unacquainted with the mother of the said child."[101] (This method so permeated the public consciousness that it surfaced in a Civil War-era political cartoon. The cartoon, which illustrates European attempts to mediate the Civil War, shows a woman running away after leaving a baby labeled "Intervention" in the arms of a baffled Napoleon III..)[102]

These methods, in which a baby was delivered to a third party who could be relied on to bring it to the almshouse, may have been used by poor and desperate mothers as ways to abandon their babies without revealing themselves and without exposing the children to the dangers that actually dropping them on streets or doorsteps entailed. In

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[101] Mary Mitchell, AHFV-NYHS, #142, July 17, 1840; Emily Charlton, #164, (William E. Johnson), November 12, 1840. A person left with a baby on their hands could be baffled even if they did know the mother. See, for instance, the case in which Mary Ann Stewart told how Mary McMahon left her with a baby, then couldn't "find her and prays the said infant may be received by the commissioners of the Alms House." Stewart McMahon, AHFV-NYHS, #138, June 29, 1840.

[102] Reproduced in Warren F. Spencer, "The Jewett-Greeley Affair: A Private Scheme for French Mediation in the American Civil War," *New York History*, 51 (April 1970), 239. Originally published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, January 10, 1863.

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1841, for instance, Clarissa Davis agreed to watch ten-month-old Laura Miranda Bowerhorn for an hour, but as a week went by and the mother did not return, Davis became aware that something was up. "Information" she gathered, possibly from neighborhood informants, revealed, as she told the commissioners, "that it was her [the mother's] intention to abandon it, and for Mrs. Davis to have it sent for its support to the Commissioners of the Alms House." The father of this baby was in prison, and her mother, a former almshouse resident, presumably did not want to return there herself.[103]

While many people who abandoned babies in antebellum New York demonstrated caring concern in their methods, others did not. Sometimes the line between abandonment and infanticide was very thin; sometimes it was nonexistent. Some babies were found hurt, presumably the work of whoever left them. In 1839 a week-old girl was found in the entry of a house with her legs tied together and a string around her neck. When a man named Andrew Allen found newborn Maria Moulton in the entry of his house one day in 1841, he reported his suspicion that she had "been thrown in there this morning as its head appears bruised."[104]

Others were left in lonely places where their abandoners could not have been certain they would be found (the very opposite tactic of those who left babies carefully on selected doorsteps). In June, 1838 two boys playing in the sparsely inhabited region of Eighth Avenue between Forty-fifth and Forty-sixth streets, found a baby abandoned "in the grass." Newborn Maria West was found between Fifteenth and Sixteenth streets "close to the east river" at three o'clock on a May morning in 1841. The dismal luck of a newborn boy left in a vacant lot on Third Street at the city's eastern margin on a January

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[103] Mary Mitchell (Catherine Reed), AHFV-NYHS, #142, July 17, 1840; Laura Miranda Bowerhorn, #170, February 11, 1841.

[104] Matilda Campbell, AHFV-NYHS, #104, December 2, 1839 and Maria Moulton, #179, April 18, 1841.

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night in 1840 was acknowledged by the commissioners when they perversely named him John J. Astor.[105]

Babies were occasionally left thinly wrapped in brutally cold weather. Five-month-old George Davis was found "during a snow storm under a cart" on a November night in 1838. During the same cold month a passerby rang the bell at 12 Batavia Street to alert the house's inhabitant, a rigger named Robert Reader, to the presence of a "child lying on his stoop entirely naked (altho the morning is excessively cold.)" The almshouse commissioners aptly named this baby William Frost. James Spring was found at the front door of a house on Spring Street on a January evening "almost naked - having nothing [on] but [a] petticoat and laid on the bricks." George Davis died the morning after he was found. William Frost lasted one week then died from "debility" and, possibly, the neglect of the nurse the almshouse placed him with.[106]

Contemporaries generally understood abandonment and infanticide to be two faces of the same phenomenon, and blamed both on the desperation of unmarried mothers. In the spring of 1820, a newspaper columnist who called himself "Howard" noticed an unusual number of cases of infants "born alive but cruelly exposed to die in some neglected part of our city and suburbs." One of these was a newborn infant found "on the upper end of Essex-street" who, the coroner reported, had been born alive but afterwards exposed, he presumed, to die. In another case a newborn boy was "found floating in the slip and wrapped up in rags." In a third a baby boy was found in a pond on the corner of Chapel and Canal streets. Howard commented in horror that these acts were the work of "inhuman mothers" who destroyed their children rather than suffer from the

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[105] Martin Pringle, AHFV-NYHS, #13, June 13, 1838; John J. Astor, #112, January 3, 1840; Maria West, #183, May 13, 1841.

[106] William Frost, AHFV-NYHS, #50, November 25, 1838; George Davis, #52, November 28, 1838; James Spring, #58, January 15, 1839.

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shame of unmarried motherhood.[107]

In many cases, however, what appear to be infanticides or attempted infanticides may, in fact, have been hasty or careless abandonments. Some of these demonstrate what may have been panic or heartbroken desperation rather than cruelty. This could have been true of whoever left a year-old boy "on the pavement near a stable gate" on Sullivan Street between Bleecker and Houston in 1838. The baby, named William Bleecker by the commissioners, died of syphilis seven weeks later, a clue to at least one of his parents' miseries. A newborn, "naked and unwashed," was "laid on an old piece of blanket" and left in the entry of a house on Doyer Street in 1839, a testament, probably, to his mother's poverty, loneliness, and fear. A butcher, walking near Fulton Market on a June night in 1838 saw a "tall Irish woman" dressed in a "light calico frock and Tuscan hat" lay a child on the pavement and run away. Perhaps she too felt beyond hope of being able to do anything for her child herself.[108] In 1838 the country was in the midst of the depression spurred by the Panic of 1837. The high prices in Fulton Market were evidence of the way that New York's poor suffered disproportionately from the

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[107] Howard, "Domestic Economy," *The National Advocate*, June 6, 1820. For infanticide cases reported in the *National Advocate* see: 1820, May 4, 24, 27 (floating in the slip), June 1 (Essex-street), 5 (pond at corner of Chapel and Canal),16, July 4, August 1, 9, 20. See also *Commercial Advertiser*, June 7 and 14. For other unambiguous cases of infanticide, see, for instance, the case of a baby girl who was beaten then thrown into the East River, reported in the *New York Evening Post*, July 28, 1804. The AHFV-NYHS contains a case, #136, June 21, 1840, in which a baby was thrown in a privy. Dr. A.B. Mott, described additional cases of babies thrown in privies in his testimony before the Special Committee of the Board of Councilmen on the Projected Foundling Hospital in 1858, "The Projected Foundling Hospital," *New York Times*, June 9, 1858. The New York Foundling Asylum, founded by the Sisters of Charity in 1869, equated infant abandonment with infanticide, describing "...the innocent offspring of passion or poverty, for whom the door-step, the street, the sink, the river, the string, and the knife present each a means of riddance..." New York Foundling Asylum, annual report, 1872, [5]. I will subsequently refer to the New York Foundling Asylum as the NYFA.

[108] Woman with Tuscan hat, AHFV-NYHS, #18, June 28, 1838; William Bleecker, #43, October 9, 1838; Morgan Dascey, #62, February 14, 1839.

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depression's hardships. Philip Hone, who had felt the effects of the Panic of 1837 himself, noted the high cost of food in Fulton Market, where he shopped for his family. Marveling at the prices, he wondered: "What is to become of the laboring classes?"[109] The desperate action of the tall Irish woman in the calico dress and Tuscan hat provides one answer to his question.

4. Conclusion.

During the years before the Civil War foundlings were a part of both the actual and the imaginary landscape in New York. New Yorkers who read novels and attended the theater laughed, cried, and even fainted at foundling tales. Newspapers in this period carried brief news items about the discovery of foundlings or, in the coroners' reports that were published regularly, announced their deaths. (Howard's full-length column about infanticide was an exception in this era. The press would not begin to publish exposes about foundlings until the 1850s.)[110] Many rich and poor New Yorkers probably had some personal experience with foundlings either as direct participants in the leaving or finding of babies, or else as hearers of the stories that must have traveled around urban neighborhoods where babies were left on streets and doorsteps. When Alfred Godfrey Douglas joined Philip Hone's dinner party in the winter of 1838, Hone speculated aloud to his guests about the possibility of keeping him. His guests advised against it, arguing that he "would have twenty more such outlets to my benevolence."[111] This group's knowledgeable speculations about the facts of infant abandonment demonstrate a surprising familiarity with the phenomenon. Their belief that Hone would be flooded

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[109] Hone, *Diary*, February 18, 1837, 243. In fact all of the cases recorded in the AHFV-NYHS, which dates from 1838 to 1841, took place during this depression.

[110] Paul Gilje describes Howard's 1820 column as "unusual and extended" for this theme. See Gilje, "Infant Abandonment."

[111] Hone, *Diary*, 370.

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with twenty foundlings if he took in baby Alfred was an exaggeration but one with a grain of truth - at least three babies were left just on Hone's street that year.[112]

Despite the realities of infant abandonment in antebellum New York, New Yorkers, not experiencing the numbers of foundlings that were common in European cities at this time, and believing that foundlings were an inevitable part of the urban landscape, did not yet feel that there was anything they could, or should, do about it.

[112] The two other foundlings left on Great Jones Street in 1838 are AHFV-NYHS #s8 and 40. The AHFV-NYHS records a total of approximately fifty-six cases of infant abandonment in the city in 1838.

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CHAPTER TWO - NEW YORK AS A NURSING MOTHER: FOUNDLINGS IN THE ANTEBELLUM CITY

1. Introduction.

During the first half of the nineteenth century private charitable institutions for the poor multiplied in New York. This proliferation became even more pronounced by mid-century as the volume of immigration intensified. As the country's main entry point for immigrants, New York City had more than its share of poor to contend with. In response, the city and state developed a practice of delegating the care of the poor to private charitable institutions to which they allocated public funds.[1] Many of these institutions were established specifically for the care of poor women and children.[2] By the eve of the Civil War New York had accumulated no fewer than eight orphan asylums - and yet none of these, nor any of the other institutions for children, accepted foundlings.[3] Later in the century the New York Foundling Asylum recalled this benighted period: "...one class of sufferers seemed to be overlooked,–the most pitiful of all, –silent sufferers, incapable of

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[1] Homer Folks, *Care of Destitute, Neglected, and Delinquent Children* (New York: Johnson Reprint Co., 1970, orig. 1902), 55; William Pryor Letchworth, "History of Child-Saving Work in the State of New York," in Twentieth National Conference of Charities and Correction, Chicago, June 1893, *History of Child Saving in the United States* (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis, 1893); Raymond Mohl, *Poverty in New York, 1783-1825* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 145.

[2] For the spread of orphanages and other childcare institutions in the 1830s, see David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little Brown, 1971), 207.

[3] The first was the Orphan Asylum, founded in 1806. It was followed by the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans; Leake and Watts Orphan House; Orphan's Home and Asylum of the Protestant Episcopal Church; Protestant Half-Orphan Asylum; Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum; St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum; and the Society for the Relief of Half-Orphans and Destitute Children. These are listed in *Valentine's Manual*, 1860, 335-355, among other institutions for poor women and children, and in King, *King's Handbook*, 394 (St. Joseph's and the Orphans' Home of the Protestant Episcopal Church) and 396 (Society for the Relief of Half-Orphans). See also, Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 811.

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pleading for their own relief, –innocent, yet paying the penalty for the sins of others, –the Foundlings alone were unprovided for."[4]

There were several reasons why foundlings were neglected. The first was that before the middle of the 1850s New Yorkers did not recognize infant abandonment as an acute problem in need of attention but instead saw it as a normal, if sad, element of urban life. The result was that there were no serious calls for a foundling asylum before the middle of the century.[5] Another was that many of the city's children's institutions were founded for very narrowly defined constituencies. The Society for the Relief of the Destitute Children of Seamen, founded in 1846 is an example of one of these. So was St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum, which was founded in 1858 for the orphaned, homeless or neglected children of German immigrants. The Protestant Half Orphan Asylum similarly identified the very particular variety of child it wanted to help.[6] Babies abandoned anonymously on stoops or sidewalks could not necessarily be made to fit into the very specific mandates of institutions like these.

Even orphanages and other children's institutions that did not discriminate so narrowly did not accept children under two or three. The reason for this was what Dr. George T. Elliot, Jr., referred to as the "fearful ratio of mortality" of young children. Institutions for children believed that it was hopeless to try to keep infants alive - so they

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[4] NYFA, *Souvenir of 1889*, in NYFA, biennial report, 1888-1890, [16]. The first foundling asylum in New York State was St. Mary's Asylum for Widows, Foundlings, and Infants, which was incorporated in Buffalo in 1852. Like the New York Foundling Asylum, it was run by the Sisters of Charity. Letchworth, "History of Child-Saving," 165.

[5] An exception was the editorial by "Howard." Responding to what he believed was an upturn in the number of infanticides in the city, Howard used his column, "Domestic Economy" to debate the pros and cons of European foundling asylums, but did not actually recommend one for New York. Howard, "Domestic Economy," *National Advocate* (New York), June 6, 1820.

[6] King, *King's Handbook*, 394 (St. Joseph's), 410 (Seamen); *Valentine's Manual*, 1860, 346 (Protestant Half Orphan Asylum).

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did not accept them. In 1859, when Dr. Elliot made this characterization, he was an attending physician at the Nursery and Child's Hospital, the only institution in the city that did take infants at that time. He angrily suggested that the other children's institutions in the city refused infants because to take them would be to elevate their mortality statistics unacceptably. In this era when infant death was common and expected, particularly for poor and neglected children, what angered Dr. Elliot was not the fact that masses of poor infants died, but that his institution alone had to bear the burden of a high mortality rate, with all of its implications for poor public relations and difficulty in raising funds.[7]

An additional, and crucial reason why New York's antebellum charities failed to help foundlings was because many of them only assisted those they judged to be deserving. As the children of unmarried mothers, foundlings did not fit into that category. While idleness or alcoholism could block a man from receiving help from a private charity, women were excluded if they failed to observe the era's strict codes of sexual morality. The Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, founded in 1797, and the New York Asylum for Lying-In Women, a maternity hospital founded in 1823, only assisted women who could prove that they were "respectable."

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[7] Dr. Elliot wrote: "Everywhere else children under two years of age have been excluded from Hospitals and other charities, (unless exceptionally,) with the effect thereby of instantly removing that fearful ratio of mortality demonstrated in the last Annual Report to be inseparable from those years of life." NCH, annual report, 1859, 8. Children's institutions that specifically stated that they did not accept infants included: Leake and Watts Orphan House, organized in 1831 for full orphans between ages three and twelve; Orphan's Home and Asylum of the Protestant Episcopal Church, founded 1851 for orphans and half-orphans between the ages of three and eight; and the Society for the Relief of Half-Orphans and Destitute Children, founded in 1835, for Protestant children between the ages of four and ten. King, *King's Handbook*, 393, 394-395, 396. The Colored Orphan Asylum did not take children under two, see Department of Public Charities and Correction, Annual Report, 1882, 164; 1884, 182. The Department of Public Charities and Correction succeeded the Board of Governors of the Almshouse in 1860. I will refer to it subsequently as PCC.

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These moral restrictions were typical of charities for women of this period.

This era also produced charitable organizations that were dedicated to the moral reform of the "fallen," specifically prostitutes, such as the Magdalen Society, founded in 1811, or the New York Female Moral Reform Society, founded in 1834. But to a poor, pregnant, unmarried woman who was neither "respectable" nor a repentant prostitute, private charity in antebellum New York shut its doors. Not wishing to condone the illegitimate sexual activity that they believed was the main reason why babies were abandoned, New York's charity workers also shut their doors to the children of so-called fallen women.[8] As presumed illegitimates, the moral taint that stained unmarried mothers rubbed off on their children, with the result that the only privately-run charity in the city that accepted infants in the antebellum years, the Nursery for the Children of Poor Women (later the Nursery and Child's Hospital), refused to accept foundlings or any other illegitimate babies.

Not everybody shunned illegitimate children and unmarried mothers. The reading habits of American women communicate something about the heartfelt empathy many felt for these female unfortunates and their children. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and

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[8] For the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, see Edward T. James and Janet Wilson James, eds., *Notable American Women, A Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), "Isabella Marshall Graham"; Amy Gillman, "From Widowhood to Wickedness: The Politics of Class and Gender in New York City Private Charity, 1799-1860," *History of Education Quarterly* 24 (1984), 62-63; and Mohl, *Poverty in New York*, 149, 167. For the Lying-In Asylum's restrictions, see Stansell, *City of Women*, 70-71. The moral tone of New York's charities was partly the result of the efforts at "moral purification" inspired by the Second Great Awakening, which hit the city in the late 1820s, was at a height in the 1830s, and reverberated until at least the middle of the century. See Mohl, *Poverty in New York*, 159-70, and Smith Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise.* Traditional English laws and customs about the deserving and undeserving poor, imported to New York in 1664, as well as Victorian ideas about women and sexuality, also influenced the way unmarried women were treated by private charity. This attitude continued into the twentieth century, where it can be read in the restrictions imposed in welfare laws, and continues today. See, for instance, Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935*, 1994.

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Clarissa, Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*, and Susanna Haswell Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, were all seduction novels published first in the eighteenth century that (like Fielding's *Tom Jones*) remained very popular in the nineteenth. At least one early nineteenth century Maine family named its daughters Pamela and Clarissa after Richardson's heroines. Their mother was pregnant at marriage, as, later on, was one of the daughters. *Charlotte Temple*, whose eponymous heroine was seduced and abandoned by a British soldier in revolutionary-era New York, was America's first best-seller. Its readership was very broad, extending across regions and classes, and even including some men. Devoted readers even made pilgrimages to the fictional Charlotte's supposed grave site at Trinity Church in New York.[9]

Many American women of the antebellum years were clearly able to feel a strong sense of identification and support for the fallen. Yet the women who ran charitable organizations in New York in the first half of the nineteenth century were largely products of the evangelical revivals of the Second Great Awakening. It was they, not novel-reading factory girls, or even their middle-class contemporaries, whose moral sense guided the city's charities.

2. The Responsibilities of the Almshouse.

Because the city's private charities erected barriers against foundlings, the only New York institution that would take them in during the antebellum years was the city's public almshouse, or poorhouse. New York's poor laws mandated the almshouse to care for illegitimate and abandoned babies. These laws, which the English brought to New Amsterdam when they wrested it from the Dutch in 1664, were modeled on the poor laws

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[9] Pamela and Clarissa Barton were the nieces of Martha Ballard, the Maine midwife about whom Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has written. See Ulrich, *Midwife's Tale*, 157-158. For the readership of *Charlotte Temple* see Cathy N. Davidson's introduction to Susanna Haswell Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), xi-xiv.

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of England. Unlike the Catholic countries of Europe, where charity was the combined responsibility of church and state and was administered at the national level, public charity in England was secular and the responsibility of localities. Catholic countries absorbed foundlings into state-run foundling asylums and assumed full financial responsibility for them, allowing mothers and fathers to maintain their privacy and therefore their honor. In England, as in New York, localities charged with the care of foundlings and other illegitimate babies required fathers, when they could be found, to pay for the care of their children by posting so-called "bastardy bonds." When the fathers could not raise the money, sureties were allowed to stand in for them.[10]

This is what happened in the case of William Lambert, who was discovered abandoned on the Division Street footwalk in 1809. William's mother worked as a servant, which might explain why she could not keep her child. Notes on William Lambert Senior in the almshouse records do not mention any occupation for him, which probably indicates that he did not have one. Another indication that he was not working was that he evidently did not have the money for the bond. Another man posted the bond for baby William, and the money was used to pay a wet-nurse to care for him. After a few years the wet-nurse relinquished him to the almshouse.[11]

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[10] On English poor laws and their importation to New York, see Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers* and Mohl, *Poverty in New York*, 38-39; 55. Relevant laws include: "An act for the relief of cities and towns from such charges as may arise from bastard children born within the same," passed February 7, 1788, *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the Sessions of the Legislature Held in the Years 1785, 1786, 1787 and 1788, inclusive...* (Albany, 1886), 618-620. A New York City statute of 1853 authorized the mayor and recorder or any two aldermen or special justices to commit abandoned children to the almshouse, *The Charter of the City of New York* (New York, 1854), 296.

[11] William Lambert, AH Children's Records, vol.214, p. 280 and vol. 0123, p.11. For many references to bonds put up by fathers to "indemnify the public with respect to a bastard child" and to resulting legal cases, see the New York City Almshouse and Bridewell Minutes, 1791-1799, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library. Many additional mentions of paid bonds and "compromise" payments are in AH Childrens' Records, volumes 0123 and 0149. The Almshouse department's annual report for 1849 noted that illegitimate children cared for by their mothers are supported by their fathers,

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New York's first almshouse was built in 1736 on the triangular plot of meadow at the northern edge of the city that would later become City Hall Park. It was initially a multi-purpose institution, housing not only destitute paupers - who included the ill, elderly, blind, and insane - but also criminals and vagrants. Children with their mothers or, like foundlings, without, were included in this mix. In 1816 the almshouse left City Hall Park, which it by this time shared with City Hall, and moved to new buildings at Bellevue, a hilly, wooded riverside site at First Avenue and Twenty-sixth Street. When Bellevue was completed it was the biggest building in the city - a statement about the substantial dimensions of poverty in New York at that time.

In order to house its ever-swelling populations of the destitute, abandoned, diseased and wayward, and in a generally unsuccessful attempt to keep the virtuous and criminal elements in these populations separate from each other, the Almshouse Department pursued a continuous building program throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the eve of the Civil War the department administered a grim empire that consisted of the almshouse, nurseries for destitute children, hospitals, lunatic asylum, work house, prison, penitentiary, cemetery, and the Department of Outdoor Poor. The "outdoor poor" were poor people who were well and capable enough to live in their own homes, but received alms from the city. The Department of Outdoor Poor was in charge of distributing money, food, coal, and other supplies to these people; another of its responsibilities was to serve as the Almshouse's intake office for foundlings. It was to the office of the Department of Outdoor Poor in City Hall Park that Philip Hone sent baby Alfred Godfrey Douglas, repacked in his original basket, when he made up his mind

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"either by compromise or by weekly payments." It also reports that "for some of that class the department has not realized anything for their support, and is obliged to provide for the child." AH, annual report, 1849,194.

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not to adopt him.[12]

After the Almshouse moved to Bellevue in 1816 the group of exhausted old buildings it left behind in City Hall Park was taken over by the city to use as offices and courts. To these the city added the Rotunda, a domed, columned, brick structure built in the park in1818 by artist John Vanderlyn to display his panoramic paintings. By 1848, after Vanderlyn had abandoned his gallery and the building reverted to the city, the offices of the Almshouse's Department of Outdoor Poor were housed in the Rotunda. People who remembered Vanderlyn's gallery would have been sad to see the change in the building. The Rotunda, whose high-domed, skylit interior once housed Vanderlyn's illusionistic scenes of the gardens of Versailles, was now divided into a warren of poorly ventilated offices. In 1851 George Kellock, Jr., the Superintendent of Outdoor Poor, complained that "in inclement seasons, when it is most thronged" his office required "the constant use of disinfectants."[13]

As Kellock suggested, the office was a chaotic place. A typical mid-century scene there consisted of "...dense crowds of human beings, of various countries, colors,

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[12] For the components of the Almshouse Department on the eve of the Civil War see PCC, annual report, 1860. For the history of the almshouse see: Raymond Mohl, "Poverty in Early America, A Reappraisal: The Case of Eighteenth-Century New York City," *New York History* 50 (January 1969): 5-27; Mohl, *Poverty in New York*; Spann, *New Metropolis; Human Resources Administration, Sub-Agency History Record*, unpublished history of the Department of Public Welfare produced by the Municipal Research and Reference Library, New York. For Bellevue as the largest structure in the city, Mohl, *Poverty in New York*, 85.

[13] Information about the fate of the old almshouse buildings comes from Stokes, *Iconography*, March 23, 1829; March 24, 1831; August 5, 1848. For John Vanderlyn and the Rotunda see Burroughs and Wallace, *Gotham*, 468. Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1936), "John Vanderlyn." Stokes, *Iconography*, April 12, 1818; May 26, 1820; May 26, 1823; July 18, 1825; March 23, 1829. AH, annual report, 1848, p.40-41 (which includes a picture of the Rotunda). Vanderlyn's painting of Versailles, once housed in the Rotunda, is now on display in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. On crowds and ventilation, AH annual report, 1851,129. For a further complaint about overcrowding at the Rotunda offices of the Department of Outdoor Poor, see AH, annual report, 1857, 294.

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and ages, filling the rooms and passage ways, to the extent of nearly preventing ingress and egress..." The applicants for alms who crushed into the office of the almshouse's Department of Outdoor Poor included the "sick and exhausted...fretting out the term of life in the most piteous poverty." People brought in by cart because they were too weak to walk sometimes "died on the floor from the sheerest exhaustion." The insane wandered the office "in the wildest incoherence of *mania*," while pregnant women "waiting their turn to obtain the alms sought for, are seized with the pains of parturition, and, ere they have time to leave, *give birth to their offspring*." Included in this crowd were "infants abandoned–just breathing their first moments, unclothed in some instances, in others conveyed hither as found in the public streets, in the rudest enclosures..."[14] The scene, according to Almshouse Commissioner Moses G. Leonard, was "harrowing to the heart."[15]

The methods the almshouse used to care for foundlings changed very little from the late eighteenth century, when New York's poor laws were revised in the aftermath of the Revolution, until 1860, when the almshouse department underwent another major overhaul.[16] The trajectory of a foundling through the almshouse's system typically went like this: foundlings entered the system through the Almshouse's Department of Outdoor Poor, where they were brought by whoever happened to find them or have them left on their hands. The Commissioners of the Almshouse (or Almshouse Governors, as they were called between 1849 and 1859) then took on the parental responsibility of naming the foundlings. At this point a few lucky babies were adopted directly from the

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[14] AH, annual report, 1847, 38-39.

[15] AH, annual report, 1848, 41.

[16] For the passage in April, 1784 of the first comprehensive poor law after the Revolution see Mohl, *Poverty in New York*, 55. In 1860 the Almshouse Department was abolished and the Department of Public Charities and Correction was established to take its place.

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Department of Outdoor Poor, escaping the misfortune of passing through the almshouse at all.

During the decade of 1849-1859, when the almshouse maintained an average of about 490 infants each year, approximately nine percent were adopted annually. About fifteen percent were returned to their families or to others who stepped up to claim them.[17] Some of these were foundlings. Two-week-old Hannah Gilmore, for instance, the baby left by a stranger at Eliza Ann Oliver's house on a June morning in 1838, was sought out and reclaimed by her mother three months later. Nearly thirty years earlier Thomas McConnell, a three-month-old who was abandoned by his "drunken parents," was reclaimed by them. In a twist, these evidently feckless parents did not remove their baby from the nurse the city had placed him with, but instead moved in with her and the

[17] I chose 1849-1859 because this is a discrete administrative period in the history of the almshouse. In 1849 the Board of Governors of the Almshouse was established, taking the place of the varying numbers of almshouse commissioners that preceded them. In 1860 the Board of Governors was itself abolished and replaced by Department of Public Charities and Correction. All figures come from the annual reports of the almshouse. No figures are available for 1857. The term "friends" here, as in the expression "restored to their friends" or, after 1852, "discharged to parents and friends" presumably means family members or associates other than parents. See the novels of Jane Austen for a comparable use of the term "friends" to refer to an extended, yet intimate circle that includes both immediate and extended family and neighbors.

Because this was a period of great corruption in city government, and because record-keeping was not practiced with exactitude in the nineteenth century, these figures should be regarded as approximations.

Year	"Whole Number Provided For"	Adopted	"Restored to their Friends"	Source
1849	514	50	97	1849, p.192
1850	399	20	77	1850, p.120
1851	425	40	69	1851, p.130
1852	503	61	76	1852, p.111
1853	486	43	69	1853, p.104
1854	503	48	77	1854, p.214
1855	473	46	78	1855, p.193
1856	452	47	51	1856, p.281
1858	582	46	73	1858, p.280
1859	566	51	67	1859, p.294

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baby themselves.[18]

The remaining majority of foundlings, those who were neither adopted nor reclaimed by their families, were placed with wet-nurses as quickly as the almshouse commissioners could manage to find them. Sometimes babies were placed with female paupers in the almshouse, if any there happened to be lactating. If none were available, the commissioners consulted the list they maintained of women willing to work as wet-nurses in their own homes and placed babies with them.[19] When there were no lactating women available either inside or outside the almshouse, the commissioners were forced to place babies with "dry nurses," women, often older women, who fed the babies in any way they could.[20]

Dry-nursing was a perilous business for babies. For most of the nineteenth century there was no safe and effective substitute for human breast milk for feeding nursing infants. The city did not have a reliable supply of clean water until 1842, when Croton water was piped into New York for the first time. Even then, this new source of fresh, clean water did not reach every home. Pasteurized, unadulterated, chilled, and

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[18] Hannah Gilmore/Emeline Toby, AHFV-NYHS, #14, June 14, 1838. The commissioners ultimately gave Hannah/Emeline up to her mother, Ann Van Berg, despite their earlier efforts to prevent the reunion. Van Berg found the baby with her nurse "in spite off all the efforts of the Commrs." The name change was probably part of the almshouse's effort to prevent the mother from finding the baby. Thomas McConnell, AH Children's Records, vol. 214, p.282. Thomas was abandoned by "his drunken parents whoreside at No.92 Anthony Street..." Anthony Street was located in the notorious Five Points slum. For more instances in which foundlings are returned to parents - mothers, but also some fathers - see AHFV-NYHS #s 7, 17, 20, 24, 89,133.

[19] The nurse section of the AHFV-NYHS lists the names, addresses, numbers of children husbands' occupations, nationalities, color, and appearance of women who applied to work for the almshouse as wet-nurses.

[20] For examples of women who worked as dry nurses, see: AHFV-NYHS, nurse section, Caroline Sherriden, #1, April 18, 1838; Sarah Jusley, #32, July 23, 1838; Mary Surtzer, #35, July 30, 1838; Susan McGovern, #91, April 8, 1839. For a description of an elderly nurse, see "The Murder of the Innocents," *New York Tribune*, February 9, 1859.

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antiseptically bottled cow's milk was not available until the 1890s, the result of knowledge gained from the bacteriological discoveries of the 1880s and the dogged efforts of milk reformers extending back to the middle of the century. It was not widely available until after the turn of the century. Before these innovations, milk and water were infested with bacteria, particularly in hot weather, and could be lethal to infants and small children. Each summer hundreds of New York babies died from cholera infantum, an intestinal disorder colloquially known as "summer complaint." Artificial feeding, attempted with spoons, "pap boats," or objects such as rags and sponges soaked in milk, was not only difficult to carry out, but profoundly unhygienic.[21]

The nurses the city hired to care for foundlings typically retained them for one or two years until they were weaned, sometimes for a few years beyond that, if they survived. From the eighteenth century until the 1830s wet-nurses returned their charges directly to the almshouse. Starting in the 1830s the Almshouse Department began making an effort to separate its children from the other almshouse inmates by establishing a separate "nursery" for them. The first of these was Long Island Farms, a 230 tract of farmland located on the Long Island shore - in what is today Long Island City, Queens - opposite Blackwell's Island. The city housed foundlings and other dependent children in its care at Long Island Farms from approximately 1835 until 1847, when conditions there so deteriorated that the city removed the children.[22] In 1848 the

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[21] For the introduction of Croton Water see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 625-628. For the dangers of adulterated milk and water, cholera infantum, and dry-nursing, see John Duffy, *A History of Public Health in New York City, 1866-1966* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968); E. Melanie Du Puis, *Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing*, 17; Richard A. Meckel, *Save the Babies: American Public Health Reform and the Prevention of Infant Mortality, 1850-1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Julie Miller, "To Stop the Slaughter of the Babies: Nathan Straus and the Drive for Pasteurized Milk, 1893-1920," *New York History* 74 (April 1993): 159-184; George D. Sussman, *Selling Mothers' Milk: The Wet-Nursing Business in France, 1715-1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982, 10-11, 84-85.

[22] According to Homer Folks, the city bought Long Island Farms, then three farms,

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Almshouse Department completed its new "Nursery Establishment"on Randall's Island. The Randall's Island nurseries remained in use until 1875 when a New York State law mandated the removal of all able-bodied children over the age of two, later three, from almshouse facilities.[23]

At the almshouse, Long Island Farms, and Randall's Island children went to school at special schools established at these institutions. At Randall's Island children received some additional special training in trades. Once they were old enough, at ages twelve, ten, or even younger, they were apprenticed.[24] There the trail of most foundlings ends. The desire to conceal the shame of their origins probably led most to keep quiet about where they spent their early years. Like solitary immigrants from foreign lands, they had to grow new roots for themselves.

The city officials who led the Almshouse prided themselves on the special care they purported to provide for the city's cast-off infants. In 1856 Almshouse Governor Isaac Townsend lauded his colleague Simeon Draper, who was retiring from the presidency of the Almshouse Board of Governors:

> The poor miserable abandoned child - the worse than orphan outcast, whose parents have been to it a curse rather than a blessing - has found in

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around 1831, at the same time it bought Blackwell's Island. Folks, *Care of Destitute*, 15. The almshouse annual report for 1837 indicates that the city used it to house paupers in the early 1830s, then built a building to house children there in1835. By 1837 it was being used for children. AH, annual report, 1837, 216-239. For the removal of the children see AH, annual report, 1847, 16.

[23] The Randall's Island Nurseries were completed in 1848. See the extended description of the new buildings in AH, annual report, 1848, 17-27. The Children's Law of 1875 mandated the removal of able-bodied children over two from Randall's. See "An Act to Provide for the Better Care of Pauper and Destitute Children," in Robert M. Bremner, *Children and Youth in America: A Documentary History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 253-254.

[24] For a discussion of age at apprenticeship see AH, annual report, 1837, 218.

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> him a thoughtful protector, a guardian possessing a *heart* as well as a head. These have constituted special objects of his sympathy; and, gentlemen, the proper and judicious management of 1,200 infants is no trivial responsibility.[25]

When the Department began to decorate the covers of its annual reports with illustrations, the picture it chose was an allegorical figure of a mother with a baby at her breast surrounded by young children. Objects symbolizing learning, plenty, justice, patriotism, and other wholesome values were strewn around the scene. During the 1850s and 1860s the Almshouse Department used no fewer than three versions of this portrait of itself as a nursing mother.[26] The Almshouse Department was, of necessity, a parent to the city's foundlings. But whether or not it was a good parent is another story.

3. Naming the Baby.

The first parental responsibility the Almshouse Commissioners carried out toward the infants brought in from the street was to name them. While some foundlings, like Hannah Frost, Alfred Godfrey Douglas, and John Luke, came with notes indicating their names, many did not. To lack a surname in this era was to lack a connection with a family. More damagingly, a child's namelessness signaled to the world that no father had acknowledged him. To "have no name" was to be illegitimate. All of this made the bestowal of names a particularly serious responsibility, and yet the Almshouse Commissioners often treated it with surprising carelessness. In 1859 the *New York Times* described how foundlings received by the Almshouse were subject to the "fancy and

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[25] AH, annual report, 1856, xl-xli. Draper, who made his fortune as an auctioneer, was a leader in Whig politics in New York. For Draper's career see Amy Bridges, *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 130 and Eric Homburger, *Scenes From the Life of a City: Corruption and Conscience in Old New York* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 141-142.

[26] See covers of the annual reports of the Almshouse Department (after 1860 the Department of Public Charities and Correction), 1850-1869.

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invention" of almshouse officials and "labeled as the Property Clerk labels a piece of stolen goods."[27] The *Times*'s criticism was colorful, but correct. The naming methods used by the Almshouse Commissioners were often as serendipitous as the one described by Charles Dickens in *Oliver Twist*. "We name our fondlins in alphabetical order," declared the workhouse beadle, Mr. Bumble, "The last was a S, - Swubble, I named him. This was a T, - Twist, I named *him*."[28]

Oliver Twist, whose story was first published in serial form in 1837, had a real-life namesake in New York. On an April evening in May, 1841, a Mrs. Sears, who lived at 393 Fourth Street discovered a baby boy about one day old in the entry of her house. She reported to almshouse officials that she "does not know who left it there nor to whom it belongs." The Almshouse Commissioners named the baby Oliver Twist. As if to make a point about the failure of the United States to live up to its promise to grant a chance at "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" to each of its citizens, the New York-born Oliver Twist died on July 4, 1841 when he was less than two months old.[29]

The commissioners' choice of a name for this ephemeral New Yorker seems to be evidence of a kind of careless brutality. Or, they might simply have been indulging in black humor based on what they knew about the abbreviated lives of most foundlings. What difference, after all, did it make if they named a baby Oliver Twist? He would not live even to school age to be teased by his classmates about it. Neither, they correctly believed, would Com[modore] Vanderbilt, who died in January, 1861, at the age of about two months, or Phineas T. Barnum, entered on the almshouse's admissions books in July, 1863 at two months old and dead less than two weeks later.[30]

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[27] "Foundling Babies. How They are Cared For," *New York Times*, February 14, 1859.

[28] Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, 6. The novel was serialized in *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1837-1838.

[29] Oliver Twist, AHFV-NYHS, #184, May 19, 1841.

[30] AH Children's Records, vol. 081, Vanderbilt, December 8, 1860; Barnum, July 8,

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Less bleak, but just as satirical, were names like Martha Washington, awarded to a baby found on a stoop in March, 1807, just five years after the death of the real Mrs. Washington; an infant George Washington was admitted to the almshouse in 1861. Alexander Burr was named by the almshouse commissioners after he was brought in by a night watchman in 1808, just four years after the Burr-Hamilton duel.[31] The Civil War era produced two Abraham Lincolns, a Lydia Maria Childs, named after the abolitionist author Lydia Maria Child, and Jeff Davis, a "colored" baby who lived to be a little more than two months old.[32]

Sometimes the imaginations of almshouse officials faltered. Between 1819 and 1821 the almshouse commissioners saddled seven babies with the brutally descriptive surname "Foundling." They included Henry Foundling and his makeshift siblings Adrian, Ann, James, Mary Ann, and William Henry Foundling. The last member of the Foundling family was called Spruce Foundling, probably after Spruce Street in lower Manhattan. The commissioners must have been having an especially bleak day when they named William Unknown, a boy whose babyhood flickers briefly on the books between February and April, 1820.[33]

Naming was often used by the commissioners to memorialize information about

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1863.

[31] Alexander Burr, AH Children's Records, vol. 214, 8.

[32] Martha Washington, AH Children's Records, vol. 214, March 14, 1807. Vol.081: Childs, September 24, 1860; Davis, April 24, 1860; Lincoln, August 25, 1860 and November 7, 1860; George Washington, April 14, 1861.

[33] William Unknown, AH Children's Records, vol. 0161, February 4 and April 14, 1820. Babies surnamed Foundling" appear mainly in AH Children's Records, vol. 0161, December 24, 1819 - March 26, 1824. The practice of naming children "Foundling" seems to have died out around 1820 - and may have begun earlier than 1819 when this series of record books begins. The case of Henry Foundling can be traced from December 24, 1819 to May 5, 1826, when his nurse returned him to the almshouse. See Almshouse Children's Records, vol. 0160.

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the circumstances, times and places where babies were found, and the people who played some role in their early lives, such as those who found them or the nurses who cared for them. The boy found on a stoop on a cold morning in November, 1838 was named William Frost. A baby girl found in 1807 on a stoop "between the hours of ten and eleven at night" was named Martha Clarissa Night. The commissioners sent this baby to a nurse called Martha Tice, which might account for young Martha's first name. Her middle name, so unnecessarily fancy for a poor abandoned baby, brings to mind the violated maiden of Samuel Richardson's popular novel *Clarissa.* The surname Night - which the commissioners neglected to regularize into Knight - recalls when she was found. The case of Melissa Frances Whittey was similar. She was found in 1809 in the entry of a house on Hudson Street where a cartman named Nicholas Whittey lived, and was subsequently placed by the almshouse with a nurse named Melissa Francis.[34]

The names of some babies recalled the days of the week on which they were found. These include Clarinda Friday (1807); Caroline (1807), Leonora (1821), and Mary Monday (1822); and Juliana Saturday (1807). Even adults, if they were unable to tell the commissioners their names, could be named after days of the week. The Rev. Ezra Stiles Ely, who began preaching in the almshouse in 1810, told of a grown man, "a poor idiot, who was found in the yard of the hospital. Whence he came, no one knew; but, since he was found on Friday morning, like Robinson Crusoe's man, he has been called by that name."[35]

Many of the descriptive names chosen by the almshouse commissioners were place names, used to commemorate where babies had been found. This was a practice

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[34] William Frost, AHFV-NYHS, #50, November 25, 1838. Martha Clarissa Night, AH Children's Records, Vol. 214, p.100; Melissa Frances Whittey, p.269.

[35] Almshouse Children's Records volume 214, all 1807: Juliana Saturday, p.80; Caroline Monday, p.92; Clarinda Friday, p.118. Vol.0161, Leonora Monday, December 21, 1821. Mary Monday, December 20, 1822 - December 31, 1824, volumes 0160 and 0161. Ely, *Visits of Mercy*, March 10, 1811, 80.

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borrowed from Europe. In France and Ireland, for instance, abandoned babies were named after the streets and places where they were discovered. Anyone could guess the origins of a girl named Ann Queenstreet, and she would never be free of the shame of starting life as a foundling.[36] In New York the Almshouse named foundlings James Secondstreet, 1821; William Bleecker, found on Bleecker Street in 1838; Elizabeth Houston, found in 1841 at the corner of Elizabeth and Houston; Peter Dey, left on a stoop on Dey street in 1839; Emily Charlton, handed by a woman to a stranger on the corner of Hudson and Charlton streets, 1840; James Bowery, 1860; and Jane Broadway, 1863, to give only a few. These place names reconstitute a virtual map of early nineteenth-century New York foundlingdom.[37] For babies found near their offices in City Hall Park, the commissioners used the surname Park, as with Mary, Elsie, Josephine and Henry Park, all found in and around the city offices in the park in 1838. Given the prevalence of this practice, we can guess where Ann Alley and Perry Alley were found.[38] The usual process in which streets are named after people was reversed here, making foundlings, at least one of whom dotted nearly every corner in lower Manhattan at one time or another in the nineteenth century, the city's own namesakes.

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[36] For the use of street names for foundlings in France, see Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 110; in Ireland, see Robins, *Charity Children*, 7.

[37] Secondstreet, AH Children's Records, vol. 0161, April 27, 1821 - June 8, 1821; Bleecker, AHFV-NYHS, #43, October 9, 1838; Bowery, AH Children's Records, vol. 081, September 26, 1860; Dey, AHFV-NYHS, #102, November 11, 1839 and AH Admissions Book 102, November 16, 1839; Charlton, AHFV-NYHS #164, November 12, 1840. Jane Broadway, AH Children's Records, vol.082, June 21, 1863. There are many more of these. See, for instance, AH Children's Records, vol. 081, early 1860s, and AHFV-NYHS,1838-1841, which include children with the surnames: Barclay, Beekman, Bond, Centre, Clinton, Cortlandt, Delancey, Eldridge, Forsyth, Fulton, Greenwich, Jones (for Great Jones Street), Laight, Mott, Mulberry, Spring, Varick, and Vesey, all of which are street names in lower Manhattan.

[38] AHFV-NYHS, Mary Park, #1, May 1, 1838; Elsie Park, #24, August 7, 1838; Josephine Park, #51, November 25, 1838; Henry Park, #67, March 2, 1838. Ann and Perry Alley, AH Children's Records, vol. 0163, December 21, 1832.

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Another of the Almshouse Commissioners' common practices was to name babies after people. We have seen how the names of famous people were occasionally coopted. People closer to hand, such as Special Justice Miles Parker, who participated in the cases of foundlings Mary Parker and Maria Parker, both in November, 1840, sometimes lent their names. In the late 1850s there were foundlings named for almshouse governor Simeon Draper, mayor (and former almshouse governor) Daniel Tiemann, and *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley.[39]

The Almshouse Commissioners often named babies after the people who found them or on whose doorsteps they were deposited. Thus Jane Palmer, abandoned at about six months old on Ridge Street in 1835 was named after Alderman Palmer, who sent her to the almshouse. Martin Pringle was named after the two boys, John Martin and Alex Pringle, who found him in the grass on Eighth Avenue between Forty-fifth and Forty-sixth Street on a June day in 1838. Agnes Maxwell was named after the man on whose stoop she was found, Hugh Maxwell, the lawyer in the Helen Jewett case. Bridget Waters was the name given to the baby Bridget Brishhan was startled to find in her bed in her room on Water Street in 1840.[40]

In Italy, foundlings who carried names like *Esposito* (meaning exposed - abandoned), *Innocenti* (the name of the foundling hospital in Florence, also used in other Italian cities), *Colombo* (after the dove on the emblem used by the foundling asylum in Milan), or the devastating but less frequently used *Incogniti* (unknown) would, like the Irish Ann Queenstreet, have suffered from stigma all their lives. In New York, it is unlikely that foundlings who lived to grow up would have kept surnames like

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[39] AHFV-NYHS, Mary Parker, #162, November 10, 1840; Maria Parker, #165, November 14, 1840,. Draper, Greeley, and Tiemann are in "Foundling Babies. How They are Cared For." *New York Times*, February 14, 1859.

[40] Palmer, Almshouse Children's Records, vol. 0149, p.44. AHFV-NYHS: Pringle, #13, June 13, 1838; Maxwell, #12, June 7, 1838; Waters, #130, May 1, 1840.

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"Foundling," "Unknown," "Secondstreet," or "Friday," all of which advertised their sad, even illicit beginnings, particularly in a city full of European immigrants who could have guessed what names like these signified. In this respect foundlings were not unlike slaves, another American group often burdened with foolish or distinctive names. On emancipation freed slaves often shed their "slave names" and adopted new ones that communicated their own family or other allegiances.[41] The absence in the city directories of any of the more egregious foundling names distributed by the almshouse during this period indicates that some grown foundlings may have similarly shed names the almshouse commissioners carelessly or even cruelly bestowed on them.[42] Foundlings who were adopted in infancy had the chance to avoid the whimsical naming practices of the Almshouse Commissioners altogether. Thus a two-month-old girl left on a stoop on Mott Street in 1838 was given the name of her adoptive father, Jacob Furman of Brooklyn, and became Mary Jane Furman. For foundlings who had been burdened with foolish names by the Almshouse Commissioners, the American possibility of self-reinvention was a blessing.[43]

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[41] On slave naming practices see, notably, Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976). Also, Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 53 (1996): 251-288, and Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 45. For the adoption of new names on emancipation see Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974). For the use of distinctive names for European foundlings, see Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 120 and 432; Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor*, 119-122, or Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 120-122.

[42] New York City directories for the early 1840s - twenty years after the almshouse commissioners were using the surname Foundling - reveals no one with that name. The Manhattan telephone directory for 1994-1995 includes no listings for the name Foundling, but a column of Espositos, several Colombos, and a few Innocentis. An Internet search revealed a few people named Foundling living in the Midwest.

[43] Mary Jane Furman, AHFV-NYHS, #39, September 21, 1838.

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4. The "Lacteal Ladies": Foundlings and Their Nurses.

The city's first responsibility toward the foundlings it received - some of whom had been lying on broiling or chilly stoops, unfed, for hours - was to place them with wet-nurses. From the late eighteenth century until 1860 the commissioners placed foundlings with any women resident in the almshouse who happened to be lactating, and they also kept a roster of women available to work - at a moment's notice - as wet-nurses in their own homes.

The lactating women who lived in the almshouse served as a kind of captive, unpaid workforce for the almshouse commissioners, yet as possessors of a desperately needed commodity they sometimes found themselves in a position to argue for terms beneficial to themselves. This was what almshouse inmate Margaret Davis did in 1792. Davis, who was wet-nursing a foundling, decided to leave the almshouse to take a job on her own in the lucrative private wet-nursing market. The commissioners, lacking any "other proper person in the house to suckle the said infant" asked Davis to keep the child and agreed to pay her.[44] In 1838 another almshouse inmate, Eliza Forbes, was less successful when she attempted a similar tactic. When she left the almshouse, Forbes simply took the baby she was nursing out with her. Hoping to be paid now that she was on the outside, she brought the ten-week-old girl to the almshouse commissioners and applied to work as an independent wet-nurse. The commissioners not only rejected her application and assigned the baby to another nurse, but they added insult to injury when they named the child Mary Lyons after her new nurse, Phebe Lyons.[45]

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[44] Almshouse and Bridewell minutes, January 9, 1792. Janet Golden demonstrates that in the nineteenth century United States "...wet nursing became a multilayered enterprise, with several tiers of wages. On the bottom rung of the ladder were poor, institutionalized women living in almshouses and other public shelters who were coerced into suckling abandoned babies..." Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing*, 77.

[45] Mary Lyons, AHFV-NYHS, #42, October 6, 1838. Lyons and her husband appear to have subsequently adopted the baby, see below. There is no mention of what Mary's name was previously, but her mother was "Mary Owens - who is supposed to life [sic] at

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Life for those foundlings who lived in the almshouse with their inmate-nurses - together with the rest of the institution's population of other children, the elderly, ill, blind, insane, criminal, and desperately poor - was, at best, unwholesome. The Rev. Ezra Stiles Ely kept a diary recording his experiences there.[46] Most disturbing to the evangelical Ely was the sexuality he sniffed in the stale air of the almshouse. The "greater part of the wards abound with the vile;" he wrote, "and here and there a solitary believer is vexed with the filthy conversation of this second Sodom." Not only was the house inhabited by prostitutes and other "fallen" women, some suffering horribly (and in Ely's view deservedly) from sexually transmitted diseases - "wretched females...on beds of disease, planted with thorns" - but the crowded physical arrangements of the almshouse themselves promoted promiscuity. "In some rooms," he recorded in dismay, "husbands and wives, with children, and even unmarried persons sleep together...it cannot be prevented under existing circumstances, to procreate a future race of paupers. These things should not be."

In the midst of all this were children. In 1811 Ely tried to deliver a sermon in "a ward which was full of poor mothers with little children. They would cry," he complained, "and required attention continually. It was no favourable place for thought and speech, and I was not a little interrupted by fifty babes."[47] Some of these may have been foundlings with their pauper caretakers. Older children were also underfoot. Ely noted that seventy or eighty of these, all living in one room "in which all the beds touch...are allowed to ramble through the apartments..."[48] Some of these children may once have been babies picked up on the street, now living out their childhoods in the

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Sawpits."

[46] Ezra Stiles Ely, *Visits of Mercy* (Philadelphia: Samuel F. Bradford, 1829).

[47] Ely, *Visits of Mercy*, 73.

[48] Ely, *Visits of Mercy*, 33-34; 88-89.

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almshouse.

Despite the almshouse's continual expansions, moves and attempts to separate the different "classes" of paupers, conditions there remained unpalatable throughout the nineteenth century. In 1853 the warden empathized with the "many old, feeble, and respectable women, who are obliged to seek an asylum here" who were forced to live with "women who have lived a life of prostitution and debauchery, and who, even here, cannot be restrained from indulging in their old habits of using obscene and profane language..."[49] The sordid conditions at the almshouse throughout the first half of the nineteenth century may have been what led the Common Council to pass an ordinance in 1838 requiring that when wet-nursing could be done "out of the [alms]house, it shall be preferred.[50]

Outside of the almshouse the "lacteal ladies" (as the *New York Tribune* dubbed them in 1859) the city employed to care for its nursing infants were generally poor mothers whose own babies had died or been weaned.[51] Some were desperate enough to take in foundlings while their own infants were still at the breast. Frances McCarty, who applied to the commissioners to nurse in 1838, already had a week-old child. The commissioners noted: "husb[and] sick - poor" explaining McCarty's need to take in an abandoned baby for pay.[52] From at least the 1820s to the 1840s the wet-nurses collected

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[49] AH, annual report, 1853, p.6.

[50] *By-laws and Ordinances of the Mayor, Aldermen and Commonalty of the City of New York* (New York, 1839),102.

[51] The term "lacteal ladies," comes from "The Foundlings of the City," *Tribune*, Feb 14, 1859. Data about wet-nurses' own children for 1838-1841 is recorded in the AHFV-NYHS.

[52] AHFV-NYHS, Nurse Section, [Frances] McCarty, May 10, 1838. Janet Golden notes that "only the most desperate mothers turned to wet nursing immediately after giving birth, Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing*, 28.

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their pay bi-weekly at the department of outdoor poor's office amidst the crowd of applicants for alms. The majority signed for their pay with marks, an indication that they could not write.[53] In this era when literacy was increasing for women in the United States, the fact that these women could not write - which meant that they probably, although not necessarily, also could not read - is an indication that were poor.

Almshouse Commissioner Moses G. Leonard chose to describe the women the almshouse hired to nurse foundlings as widows. The sums paid them, according to Leonard, were "the main support of many a widowed woman, who, by this means supports herself and family, at any rate, in part, and saves herself from having her name enrolled on the pages of the pension book."[54] This was, perhaps, an idealized representation of who most of the nurses were. The hard-working, deserving widow was a character commonly conjured up by charitable organizations who sought to prove that their alms went only to the worthy. In reality, many, possibly the majority, of the independent wet-nurses the city hired were not widows, but poor married women whose husbands' pay was inadequate to support their families.[55]

The majority of the women who applied to work as wet-nurses between 1838 and 1840 were, or claimed to be, married, probably a sign of the commissioners' insistence that they must be, since unmarried women with babies would presumably also have appreciated these jobs.[56] The nurses' husbands were laborers, artisans, and small

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[53] For a description of the intake process for foundlings and the payment of their nurses see AH annual report,1848, 42-43. The paybooks the nurses signed are at the Municipal Archives, see AH Children's volumes 0161 (1819-1824), 0160 (1824-1829), and 0163 (1829-1835). On page one of volume 0161, of the twenty-six nurses who received payments, nineteen signed with marks. This is just a sample.

[54] AH annual report, 1848, 42-43.

[55] On the worthy widow, see Gillman,"From Widowhood to Wickedness."

[56] The most complete source of information about the independent wet-nurses hired by the city to care for foundlings is the Almshouse AHFV-NYHS at the New-York Historical Society. It contains the applications and work records of 199 women who

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tradesmen and included cartmen, house and ship's carpenters, a blacksmith, a rope-maker, a shoemaker, a waiter, a vegetable-seller, a mason, and a boatman.[57] Yet even though they had husbands, these women still needed to earn. Some of the women told the clerk who took down their information that although they were married, their husbands were not living with them and, critically, not supporting them. A few of these women really were widows; a few of their husbands were sailors, away at sea; at least one husband was a soldier. A few women, like Frances McCarty, reported husbands who were sickly or otherwise down on their luck. Some simply stated that their husbands were "away," and gave the clerk - and everyone else in the crowded office - a topic for gossip. One woman stated outright that her husband had abandoned her.[58]

The clerk who recorded the information given by women applying to work as wet-nurses noted each woman's appearance. Comments such as: "Amer[ican] ap[pearance] good," "ap[pearance] tol[erable]" "ap[pearance] very good for Irish," "Amer[ican] widow, ap[pearance] respectable" are typical.[59]

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applied to the almshouse department to work as wet-nurses between 1838 and 1840. The entries are numbered, 1-199, and date from April 18, 1838 to July 8, 1840. Some women are listed more than once. After the spring of 1839 entries grow sketchy.

[57] Examples of husbands' occupations and whereabouts come from the AHFV-NYHS, nurse section. This is only a sampling.

[58] In the AHFV-NYHS nurse section: [Frances] McCarty, May 10, 1838. Mary Surtzer, July 30, 1838, had a "sickly" husband and a "large family." Elsie Brower was another widow, May 4, 1838. Women whose husbands were on board ship included sailors' wives Elizabeth Hutchings, May 4, 1838, Mary Keely, August 1, 1838, and Mary Falconi, a native New Yorker whose husband was an "Italian mate of Ship Anson of Charlston," September 6, 1838. Jane Maria Martin's husband was a ship carpenter, away on board ship, December 4, 1838. Bridget Taylor's husband was a soldier. Women with husbands who were simply "away" include Mary Ann Hill, August 1, 1838 and Eliza Peters, September 28, 1838; Sarah Lawrence stated that her husband abandoned her, September 21, 1838. These examples, all from the nurse section of the AHFV-NYHS, is a sampling, not an exhaustive list.

[59] AHFV-NYHS, nurse section: Elizabeth Hutchings, May 4, 1838; [Frances] McCarty, May 10, 1838; Cath Conley, June 7, 1838; Sarah Jusley, July 23, 1838.

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He also noted color, as in the case of Mary Ann Bunce about whom the clerk wrote: "Coloured woman husb[and] ship carp[enter] in Brown and Bulls yard, ap[pearance] good."[60] In the antebellum South it was customary for black women to nurse white babies, but in northern cities like New York, cross-race wet-nursing was not the norm. A black woman like Mrs. Bunce probably would have had difficulty finding work as a wet-nurse in a white family. This local bias, constructed out of the evil complexities of southern slavery and northern racism, apparently extended to the almshouse authorities, who matched black babies with black nurses when they could - and in the process created jobs for black women who wanted to work as wet-nurses. Thus when a "female coloured child about four weeks old" was found early on an April morning in 1840, she was named Letetia Finder by the commissioners and put to nurse with Margaret Sickles, the black woman who found her. Elizabeth Houston, the two-week-old "female coloured child" found at the door of a black man identified as Mr. Leveridge (at the corner of Elizabeth and Houston streets, an African-American neighborhood in this period) was put to nurse, successively, with three nurses, Jane Martin, Julia Ann Smith, and Sophia Gibson, all of them black. Charles Smith, a black neighbor of Mr. Leveridge, brought Elizabeth into the almshouse. The concentration of African-Americans in the early life stories of Elizabeth Houston and Letetia Finder - and John Luke and his son - indicates more than the efforts of the almshouse department to provide black babies with nurses of their own race and vice versa. It also opens a window through which we can, if only foggily, view the circumstances of foundlinghood in the city's African-American residential pockets.[61]

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[60] Mary Ann Bunce, AHFV-NYHS, nurse section, July 24, 1838. Slavery ended in New York in 1827, so Mary Ann Bunce and her carpenter husband must have been free and self-supporting, though poor.

[61] Letitia Finder, AHFV-NYHS, #123, April 27, 1840; Elizabeth Houston, #174, March 9, 1841. Other examples of black babies matched with black nurses in the AHFV-NYHS are: #72, William Shotwell, April 6, 1839; #179, Maria Moulton, April 18, 1841; #180,

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According to the directives of the almshouse throughout this period, foundlings were supposed to remain with their nurses for one or two years or until they were weaned.[62] Sometimes, however, nurses evolved into foster mothers with whom foundlings remained for substantial lengths of time. For some of these women nursing for the almshouse - whether it was wet-nursing, dry-nursing, or simply fosterage - served as an ongoing cottage industry lasting years.

One such woman was Martha Skaats, who cared for three almshouse babies over a period of more than six years. Beginning as early as December, 1819, she appeared at the almshouse department's office with unusual regularity at every bi-weekly pay period, signing for her pay with a mark. On one rare occasion when Martha did not come, Elizabeth Skaats, presumably a relative, signed for her. The child she cared for longest was Henry Foundling, a member of the ad hoc Foundling family created by the almshouse commissioners. The evidence of the almshouse pay books shows that Martha was caring for Henry by December, 1819, and returned him to the almshouse - whether

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Margaret Ann Butler, April 19, 1841. There is a concentration of addresses on Laurens Street (35, 45, and 49, cases 10, 174, 179, and 180). What was once Laurens Street is now West Broadway in SoHo. In 1838-1841 this was an African-American neighborhood. Janet Golden finds city authorities attempting to match black babies and nurses in eighteenth century Philadelphia, as I do in nineteenth-century New York, Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing*, 30. For cross-race wet nursing in the south, see Fox-Genovese,151-152, 315.

[62] In the 1790s the almshouse decreed that "...all such children as are or may be out to nurses when weaned, be return[e]d to the almshouse, unless it be in cases where the board may order otherwise. Later they refined their directive and: "order'd, that the clerk notify their respective nurses that they [the orphan and foundling infant children] are to return them weaned to the almshouse, as they arive [sic] to the age of twelve months respectively, unless they obtain leave of the board to retain them longer." Almshouse and Bridewell minutes, December 28, 1795; May 2, 1796. The Almshouse annual report for 1846 notes that "the children at nurse being those under two years of age..." p.387. In 1848 the almshouse reported that "they [foundlings and otherwise abandoned infants] are nursed out by careful and competent women, until they arrive to the age of two years. They are then removed to the *Nursery*..." AH, annual report, 1848, 42-43.

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with or without a sorrowful wrench we will never know - in May, 1826. During the five and a half years that Martha Skaats cared for Henry Foundling she also intermittently cared for another boy. By 1827, after Henry was gone, the pay books show Skaats receiving payments for the care of a girl named Margaret Watters.[63]

More typical were nurses who cared for several babies in quick succession - generally because so many of these ill and neglected infants died so quickly.[64] One such nurse was Johanna Hill. Hill's own baby was three months old when she applied to the almshouse commissioners on April 20, 1838 to work as a nurse. On May 1 she took foundling Mary Park to nurse. The week-old infant had been left the previous afternoon "by an unknown woman in the kitchen of the Old Alms House" in City Hall Park. She died on August 1 of cholera infantum, the intestinal disorder that was a common cause of infant death in New York at this time, especially in hot summer weather. On July 27, while she still had Mary Park and her own baby in hand, Hill took another foundling, eleven-month-old Ann Clark, who died on August 22. Three days later Hill took in six-month-old Charles Cox, who lived only until October 19.

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[63] Martha Skaats and the children she cared for, Henry Foundling, Lewis Bunill/Burrell, and Margaret Watters, appear in AH Children's Records, vols. 0161 (1819-1824) and 0160 (1824-1829). Martha's name is variously spelled Skates and Skatts, while Henry appears sometimes as Henry Fondling or Henry Bondling. These volumes record bi-weekly payments to nurses, and Henry and Martha appear first on December 24, 1819, the first pay period represented in volume 0161. Earlier paybooks are listed on the Municipal Archives inventory to the almshouse records collection, but the volumes were not available. Thus Martha had Henry before that date, but it is impossible from the available records to tell how long. On May 5, 1826 there is a note indicating that Henry was taken into the almshouse, and by the last pay period of 1827 (December 28, 1827) Martha is caring for Marg[aret] Watters. On December 19, 1819 Martha Skaats is also nursing Lewis Bunill; on April 9, 1824 she has Lewis Burrell. I am guessing that these are the same child.

[64] Of the fifty-one babies placed with nurses by the almshouse commissioners in 1839, (as recorded in the AHFV-NYHS) twenty-eight, or 55 % died. Of the sixty placed in 1840, twenty-two, or 36.6% died. The women who were given babies by the almshouse commissioners between April 1838 and July 1840, as recorded in the AHFV-NYHS, each cared for between one and five infants during this time.

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Hill cared for three babies in the space of four months in 1838 and every one of them died. Almshouse officials did not leave any notation, as they did in some other cases, to indicate that Hill was particularly at fault.[65] In March of 1839, after a hiatus of five months, Hill took another foundling, Charles Smith Pugsly. This time, though, noting that he was "sickly," she returned him to the almshouse less than two weeks later. Perhaps Hill was unwilling to have another baby die on her hands, or else she feared an illness that could spread to herself or her own child.[66] Johanna Hill's experience is evidence of the danger these often sickly babies could pose to wet-nurses and their families. In order to avoid becoming infected, some nurses simply chose not to take foundlings that looked sick. Diseases like syphilis - which carried the stigmatizing taint of sexual wrongdoing in addition to its physical ravages - and smallpox were a worry.[67]

Nurses like these, whether they worked for the city or for private clients, (who

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[65] Two cases in which almshouse officials pointedly commented on abuse or neglect on the part of the nurse are: AHFV-NYHS, nurse section, nurse Ann McCullock, June 29, 1838, "behaved improperly, half starved the child," and #50, November 25, 1838, baby William Frost who "Died from debility Dec 1 1838, I think the nurse neglected it. R. [J.] W."

[66] For the nursing record of Johanna Hill, see AHFV-NYHS, nurse section, April 20, 1838. For Mary Park see children's section, #1, May 1, 1838. For Charles Smith Pugsley's history see Charles Smith Pugsley, AHFV-NYHS, #65, February 15, 1839 and nurse section, nurses Eliza Reed, February 19, 1839; Cath Dougherty, March 9, 1839; Caroline Williams, March 22, 1839; Eliza Gallon, March 23, 1839; Johanna Hill, March 11, 1839.

[67] In Europe, where syphilis was often identified as a disease associated with urban immorality, and foundlings were typically city-born then sent out to rural villages to nurse, public officials framed their anxiety in terms of an urban/rural dichotomy. For discussions of syphilis, foundlings, and wet-nurses in Europe, see: David Kertzer, "Syphilis, Foundlings, and Wet-nurses in Nineteenth Century Italy," *Journal of Social History* 32 (Spring 1999): 589-602 and David Ransel, *Mothers of Misery*, 278-290. For a case of smallpox at the Nursery and Child's Hospital before the Civil War see: Mary Du Bois, "Thirty Years' Experience in Hospital Work" in Janet Golden, ed., *Infant Asylums and Children's Hospitals, Medical Dilemmas and Developments, 1850-1920* (New York: Garland, 1989),18.

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were typically poor working mothers) developed an unsavory reputation in both English and American cities by the 1870s. Known as "baby-farmers," these women were often accused of neglecting the children in their charge, or even of making unwanted infants disappear through underground adoptions or fatal neglect.[68] Some almshouse nurses were neglectful or even abusive, yet many, probably most of the women the almshouse hired did their job in good faith.

Nursing for the almshouse was a job for poor women. It did not require any particular skills, only that the applicant be female and, preferably, lactating. As the case of Johanna Hill makes clear, it carried serious risks for the nurses and their families. Yet it was one more way for poor women to make money in a world in which very few occupations were open to them. For black women like Mary Ann Bunce, Jane Martin, Julia Ann Smith, and Sophia Gibson the almshouse, with no altruistic motives intended, created jobs in an even more painfully constricted occupational universe.

In at least one instance, wet-nursing for the almshouse evidently brought its own rewards. In the winter of 1839 a woman named Augusta Alexander whose newborn baby had died, applied to the almshouse to work as a wet-nurse. The almshouse put her to work, giving her Sarah White, the baby girl found by one of the city's night watchmen "on the side walk in a willow market basket." The almshouse clerk noted in his records: "Takes it without charge."[69]

5. Foundlings in the Almshouse.

After spending their earliest years with wet-nurses, foundlings (that is, those who survived the dangers of infancy, were neither adopted nor reclaimed by their families,

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[68] For evaluations of the unsavory reputations of "baby farmers,"see Arnott, "Infant Death," Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing*, 101.

[69] AHFV-NYHS, nurse section, Augusta Alexander, February 18, 1839; Sarah White, #63, February 14, 1839. Alexander kept Sarah White from February 18 to March 7.

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and were not already resident in the almshouse with inmate-nurses) were returned to the almshouse by their nurses.[70] Before the 1830s this meant the almshouse proper, first at its original site in City Hall Park, after 1816 at Bellevue. In the almshouse foundlings aged about two through ten, with only the ad hoc supervision that could be provided by a transient population of female pauper inmates, mingled with prostitutes, ailing sailors, vagrants, the insane, the ill, and the destitute.

They also met other children with whom they attended the almshouse school.[71] The almshouse, as the legally mandated receptacle of last resort for all New York's poor, housed children who were admitted with their families, children who had been removed from unfit families by the city, children sent by their families or the authorities to the almshouse for disciplinary reasons, blind and disabled children, children who had been born in the almshouse to destitute mothers, lost children who remained only until their families could pick them up, orphans, and a few solitary, homeless children. One of these was six-year-old Richard Shannon, who walked into the almshouse alone one day in 1827. Richard was an immigrant whose family had set sail from Liverpool in 1825. Now his mother was dead and his stepfather, an alcoholic, could not or would not care for him.[72]

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[70] For policies regarding returning weaned children to the almshouse see note 62. For some specific cases of children returned to the almshouse, see: Juliana Saturday, "This child is returned to the Alms House today," AH Children's Records, vol. 214, August 1, 1809; William Lambert, who is "Taken in Almshouse," on December 31, 1813, vol. 0123, 11; and Henry Foundling, vol. 0160, "Taken in H," May 5, 1826.

[71] For references to the school in the almshouse in the 1790s, see Almshouse and Bridewell minutes, September 24, 1792, and February 29, March 21, and June 6, 1796.

[72] For admissions of children to the almshouse, with and without their families between 1826 and 1841 see Almshouse Admissions Books, vols.102 and 146. Richard Shannon is in vol. 146, February 1, 1827. In the 1790s the almshouse maintained a midwife, see Almshouse and Bridewell minutes, March 12, 1792 and November 17 and December 1, 1794. The women delivered in the almshouse joined the pool of women who were available to nurse foundlings. For a blind parentless boy in the almshouse see Ely, *Visits of Mercy*, 68. Of a crippled boy, about twelve years old, admitted to the almshouse, see

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By combining foundlings with the other children in its care the almshouse was departing from the European practice of separating foundlings from orphans so as to avoid contaminating the latter by contact with the former. Officials of the almshouse blurred the issue further when they described foundlings in ways that obscured their origins. In 1849 the almshouse clerk, George B. Gilbert, kindly attempted to designate the infants left with caretakers as "paupers" rather than "foundlings," so that they could avoid the greater stigma of illegitimacy. Describing the infants the almshouse was maintaining at nurse, he carefully defined his terms:

> About forty-six children are classed as paupers...also those left at board in the city and abandoned; as many are included in this class as possible, to avoid the stigma of being illegitimate.
> The infants found in the streets are called foundlings...[73]

Compared to the paupers, criminals, and vagrants crowding their buildings or beseeching them for aid, children, including foundlings, looked eminently worthy to almshouse officials. New York's almshouse was typical of charitable institutions of its era in that it equated destitution with immoral behaviors such as drinking, idleness or, in women, sexual promiscuity. The opportunities offered by the United States made the "crime of pauperism" seem even more unforgivable to those who throve in the burgeoning market economy. Almshouse Commissioner Moses G. Leonard protested: "...in our highly favoured country, where labor is so much demanded and so liberally

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Ely, *Visits of Mercy*, 79.

[73] AH, annual report, 1849, 194-195. After the Civil War the almshouse classified infants according to whether or not they had their mothers with them. Thus by the 1860s foundlings are referred to as "nurse children," since they were cared for by wet-nurses, in distinction to "mother's children" who were cared for by their own mothers. Foundlings were sometimes interchangeably referred to as orphans in this period. See, for instance, tables in AH, annual report, 1866, 302, or 1886, 61. Almshouse officials alternated the use of orphan and foundling, as in this passage: "At the Infant's Hospital, 1,081 children were received in 1877, of whom 574 were orphans; of these 210 were foundlings..." PCC, 1877, xxi. This post-Civil War trend seems to be the result of a softening in attitudes toward illegitimates.

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rewarded, and the means of subsistence so easy and cheaply obtained, poverty need not and ought not to exist..." The almshouse commissioners, like other charitable administrators of this era, made the distinction between their worthy and unworthy dependents clear: "The child, (unprotected), the lunatic, the aged, the infirm, and the demented may be, and many are, unfortunately paupers: - worthy subjects of our charity, entitled to all the sympathies and provisions, now made for, and exercised toward them. But beyond these, *none*."[74] Thus, paradoxically, one result of the sordid confusion of New York's almshouse was that it served to lighten the stigma against foundlings.

6. The Long Island Farms Nursery.

In approximately 1831 the city purchased Long Island Farms, originally three farms on the shoreline of present-day Queens opposite Blackwell's Island. In 1835 it began constructing a building to house children there.[75] In taking this step, the almshouse was bending to the prevailing winds of opinion regarding the care of poor and dependent children. In the 1830s Americans began removing wayward, parentless, destitute, abused and abandoned children from all-purpose institutions such as almshouses, and creating special children's institutions. Orphanages and reform schools (known in this period as houses of refuge) began to spring up in the 1830s at an

[74] AH, annual reports,1847, 6. In 1855 the department, now under a new administration, reiterated the point, noting that expenditures made for children and the insane were justified because these groups were "...objects of pure charity. The claims they make are not such as are made for those who fill the prisons, nor even the Alms House, but present those of a totally different and more direct charitable character." AH, annual report, 1855, xix. On the almshouse's view of poverty as a "moral evil" to be addressed by punitive measures, and the phrase "crime of pauperism" see Mohl, *Poverty in New York*, 65.

[75] On the purchase of Long Island Farms, Folks, *Care of Destitute*, 15. On the construction of the building for children there, AH, annual report, 1837, 238. It appears that children were living at Long Island Farms even before this building went up, along with the adult paupers who worked the farm. For the location of Long Island Farms, see *Valentine's Manual*, 1842-1843, 79, which describes Long Island Farms as "opposite Blackwell's Island."

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unprecedented rate.[76] This new attention to the needs of children reflects the beginning of an understanding that gradually began to build in both England and the United States that children were essentially innocent and good, and that childhood ought to be a protected time of life unsullied by adult dangers and concerns. This understanding did not yet fully include foundlings which, in this era, were still being excluded from private charities in New York.

By the 1830s the idea that children were being raised in almshouses along with prostitutes and criminals dismayed a wider number of people than it did a century earlier when New York's first almshouse was built.[77] The experiences of Charles Dickens' workhouse child, Oliver Twist, whose incandescent goodness glows even in the grit of the London slums, capture the sentiments of this era in regard to children. In 1837, the same year *Oliver Twist* was first published, New York's almshouse commissioners characterized Blackwell's Island as an inappropriate location to house children since there they would be in the "improper vicinity of a criminal prison." Addressing the Board of Aldermen in fulsome tones, the Almshouse Commissioners argued that "Blackwell's Island would accommodate all, except the children; whom, it is believed, your Honorable Body would not, for a moment, entertain the idea of placing on that location."[78]

Regardless of the Almshouse Commissioners' burgeoning sensibilities about children, the fact is that their designated facility for children, Long Island Farms, was a disaster from beginning to end, a victim of their own neglect and bad management. A building begun there in the spring of 1835, meant to serve as a "school house, nursery,

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[76] Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*, 207.

[77] For the 1830s as the decade when the tide turns toward the sentimentalization of children see Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 136.

[78] AH, annual report, 1837, 212.

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&c." was "materially injured by the neglect of proper filling in round the foundation, and other attentions towards its completion." This, despite an appropriation of funds in 1836 by the Common Council's Committee on Charity and Almshouse to complete and furnish the building. As a result, by 1837 there was still inadequate accommodation for the children. According to the matron, Jane Ley, and the superintendent, the children also suffered from inadequate supplies of clothing, shoes, food, water, and fuel. Ley further complained that the meat received at the Farms was of inferior quality, the lack of fuel compelled the women and children to gather twigs in the woods, and the superintendent of the almshouse had not visited in nine months. Another official had in that time "visited the *Farmer*, but not the *children*," Ley complained.[79]

During the 1830s and 1840s about 600 children lived at Long Island Farms at any given moment.[80] These were accompanied by a smaller number of adults, dependents of the almshouse, who absorbed the elevating benefits of hard labor and at the same time helped to feed themselves and their fellow almshouse dependents by working the farm. The matron, Jane Ley, was accompanied by an assistant matron, superintendent, a steward and his assistant, a physician, and a nurse. The children attended a school at Long Island Farms that was run by the Public School Society, the Protestant-dominated, privately-run school system that later evolved into New York's public school system.

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[79] AH, annual report, 1837, 216, 238, 250-251. For the appropriation of funds for the nursery building on Long Island Farms see Municipal Archives, City Clerk, Filed Papers, Committee on Charity and Alms House, 1836.

[80] Lydia Maria Child, who visited Long Island Farms in 1842 and James Gibbons, who visited in 1846, both reported that there were 600 children there. See Lydia Maria Child, "Letters From New York, Number 29," in *A Lydia Maria Child Reader*, Carolyn L. Karcher, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 325, and James Gibbons diary excerpt in Sarah Hopper Emerson, *Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons, Told Chiefly Through her Correspondence* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1897), 135. According to the almshouse there were 463 children at Long Island Farms in 1836 (AH, annual report, 1837, table following page 251) and 698 in 1840 (City Clerk, Filed Papers, Committee on Charity and Almshouse, 1839). *Valentine's Manual* reports 475 there in 1845, *Valentine's Manual*, 1845-1846, 190.

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Black children were excluded from Long Island Farms which, given the conditions there, would have been just as well for them if conditions in the almshouse proper, where they remained, were not equally awful.[81]

During the 1830s and 1840s, when America's asylums were still new and hopeful experiments, they were a popular destination for visitors. Alexis de Tocqueville, who came to the United States in the 1830s to visit American penitentiaries, is one of the most famous asylum tourists of the nineteenth century. Charles Dickens, who came to the United States in the early 1840s, is another. Long Island Farms, although it was never a model institution like the penitentiary at Auburn in upstate New York, or the insane asylum at Bloomingdale in northern Manhattan, attracted its share. Even though the Farms' personnel seem to have been capable of putting on a good show, visitors generally perceived the bleakness that lay just beneath the surface. The abolitionist and author Lydia Maria Child, visiting in 1842, remarked: "The oppressive feeling is, that there are no *mothers* there." While noting that the children seemed to be clean, well-dressed and well-housed, she also objected to the regimentation of life in a children's institution. "The sleeping-rooms were clean as a Shaker's apron." she observed. "When I saw the long rows of nice little beds, ranged side by side, I inquired whether there was not a merry buzz in the morning. 'They are not permitted to speak at all in the sleeping apartments,' replied the superintendent. The answer sent a chill through my heart."[82]

Other visitors unearthed deeper evidence of demoralization and disarray. The

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[81] For personnel at Long Island Farms see *Valentine's Manual*,1845-1846, 39. For the exclusion of black children see AH, annual report, 1837, 226-227. For references to the school there see AH, annual report, 1837, 219 and *Valentine's Manual*, 1842-3, 79. For conditions for African-Americans at Bellevue see the comments of L.W. Stevens, superintendent of the almshouse, who remarked on the "deplorable condition" of the quarters assigned to "colored inmates" of the almshouse. The people there were "ragged, filthy, lousy," and suffering from an "alarming contagious fever." AH, annual report, 1837, 238.

[82] Child, "Letters From New York, Number 29," 325-326.

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physician and city inspector John Griscom found ophthalmia, an eye disease common among institutionalized children, at Long Island Farms.[83] Quaker abolitionist James Gibbons, who, along with his wife Abigail Hopper Gibbons, established an annual tradition of visiting the children at Long Island Farms every July Fourth (later, every Christmas), was particularly cutting. The children at Long Island Farms, he observed,

> need everything and have nothing; and whose initial lesson, on going there, is to learn practically that they are the most miserable little wretches in all creation, that obedience to hirelings is their first duty, and to expect nothing. Secondly, gratitude for bad treatment; and thirdly, any quantity of the same stuff continued.[84]

The author of *Oliver Twist* declined to visit Long Island Farms during his tour through New York's charitable and correctional institutions. This, however, did not prevent him from impaling it on the point of his pen in his *American Notes*, published in 1842. "...I believe it is well conducted;" Dickens wrote, "and I can the more easily credit it, from knowing how mindful they usually are, in America, of that beautiful passage in the Litany which remembers all sick persons and young children."[85]

By 1846, the year James Gibbons recorded his caustic comment, the situation at Long Island Farms had deteriorated dangerously. Almshouse officials belonging to the administration that came in with Almshouse Commissioner Moses G. Leonard in 1845, looking back on the unsatisfactory work of their predecessors, complained that the

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[83] John Griscom, *The Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Population of New York* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1845), 3.

[84] Excerpt from James Gibbons' diary, July 4, 1846, in Emerson, *Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons*, 135. For the Gibbons' practice of visiting Long Island Farms, and later Randall's Island on Christmas, and the switch from July Fourth to Christmas, see Mary E. Dewey, ed., *The Life and Letters of Catharine M. Sedgwick* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1871), 421. Sedgwick, Child, and the Gibbonses all worked together in the city's abolitionist and other reform movements. Sedgwick sometimes accompanied Abby Gibbons on her visits to the nurseries.

[85] Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (London: Penguin Books, 1972),141.

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"miserable group of hovels" there were "more than crowded," and "so dilapidated and ill-arranged" that the Farms "may now be termed the *opprobrium* of the Alms-house Department."[86] In 1847, with new nursery buildings under construction on Randall's Island, the children were removed from the "old and wretched 'Long Island Farms' hovels," as Commissioner Leonard termed them, and placed temporarily in one of the recently completed but still vacant almshouse buildings on Blackwell's Island. Evidently almshouse officials now feared the malign influence of the Blackwell's Island penitentiary less than they did the shambles that Long Island Farms had become. Long Island Farms was such a dilapidated eyesore that as soon as the children moved out local people set it on fire. This act of vigilantism foreshadowed a similar act taken by the citizens of Staten Island a decade later.[87] Fearing the spread of yellow fever to the local population, the Staten Islanders burned down a quarantine station where ship passengers were conveyed before being allowed to land in the city proper. The Long Island locals who burned Long Island Farms similarly feared contagion - in this case moral as well as physical - from poor city children.

Commissioner Leonard evidently approved of the destruction by fire of Long Island Farms. He chose to interpret it as commentary on his predecessors, rather than on himself. "Has not the city of New York for years been disgraced in the possession of the unsightly barracks of Long Island Farms?" Leonard inquired of the readers of the almshouse department's 1847 annual report. "The neighbors on Long Island thought so, and having more regard for us than we had ourselves, eventually burned them to the ground...."[88]

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[86] AH, annual report, 1846, [376].

[87] John Duffy, "Social Impact of Disease in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Leavitt and Numbers, *Sickness and Health*, 416.

[88] AH, annual report, 1847, 16-19.

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7. The Randall's Island Nursery.

In 1848 the almshouse department completed the construction of a new and much improved "Nursery Establishment" on Randall's Island. The deterioration and overcrowding of Long Island Farms was the immediate impetus behind the new buildings, but the new nursery was also part of a larger program of construction and renovation that the department was undertaking on Randall's and Blackwell's islands in the East River. The same year that the Randall's Island nursery was completed much of the original grounds of Bellevue were sold. The convicts, vagrants, and paupers formerly resident there were sent to the penitentiary and new almshouse and insane asylum buildings on Blackwell's Island. Bellevue Almshouse became Bellevue Hospital, finally losing its multipurpose character.[89]

Central to this program was the notion of separating the different "classes" of paupers and criminals from one another and of isolating many of them from the city proper. Commissioner Leonard even proposed the idea of erecting walls between the different institutions on Blackwell's Island in order to separate the penitentiary, workhouse, and almshouse buildings there. The new almshouse had separate buildings for men and women, in contrast to the old one, where men, women, and children freely - and, Ezra Stiles Ely thought, promiscuously - mingled. The "poison of the contact" between criminals, vagrants, respectable elderly women, and vulnerable children would, Commissioner Leonard hoped, finally be eliminated.[90]

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[89] For the completion of the Randall's Island Nursery, see AH, annual report, 1847, 9. For the breakup of Bellevue, AH, annual reports, 1847, 11-12, and 1856, 23-24. Also King, *King's Handbook*, 421-422, 456-460; Mohl, *Poverty in New York*, 86; Spann, *New Metropolis*, 76-79.

[90] "The poison of the contact," AH, annual report, 1847, 24. The suggestion to divide Blackwell's with walls, AH, annual report, 1847, 8. For the trend toward specialization in the care of the poor in the nineteenth century see Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum.*

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It was in this spirit of classification and separation that Randall's Island was devoted solely to institutions for children. (The only institution on the island other than the city's nursery was the privately-run House of Refuge for juvenile delinquents which moved there from Manhattan in 1854.)[91] The Randall's Island Nurseries, in keeping with this era's sharpening focus on the welfare of children, was an enormous improvement over Long Island Farms - at least in its original conception. It consisted of twelve buildings on an elevation at the island's center. Facing southeast, the buildings enjoyed "a view of Flushing bay, the intervening islands and adjacent country–one of the finest prospects in the vicinity of New York."[92] The nursery's central structure was a stone schoolhouse. Arranged around the school building were a reception house where new arrivals were quarantined, a kitchen building, four dormitories, and an "Infants' House" for small children who were too old to nurse but still too young to go to school. The "Nursery Hospital," a public children's hospital, consisted of two hospital buildings, a kitchen, and a separate structure for the mentally disabled or "idiots." The Nursery Hospital received charity cases from the city as well as patients from the island. The island's resident staff, many of whom lived in these buildings, consisted of a superintendent, matrons, teachers, chaplain, physician, nurses, and boatmen; also adult paupers, dependents of the almshouse, who worked as cooks, servants, and farm laborers.

The children's dormitory buildings - two were originally planned, but two more were added immediately due to overcrowding - were designed for comfort, health, and

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[91] For the House of Refuge, founded in 1825 on the site on what is now Madison Square Park, see J. F. Richmond, *New York and its Institutions, 1609-1871* (New York: E.B. Treat, 1871), 568-571, and Raymond Mohl, "Humanitarianism in the Preindustrial City: The New York Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, 1817-1823," *Journal of American History* 57 (December 1970), 594-595.

[92] AH, annual report, 1848, 17. My description of the Randall's Island Nursery is based on the extensive description of it in AH, annual report, 1848, 17-27, except where otherwise noted.

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even pleasure. Each was supplied with porches on every floor, a hot air furnace in the basement, and large, high-ceilinged rooms for eating and sleeping, all of which supplied that commodity insufficiently available in the crowded slums, fresh air. Croton water, still a novelty only six years after it was introduced to the city at large, was piped in. Commissioner Leonard, aware of the eye diseases that were commonly passed from child to child in large institutions, was particularly proud of the new "apparatus for bathing." It consisted of a circular tub, ten feet in diameter, that a dozen children could splash in at once. Between bath times the children could wash their hands and faces with hot and cold water spraying from the tub's pipe. The separate sprays of water were meant to guard against ophthalmia - but it seems likely that the communal baths undid the benefit.

For health, but also for fun, the children swam in the rough, cold, salty water that raced around the island. To protect them from the "turbidness of the water and the strong currents of the river" a bath house for boys was built in 1851 on the eastern side of the island (Hell Gate threatened navigators on the western side). Another for girls was planned for the following year.[93] In rainy weather the children played in two brick playhouses, and gymnasium equipment was set up in the boys playroom and in the "idiot's" house. Randall's Island boasted landscaped grounds planted with "hundreds of ornamental and useful trees." An almshouse farm, worked by paupers, supplied milk and produce to the children of the nurseries.[94]

During the hours they were not at school, the Randall's Island children worked. The boys worked on the farm or learned to make men's clothing under the direction of a master tailor. The girls were also kept busy sewing, producing clothing, towels, and other items for use by the populations of the almshouse institutions. Even girls in quarantine

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[93] For references to the boys' and girls' bath houses and the health benefits of bathing, see AH, annual reports, 1850, 158 and 1851, 138.

[94] "Ornamental trees," AH, annual report, 1848, 22; playhouses,1848, 23; gymnasium equipment, 1856, 211; farm, 1846, 383.

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and in the hospital were put to work making eye-towels for the use of inmates of almshouse institutions - a rather frightening demonstration of the still limited understanding of contagion in this era. The products of the children's labor, like those of the paupers working on the farm, brought monetary returns to the almshouse department, but the labor itself was also meant to serve as an inoculation against future pauperism. In 1855 the warden of Randall's Island noted approvingly: "The habits of industry impressed on their minds...will, in my opinion, be quite as beneficial to them in mature years as their educational improvement while here."[95]

According to Commissioner Leonard, Randall's Island was no less than paradise. "We can certainly now," he wrote in 1848, after the buildings were just completed, "after having been incommoded with miserable and unsightly hovels for many years, boast with a becoming pride, of possessing the most thoroughly complete, convenient and elegant establishment for the rearing of the young orphans of the City's care known in the world– here, true humanity can fulfill its ennobling mission."[96]

Randall's Island also had its problems. These included overcrowding and epidemics of scarlet fever, measles, and other diseases.[97] Another problem was the use of men and women from the workhouse, penitentiary, and other almshouse institutions as a source of free labor on the island. At first, Commissioner Leonard was optimistic about

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[95] "Habits of industry," AH, annual report, 1855, 126. For references to boys at work on the farm and working with a master tailor, see AH, annual reports, 1855, 126 and 1856, 211-212. For a table showing the output of girls at work sewing eye towels in the quarantine department, play room, and hospital, see AH, annual report, 1855, 128. That year they produced a total of 7,208 eye towels. The majority (4,686) were made by the girls in quarantine. In 1856 the boys produced 3,183 garments, the girls 4,392 towels, aprons, sheets, curtains, and other items, AH, annual report, 1856, 212.

[96] "Ennobling mission,"AH, annual report, 1848, 22.

[97] For references to overcrowding in the Randall's Island school see AH, annual reports, 1856, 214 and 1857, 211. For epidemics, see the reports for 1851, 140 and 1855, 107-108 (scarlet fever and measles).

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even this. Arguing in favor of the use of convict and pauper labor on the Randall's Island farm, he stressed the "entire practicability of employing pauper labor in agricultural and horticultural pursuits." Not only would the unpaid labor of almshouse dependents produce farm products for the children of Randall's Island, but it would also serve to "bring forth the latent industry of a destitute dependency." Farm labor, he believed, could serve as a "prop" to "broken down constitutions," such as those that belonged to the city's paupers.[98]

Soon enough, though, the use of convict and pauper labor on Randall's Island, not only on the farm but in every area of its operation, would prove to be a plague that each new set of almshouse officials would try to remove. In 1854, after the warden of the almshouse succeeded in limiting the amount of convict labor used, at least for the moment (the almshouse never could quite bring itself to entirely relinquish this ever-replenishing supply of free, captive labor) he expressed his pleasure at removing a "great source of trouble, and also relieving the children from the corrupting influence of that class of persons."[99]

Like other charities, in this era when the charities of the United States were considered a model for reformers everywhere, the Randall's Island institutions were a destination for visitors. Delegations of politicians, fire and police companies, and other groups regularly made their way over the East River to be serenaded by the children, observe them at meals and at play, and present them with flags, Christmas treats, and other gifts. The journalists who reported on these visits, even those from the *New York Times* and *Harper's*, which would later turn on the almshouse and its treatment of

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[98] AH, annual report, 1848, 24-25.

[99] AH, annual report, 1854, 141. For complaints by almshouse officials about convict and pauper labor at Randall's Island see AH, annual reports, 1869, 122; 1870, 268; 1871, 202-203, 206; 1877, vii-viii; 1893, 138. In 1902 men from the penitentiary on Blackwell's Island were at working making roads at Randall's, PCC, annual report, 1902, 180.

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children, made favorable comments. "There were no 'Olivers' asking for 'more'" declared a reporter for the *New York Tribune*, describing a visit of the newly elected state legislature to Randall's in 1853. "...In no other institution of this kind do we remember to have ever seen such a general appearance of contentment with their lot–such a home-like happiness as these poor children exhibited on our visit yesterday."[100] A decade later the *Times*, reporting on the visit of another group, noted that the "excellence of all the arrangements and the proficiency of the boys called forth many expressions of satisfaction and gratification."[101] The author and reformer Catharine Sedgwick, who sometimes accompanied Abigail Hopper Gibbons and her husband on their annual Christmas visits to Randall's Island, commented on the "wise and generous provisions the city has made for its young pensioners, by which they are to become a crown instead of a curse to us."[102]

During its first few decades Randall's Island may in fact have been something like a paradise for the city's foundlings and other destitute children, but it did not last. By the 1870s conditions at Randall's Island had deteriorated. *Harper's Weekly*, which had once amused its readers with illustrated articles about happy visits to the island, was reporting that "at present the Randall's Island Nursery is merely breeding paupers and criminals."[103]

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[100] "Visit of the New-York Legislature Elect to Randall's and Blackwell's Islands," *New York Tribune*, December 15, 1853.

[101] "Flag Presentation to the Randall's Island Boys," *New York Times*, December 12, 1864. For more on this theme see "Presentation of a Flag to the Randall's Island Boys," *New York Tribune*, January 17, 1854 and "Caledonian Club at Randall's Island," *Harper's Weekly*, November 2, 1867, 689.

[102] Abigail Hopper Gibbons, "Sketch of Miss Sedgwick's Connection With the Women's Prison Association of New York," in Dewey, *Catharine M. Sedgwick*, 421.

[103] "A School of Crime," *Harper's Weekly*, January 29, 1876, 83. For more negative commentary on Randall's in the 1870s, see "Scurvy on Randall's Island," *New York Tribune*, May 22, 1878. The *Tribune* reported seven or eight deaths from scurvy, but gave nearly all the space in this short piece to Townsend Cox's (president of the

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8. The Foundlings' Fate.

In 1846 the almshouse department appointed John McGrath, a "visitor" to check on the whereabouts and well-being of children who had been bound out or placed in adoptive homes by the department since the early 1830s. McGrath paid visits to the homes of two girls, Catharine Carr Chapman and Catharine Jane Petit, both of whom had once been foundlings and were now living as adopted children in new families. Each had taken the name of her adoptive family and both appeared to be doing well. Of Catharine Chapman, who was living in Harlem, McGrath reported: "begins to read, with him 7 years; adopted, very good child, is a foundling."[104] Three-year-old Catharine Petit was five months old when she was taken in by William Petit, who lived on Avenue C. About her McGrath noted that she was "a foundling, gets on very well."[105]

Adoptions such as these were the best fate a foundling could hope for. The experience of infant John Ferguson demonstrates just how narrow an escape adoption could offer to these luckiest of foundlings. John's mother was a housekeeper who worked in the home of a man named Archibald Pohock. His father was absent from the scene by the time he was born in the spring of 1840. After his birth John's mother

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Department of Charities and Corrections) defense of conditions on Randall's. Children have been known to enjoy orphanage life. See, for instance, Eileen Simpson, *Orphans, Real and Imaginary* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987), Simpson describes a blissful period she spent at the Tuberculosis Preventorium in Lakewood, New Jersey.

[104] "Report of Mr. John McGrath, Visitor, Relative to Children Indentured from the Alms House Department," in AH, annual report, 1846, 455. The following year McGrath added that she "goes to school; is a very good child." McGrath, "Report," in AH, annual report, 1847, 98.

[105] Catharine Jane Petit, McGrath, "Report," in AH, annual report, 1846, 456. McGrath also reported on a girl named Jane Dey, a "very fine healthy child" who was six months old when she was taken in by the John Holder of Sixteenth Street. Since Dey is a Manhattan street name and Jane Dey was taken in as an infant, she may also have been a foundling. McGrath, "Report," AH, annual report, 1846, 458.

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disappeared, leaving Pohock, her employer, to place the baby with a nurse. It was the nurse, Elizabeth McCarthy, who brought seven-week-old John to the almshouse, presumably because Pohock had failed to keep up with his payments to her. The almshouse quickly placed him with one of its own nurses, with whom he remained for almost twenty months. It was at this point, after being abandoned first by both his parents, then by his mother's employer, and then by his original nurse, that John was adopted from the almshouse by George B. Wooldridge, a hatter with an address on Duane Street. The hatter provided him with a secure nest and the first lucky break of his life.[106]

"Adoption," as it was practiced by the almshouse in the first half of the nineteenth century, had more in common with placing-out than it did with true legal adoption. In the United States there was no legal adoption, in which all parental rights are transferred from the birth parents to the adoptive family, until the middle of the nineteenth century. New York State passed its adoption law in1873. Thus if families wanted to adopt foundlings as full family members the only legal instrument available for them was the indenture agreement used for apprenticeship even though, as one legal codifier expressed it, the practice as applied to "children in the cradle, becomes absurd and repulsive."[107] Yet most infant adoptions in this period, even when they were solidified with an indenture agreement, were probably guided more by sentiment than by venal motives, since an infant, unlike an older child, could not work and would require unremunerated care for years to come.

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[106] John Ferguson, AHFV-NYHS, #126, April 21, 1840, and nurse section, Sarah McClennan, April 22, 1840. Wooldridge adopted John Ferguson on December 4, 1841.

[107] For the evolution of adoption law in the United States see: Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 268-280. Grossberg notes that before the passage of legal adoption laws, beginning in Massachusetts in 1851, some families adopted children by individually petitioning state legislatures, 269-271. New York legal codifier David Dudley Field wrote that apprenticeship of infants was "absurd and repulsive," as cited in Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth*, 272.

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Infant adoptions in this period before the law fully recognized them, while they were probably mostly well-intended, could also be precarious. Martha Clarissa Night, who was picked up off a stoop in 1807, was the subject of a flimsy adoption. When Martha was approximately thirteen months old and had been with her almshouse nurse for a year, a French family offered to adopt her. The almshouse commissioners were enthusiastic about this interesting foreign family. Monsieur Etienne Thuron ("The english of Etienne is Stephen." the almshouse clerk noted helpfully) had "expressed a desire to have this child to bring her up as his own," and since the almshouse commissioners judged him to be a "Man of humanity," they handed over Martha, the "helpless & abandoned female Infant." Thuron and his wife kept Martha for five and a half months, but when the family decided to return to France, they disappointed the commissioners' expectations and returned the baby to the almshouse.[108]

Foundlings who failed to be adopted in infancy and spent their childhoods in the almshouse's system, were indentured to farmers, artisans, sea-captains and even to factories, once they were old enough.[109] This was a fate they shared with all the children under the care of the almshouse. From colonial times localities used indenture as a way to place illegitimate, orphaned, or poor children in households. In the 1790s the binding out of children was so routine a practice in New York that the almshouse commissioners ended nearly every one of their weekly meetings with the phrase "after binding out a boy...they adjourned."[110] Even well into the nineteenth century, as the system of live-in apprenticeship as a means to train young people was declining in favor of wage labor, and immigrants began to take the jobs once held by children and young adults, the

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[108] Martha Clarissa Night, AH Children's Records, vol. 214, p.100.

[109] For a case of an almshouse boy being apprenticed to a factory in 1811, see Ely, *Visits of Mercy*, 60.

[110] For frequent references to "binding out a boy," Almshouse and Bridewell minutes, 1791-1799.

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practice of binding out survived as a way for public authorities to place poor and parentless children. New York's almshouse commissioners bound out orphans and foundlings as a way to provide them with housing, supervision, vocational training, education, and, if they were lucky, a substitute family.[111]

John McGrath, the almshouse visitor, discovered these indentured former almshouse children in a range of situations. Twenty-one-year-old Thomas B. Mathers, for instance, had been with his master on Water Street for five years. McGrath reported that he had "done well during his apprenticeship, reads, writes and cyphers; now working for him [his master] as a journeyman, and receives eight dollars per week." Thirteen-year-old Margaret McGowen also satisfied McGrath's expectations. She was a "very good girl, reads and writes," and was learning to make artificial flowers, which, like seamstressing, was one of New York's home-based trades for women.[112]

Sometimes the arrangements did not take. McGrath found children who were treated badly, and cases in which masters failed to educate the children or fulfill other agreed-upon obligations toward them. When McGrath found that Elisha Corwin had failed to educate his apprentice, Elizabeth Smith, McGrath "told him I would call and see her again, and if not attended to would take her away." A boy apprenticed in the Catskill region north of the city was "very ill treated by his master." McGrath was also very doubtful about the effect that labor on the Erie Canal might have on an almshouse boy. Joseph Kelly, bound to a master in Rochester, worked on the canal which, according to McGrath, "is considered a very bad school for boys."

In other situations it was the child who did not live up to the expectations of his or

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[111] For the English practice of placing-out, on which New York's was based, see Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, 365-369; for placing-out in the colonial United States, Wall, *Fierce Communion*, chapter four and afterward. For the apprenticeship system in New York see Blackmar, *Manhattan For Rent*, 57-69 and elsewhere. For the practice of binding out poor children in New York, see: Folks, *Care of Destitute Children*, 8.

[112] McGrath, "Report," 1847, Thomas B. Mathers, 87; Margaret McGowen, 104.

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her master. McGrath saw fit to caution twelve-year-old Catherine Fauzer "severely about her habits." One master complained to McGrath that his twelve-year-old apprentice Henrietta Valentine was "not industrious"and he wanted to return her to the almshouse, even though she had been living in his home for six years. Jane Wright was apparently the cause of constant problems. McGrath found her unable to read or write at the age of fourteen and commented: "this girl has been in other places, and found fault with–she needs looking after much."

When the relationship between master and servant broke down children - including a significant number of girls - sometimes took matters into their own hands and ran away. One example is fifteen-year-old Margaret Bell, who had been with her master since she was nine. Even though her master advertised for her after she ran away she was, according to McGrath, "not heard of." Three boys, all with the same evidently impossible master, remained with him a short time then ran away. In some instances McGrath found that masters had simply lost track of their charges. Ellen McCluskey's former mistress told McGrath that she was "supposed to have gone to New Haven." Ellis Rushton, similarly, was "supposed to have gone to New Jersey." A few boys broke their indentures and ran away to sea.[113]

While many of the children McGrath visited in 1846 and 1847 were living in New York City or its immediate suburbs, others were living farther afield in places like Westchester County, Long Island, the Catskills, and even as far away as New York's Finger Lakes region. The almshouse had been placing children in the rural regions surrounding the city since at least the 1790s. Rural placement was no guarantee of health or happiness for almshouse children. In 1792 the almshouse commissioners

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[113] McGrath, "Report," 1847: Margaret Bell, 96; John Chandler, 91; Catherine Fauzer, 95; Joseph Kelly, 91; Ellen McCluskey, 100; Ellis Rushton, 100; Elizabeth Smith, 95; Henrietta Valentine, 103; Jane Wright, 100. The three boys who ran away from one master are Charles Williams, Patrick Cunnion, and Owen Ward, 88. References to boys who ran away to sea are in McGrath, "Report," 1846.

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acknowledged that there had been frequent complaints made on behalf of children "placed at a distance in the country." These children, it appeared, had been "very illy treated by the persons with whom they live."[114]

Despite this history, by the mid-1850s almshouse officials began to positively express their belief that country life was best for these children. Boys on Randall's Island were put to work on the island farm "so they would become "familiar with a farmer's life."[115] Once it was time for them to be indentured, the almshouse tried to place them "as far from the City as practicable" with "respectable farmers and mechanics, in the country towns of this and adjoining States," including New Jersey. Placement with farmers, an almshouse official reported in 1856, "is preferred by the Alms-house Department."[116] In 1854 the almshouse began a program of sending children as far away as Iowa, to the Rev. Charles C. Townsend's Orphan's Home of Industry in Iowa City. Some of these children lived in the Iowa City Home, while others were placed with nearby families. Among the fifty older children Townsend took were two or three infant foundlings.[117]

Almshouse officials' enthusiasm for the countryside at a time when there was massive immigration into cities both from the American countryside and the farms and villages of northern Europe is a symptom of a kind of romantic pastoralism that dates back to the eighteenth century in American thought, and that the nineteenth-century

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[114] Almshouse and Bridewell minutes, NYPL, December 3, 1792. For references to infants placed with nurses in areas north of the city see July 7, 1791 (Sing Sing in Westchester) and AHFV-NYHS, nurse section, May 4, 1840, for nurse Sarah Jewell of Nyack in Rockland County.

[115] AH, annual report,1856, 211.

[116] AH, annual reports, 1853, 102; 1854, 214; 1855, 191 and 193; 1856, 281.

[117] For the reports of Charles C. Townsend of Iowa City see his letters to George Kellock, superintendent of outdoor poor, reprinted in AH, annual reports, 1858, 281-284 and 1859, 295-297. In 1858 Townsend states that he has three foundlings, and in 1859 he claims to have only two. In this era of vague record keeping Townsend evidently did not feel it necessary or was not required to explain what happened to the missing foundling.

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growth of cities stimulated further. Henry David Thoreau's retreat to the arcadia of Walden Pond in the summer of 1845 is the grand anti-urban gesture of this era. (Thoreau's death from tuberculosis at the age of forty-four was a tragedy laced with irony, since tuberculosis was one of the diseases most associated with the unnatural filth of city life.) It is also an echo of the eighteenth-century pastoralism of Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, each of whom at intervals retreated to the (slave-powered) eden of his Virginia plantation.

New York in the mid-nineteenth century was crowded, noisy, dirty, unhealthy, and socially and geographically complex in a way that was alarming to the city's middle class, among them the public officials, reformers, and others who had power over poor and parentless children. The irony was that the poor themselves - many of whom had come from the country in the first place - were notoriously unwilling to leave the city. Virginia Penny, a social investigator who published a study on women's work in 1857, noticed that women who worked as domestic servants much preferred the city to the country - even though the glut of servants in the city drove down their wages. "The majority of female domestics would rather starve in New York than go to the country, or even little towns around for fair wages. I think it arises from the fear that they will not find associates," Penny observed.[118] Later in the century a journalist made a similar, if more cynical observation about men "who might have healthy country homes [but instead] choose rather the tenement, with its facilities for indulgence in ward politics and bad whiskey."[119] In 1859 an urban missionary, bewildered by the unwillingness of New York's poor to leave the slums and decamp for the countryside, wondered, "The question often occurs, Why do the needy thus crowd together in our over-populated towns? How

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[118] Penny, *Employments of Women*, 425.

[119] "Institution Life. I. Foundling Asylum," *The Illustrated American*, May 17, 1890, 308.

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is it that they do not find their way into the broad and fertile districts, where labor is to be obtained and food is plentiful?"[120]

Horatio Alger answered this question in 1868 in his novel *Ragged Dick.* Describing a street boy who, sent to live on a farm, runs away and resumes his life on the streets of New York, Alger explained: "it is often the case that the young vagabond of the streets...gets so attached to his precarious but independent mode of life, that he feels discontented in any other. He is accustomed to the noise and bustle and ever-varied life of the streets, and in the quiet scenes of the country misses the excitement in the midst of which he has always dwelt." The boy expressed his feelings more succinctly: "I got lonely," he explained, "I like New York best."[121]

9. Conclusion.

Adoption, indenture, and the virtuous pleasures of the countryside were irrelevant to most foundlings, since the overwhelming fact about New York foundlings in the first half of the nineteenth century is that most did not survive past infancy. In 1858 a committee of city councilmen delegated to investigate the problem of foundlings reported that of all the children the almshouse boarded with nurses that year, only two had survived to be transferred to Randall's Island. Physician Job Lewis Smith, who cared for almshouse foundlings in the mid-nineteenth century, and who later made a career for himself as a pioneer in the new field of pediatrics, was told by the superintendent of the almshouse "...that it would be an act of humanity if each foundling were given a fatal dose of opium on its arrival, since *all of them died.*"[122]

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[120] Samuel B. Halliday, *The Lost and Found; or, Life Among the Poor* (New York: Blakeman and Mason, 1859), 247.

[121] Horatio Alger, *Ragged Dick and Struggling Upward* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 7-8.

[122] Samuel Galpin, John C. Frazer, and George Ross, *Report of the Select Committee on Foundling Hospital*, Document No.17, *Documents of the New York City Board of Councilmen*, vol.5 (New York, 1858), 5. Smith, "Hindrances," 95. The italics are mine.

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Almshouse officials observed that foundlings died at a much higher rate than other almshouse babies. Between 1849 and 1859 the almshouse reported that the death rate of all infants under its care averaged 41.4 percent.[123]These percentages were calculated from figures in the annual reports of the almshouse. As in footnote 17, I chose 1849-1859 because this decade was a discrete period in the history of the almshouse, the tenure of the Board of Governors, during which reporting was fairly consistent. There are no figures for 1857. At roughly the same time the death rate for foundlings ranged between approximately eighty-five and one hundred percent.[124] The high death rate of foundlings was due, in part, to the poor conditions many had sunk to by the time the almshouse received them. Foundlings were endangered by their mothers' poverty, panic,

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[123] These figures come from the annual reports of the almshouse:

Year	Death Rate	Source
1849	50%	1849,192
1850	43%	1850, 120
1851	36%	1851,130
1852	36%	1852, 111
1853	41%	1853, 104
1854	41%	1854, 214
1855	36%	1855, 193
1856	39%	1856, 281
1858	45%	1858, 280
1859	47%	1859, 294.

[124] New York physician and sanitary reformer Elisha Harris reported that between 1854 and 1859 ninety percent of the infants sent out to wet-nurses did not live to their first birthdays. Harris's commentary is in NCH, annual report, 1879, 7. In 1871 the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction reported that "prior to 1866 the death rate of foundlings was 85 per cent." AH, annual report, 1871, ix. I am using this anecdotal information because in this era the almshouse did not consistently break out separate data about foundlings. After the Civil War the new Infant Department of the almshouse (by now the Department of Public Charities and Correction) began to keep track of the separate rates of mortality of foundlings and what they called "mothers' children" - infants who entered the Infant Department with their mothers. In 1868 the acting resident physician commented that the mortality of foundlings was "practically 100 per centum." PCC, annual report, 1868, 328. A table in this reports shows that infants breast-fed by their own mothers died at a rate of 20.03%, while 72.83% of "nurse children" died.

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malnutrition, and concealed pregnancies, and from the danger caused by solitary, unattended births and exposure on the street. Infants who spent weeks with disgruntled caretakers who had not been paid probably also suffered from neglect.

In the first half of the nineteenth century immorality and disease were thought to be related, and both were understood to be transmittable through the generations. If foundlings were the products of sexual sin, then it followed that the wrongdoing of their parents contributed to their physical frailty. In 1853 George B. Gilbert, the clerk of the almshouse's Department of Outdoor Poor, the department at whose office in the Rotunda foundlings were received, commented: "The miserable condition of many of these children, when received by the department, being debilitated, filthy and diseased, offspring of the profligate and intemperate, will account for the great mortality."[125]

Once admitted to the almshouse, foundlings were exposed to its insalubrious environment, or to the environment of the impoverished homes of their nurses, or to the significant dangers of bottle-feeding, or to the inattention of the nurses - poor women with other responsibilities who were not their mothers, and who may have restrained themselves from becoming too attached to babies who they could reasonably expect would die.[126] Some foundlings had caring nurses, but were endangered by the

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[125] AH, annual report, 1853, 102. For another comment on this theme see AH, annual report, 1858, 281. For an investigation of the way that morality was supposed to contribute to physical debility and disease, see Charles Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Once the foundling asylums opened their physicians also commented on the fragility of foundlings. Dr. Jas. B. Reynolds of the New York Foundling Asylum estimated that only 38% of foundlings were received "in what could be called a good healthy condition." He protested that it "would be unfair to attribute the larger mortality in Foundling Hospitals, chiefly to causes to found within the hospital. We should consider the condition in which the infants are received." NYFA, biennial report, 1869-1871, 12, 13.

[126] Dr. Job Lewis Smith commented on the contribution of bottle-feeding to the high death rate of infants. In 1875 he wrote that "infants under the age of six months, who are entirely bottle-fed, in any hospital or asylum within the limits of New York, almost invariably die during the hot months, whatever the care and treatment which they receive, and a majority of those between the ages of six and twelve months who are bottle-fed

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indifference of physicians who wrote them off as unsalvageable. In 1857 an almshouse nurse named Phebe Powell asked the local dispensary (a neighborhood clinic that treated poor patients and dispensed medicine) to send a doctor to look at one of the six children she was caring for. The doctor refused to visit. "The poor rotten things," the doctor told Powell, "they ain't worth raising." Powell claimed that "the physicians at the Dispensary talk and act so about these children" that she could not "bear to go there at all." Indifference toward almshouse babies on the part of dispensary doctors was apparently common. Margaret Edwards Dormand, another almshouse nurse, similarly reported that when she attempted to take her "diseased pauper infant" to the local dispensary the doctor there told her "they would do nothing for it, as it was not her own child; but she must take it where she got it if she wanted it helped."

There was apparently another side to this story that was less flattering to the nurses. George T. Elliot, a physician later associated with several of New York's foundling hospitals, implicated the nurses in the dispensaries' failure to help foundlings:

> How many black-hearted guardians of motherless babes await, with ill-concealed anxiety, the end of the little life; and I know, from my personal observation, that the Dispensaries are thus often prostituted to people who bring the little sufferer but once, that its disease may be recognized, and a certificate of death from natural causes be obtained, without ever availing themselves of those advantages which the Dispensaries were designed to offer.[127]

When babies were abandoned in New York they entered a world in which some adults were kind, some were cruel, but most subscribed to a traditional resignation in the face of infant death. In a world in which nearly all families, regardless of income level, experienced the death of at least one child and often more, almshouse officials accepted it

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also perish." NYIA, annual report, 1875, 27.

[127] Powell's and Dormand's statements are in "The Murder of the Innocents," *New York Tribune*, February 9, 1859. Elliot's: "Inauguration of the Nursery and Child's Hospital" [1858], 12 Records of the New York Nursery and Child's Hospital, New-York Historical Society.

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as a matter of course that poor, parentless foundlings were in the greatest danger of all and that there was little they could do about it.[128]

[128] In 1857 the author of a report on infant mortality noted that well-to-do families, as well as the poor, routinely lost children: "...statistics could readily be cited which would render it apparent that in the better circumstanced, and even among the wealthier classes of our cities, the instances are rare in which the most favored families succeed in preserving a moiety of their children through the perils of infancy." David Meredith Reese, *Report on Infant Mortality in Large Cities, the sources of its Increase, and Means for its Diminution*, (Philadelphia, 1857), 17. As late as the1890s, the more well-to-do still did not have substantially lower rates of infant mortality than the poor, since the tools and information necessary to save children - notably antibiotics - simply did not exist yet. The mortality of children of doctors, for instance, was only six percent below the national average. Preston and Haines, *The Fatal Years: Child Mortality in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 209. On resignation about infant death in the antebellum period see Sylvia D. Hoffert, *Private Matters: American Attitudes Toward Childbearing and Infant Nurture in the Urban North, 1800-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

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CHAPTER THREE - THE MURDER OF THE INNOCENTS

1. Introduction.

In the spring of 1857 the Board of Governors of the almshouse appointed a select committee of three of its own members and charged it to "investigate the claims of the city to the institution, and erection of a foundling hospital." At the same time the city's Board of Councilmen appointed its own three-man "Select Committee on Foundling Hospital." After months of investigation, consultations with experts, and penning of reports, both committees concluded that they were strongly in favor of building a public foundling hospital for New York. In November, 1858 the Councilmen's Committee voted on a resolution to start work on the new project. The cornerstone of the institution they decided to call the "Infant's Home" was laid in the winter of 1859.[1] The Board of Councilmen was also a reform effort. It was established in 1853 by a new city charter promoted by reform interests. It, together with the Board of Aldermen, made up the city's legislative branch, the Common Council. The Board of Councilmen replaced an older body, the Board of Assistant Aldermen, and consisted of sixty members, each elected from one of sixty newly created districts. These efforts were supposed to be proof against corruption.

In 1857 these city officials knew that medicine was no more capable than it had ever been of saving the lives of abandoned infants. They also realized that the death rate of infants in European foundling hospitals was high - sometimes horrifyingly so. The stimulus to build a foundling hospital in New York, then, had to come from a conglomeration of other interests, the rubbing together of which was enough to create a

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[1] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee,* and Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*. For a description of the political makeup of the Board of Almshouse Governors and the purpose of its creation, see Halliday, *Little Street Sweeper*, 147. The Board of Governors of the Almshouse was a product of reform. Its ten members replaced Almshouse Commissioner Moses G. Leonard in 1849. In an effort to immunize it against corruption, membership on the new almshouse board was evenly balanced between political parties.

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spark. Some in this debate argued that a foundling hospital could help stop outright infanticide, by providing a place where desperate mothers could rid themselves of their unwanted babies. Others believed that a foundling hospital could drain away the trade of abortionists, also, by providing an alternative for women who wanted to rid themselves of unwanted babies. New York's proposed foundling hospital was also envisioned as an institution of moral reform, where fallen women could relearn the ways of virtue. At best, this group of planners believed, a foundling hospital could provide a clean, comfortable, and humane place for sickly and unwanted babies to die.

The fact that this group devoted more attention to the behavior of women than to the welfare of children is not a judgment on the quality of their humanitarian vision - it was just an acknowledgment of the reality that there was not much anyone could do to bolster the fragility of infants and young children. In fact one of the factors that stimulated the committeemen to action was the rise in the number of foundlings.

When Abigail Adams visited the Paris Foundling Hospital in 1785 she was appalled to learn that it took in six thousand foundlings per year. The newborn republic, whose interests her husband was representing in France, did not, she believed, have to worry about such problems. In the United States, she observed, "wise Laws and institutions" and "industry and sobriety" allowed parents "to rear a numerous of offspring." In terms of its production of foundlings the United States was not to be compared to France, "a Country grown old in Debauchery and lewdeness."[2]

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[2] Abigail Adams to Elizabeth Smith Shaw, Auteuil, January 11, 1785. Richard Alan Ryerson, ed., *Adams Family Correspondence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 6: 57-58. According to Rachel Fuchs, infant abandonment in Paris during the second half of the eighteenth century was particularly high. In 1772 the *Hopital des Enfants Trouves* accepted 7,676 babies, a twenty-fold increase from the 312 it took in 1670. Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 10. Admissions to the *Hospice* in the nineteenth century remained high. Between 1810 and 1900 they ranged from a high of between five and six thousand, to a low of between two and three thousand yearly, Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, table: "Admissions to the Hospice," 78.

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While there certainly were some foundlings in the United States in the 1780s - and a fair amount of "debauchery and lewdness" along with the Puritan rectitude Adams assumed to be the American norm - she was correct in her belief that American foundlings were rare. This was the case even in New York, which was a sinful town compared to Quincy, Massachusetts, site of the Adams homestead. In 1788, when a woman traveling to market found an abandoned baby in a field near the Bowery, the *New-York Packet* characterized the event as an "extraordinary occurrence."[3] In 1796 the almshouse commissioners reported that they were maintaining just twelve infants at nurse, "most of whom are orphans and foundlings."[4] But as New York's population grew, and particularly as it was affected by economic and other crises, its population of foundlings grew also.

In 1809, during the depression caused by Jefferson's Embargo Act of December, 1807, the almshouse counted 190 babies during its annual population census of almshouse dependents.[5] By 1823, even as the population of the city increased, the number of almshouse infants subsided from the embargo height of 190 to129.[6] In 1840,

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[3] *The New-York Packet*, April 25, 1788.

[4] Almshouse and Brideswell minutes, May 2, 1796. In 1800 New York's population was 60,489. *Valentine's Manual*, 1857, 347.

[5] The almshouse specifically counted the number of babies it had "at nurse," in the homes of the women it hired to care for them. In this period the almshouse did not report the total number of infants it took in each year. Instead it reported the number present on the day it took its annual census. In 1809 census day was May 15. Almshouse officials also did not always distinguish between foundlings and the other infants it placed with nurses. Record-keeping became more detailed in 1849 when the almshouse administration was reorganized and the Board of Governors was appointed. For the 1809 figure of 190 see *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1784-1831* (New York: City of New York, 1917), 5: 548. For the effects of the embargo on New York see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 409-413.

[6] For the number of infants at nurse on April 1, 1823 see Folks, *Care of Destitute*, 8. In 1810 the city's population was 96,373; in 1820, 123,706; in 1830 it had more than doubled to 202,589. *Valentine's Manual*, 1857, 347.

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when the city was suffering from the depression caused by the Panic of 1837, the almshouse counted 142 infants during its annual census.[7] In 1848, commissioner Moses G. Leonard described the number of foundlings as "numerous" and estimated that his department cared for between 160 and 200 "and upwards" yearly.[8] Three years later the number of foundlings had emerged as a problem serious enough to elicit this worried comment from the Superintendent of Outdoor Poor:

> The number of children abandoned by their parents at a very tender age is increasing yearly, and calls for prompt and energetic measures on the part of the police authorities for the detection and punishment of those who, even in the most inclement season expose their children to almost certain death.[9]

In 1849 the almshouse department was reorganized and a Board of Governors was appointed. Among its reforms was a more detailed system of record-keeping. Now the almshouse recorded not only the number of infants at nurse on its annual census day, but also the number it received over the course of a year. Between 1849 and 1859 the almshouse accepted an average of 323 infants - foundlings and other infants who for one reason or another had no parents to care for them - per year. The numbers of infants received tipped sharply upward in 1849, when the city suffered from a cholera epidemic, and again in 1858, during the depression caused by the Panic of 1857. It was during this crisis that the Board of Councilmen passed its resolution in favor of a foundling asylum. Even though the number of foundlings in New York was not even close to the number collected in Paris, the trend upward in their numbers was enough to cause New York

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[7] On May 1, 1840 the almshouse counted 142 infants at nurse. New York City Municipal Archives, City Clerk, Filed Papers, Committee on Charity and Almshouse, Annual Report of the Superintendent of the Almshouse, May 1, 1840 - May 1, 1841.

[8] AH, annual report, 1848, 42. Leonard refers to the 160 to 200 infants his department cared for yearly as "foundlings and otherwise abandoned infants."

[9] AH, annual report, 1851, 128.

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officials serious alarm.[10] Another critical spur to action for city officials was this era's

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[10] For the cholera epidemic of 1849 see Rosenberg, *Cholera Years*, For the effect of the Panic of 1857 on New York, see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 842-851.

1849-1859 is the decade when the almshouse was run by the Board of Governors of the Almshouse. During this period the almshouse department's reports are the only source of information for the number of foundlings retrieved from city streets. These numbers do not reflect those infants found dead, who were collected by the coroner, or babies who were kept by the people who found them. I have not found any definite evidence about foundlings who were absorbed into families only hints that some finders, such as Philip Hone, considered doing so. See his musings on this possibility in Hone, *Diary*, 370. Since foundlinghood carried a stigma, foundlings kept by families may have decided to keep their origins secret. All figures come from the annual reports of the almshouse. There are no comparable figures for 1857, but see the table which includes figures (slightly differing from these) for children at nurse (no specific date given) in 1856 and 1857, AH, annual report, 1857, xv.

Year	"Received During the Year"	Source
1849	349	1849, p.192
1850	290	1850, p.120*
1851	295	1851, p.130
1852	339	1852, p.111
1853	303	1853, p.104
1854	330	1854, p.214
1855	299	1855, p.193
1856	274	1856, p.281
1858	386	1858, p.280
1859	367	1859, p.294.

* The table on page 120 only cites the number provided for during the year, 399. According to the table from the previous year, 109 were at nurse on January 1, 1850, which according to my calculation means that the almshouse received 290 infants in 1850. See AH, annual report, 1849 192 for the figure of 109.

Date	Number "At Nurse"	Source
1850, Jan. 1	109	1849, p.192
1851, Jan. 1	130	1851, p.130
1852, Jan. 1	164	1852, p.111
1853, Jan. 1	183	1853, p.104
1854, Jan. 1	173	1854, p.214
1855, Jan. 1	174	1856, p.193
1856, Jan. 1	178	1856, p.281
1857, Dec. 31	196	1858, p.280
1858, Dec. 31	199	1858, p.280
1859, Dec. 31	182	1859, p.294

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focus on infant mortality. Starting in the 1840s physicians and reformers began to pay attention to the health and housing conditions of the urban poor - and particularly poor children.[11] As expanding, industrial cities in both Europe and the United States became increasingly squalorous, filthy, and deadly, public officials and physicians began to understand that just as human action had created these conditions, human action could also work to reverse them.

The members of New York's first permanent health board (among whose members were two physicians, Stephen Smith and Elisha Harris, who would be active in one of New York's foundling asylums after the Civil War) argued that "most of the fevers, diarrhoeas, dysenteries, and consumptions, are caused by bad air, impure water, insufficient food, and ill-ventilated dwellings; and small-pox, measles, and scarlatina, although they have a specific origin, are aggravated by the existence of these causes." If medicine could not do much to save infants and young children, perhaps improved sanitary conditions could. "Individually considered," the members of the health board continued in a later report, "most of these deaths seem to the medical attendant to be *inevitable*, but if we consider them with regard to their chief causes, they plainly appear

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By way of contrast, in 1998 there were 105 infant abandonments in the whole United States. See Barbara Whitaker, "Death of Unwanted Babies Brings Plea to Help Parents," *New York Times*, March 6, 2000.

[11] New York sanitarians included Robert Hartley, author of the 1842 *Essay on Milk* and founder, in the same year, of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor. Another was physician and city inspector John Griscom author of *Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Population of New York*, an expose of the living conditions of the city's poor. Another sanitary reform project, the district-by-district mapping of the city's urban environment undertaken by the Council of Hygiene of the Citizens' Association of New York, a reform group, ultimately led to the creation, in 1865, of New York's first permanent board of health, the Metropolitan Board of Health. Three members of the Council of Hygiene, statistician and sanitarian Elisha Harris and the physician brothers Stephen Smith and Job Lewis Smith were afterward active in the New York Infant Asylum, one of the foundling asylums that opened after the Civil War. Both Job and Stephen Smith attended to foundlings in the almshouse at mid-century.

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to be due to *preventable* circumstances."[12]

It was clear to the members of the Metropolitan Board of Health, as it was to other sanitarians of this era, that the city's dirt and disease concentrated most intensely in the bodies of infants and small children. The board of health's first annual report noted that: "The excessive death-rate in infancy has, with the medical profession, been justly regarded as one of the sure indications of growing causes of insalubrity in the Metropolis." If the death rate of infants was an indicator of the health conditions of the city, then New York was in trouble. The board noted that one-third of infants born in New York died before their first birthday. They understood that an infant death rate like this was a judgment on their city.[13]

Child welfare advocates were not only afraid for children, but also afraid of them. The first chief of New York's newly established police department (the city's first professional police department was established in 1847) was among those who worried about the dangers posed by poor and vagrant children. In 1849 police chief George W. Matsell devoted a substantial section of one of his earliest reports to the issue of vagrant children. He complained about the increasing number of "embryo courtezans and felons" who "infest our public thoroughfares, hotels, docks, &c.; children who are growing up in ignorance and profligacy, only destined to a life of misery, shame and crime, and ultimately to a felon's doom." A decade later almshouse officials were echoing Matsell's concerns, brooding over the

> large number of children in the city of New York that are constantly running at large with no one to look after their moral or intellectual culture...the expense of supporting for a few years the children, will be as nothing compared to the expense of supporting in prisons when grown, if

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[12] Metropolitan Board of Health, annual reports, 1866, 11; 1868, 522.

[13] Metropolitan Health Board, annual report, 1866, 152. For a broader statement about infant mortality as a "particularly sensitive index of community health" see Meckel, *Save the Babies*, 5.

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they are not educated and taken care of when young.[14]

Charles Loring Brace, the Congregationalist minister who founded the Children's Aid Society in New York in 1853, similarly believed that the city's vagrant children would grow up to populate the "dangerous classes," mobs of criminals and revolutionaries that would overwhelm the city. The flour riots that broke out in New York during the Panic of 1837, the 1848 political uprisings in Europe, New York's Astor Place riot of 1849, the crime wave that New York suffered through in the 1850s (which one historian refers to as "decade of disorder") - all of this made such a scenario seem not at all unlikely.[15] By the time Brace's book, *The Dangerous Classes* came out in 1872, the New York draft riots of 1863 and the Paris Commune of 1871 had erupted as if to further prove Brace's point. Brace specifically associated the condition of foundlinghood with criminality in later life. Not surprisingly, he found evidence for this view from France, where foundlings and law-breaking were closely associated (and whose capitol city was in turmoil as he wrote). Looking at "some striking statistics from France," Brace found that a disproportionate percentage of the French prison population was composed of foundlings.[16]

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[14] Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes and Twenty Years' Work Among Them* (Wynkoop and Hallenbeck, 1872). George Washington Matsell, *Semi-Annual Report of the Chief of Police from May 1, to October 31, 1849* (New York, 1849). AH, annual report, 1858, 161. For more on the child welfare movement see Meckel, *Save the Babies.* For an evaluation of the changing value of children in the nineteenth century from an economic perspective, see Zelizer, *Priceless Child.* For legal changes reflecting a new concern for child welfare beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, see Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth.*

[15] For the flour riots see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 609-611 and Hone, *Diary*, 241-242. For the Astor Place riot see Spann, *New Metropolis*, 234-241. For the crime wave of the 1850s see Spann, *New Metropolis*, 253 ("decade of disorder")-254, 390-391. For more on crime in New York, particularly in 1857, the year the councilmen and almshouse governors assembled foundling committees, see Kenneth Stampp, *America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[16] For foundlings in French prisons, see Brace, *Dangerous Classes*, 406, in the chapter titled "What Shall be Done With Foundlings?"

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The event that served as the most immediate spur to action was an investigation of almshouse infants and their nurses undertaken by two reformers, urban missionary Samuel Byram Halliday and Quaker philanthropist William F. Mott. Mott and Halliday discovered foundlings and their nurses tucked into every corner of the city where poor people lived - "the vicinity of the Five Points not excepted" Halliday noted darkly, referring to the city's most notorious slum. Many of the harried, impoverished women who took infants home from the almshouse for a dollar per week were, to Halliday's eyes, "persons of slovenly and almost filthy habits, and plainly wholly unfit to be employed as nurses for the dependent infants of the great city of New York."[17] Halliday - who was the chief instigator of the investigation, the elderly Mott soon dropped out of the picture - brought his report to the Board of Governors of the Almshouse and, even more significantly, to the press.[18] Mott and Halliday's release of their findings to the newspapers - at a time when the penny press was eager for scandals with which to entertain its expanding readership - was what stung public officials into action.[19] The threat of negative publicity, perhaps more than anything else, was what moved the city to action on behalf of foundlings.

When the city's two foundling asylum committees got to work, they found that there was no shortage of people ready to goad, assist and advise them. Samuel Halliday,

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[17] Samuel B. Halliday, *The Little Street Sweeper; or, Life Among the Poor* (New York: Phinney, Blakeman, and Mason, 1861), 149. Halliday's comment about the Five Points, 153. *The Little Street Sweeper* is a later edition of Samuel B. Halliday, *Lost and Found; or Life Among the Poor* (New York: Blakeman and Mason, 1859).

[18] Halliday describes the influence of his and Mott's investigation on the Board of Governors of the Almshouse. See Halliday, *Little Street Sweeper*, 153-154. Mary Du Bois described the same events in NCH, annual report, 1879, 8-9. The Board of Councilmen describe Halliday's survey and his conclusions in their report. See Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 5-6. Halliday was one of the people who testified before the Councilmen.

[19] For Mott and Halliday's use of the press to publicize the findings of their investigation see Mary Du Bois's comments in NCH, annual report, 1879, 8.

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who was both goad and advisor but not necessarily a friend, was one of these people. Another was Mary Du Bois, founder of the Nursery for the Children of Poor Women which, up until that point had not accepted foundlings. Now Du Bois was ready to reconsider. A third, and particularly influential set of advisers consisted of the city's establishment physicians. All of these people inserted interests of their own into the debate. The physicians brought abortion, against which the American Medical Association was just taking up arms, to the table. The fate of fallen women was of particular interest to Mary Du Bois. All of these people were worried about prostitution which, like infant abandonment, looked to them like evidence of spreading sexual misbehavior in the increasingly anarchic city. Questions of morality, particularly the sexual morality of poor women, influenced these debates as much as the questions of mortality that had originally inspired the two urban investigators, Halliday and Mott.

Unavoidably absent from the table were any direct representatives of the foundlings themselves. Parentless and voiceless, foundlings never had anyone who cared only for them.

2. The City Officials Get to Work.

By the winter of 1857 the Board of Councilmen had appointed its Select Committee on Foundling Hospital consisting of councilmen Samuel W. Galpin, John C. Frazer, and George Ross.[20] In March of the same year the Almshouse Board of Governors set its own foundling hospital committee to work. Its members were almshouse governors Isaac Townsend, Washington Smith, and Anthony Dugro. These three also formed the membership of the almshouse department's Committee on Outdoor

[20] The Councilmen's Select Committee on Foundling Hospital delivered its report on November 4, 1858. Newspaper articles show it at work as early as December, 1857. See "Proposition for a Foundling Hospital in New York," *New York Herald*, December 12, 1857.

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Poor. It was the almshouse's Department of Outdoor Poor that was responsible for the intake of foundlings. Isaac Townsend was the chair of the committee and, according to Mary Du Bois, who was acquainted with him, its moving spirit.[21]

Isaac Townsend, who was fifty-two in 1857 when he took the chair of the Ten Governor's foundling committee, was a prosperous member of the city's business community with an interest in civic affairs. He had served as a vice-president of the Bank of the State of New York and a director of the Panama Railroad Company. At the time of his death in 1860 the *New York Evening Post* described him as a "well-known resident of this city" with an address on West Twenty-fifth Street. He had been an almshouse governor since the board's formation in 1849, and had served as the almshouse board's president for one year. Mary Du Bois believed that it was Townsend's "kind heart" that led him to investigate the problem of foundlings.[22]

The sixty-two page report that Townsend's Committee produced veered distractedly from one topic to another, at one point pausing for a long digression on the London Foundling Hospital's art collection and music program. The terse eight pages produced by the Councilmen's Committee were, by contrast, sharply to the point. The two committees, however, were in agreement about both their concerns and their conclusions. To start with, they agreed that the problem of foundlings was created by women, and therefore a problem for women to solve. Whether they were prostitutes, girls from the countryside who had been seduced and abandoned, or what the Councilmen's Committee referred to as women of the "so-called better classes," women,

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[21] Mary Du Bois wrote: "Hon. Isaac Townsend, whose kind heart induced him to investigate the facts, wrote a report in which he pleaded for a Foundling Hospital..." NCH, annual report, 1879, 9.

[22] "Obituary. Death of Mr. Isaac Townsend." *New York Evening Post*, April 2, 1860, 2. A list of governors of the almshouse with their dates of service appears in annual report, Department of Public Charities and Correction, 1875, 15. For Du Bois's comment about Townsend's "kind heart" see NCH, annual report, 1879, 9.

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the two all-male committees, illogically believed, were chiefly responsible for producing foundlings, and therefore women ought to be chiefly responsible for caring for them.[23] The mandate of Townsend's Committee specifically required it to report on "the expediency of an advisory directory of benevolent ladies..."[24] As for the Councilmen's Committee, they argued that any new foundling asylum "should be under the superintendence of females." The unmarried mothers of foundlings, the councilmen argued, would be more comfortable "confessing their lapse of virtue to a sympathizing female," and would appreciate "a helping hand extended to prevent their being utterly cast out from virtuous associations, and nothing left but further sin," by which they meant a descent into prostitution. Samuel Halliday, who testified before the councilmen, also subscribed to the evidently universal belief among this all-male group that foundling care was women's work. "This is women's work," he argued, "we of the sterner sex are unfitted for any part of it save furnishing the material."[25]

Added to this was Isaac Townsend's own rather anomalous desire to make New York's foundling asylum a glittering venue for the arts, with women serving as benevolent patronesses. His model for this vision was the London Foundling Hospital. The London Foundling Hospital, a private institution founded in 1739, attracted the painter William Hogarth and the composer George Frederick Handel to its governing board in the mid-eighteenth century. The art collection Hogarth assembled and exhibited there - which included such appropriate works as his own "Moses Brought to Pharaoh's Daughter" and "Hagar and Ishmael" by Joseph Highmore - made the foundling hospital London's first public art museum. The London Foundling Hospital had a similarly

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[23] "So-called better classes," Doc. No.17, 2.

[24] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, [xxxii]

[25] Halliday and Mott's comment comes at the end of the report of their investigation, published in "The Murder of the Innocents," *New York Tribune*, February 9, 1859. In 1859 the report was brought out to illuminate the Mary Cullough scandal.

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fruitful relationship with composer George Frederick Handel, who conducted his "Foundling Hospital Anthem," "Messiah," and other works at benefit concerts in the hospital's chapel.[26]

In London to carry out his mission for the almshouse governors, Townsend (a "mere politician" as he humbly refers to himself here) was evidently bedazzled and a little cowed by the artistic splendors of the London Foundling Hospital.[27] The London Foundling Hospital's chapels, paintings, and concerts featuring choruses of sweet-voiced young foundlings singing Handel's music, were open to the public. According to Townsend the London Foundling Hospital was not only an important charity, but also "one of the most popular places of metropolitan resort" for the city's "thoughtful...wealthy...[and] fashionable." Townsend's awe is conveyed in his description of the "fascination" he felt, attending a concert at the London Foundling Hospital, in the presence of "that slope of youthful faces descending from the ceiling to the front of the gallery...the boys, in their dark dresses on the right, on the left the girls, all neatly attired in white, and the noble organ, Handel's munificent gift, rising between them."[28]

One product of Townsend's bedazzlement in London was a trail of fairy dust twining through his vision for New York's proposed foundling asylum. In Europe, Townsend observed, the history of charities was bound up with the history of the arts.[29]

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[26] For Hogarth and Handel as governors of the London Foundling Hospital see McClure, *Coram's Children*, 66-72.

[27] The section on art takes up eight of the report's sixty pages. Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, lii-lx. "Mere politician," lix. I do not have direct evidence that Townsend went to London himself, although his descriptions, clearly based on direct observations, strongly suggest that he did. The almshouse department did send officials on investigative trips. A decade later they sent Dr. Abraham Jacobi to Europe to study foundling asylum management. See Jacobi, *Raising and Education.*

[28] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, lviii.

[29] On the relation of charity to the arts Townsend wrote: "In a word, the history of the

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The United States, lacking adequate training facilities for the arts, and also lacking large, publicly-run charitable institutions, was missing an opportunity to develop its own painters, composers, and authors. Stung, as many Americans of this era were, by the tendency of Europeans to look down their noses at American art, literature, and music, Townsend observed: "We are not destitute of artists who would gladly hang historical pictures upon the wall of a similar national institution in New York....We are not devoid of composers, and if due encouragement were offered, the character of their productions would rise. But the institution is yet unbuilt that might receive the memorials of their patriotism."[30] Townsend was particularly miffed - but also impressed - at the sight of a painting by American painter Benjamin West hanging in a chapel at the London Foundling Hospital. "A very noticeable scene," he wrote, "is that chapel which contains West's picture. The building itself is large, light, elegant and airy in its appearance. Stained glass sheds its rich glories upon the floor. The altar piece, 'Christ blessing little children,' is treated in West's best manner. Why is not that picture in New York?"[31]

Townsend believed that New York should follow the example of the London Foundling Hospital and make a New York foundling hospital a venue for the arts. One result would be a raising of the tone of public life, not only in taste, but also, he hoped, in morals. In New York, he worried, civilization was in danger of breaking down. "New-York is a city of strangers accidentally thrown together," Townsend observed. In a city of immigrants like New York, there was no community life of the sort that could enforce marriages and prevent illegitimate births. Infant abandonment was the result. "Not only is the idea of *home* one that fails to be realized, but there is the absence of the realization

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noble public charities, both of France and England, is closely interwoven with the progress of civilization and the advancement of the polite arts," Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, lix.

[30] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, liv.

[31] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, lviii.

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of all the duties and obligations to society which the establishment and maintenance of a home requires, imposes, and secures." A foundling asylum filled with art, therefore, would fulfill two functions: it would save unwanted babies from the street, and by providing New York's citizens with an "alliance with the loftiest manifestations of PAINTING, SCULPTURE, and MUSIC," it would help to prevent a "second barbarism."[32]

An idealized vision of women ("the gentler sex," "the fairer part of creation") was central to Townsend's picture.[33] Women were to be the priestesses of this new foundling asylum/temple of art since "for them music, painting, sculpture, every art, every science of civilized life, start into activity at the tap of the wand of that potent beneficent fairy, that irresistible enchantress–WOMAN."[34] Townsend's vision of women was typical of an age in which women were seen as the moral enlighteners of society, the defenders of the values of the home against the moral dangers of commerce and the street. But it was badly out of sync with what the well-to-do women who volunteered their time in charities for poor women and children actually did. Work with sickly babies and poor, unmarried mothers could be socially and emotionally jarring and even, when it involved exposure to infectious diseases, physically dangerous. Mary Du Bois described babies arriving at the Nursery for the Children of Poor Women "mostly covered with terrible sores from neglect and poor nourishment" and "lady managers" who "were so shocked by the sights presented that several said it was impossible to visit the Nursery, or manage the house."[35]

Townsend was also not quite right about New Yorkers' receptivity to art. He may

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[32] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*," xxxviii, lv.

[33] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, lii.

[34] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, lii.

[35] Du Bois, "Thirty Years," 17. The Nursery opened in 1854 and began accepting foundlings after the Civil War.

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or may not have known that the Rotunda, the building that housed his own Department of Outdoor Poor was a failed art gallery. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, part of whose mission was to refine the tastes of the working classes, did not open until 1880. In the meantime, P.T. Barnum's American Museum, located just a few blocks south of the almshouse, evidently satisfied New Yorkers well enough with its exhibits of the Nova Scotia Giantess and the Fejee Mermaid.[36] In 1810 the theater critic Hamlet had complained that New Yorkers were too preoccupied with business to pay attention to art.[37] As the city grew into its role of finance capital of the country this became, if anything, even more true.

There is no reason to believe that Mary Du Bois was not correct when she said that Isaac Townsend had a kind heart, and that this was what stimulated him to get to work on a foundling asylum. But like almost everybody else who dealt with the problem of foundlings in the nineteenth century, he had other interests and allegiances also. Foundlings were children who were not his own, who were not expected to live, and who, people at the time supposed, would only inherit the physical and moral taints of their parents if they did live. Townsend therefore found it easy to be distracted when other more tantalizing subjects materialized unexpectedly before him.

3. Mott and Halliday Take a Tour.

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[36] The Rotunda was an art gallery from 1817, when artist John Vanderlyn built it to display his panoramic paintings, until 1826, when his venture failed and the city took back his lease. Soon after, the city began using the Rotunda for offices. For the history of John Vanderlyn's Rotunda see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 468; Stokes, *Iconography*, 5: 1591; "John Vanderlyn" in DAB. For the Metropolitan Museum of Art and its mission, see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 1081-1083. For Barnum's American Museum see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 644. For the efforts of New York's elite to bring culture to the city at mid-century see Spann, *New Metropolis*, 220-222.

[37] "Both curiosity and taste, in this city, are either lulled to sleep, or swallowed in the whirlpool of avaricious speculation." *The Columbian* (New York), September 13, 1810.

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Isaac Townsend may have been intoxicated with what a foundling hospital could do for the arts in New York, but William F. Mott and Samuel Halliday were the ones who had already gotten their hands dirty. In 1857 the two social investigators descended into the crowded tenement districts to visit the foundlings and other babies the almshouse department placed with the city's poorest women.[38]

Mott and Halliday's focus on the effect of the urban environment was typical of the trend that charity was taking at mid-century. As the city filled with floods of destitute refugees from the Irish potato famine, charities increasingly turned their attention away from the failed moral reform efforts of the first decades of the century and toward the more pragmatic goal of alleviating the physical distress of the poor. The sanitary conditions in the increasingly packed slums caught their attention. Reformers like city inspector John Griscom investigated the piles of garbage that he believed, in keeping with the "miasma" theory, bred disease-causing "effluvia"; the damp and crowded cellar dwellings of the very poor; the inadequate or nonexistent ventilation in tenement homes; and the inadequacies of the city sewer system.[39]

Griscom was an important model for Mott and Halliday not only because of his concerns, but also because of his methods. Griscom's method, the urban investigation, was pioneered in English cities, then quickly appropriated by Americans. As public transportation made class-specific neighborhoods possible, the living conditions of the poor became increasingly alien to more well-to-do urban residents. The squalor of poor

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[38] Mary Du Bois had an uncertain recollection of the date of Mott and Halliday's survey, noting in one place that it occurred in 1853-1854 and in another as 1856-1857. See: Du Bois, "Thirty Years," 14 and NCH, annual reports, 1876, 10; 1879, 8. Halliday himself wrote that the survey occurred "some two years since" in his book, *The Lost and Found; or Life Among the Poor* (New York: Blakeman and Mason, 1859), or around 1857. I think 1857 is probably the correct date.

[39] Griscom, *Sanitary Condition;* Meckel, *Save the Babies;* Spann, *New Metropolis*, 132-138, 142-144. For the shift away from moral reform and toward a more pragmatic concern for the physical welfare of the poor, see Smith Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise.*

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neighborhoods like London's East End or New York's Five Points made them seem even more frighteningly strange to those who did not live in them. Comfortable Londoners began to refer to their city's rundown regions as "Darkest London," as remote, in their minds, as Africa.

It was in the face of this danger and strangeness - and the fear that it might spill out into more civilized territory - that a diverse group of statisticians, physicians, journalists, social reformers, and others began writing exposes of the slums. In an echo of British scientific investigations in far-flung colonial outposts, these books very often resembled travelogues of strange and far-off places, investigations undertaken by intrepid explorers for the benefit of the less adventurous who remained at home.

Undertakers of such investigations included the English sanitarian Edwin Chadwick, whose *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Laboring Population of Great Britain*, published in 1842 was an important model for John Griscom, whose *The Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Population of New York* came out three years later. Friedrich Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, published the same year as Griscom's book, was the product, in part, of an eye-opening tour of the slums of Manchester. Engels' lengthy descriptions of the poor health, housing, and moral conditions he found in the crowded and odoriferous streets of industrial Manchester are reminiscent of Chadwick's and Griscom's, despite the different ends to which he put them. Investigators like Chadwick, Griscom, and Engels were among those who pioneered an investigatory method for those who wanted to understand how the poor lived. Mott and Halliday made use of it when they went on their tour of New York's slums.[40]

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[40] Historian Eric Homburger describes what these investigators did as the "Virgilian mode of social investigation," referring to the way they led their readers on a tour of the urban "underworld." See Homburger, *Scenes From the Life*, 30-37. Other social investigators of this sort included Charles Booth, author of *Life and Labour of the People in London*, Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, and Beatrice Webb, who describes the methods and motivations of the social investigator in her

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William F. Mott was a Quaker who, believing that "Christian moderation forbade large accumulations by individuals," retired from business to devote himself to charity.[41] Early in 1857 Mott brought his concerns about the almshouse babies to the American Female Guardian Society, where they attracted the interest of Samuel Halliday, the Society's missionary. While Mott was the one who originally identified the problem, he ultimately played a minor role and it was Halliday who took the lead in the investigation.

Samuel Halliday was born on a farm in New Jersey in 1812, and began his working life as a grocer's clerk in New York. When eyestrain and bouts of "nervous prostration" interrupted his theological studies and early efforts in missionary work, he left New York and took up a business career in Providence, Rhode Island. By 1839 Halliday was apparently recovered enough to return to New York and begin missionary work for the American Female Guardian Society. Halliday was finally ordained in 1863, and in 1869 went to Brooklyn Heights to work as Henry Ward Beecher's assistant at the Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims. Halliday was evidently so devoted to the reformist preacher that "nothing gave him greater satisfaction than to tell him that he was getting to

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autobiography, *My Apprenticeship* (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1926). Mayhew's book, with its pictures and descriptions of different kinds of laborers, is what amounts to a taxonomy of London working people. The practice of social investigation began in the 1830s and continued into the Progressive era. Jacob Riis is an early twentieth-century example. In the United States and England there were also journalists and novelists who authored sensationalistic accounts of urban life that similarly used the "Virgilian mode," showing how the "shadows" of city life were uncomfortably close to its "sunlight." In New York George Foster wrote several such books. See his *New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), first published in 1850. Other authors of this genre include Ned Buntline, George Ellington, and George Lippard. It is likely that Mott and Halliday were more influenced by serious, pious, and scientific investigators like Griscom than they were by sensationalistic authors like Foster.

[41] "Death of an Old Citizen - William F. Mott," *New York Times*, May 4, 1867. According to this obituary Mott was a benefactor of the City Dispensary, House of Refuge (reform school), Colored Orphan Asylum, and Women's Hospital.

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look like Mr. Beecher." After Beecher's death Halliday became the pastor of the Beecher Memorial Church in Ocean Hill, Brooklyn, where he remained until his own death in 1897.[42] Like so many others who adopted foundlings as a cause, Halliday was fickle, pleading their case when it interested him, then turning to other concerns when these drew his attention away.

The first problem the two men encountered was that they could not locate some of the nurses even though they carried a list supplied to them by George S. Kellock, the Superintendent of Outdoor Poor. New York's poor were notoriously mobile. Many decamped yearly on the city's traditional moving day, May 1. Others, living in ephemeral boarding arrangements, probably moved even more often.[43] Once Mott and Halliday found the nurses, they did not always like what they saw. While a few almshouse babies were living in "really comfortable situations" with competent nurses, in most cases Mott and Halliday found the poor women the almshouse department relied on to nurse infants "sluttish." The nurses' homes were "in the worst portions of many of the worst streets in the city–on lots crowded full of tenant-houses, and these houses completely stowed with families, from sixteen to thirty-five or forty on each lot." All of this was "exceedingly unpropitious for the promotion of their [the babies'] health."

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[42] "Rev. S.B. Halliday Dead," *New York Times*, July 10, 1897. For Halliday's work at the American Female Guardian Society, see his books, *Lost and Found* and *Little Street Sweeper*. The *Times* obituary says that Halliday lived in Providence for about twenty years, but Carroll Smith Rosenberg finds that Halliday began working for the American Female Guardian Society in New York in 1839, Smith Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise*, 207. Halliday worked for other charities also. The obituary notes that in the 1860s Halliday was the manager of the Five Points House of Industry. A newspaper article from1868 finds him as the superintendent of the Workingwomen's Home on Elizabeth Street. "Presentation at the Workingwomen's Home," *New York Times*, September 30, 1868. For more on Halliday see Homburger, *Scenes from the Life*, 3-6.

[43] The AHFV-NYHS records the many address changes, often in short spaces of time, of the almshouse nurses. Fanny Trollope noted New Yorkers' habit of moving every May 1: "On the 1st of May the city of New York has the appearance of sending off a population flying from the plague..." Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (New York: Vintage Books, 1949), 349.

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With an attention to sordid detail worthy of Dickens, Mott and Halliday described the dark, damp, airless, filthy and smelly living conditions in the shanties, basements, and crowded neighborhoods of the poor. They found almshouse babies as well as the nurses' own children crawling on dirt floors together with chickens and pigs. At one home they visited a neighbor reported that two almshouse children living with a Mrs. McCabe "suffered dreadfully from simple neglect." Mrs. McCabe left the children alone for hours, and when the neighbor went in to check on them, she found them "lying in wet places on the bed." The neighbor told Mott and Halliday that she did her best to move them to dry spots on the bed, but "from these neglects they became sore, and even in almost a rotten state." In spite of this, the neighbor seemed to pity Mrs. McCabe rather than blame her, perhaps out of empathy born from shared experience. She noted that Mr. McCabe was an occasional resident of the city's penitentiary and, when he was home, abusive to wife and children. It was he, the neighbor implied, who was ultimately the one at fault.[44]

On Sullivan Street the two men stepped into a rear basement, "a low, damp, dark, dirty room, badly ventilated; atmosphere villainous." The nurse living there had "several children of her own, and two from Alms-House; *one* of them a *sickly child was seated on the floor, endeavoring to devour a large piece of grisly meat* it held in its hands. It seemed to us a hard place in which to rear humanity."

Mott and Halliday also found instances in which the nurses favored their own children over the almshouse infants whose weekly dollars were supporting the household. They described a "stout Irishwoman," whose son was a "fat burly little fellow." This child's well-fed appearance "told better than language could, that the presence of the

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[44] Mott and Halliday's observations are published in "Report Made to the Governors Two Years Ago," in "The Murder of the Innocents," *New York Tribune*, February 9, 1859, and in Halliday, *Little Street Sweeper*, 147-166. All quotes are from the *Tribune* article unless otherwise cited.

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Almshouse babies had not lessened the quantity or quality of the fodder that might help him along to aldermanic dimensions."[45] (The distended belly of the bribe-fattened alderman was a symbol of political corruption.)

Like other urban investigators of this era Mott and Halliday looked for the ways that the dirty, overcrowded urban environment damaged not only the health, but also the morals of the poor. "Temperance and chastity," Halliday observed in another context, "are as fond of pure air, and clean beds, and plenty of room as any *millionaire* on the Fifth Avenue, and shun the fetid attics and the stifling alley with fastidious speed." In their understanding that the close and filthy conditions of the tenements led to immorality, Mott and Halliday were echoing Griscom. In the promiscuously overcrowded conditions of the tenements, Griscom argued, "can it be doubted that the nice moral distinctions so necessary to a life of virtue, will be gradually subdued, or overthrown, the heart hardened against the teachings of the moralist, and the wave of lustful passion become of increased power?"[46]

Almshouse babies, who shared the threadbare circumstances of the city's poorest families, had no access to the pure air, clean beds, and spacious dwellings that nurtured virtuous citizenship. If better conditions were not provided, Mott and Halliday warned, "*this large* and *over* flowing accession to its [the city's] population shall come to take their places among us in active life with vitiated, damaged constitutions" and "depraved and rotten moral propensities." Like Police Chief Matsell and Charles Loring Brace, Mott and Halliday believed that neglected children - those who lived to grow up - were as much to be feared as feared for.

The two investigators emerged from their tour convinced that the almshouse department's system was "radically defective," riddled with systemic flaws as a result of

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[45] Halliday, *Little Street Sweeper*, 152.

[46] Halliday, *Lost and Found*, 222-223; Griscom, *Sanitary Condition*, 23.

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which children suffered and died. The fault lay with the almshouse governors, who had failed to keep track of these infants or note the conditions in which they were living. "There can be no question that scores and scores of these children were murdered," Halliday accused, "and are not these men to be held responsible for the consequences of their neglect?"[47] When Halliday delivered the report of his and Mott's investigation to the Board of Councilmen's Committee a year or so later he softened the tone of his accusations, but his recommendation was the same.[48] That recommendation: to remove almshouse babies from their nurses and house them together in a central institution.

4. The Anti-Abortionists.

Halliday was as much of an adversary to the committeemen as he was an advisor - they found a much more sympathetic set of helpers in the city's physicians. The Councilmen's Committee gratefully acknowledged that there was "on the part of the medical profession of this city, a very general desire to aid them in their labors, and the universal opinion that the Institution of a Foundling Hospital or Infant's Home was a measure of philanthropy imperatively called for..."[49] Doctors were drawn to this issue because they believed that infant abandonment and the related crime of infanticide were among the factors contributing to the alarming rise of infant mortality in cities in the mid-nineteenth century. They also believed that a foundling asylum, by absorbing unwanted babies, would cut off the practice of their bitter professional rivals - the abortionists.

In the spring of 1857, just as the foundling asylum committees were getting to work, a Boston physician named Horatio Robinson Storer, backed by the American

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[47] Halliday, *Little Street Sweeper*," 155.

[48] The committee's report stated that Halliday "believed the fault rested, not with the governors, but with the system." Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 6.

[49] Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 3.

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Medical Association, began the first significant, and ultimately successful, crusade against abortion in the United States.[50] Before the 1820s there were no laws regulating abortion in the United States. During the antebellum years the American public, including its Protestant clergy (in this era the Catholic clergy were not central to the antiabortion movement as they would be in the twentieth century), did not commonly believe that a fetus was a person or that abortion was a crime. Most Americans understood abortion as a reasonable, if shameful, solution for unmarried women who unintentionally became pregnant. Law and public opinion normally allowed folk practitioners and midwives to wield their ancient arsenal of abortifacients, plants such as black hellebore, ergot, tansy, and the aptly named rue, unmolested.[51]

The first anti-abortion laws, enacted by states between 1821 and 1841, were really poison control laws, passed to protect women against dangerous abortifacients. These laws typically punished the purveyors of abortifacients rather than the women who used them. The terms of the abortion debate when it first emerged in the 1820s were entirely different from what they became by 1973 when Roe vs.Wade was passed. The rights of women and the lives of fetuses were not central to the debate in the early nineteenth century. What was at stake instead was the status of physicians. The so-called "regular," or establishment physicians of this era favored laws that limited the movements of

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[50] The almshouse governors' resolution establishing a committee to investigate the possibility of a foundling asylum was passed on March 17, 1857. Storer's anti-abortion crusade took root with a resolution passed at the Suffolk County Medical Society in May, 1857 and in a committee formed at the 1859 annual meeting of the American Medical Association. James C. Mohr, *Abortion in America: The Origins and Evolution of National Policy, 1800-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 152, 154.

[51] Sources for my brief history of abortion are, unless otherwise indicated: Janet Farrell Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth*; Mohr, *Abortion*; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Abortion Movement and the AMA, 1850-1880," in Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

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"irregular" practitioners, including abortionists, because their own professional status was faltering.

Physicians of this period - the exuberantly democratic, anti-authoritarian Jacksonian era - were threatened by the proliferation of so-called "irregular" medical practitioners and the unregulated establishments that trained them. Homeopaths, proprietors of water cure establishment, vendors of pills and patent medicines, and so-called specialists in every ailment, including "female complaints" - the heading beneath which abortion was often hidden - all flourished during this period, at the expense of the regular physicians. In truth, the regulars, whose repertoire consisted of painful, not necessarily effective, and frequently harmful treatments such as cupping and bleeding, and toxic drugs such as calomel (mercury), had little better to offer.[52] Physicians paid the price for their high pain, low cure regimens. Between about 1830 and 1850 state legislatures, losing faith in the expertise of the regular physicians, began to repeal medical licensing laws, thus stripping trained physicians of their legally-sanctioned professional authority. The disappearance of medical licensing laws made it possible for anyone to set up shop as a healer.[53] In 1847 physicians founded the American Medical Association and began to fight back. The AMA combated physicians' loss of status by drawing firm boundaries around what they defined as "regular" medical practice, and protecting those boundaries against uncredentialled interlopers.

In the 1840s physicians were battered by yet another phenomenon - the habitual

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[52] For a sense of the dangers involved and the comforts offered by these "cures," see the biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who suffered from mercury poisoning as a result of overdosing of calomel, and, in England, Charles Darwin, who had water cures in an effort to cure his bad stomach. Joan Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin*, vol.1, *Voyaging* (New York: Knopf, 1995) and vol.2 *The Power of Place* (New York: Knopf, 2002).

[53] On the repeal of state medical licensing laws, Robert P. Hudson, "Abraham Flexner in Perspective: American Medical Education, 1865-1910," in Leavitt and Numbers, *Sickness and Health*, 153.

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use of birth control and abortion by married, white, middle-class, Protestant women. The birth rate among white, married women in the United States declined by about half over the course of the nineteenth century. While in 1800 such a woman could be expected to give birth to 7.04 children, by 1850 she was producing only 5.42. By 1900 this figure had dipped to 3.56. The sharpest decline took place in the decade between 1840 and 1850. Physicians then and historians now agree that this drop in the birthrate was the result of the deliberate use of birth control and abortion by married women to limit their families.[54]

This trend signaled a change in attitude about what and whom birth control and abortion were for. The traditional association of birth control with prostitutes, and of abortion with the unmarried and pregnant was fading. In this era of the first movement for women's rights, married women were starting to use birth control and abortion as methods to help them control their reproductive lives. For physicians, however, this trend opened up a new front in their war against abortion. Now they were not only fighting their professional rivals, the abortionists, but also women of their own social milieu.

When married women wanted abortions, they frequently went to unlicensed specialists in abortion. Regular physicians traditionally did not provide married women with abortions, or with birth control supplies or information. This was due in part to the association of birth control and abortion to the realm of folk medicine, often the province of female practitioners.[55] By the 1840s abortion had moved beyond the domain of

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[54] Daniel Scott Smith, "Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America," in Mary Hartman and Lois W. Banner, eds., *Clio's Consciousness Raised*, see Table 3, p.123, for figures on the declining birthrate. Mohr, *Abortion*, chapters three and four, and pages 82 and 83 for figures on the declining birthrate, which match Smith's. Also Brodie, *Contraception*. For an evolutionary perspective on the phenomenon of women in comfortable societies choosing to have fewer children, see Hrdy, *Mother Nature*, 9.

[55] James Mohr also notes that physicians were reluctant to perform abortions because

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herbalists and midwives and become a business - the province of the "irregulars." Women could purchase products with names like "Female Regulator," "Periodical Drops," or "Woman's Friend" to take privately at home, or they could visit the discreet parlors of abortionists.[56] To the horror of the regular physicians and other respectable citizens, abortionists, like many other businesspeople of this period, placed thinly disguised advertisements in the newspapers. Women, who by the middle of the nineteenth century were literate in equal numbers with men, were part of newspapers' expanding audience and made use of the ability of newspapers to provide information directly to them in the privacy of their parlors.[57] Thus women routinely, and without the advice or assistance of their physicians, could and did seek out a service that the regular physicians scorned. To add insult to injury, they paid high fees to abortionists such as New York's notorious Madame Restell who in the spring of 1857, just as Horatio Robinson Storer was beginning his anti-abortion crusade (and the almshouse governors were assembling their foundling asylum committee), purchased the plot of land opposite St. Patrick's Cathedral on which she would erect her brazenly magnificent house.[58]

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they felt it would violate the promise they made in their Hippocratic oath not to take life, and because they did not accept the popular concept of "quickening." Quickening was the movement made by a fetus. It was popularly believed that pregnancy could not be proven until the woman could feel this movement. See Mohr, *Abortion*, 34-36 and Brodie, *Contraception*, 33-34. Then as now, ideas about when life begins were based more on religious and ethical beliefs than on science. This was perhaps even more true in the nineteenth century when physicians still did not fully understand the process of conception, and certainly did not, in an age long before x-rays or ultrasound, have the ability to observe gestation with any accuracy. For physicians' failure to understand the mechanics of the menstrual cycle and conception, see Brodie, *Contraception* 28-30.

[56] For names of abortifacient products see Brodie, *Contraception*, 225.

[57] On abortionists advertising in the press see James L Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald and the Rise of the Popular Press* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989), 53. For the closure of the literacy gap between men and women by 1850, see Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 193.

[58] For the timing of Madam Restell's purchase see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 810.

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It was at this tense moment in the history of the medical profession in the United States that physicians gathered to advise New York City officials that a foundling asylum would provide an alternative for women who would otherwise patronize the abortionists. One of the physicians who made this point was the young surgeon Alexander Brown Mott. Dr. Mott was thirty-two in 1858 when he testified before the Councilmen's Committee. He had received his M.D. just the year before, although he had already been practicing for several years as a visiting surgeon at several New York hospitals. He had studied medicine in France, and the knowledge of French foundling hospitals that he displayed to the councilmen may reflect observations he made while he was there. His father, with whom he practiced, was the prominent surgeon Valentine Mott. His wife, Arabella Phelps Mott, was the secretary of the Nursery and Child's Hospital from about 1857 to 1863. Both were probably sources of information for him about the circumstances and states of mind of unwillingly pregnant women, both poor and not poor. Later Mott would make a satisfying career for himself. As an army surgeon during the Civil War he was present at General Lee's surrender at Appomattox. At his death an obituary described him as "one of the most noted of American surgeons." But even as early as 1858 Mott was on his way to full membership in the medical establishment's upper ranks. As his testimony demonstrates, he saw it as his responsibility to defend those ranks against intruders.[59]

Mott presented the Councilmen's Committee with a vivid picture of masses of women forthrightly, anxiously, but unsuccessfully, seeking abortions from their doctors (and many must have bypassed doctors altogether and gone straight to abortionists). The newspaper that covered the councilmen's hearing emphasized Mott's comments on this

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[59] "Alexander Brown Mott (1826-1889)," in DAMB; "Alexander B. Mott. Dead," *New York Herald*, August 13, 1889. The annual reports of the Nursery and Child's Hospital list Arabella Mott as secretary. She was also a founding member of the Nursery's board of lady managers. See Golden, *Infant Asylums*, 31.

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theme: *"There was hardly a physician in the City to whom application was not made every week to induce abortion..."* Some of these appeals, Mott added, "were of a very pathetic and energetic character." When regular physicians turned women away, as their professional standards at that time required them to do, they went to "quacks" instead. Mott described these "quacks" for the councilmen in terms that revealed his personal and professional biases: "There are many men in this city, chiefly foreigners," Mott explained, "uneducated men, who are professed abortionists. They are unable, from their ignorance of medicine, to remedy the dangerous consequences they frequently inflict." (Mott's very specific identification of the enemy as "foreigners" demonstrates the nativist bias of his own elite class. Mott also sidesteps a reality that he was surely aware of - that many abortionists, both traditional purveyors of potions and services and modern, entrepreneurial purveyors of essentially the same products - were women.) When councilman George Ross, a member of the Councilmen's Committee, asked Mott how a foundling asylum would "lessen the unnatural crime so frequently attempted by *married* women in the desire to subject themselves to the abortive process," Mott told him that if the city had a foundling asylum where women could leave their unwanted babies, they would not resort to abortion. A foundling asylum, Mott told Councilman Ross, was a "facility which rendered child-murder unnecessary."[60]

Another physician who testified before the councilmen was David Meredith Reese. Dr. Reese, born in 1800, was a generation older than Alexander Mott and had established a reputation for himself as a warrior against medical "quacks." He was the author of an 1838 book titled *Humbugs of New York: Being a Remonstrance Against Popular Delusion; Whether in Science, Philosophy, or Religion* in which he protested

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[60] Mott's testimony appears in "The Projected Foundling Hospital," *New York Times*, June 9, 1858, and is summarized by the councilmen in their report, Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 3. It is also referred to in Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, xxxvii.

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against the "ultraism" of the reform-crazy Jacksonian period in all its forms. Reese debunked "ultra-temperance" ("a humbug"), "ultra-abolitionism" (he favored gradual abolition instead), and "ultra-sectarianism" of all kinds. Reese was from Baltimore, so his annoyance was probably a southern reaction to what he, like many other white southerners in this period of heightening sectional tension just before the Civil War, considered the "excesses" of northern reform movements. Most of Reese's irritation, however, was provoked by the medical and psychological practices that threatened his own profession. He attacked practitioners of phrenology, homeopathy, animal magnetism, clairvoyance and, not wanting to leave anything out, "quackery in general." "Any clown," he protested, "...may succeed in acquiring popularity, and even wealth, by announcing himself a quack doctor!"[61]

Of more direct relevance to the city councilmen was Reese's "Report on Infant Mortality in Large Cities" which he presented to the American Medical Association, then published in 1857.[62] According to Reese, half of all the deaths that occurred in large American cities during the first half of the nineteenth century were of children aged five and under. Looking at New York City, and comparing 1843 (the first year that the City Inspector was required to record deaths) with1853, Reese found that the ratio underwent an "appalling increase...vastly beyond the proportional increase of the population of the city..." The first year of life was particularly dangerous, showing the "most appalling waste of life."[63] Reese included stillbirths, which included intentional abortions, in his

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[61] David Meredith Reese, *Humbugs of New York: Being a Remonstrance Against Popular Delusion; Whether in Science, Philosophy, or Religion* (New York: John S. Taylor; Boston: Weeks, Jordan, Co., 1838), 125. Reese was a resident physician at Bellevue until 1849, and also spent periods teaching at the Albany Medical School and Castleton Medical College, Vermont. "David Meredith Reese (1800-1861)," DAMB.

[62] Reese, *Report on Infant Mortality.*

[63] Reese cites the following statistics: 1843: deaths of children aged five and under - 4,588; he does not give a figure for the deaths of all others. 1853 - deaths of children aged five and under - 12,963; deaths of all others, 9,739. Reese, *Report on Infant Mortality*, 6,

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figures for infant mortality, and therefore identified abortion as one of the factors contributing to the rise.

Reese's inclusion of stillbirths - many of which he suspected were abortions - among the statistics of infant mortality was backed by Dr. James Wynne, another physician who testified before the city councilmen. Wynne was a statistician as well as a physician and the author of a *Report on the Vital Statistics of the United States*, which was published in 1857 (later he became a coffee-planter in Guatemala, where he died in 1871).[64] In his testimony to the councilmen Wynne deployed statistical tables to show that the rate of stillbirths in New York was going up significantly, from one in every forty-nine births in 1805 to one in every twelve births in 1850. Wynne declined to directly acknowledge any link between stillbirth and abortion, but indicated his suspicion when he quoted the city inspector (from whom he got his figures) who warned that "there is great need that some fearless and high minded physician should investigate the subject."[65]

As a statistician Wynne may have been unwilling to draw any conclusions that did not come directly out of his numbers, but Reese had no such qualms. Reese used his medical authority to assert that naturally occurring stillbirths were rare, and insisted that the overabundance of stillbirths in New York was the result of the "ghastly crime of

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11. For another contemporary statement about the rise in New York's infant death rate in the 1840s and 1850s see the comments by physician George T. Elliot in "Inauguration of the Nursery and Child's Hospital."

[64] James Wynne, *Report on the Vital Statistics of the United States Made to the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York* (New York: H. Bailliere, 1857).

[65] James Wynne's testimony is reported in detail in "Proposition for a Foundling Hospital in New York. Interesting Statement of Dr. James Wynne–Remarkable Statistics,"*New York Herald*, December 12, 1857. It is mentioned briefly in the councilmen's report, Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 3. Wynne was also the author of a report titled *Public Hygiene* (1847), and several books on scientific bibliography. He moved to Guatemala in 1867. "James Wynne (1814-1871)," DAMB.

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abortionism." "[T]hat very many 'premature births and stillborn children' are the result of mischiefs inflicted upon mother or child or both, by awkward or unskillful attempts at abortionism, can neither be denied nor doubted."[66] Like Alexander Mott, Reese argued that one function of a foundling asylum would be to "remove the temptations to the unnatural crime of abortionism..."[67]

Drs. Mott and Reese were anxious to make the point that it was not only poor unmarried women who wanted to rid themselves of unwanted babies - married, well-to-do women did too. It appears that the physicians read into the visible evidence produced by poor, single women - abandoned babies and victims of outright infanticide - the less easily spied misdeeds - abortion - of middle-class, married women. In his testimony to the councilmen Alexander Mott warned: "A married woman capable of sending her child to a foundling hospital, was very capable, if not prevented, of doing worse. She would commit murder, she would procure abortion." The city councilmen, referring to abortion, asked "who will dare even to guess at the hundreds and thousands of cases occurring every year, which are known only to the woman and her physician–occurring not in squallid haunts of poverty, but among the so-called better classes, where exposure would be infamy?"[68]

In his report on infant mortality Dr. Reese commented angrily and at length at the failure of married women to embrace maternity wholeheartedly. Reese accused married women of the middle and upper classes of harming or even killing their babies by neglecting their own health during pregnancy and after childbirth. Young women of the cities, misled by the "fashionable follies of the times," committed the following list of

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[66] Reese, *Report on Infant Mortality*, 9, 10.

[67] Reese, *Report on Infant Mortality*, 14.

[68] Mott's commentary: "The Projected Foundling Hospital," *New York Times*, June 9, 1858. The councilmen's comment: Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 2. "Squallid" is the councilmen's spelling.

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sins "incompatible with the duties of maternity":

> Errors in diet; late hours; crowded assemblies; the excitements of the opera, the theatre, or the ball-room; the transitions from high to low temperature; the exposure to night air, especially with insufficient clothing, such as exacting customs and fashion demand....[69]

At their very worst, according to Reese, such women avoided maternity at all by going to abortionists:

> Would that it were only the profligate, or even the unfortunate of their sex, whose guilty fear or shame thus seeks to hide the evidence of their illicit amours. But the proof is overwhelming, and everywhere known to the profession, that even the married, to postpone the cares of a family, the perils of parturition, the privations and duties of maternity, and sometimes in view of the pecuniary burdens they apprehend as intolerable, consent to the use of drugs, and even the employment of instrumental and other means, to arrest early pregnancy...[70]

The members of Townsend's committee understood that most of the clientele of their proposed foundling hospital would be the unwanted babies of poor women, mostly servants, and not the middle-class women Reese described. They sympathized with the plight of poor women, citing "sudden emergency," "the pressure of immediate and unprotected poverty," and "the desertion of a husband" as among the factors that caused them to abandon their babies, and that made a foundling asylum desirable.[71] Yet they

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[69] Reese, *Report on Infant Mortality*, 17.

[70] Reese, *Report on Infant Mortality*, 9. The supposed debility of young women caused either by their own bad judgement, by stress produced by higher education, or by some harder to pinpoint aspect of urban and/or middle class life was an important theme among nineteenth century doctors. David Meredith Reese expounds on this theme in his *Report on Infant Mortality*, see 16-17. For more on this theme, see Jean Strouse, *Alice James, A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), for a portrait of a neurasthenic, or Carroll Smith Rosenberg, "Puberty to Menopause: The Cycle of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century America," in Smith Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct.* For a portrait of a young woman who "ruins her health" with study see the novel by the English author George Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee*, first published in 1894.

[71] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, xxxiv. In the context of a description of the London Foundling Hospital Townsend, et al note that the mothers of most families are domestic servants, while the rest are "chiefly *daughters* of *small tradesmen*,

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also believed, along with their medical advisors, that one of the functions of a foundling asylum would be to prevent abortion. Isaac Townsend and his colleagues argued that abortion was nearly eradicated in cities like London and Paris where foundling asylums were available to take in unwanted babies. In New York, where foundling asylums were lacking, the "vile occupation of the 'abortionist'" flourished. The committeemen even absorbed the physicians' professional disdain for quacks and for physicians who defied their profession's standards regarding abortion. "Scarcely a month passes," Townsend's committee wrote, "without the public record of the implication, not of some ignorant midwife to procure abortion–but of a creature walking erect like a man - a 'physician'."[72]

5. The "Yawning Hell of Prostitution."

The city officials and their advisors had yet another use in mind for their proposed foundling asylum: they hoped it would help to prevent prostitution by leading fallen women away from the brink of what Townsend's report referred to as the "yawning hell of prostitution" and safely back onto the path of sexual respectability.

The idea that the fallen woman was permanently ruined was a nineteenth century idea. Fanny Trollope, the British author who visited the United States in the early 1830s, noted the difference between the boys and the girls she encountered at New York's reform school, the House of Refuge on Randall's Island. The superintendent confirmed her observation that the boys recovered quickly from the "evil influences" that had landed them in the institution and were easily reformed. With the girls, however, it was another story. To Trollope the girls looked "heavy, listless, indifferent, and melancholy."

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mechanics, or *farmers*, or *milliners* in humble circumstances," a group, they noted "becoming exceedingly numerous both in Europe and America." The italics are in the report. Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, lxx.

[72] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, lxxx, lxxxii, xxxvi. The almshouse governors make what appears to be a fascinating evolutionary metaphor one year before Charles Darwin published his *Origin of Species*.

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After their transgressions "they can hardly look up again."[73] Charles Loring Brace, the founder of the Children's Aid Society, also believed that where errant boys, even boys who had engaged in prostitution, were salvageable, girls who had sexually transgressed were not. "There is no reality," he wrote in his book, *The Dangerous Classes*, "in the sentimental assertion that the sexual sins of the lad are as degrading as those of the girl." Prostitution "with the girl, seems to sap and rot the whole nature." The girl was soiled "beyond all human possibility of cleansing."[74]

The people involved in New York's foundling asylums also believed that the victim of seduction was in danger of permanent ruin. She was inevitably sucked into a downward spiral that led to a host of terrible possibilities that included abandoning or even killing her infant, killing herself out of shame, or turning to prostitution, which virtuous Victorians believed was the only possible employment for a woman who had been revealed to have lost her virtue.

Isaac Townsend's report described the fate of the "friendless Irish or German emigrant girl in New York," who is seduced and abandoned and gives birth in secret:

> We next read that she has taken poison, or if nothing be afterwards known, is it unfair to suppose, that, devoid of all assistance and shelter, the yawning hell of prostitution absorbs, as a fatal necessity, thousands who go down to the pit, despairing of all reclamation and past all hope?[75]

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[73] Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 347. Trollope refers to the institution she visited as the Asylum for the Destitute, but this is probably inaccurate - it was most likely the House of Refuge.

[74] Brace, *Dangerous Classes*, 115, 116. For more on the inescapable category of "fallen woman" in the nineteenth century, see Estelle Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 14-15.

[75] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, lxviii. For restatements of this scenario, see the "Appeal in Behalf of the New York Infant Asylum, Chartered by the State of New York, and Organized Under the Management of Representatives from the Protestant Denominations of the City" and "A Statement in Behalf of the New York Infant Asylum" which warns that fallen women are "easy prey to the ever watchful habitues of houses of prostitution," 7. Both are bound into the front of the volume

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With marked sympathy for prostitutes Townsend asked: "who, what were they once? Many of them cheated, seduced, abandoned, yet pure and confiding women..."[76]

The dangers of prostitution seemed particularly vivid to Townsend and his colleagues because at the time their committee was meeting prostitution had entered what one historian refers to as a "halcyon period."[77] By the 1850s prostitution had become particularly widespread and visible, spreading beyond the waterfront districts and into the heart of the city itself. Streets running alongside the commercial spine of Broadway contained blocks that included as many as eight houses of prostitution. Broadway itself was sprinkled with them.[78] Ordinary citizens going about their business could no longer avoid the spectacle of prostitutes going about theirs. Prostitutes who strode boldly through the city's bustling business district were like the abortionists who mimicked the methods of businessmen by placing advertisements in the newspapers. Both mocked the new, middle-class ethic of deliberate, watertight separation between the world of private life, women, and the home and the public life of men, commerce, and the street. Furthermore, the public displays of abortionists and prostitutes, like unwanted babies lying in the street, were public evidence that private sexual protocols were disintegrating.

The councilmen devoted the first paragraphs of their report not to foundlings, but

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containing annual reports of the New York Infant Asylum, 1872-1883, at New York Weill Cornell Medical Center Archives.

[76] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, lxxv.

[77] Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), part two, "Halcyon Years." For a thorough picture of prostitution in New York from a slightly earlier period see Cohen, *Helen Jewett.*

[78] Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, chapter two, particularly map five showing the locations of houses of prostitution, 1850-1859, 33. The moral reform movement of the 1820s and 1830s, which had adopted the reform of prostitutes as one of its chief goals, had failed by this time. The anti-prostitution movement was not fully reactivated until the early 1870s with the creation of Anthony Comstock's New York Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1873.

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to prostitutes, whose increasing visibility was a feature of mid-nineteenth century urban life. Prostitution, they wrote, "intrudes everywhere, and will no longer be named in whispers, or elbowed or frowned out of sight–it is as open and as patent as drunkenness or pauperism..."[79] Another citizen who was horrified at the new ubiquity of prostitution was William Sanger, the resident physician of the city-run almshouse and hospitals on Blackwell's Island and the author of the 1858 book *The History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effects Throughout the World.* Prostitution, he observed, "no longer confines itself to secrecy and darkness, but boldly strides through our most thronged and elegant thoroughfares, and there, in the broad light of the sun, it jostles the pure, the virtuous, and the good."[80]

One of the most important factors contributing to the expansion of prostitution at mid-century was the presence of legions of ill-paid, underemployed, unmarried young women in the city after the great migrations, largely from Ireland and Germany. Journalist George Foster was only one among many who commented on the vulnerability of desperately underpaid seamstresses to the pecuniary temptations of prostitution. "Here are thirty thousand women and young girls," he wrote, "who work ten, twelve, fourteen hours a day for that which scarcely, with the strictest economy, procures them the merest necessary food and cheapest rags to cover them." It was little wonder that these impoverished women, seeing "the daughters of infamy flaunting along in idle and fantastic splendor" asked themselves "why shall I be thus a martyr to that virtue that will not even bring me bread?"[81]

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[79] Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 2.

[80] Sanger, *History of Prostitution*, 29.

[81] [Foster], *New York in Slices.* See also, Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 59-60. Gilfoyle treats the causes of prostitution much more fully than I am able to do here, blaming the existence of a male "sporting culture" and, particularly, the complicity of the rapidly expanding real estate market. In the mid-nineteenth century prostitutes could earn several dollars per night, while seamstresses earned only pennies per day, see Gilfoyle, *City of*

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Sanger's book included the results of a study he had conducted of two thousand New York prostitutes, women like the ones he regularly met in the hospitals on Blackwell's Island. Sanger concluded that underemployment leading to poverty was one of the factors that caused women to turn to prostitution.[82] He regretted that there were not more, more steady, and better paid occupations open to women, and asserted "unhesitatingly and without fear of contradiction, that were there more avenues of employment open to females there would be a corresponding decrease in prostitution..."[83] He made this case forcefully:

> The most prominent fact is that a large number of females, both operatives and domestics, earn so small wages that a temporary cessation of their business, or being a short time out of a situation, is sufficient to reduce them to absolute distress. Provident habits are useless in their cases; for, much as they may feel the necessity, they *have nothing to save*, and the very day that they encounter a reverse sees them penniless. The struggle a virtuous girl will wage against fate in such circumstances may be conceived: it is a literal battle for life, and in the result life is too often preserved only by the sacrifice of virtue.[84]

Eros, 59-60 and 68-69. In 1849 police chief George W. Matsell estimated that child prostitutes earned between two and five dollars per day, "two or three dollars daily." Matsell, *Semi-Annual Report*, 1849, 63-64. According to Virginia Penny, working men earned between $1.50 and $2. per day while women earned between 50 cents and one dollar per day. These figures are based on her extensive survey of women workers carried out in New York between 1859 and 1861. See Penny, *Employments of Women*, 488.

[82] Of the 2,000 prostitutes in Sanger's study, 525 gave destitution as the reason they turned to prostitution. A little less than half that number, 258, cited that they were "seduced and abandoned." Another twenty-four reported that they had been seduced on board immigrant ships or in boarding houses catering to immigrants. Twenty-seven said they had been "violated"- raped. Others gave reasons such as drink, bad company, idleness, or the persuasion of other prostitutes. 164 cited abuse by families or husbands. Sanger found it hard to explain the 513 who reported that they turned to prostitution out of "inclination." Sanger, *History of Prostitution*, 488.

[83] Sanger, *History of Prostitution*, 525.

[84] Sanger, *History of Prostitution*, 492.

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The pangs of hunger and the chill of homelessness, then, had as much to do with a woman's decision to turn to prostitution as did the shame of unmarried motherhood.

The city officials called on William Sanger when they wanted to learn more about prostitution. Isaac Townsend and William Sanger were already acquainted. It was Townsend who, several years earlier, as president of the board of governors of the almshouse, had first suggested that Sanger get to work on his study of prostitution. Sanger's *History of Prostitution* was ultimately commissioned by the almshouse department. When Townsend became president of the almshouse governors' foundling committee, he turned again to Sanger, borrowing Sanger's research material for the report produced by his foundling asylum committee.[85]Sanger was also aware of Meredith Reese's *Report on Infant Mortality*. He quotes Reese on the "ghastly crime of abortionism, " *History of Prostitution*, 483.

Like his colleagues, the physicians who testified before the Councilmen's Committee, Sanger believed there was an integral link between prostitution and foundlinghood. In addition to its survey of New York prostitutes Sanger's book also included an around-the-world history of prostitution, ranging from the habits of the "Esquimaux" to the practices of Peruvians; from biblical times to his own day. Based on what he learned about the related phenomena of prostitution and infant abandonment in other times and places, Sanger concluded that a country's rate of infant abandonment was a barometer of its poverty level. It was also, like prostitution, an indicator of its level of sexual morality. He also commented on the role of foundling asylums, noting that in countries, like Italy, where there were foundling asylums, the rate of infanticide went down. In countries without foundling asylums, like Peru, unwanted infants were "cast on

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[85] For Townsend's influence on Sanger, see Sanger, *History of Prostitution*, 27-28. The authors of the report cite Sanger's sources as an influence, see Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, xcii. Compare the Belgian and Russian statistics cited by the Townsend's committee lxxxiii and lxxxv with those cited by Sanger, *History of Prostitution*, 187 and 275.

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dunghills, to be devoured as carrion by obscene animals and birds of prey." With this evidence in hand Sanger endorsed the building of foundling hospitals, warning doubters to "suspend a hasty judgment on Foundling Hospitals."

Townsend and his colleagues appropriated Sanger's message (while discarding much of his gruesome imagery) as the capstone of their report. "In Lima," they wrote, "where no such institution [a foundling asylum] exists, it is not unusual to notice the dead bodies of infants cast out by unfeeling mothers, and what reason have we to avert the fact that our own Hudson and the East River carry with them to the Atlantic, with the returning tide, annually, a number of equally hapless victims..."[86]

The councilmen and the almshouse governors devote significant space in their reports to the issue of prostitution. Infant abandonment and prostitution were connected in several ways. The councilmen suspected that at least some of the foundlings for whom they were considering building an asylum were the children of prostitutes.[87] The girl inmates of foundling asylums were also traditionally thought to be in more than ordinary danger of growing up to become prostitutes. The foundling asylums in Dublin, Cork, and Paris, for instance, were suspected of being incubators for prostitutes. This possibility

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[86] Sanger, *History of Prostitution*, Italy, 167; Lima, Peru, 371. Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, xci-xcii. There was at least one foundling asylum elsewhere in Peru. See Mary Gallagher, "Aristocratic Opposition to the Establishment of a Foundling Home in Arequipa, Peru," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 9 (1979): 45-58.

[87] Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 1-2. The Councilmen here represent prostitutes as the patrons of abortionists. William Sanger also commented on the sad fate of the illegitimate children of prostitutes, although he does not specifically mention any who became foundlings. In his survey Sanger asked New York prostitutes about their children. Of the 1,917 children born to the prostitutes he interviewed, 1,090 were illegitimate. Sanger commented that these children were "liable physically to inherit the diseases of the mother, morally to endure the disgrace attached to their birth, and very probably to be reared in the midst of blasphemy, obscenity, and vice, to follow in the footsteps of their parents, and perpetuate the sin to which they owe their origin." Sanger, *History of Prostitution*, 480. Sanger stated that at least some of the children at the Randall's Island nurseries were the offspring of prostitutes, see Sanger, *History of Prostitution*, 484.

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worried Townsend's Committee, but they contended that if this was true for Paris then it was probably due to the "lax morality of Parisian society." In any case, they argued, "is the accidental misuse of a humane institution any valid argument against its existence?"[88]

The connection between infant abandonment and prostitution that seemed the most vividly treacherous to them, however, was their belief that the mothers of foundlings, as fallen women, were in danger of falling further into what they believed was the inescapable trap of prostitution. The city officials hoped that their proposed foundling asylum would be able to rescue women from that fate, but by offering to provide a place for fallen women to rid themselves of their babies, they opened themselves up to the accusation that they were promoting sin. The specter of this accusation is raised very often in the literature of New York's foundling asylums and their supporters - it seems to have hit a particularly sensitive nerve. The members of the two committees and their supporters argued vigorously against the accusation that foundling asylums smoothed the way for sexual sinners by providing them with a place to rid themselves of the evidence of their misdeeds. David Meredith Reese told the councilmen that in his opinion a foundling asylum "would have little, if any, effect in encouraging vice." James Wynne, the medical statistician, wielded his statistical tables to prove that "...the causes of illegitimacy lie beyond the influence of foundling hospitals, and are in no way affected by the existence or absence of these establishments. If any argument can be deduced...it is that their presence rather tends to decrease than increase illegitimacy." When the councilmen were asked if a foundling asylum "would not have the effect of relieving seduction and prostitution of one of their repulsive consequences,

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[88] For references to the use of abandoned children as prostitutes in Rome, see Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 112-113. Robins states that from one third to one quarter of the inmates of the Magdalen Asylum in Dublin had been raised in the city's foundling asylum or the charter schools, and girls from the foundling asylum in Cork often became prostitutes. Robins, *Charity Children*, 51, 58. Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, xlix.

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and thereby tend to increase these practices" they countered with Dr. Wynne's conclusions. Townsend's committee combatively claimed that "in demolishing the assertion that Foundling Hospitals have a tendency to encourage licentiousness, one fact is worth a thousand theories." They then presented not one, but a string of facts and asked "whether even the records of that noble institution, the Sunday School, can produce a more cheering picture." It was the absence of foundling hospitals, not their presence, Townsend and his colleagues concluded, that led to "the commission of graver offences: intentional abortion, child murder, and all the evils, frequently death itself, resulting to the woman, who has no asylum to hide her shame and amend her life."[89]

6. Mary Du Bois, the Nursery for the Children of Poor Women, and the London Foundling Hospital.

Despite their avowed commitment to the participation of women in the new foundling hospital, the only woman the committeemen asked for advice was Mary Du Bois, founder and "first directress" of the Nursery and Child's Hospital. Mary Delafield Du Bois was born in 1815, the daughter of a well-to-do businessman and banker. Du Bois's father (and later, her husband) provided her with important ties to the city's mercantile elite. Her older half-brother, physician Edward Delafield, tied her to the city's elite medical community. Dr. Delafield was a consulting physician at his sister's Nursery from its founding in 1854 until his death twenty years later. These years overlapped with his tenure as president of the prestigious College of Physicians and Surgeons. The children and parturient women of the Nursery benefitted from Delafield's medical

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[89] "Proposition for a Foundling Hospital in New York," *New York Herald*, December 12, 1857. Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 3, 4. Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, lxxx, lxxxi, lxxxii. New Yorkers did not invent the idea that foundling hospitals promoted sin - this was one of the many ideas about foundlings and foundling institutions that they borrowed from Europe. See, for instance, Ulbricht, "Debate about Foundling Hospitals," 247.

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specialties in obstetrics and ophthalmology (institutionalized children were particularly prone to eye diseases, such as the ophthalmia John Griscom found at Long Island Farms). They may also have gained from whatever compassion Delafield learned from the catastrophes of his first marriage. All six children born during that marriage predeceased him, as did his wife.[90]

Mary Du Bois was raised in New York and educated at the Litchfield Female Academy in Connecticut. The Litchfield Female Academy was one of many new schools, including schools for girls, founded after the American revolution to create educated citizens for the new republic. In addition to feminine training in needlework, painting and dancing, the school offered girls like Mary Delafield a relatively rich offering of academic subjects. This was the sort of education that could make an intelligent and ambitious girl like Mary Delafield (and author Catharine Beecher, another Litchfield alumna) restless and dissatisfied in a world that could only imagine a future for her consisting of wifely duties, motherhood, and domestic seclusion.

The Academy also offered proximity to the marriageable young men of the Litchfield Law School. It was there that she met her husband, Cornelius Du Bois, also a member of a New York mercantile family. After their marriage the Du Boises settled in

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[90] Delafield was president of the College of Physicians and Surgeons from1858 to1875. He was a founder of the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary in 1820, and a founder and first president of the American Ophthalmological Society. At the College of Physicians and Surgeons he held the chair of obstetrics and diseases of women and children. He married a second time and his child from that marriage was physician Francis Delafield (1841-1915). Obituary of Edward Delafield, *New York Times*, February 15, 1875, 4:7. "Edward Delafield (1794-1875), DAMB. Edward Delafield's obituary in the *Times* describes his father, John Delafield, as a man who "for many years held a high position in the mercantile community of New York." For Delafield's association with the Nursery see the list of consulting and attending physicians of the Nursery and Child's Hospital, in NCH, annual report, 1886, 32. For a reference to his presidency of the Nursery's medical board see NCH, annual report, 1875, 25. In 1865 Delafield was elected to be president of another of New York's foundling asylums, the New York Infant Asylum. See NYIA, minutes, March 27, 1865.

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the genteel neighborhood of Gramercy Park, where they raised their three children.[91]

In 1854 Mary Du Bois founded the Nursery and Child's Hospital. The Nursery, which was at first called the Nursery for the Children of Poor Women, was originally intended for the children of wet-nurses and other poor working women.[92] Poor women who made ends meet by hiring themselves out to work as live-in wet-nurses for well-to-do families often had to place their own babies with even poorer women. The result was that wet-nurses' babies often died of malnourishment, mistreatment, or disease. At least one physician of this period believed that "As a rule, all infants of wet-nurses die, and generally from neglect."[93] Needing wet-nurses itself, the Nursery, early on, began admitting some of these women, with their babies, and required them to feed one additional baby along with their own.

Mary Du Bois modeled the Nursery on New York's many existing woman-headed charities. These charities, many of them founded in the afterglow of the evangelical revivals of the first decades of the nineteenth century, typically aided poor

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[91] For Mary Du Bois' background and education see Virginia A. Metaxas Quiroga, *Poor Mothers and Babies: A Social History of Childbirth and Child Care Hospitals in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (New York: Garland, 1989), 59-60. For the Litchfield Female Academy, also known as Miss Pierce's School, see Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, chapter seven and Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), 15-19. Catherine Beecher also went to the Academy, starting in 1810. For Cornelius Du Bois's background see Quiroga, *Poor Mothers and Babies*, 59. An 1804 newspaper advertisement shows a shopkeeper named Cornelius Du Bois doing business on New York's Front Street. Mary Du Bois's husband was born in 1810, so this may have been a relative. *New York Evening Post* June 14, 1804.

[92] Charter, The Nursery for the Children of Poor Women, 1854, [3].

[93] This remark was made to Mary Du Bois by the physician she first consulted when she began to plan the Nursery. See Du Bois, "Thirty Years," 15. Du Bois does not name the physician, but he was probably George T. Elliot, who afterwards worked with her at the Nursery and Child's Hospital. Elliot himself later wrote that the Nursery and Child's Hospital "originated in a conversation in my office with Mrs. Du Bois." *Medical Record* 3, 1868, 427.

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women and children. Their chief officers were women, some of whom took the title "first directress," as Mary Du Bois did and, like the Nursery, were administered by all-woman boards of managers.

One such organization to which the Nursery had links was the New York Asylum for Lying-In Women, a maternity hospital for poor married women, founded in 1823. Both Anna Emmet, one of the Nursery's charter managers, and Dr. George T. Elliot's wife (her own name is unlisted) took leadership roles at the Lying-In asylum, as "directress" and manager, respectively.[94] The American Female Guardian Society, for which Samuel Halliday worked as a missionary, was another organization run by women of the middle and upper classes for the benefit of poor women and children. Its "Home for the Friendless," founded in 1847 to shelter young women - the "yet unfallen" - and children from the dangers of the city resembled what Mary Du Bois attempted at the Nursery.[95]

The roles that women took on at charities like these were, to them, an antidote to the civil impotence that law and custom normally imposed on women in a public world that was run by men. In the 1820s and 1830s when the New York Asylum for Lying-In Women and the American Female Guardian Society were founded, women could not vote, serve on juries, run for political office, or train for and practice the great majority of professions. When a woman married, her property passed into the control of her husband. Any money she earned belonged to her husband. If she was divorced or

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[94] Lying-In Asylum: *Valentine's Manual*, 1857, 277; James J. Walsh, *History of Medicine in New York: Three Centuries of Medical Progress* (New York: National Americana Society), 1919, 825-826. *Valentine's Manual* for 1857 lists other organizations that adhere to this pattern. These include: The Association for the Relief of Respectable Aged and Indigent Females, 276; Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans, 282-282; Colored Home, 282; and the Magdalen Female Benevolent Asylum, 287-288. All of these organizations assisted poor women, children, or the elderly.

[95] Halliday, *Lost and Found*, 237-239. The American Female Guardian Society was originally called the New York Female Moral Reform Society and was founded in1834.

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widowed, she frequently lost custody of her children to her husband or a male guardian. By the time the Nursery was founded in 1854, New York's Married Woman's Property Act had been in place for six years. The act allowed women to revive somewhat from the "civil death" that marriage had traditionally condemned them to. But while the bonds were loosened, they were not really untied, and in the nineteenth century both law and custom continued to limit women's actions in the public realm.[96]

The world of antebellum female charity, in whose traditions the Nursery was rooted, could be a liberating environment for the (mostly) married women who ran these organizations. When women founded charities and had them chartered by the state, they acquired rights, as members of a genderless corporation, that they did not have as individuals. They could buy land, sign leases, order the construction of buildings, manage personnel, and control funds. They also gained the confidence to claim their constitutional right to petition legislators. Representatives of New York's women's charities regularly traveled to Albany to convince members of the state legislature to charter their organizations, grant them funds, and pass laws that favored their goals.

The charities organized by women in cities during the antebellum years evolved over the course of the century into what was virtually a national welfare system, the country's first. These organizations, fueled by the unpaid labor of married, middle-class women took on work left undone in a country with no established church and no national tradition of charity. In New York City, where there were so many poor strangers because of the city's status as the country's foremost port of entry for immigrants, the city and state were particularly willing to delegate the work of succor to private, religious charities. In this environment ambitious, sometimes educated women like Mary Du Bois

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[96] On women's legal status in colonial and antebellum America see Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, especially chapters four and five, and Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

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took on their duties like a force unleashed.[97]

In 1856 the Nursery added a children's hospital. In temporary quarters for two years, the renamed Nursery and Child's Hospital, with assistance from city and state, moved to new buildings on Fifty-first Street and Lexington Avenue in 1858.[98] The Nursery also sprouted some auxiliary functions. By 1859 it had established a free, public dispensary, attached to the hospital. For the benefit of the poor mothers living in its wards (as well as for the city's middle- to upper-class women who were continually in search of good help) the Nursery opened a "servants' school" and a placement service for wet-nurses. The servants' school also took a few additional students, girls aged twelve and older, from the Children's Aid Society.[99]

The Nursery was pathbreaking in that it was the first institution for children in New York to admit infants and young children under two or three. Du Bois was more conservative in her attitude toward foundlings and other illegitimate babies, whom she at first refused to admit. The reality, however, was that wet-nurses, the very women Du

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[97] I primarily owe this interpretation of the empowering role of charities on the women who ran them to Kathleen McCarthy. For her most succinct statement of it, see: McCarthy, "Women, Politics." For more on women's charities: Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984);; Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women, Culture, and Community: Religion and Reform in Galveston, 1880-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). For New York's willingness to fund private, including religious, charities, see Folks, *Care of Destitute*, 1970, chapter seven, "The System of Public Support in Private Institutions."

[98] For the move to the new Lexington Avenue buildings see NCH, annual report, 1858, 2 and "Inauguration of the Nursery and Child's Hospital," [1858].

[99] For the wet-nurses' placement service see "Rules in Relation to Wet-nurses Employed by the Nursery," NCH, annual report, 1854, 13-16. For the dispensary and servants' school, NCH, annual report, 1859, 3.

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Bois wanted to help, were very often single mothers. These women, wanted or not, appeared with their babies at the Nursery's door. According to Du Bois, the "pitiable condition" of their babies caused her to relax her restriction against illegitimates. This change in policy also applied to foundlings since Du Bois assumed, like many others, that foundlings were necessarily illegitimate.[100]

Du Bois later regretted the Nursery's initial decision to exclude foundlings. "Can it be believed," she wrote at her institution's twenty-fifth anniversary, "that when the Nursery was founded, our minds were so narrow, our hearts so numb, that we turned away the 'waifs and strays,' so much more to be pitied than those who had mothers– however poor and destitute....The very thought of that time of strict rule, is the only blot which causes a blush to rise as we review our record of charity."[101]

Mary Du Bois's experience running New York's only institution that accepted infants was probably what made the city officials tap her for advice. The three-man Councilmen's committee even left their rooms at City Hall to pay a visit to the Nursery and Child's Hospital on St. Mark's Place and were pleased with what they found there.[102] But it was not her own experiences that Mary Du Bois presented when she testified before the Councilmen's Committee. Instead, Mary Du Bois, like Isaac Townsend, looked to the London Foundling Hospital as an important model for her work. It was not art and music that attracted her, but the Hospital's moral values. She tried to make these a part of the policies of the Nursery, and she hoped the Councilmen would do the same at their proposed foundling asylum.

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[100] On the Nursery's initial refusal to admit illegitimates and Du Bois's change of heart see Du Bois, "Thirty Years," 20 and "Petition of the First Directress of the Nursery and Child's Hospital...," in NCH, annual report, 1868, [20].

[101] NCH, annual report, 1879, 7.

[102] For the councilmen's field trip to the Nursery see Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 4, where they refer to it themselves.

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Unlike foundling asylums in Catholic countries, which, for the most part, accepted all foundlings offered anonymously and indiscriminately, the London Foundling Asylum never had enough room or enough money to support all the babies that women in London and its surrounding area would have liked to abandon. The difference had to do with funding and government commitment. While foundling asylums in countries like France and Italy were funded by the government, the London Foundling Hospital was privately run and, except for a few years in the mid-eighteenth century when the government experimentally stepped in to support it, privately funded.

In 1742, one year after it opened, the London Foundling Hospital put in place an admissions procedure in order to discriminate between worthy and unworthy applicants. Part of the procedure involved a system of ballots in the form of black, white, and red balls. Women who wanted the Hospital to relieve them of their babies assembled at the Hospital on an appointed day, were seated on benches placed around the walls of one of the Hospital's beautifully decorated rooms, and chose a ball. Those who chose white balls were allowed to hand over their babies (if the babies could pass a medical examination); those who chose black balls were sent away; and those who chose red balls could draw again if any spaces were left at the end of what must have been the most excruciatingly suspenseful process imaginable.

In 1763 the governors of the London Foundling Hospital added a layer of complexity to their already uncomfortable admissions process. Now they began making applicants petition for the right to have their babies admitted before they were allowed to advance to the balloting phase. Women had to answer a series of questions on a printed form and appear for an interview with a committee of Hospital governors. Applicants, most of whom were poor young women working as domestic servants, were required to provide the hospital's governors with information about their babies' fathers and, humiliatingly, details about the sexual relationships that had produced the babies. They had to demonstrate that they felt an appropriate degree of shame over what they had done

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(a woman could demonstrate her shame by proving that she had striven to keep her pregnancy secret). And they had to prove - testimonial letters were submitted for this purpose - that they had enough support from families or employers to get back on their feet again. The collection of this kind of information signaled a shift in the hospital's goals. Instead of simply seeking to save the lives of infants abandoned on the street - Thomas Coram's original aim - the London Foundling Hospital adopted the new mission of reforming fallen women. With only limited space available, the Hospital chose its babies based on their mothers' ability to prove to the governors that they could be restored to "a course of Industry and Virtue." When in 1801 the hospital ruled that from then onward only illegitimate babies would be received it further cemented its commitment to the reform of fallen women.[103]

Mary Du Bois eschewed the ceremony and paraphernalia of the London Foundling Hospital, but she retained its spirit in the admissions policies she formulated for the Nursery. One significant difference was that while the London Foundling Hospital firmly separated mothers and babies, the Nursery admitted mothers with their babies if they agreed to breast-feed their own and one other child. To be admitted to the Nursery with their babies women had to be of "previously good character" and penitent. This meant that women pregnant with a second illegitimate child would not be admitted.

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[103] For descriptions of the London Foundling Hospital's admissions process see McClure, *Coram's Children*, 76-78 and 139-144 and Outhwaite, "'Objects of Charity'." Bern Weisbrod describes it with particular insight, see "How to Become a Good Foundling in Early Victorian London," *Social History* 10 (Mary 1985),198-203. Weisbrod compares this entrance process, with all its ceremony and requirements of sexual revelation, as a kind of symbolic "commitment ceremony" at which women formally confessed their shame and renounced claim to their children. He also shows how the hospital's carefully delineated rules of admission had the effect of defining exactly what a "good foundling" was. Weisbrod even suggests that "preserving the lives of innocent infants born out of wedlock, as Captain Coram had wished, had become an object of only secondary importance" at this point, 206. Other historians have used these petitions as a source of information about poor women in eighteenth- and nineteenth- century London. See Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria* and Gillis, "Servants, Sexual Relations."

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Mary Du Bois defended this policy with an acknowledgment that not every woman could be reformed: "[W]hen we refuse (as we *must*) to open our doors to unmarried women in their second confinements," she wrote, "we see that there is 'in the lowest deep, a lower deep.'"[104]

Shame was important to Mary Du Bois and the lady mangers of the Nursery, just as it was to the governors of the London Foundling Hospital, since it was the quality, she and the others believed, that made these women worth saving. Alice T. Barlow, an officer of the Nursery, suggested that it was only the unmarried mothers with the finer sensibilities, those capable of feeling shame at their condition, who were driven to murder their illicitly born children. "[I]t is well known," she wrote, "that it is not by the lowest or most degraded that the crime of infanticide is oftenest committed: it is those in whose breasts the sense of shame is not only not wholly dead, but on whom it inflicts its keenest pangs, that this temptation so often haunts and finally overpowers." The almshouse, Mary Du Bois claimed, was good enough for those women "who have no shame or modesty left which would prevent their seeking refuge in a public charity."

Here Du Bois was referring to unmarried women who chose not to abandon their babies, but instead to reveal their plight to the almshouse and openly take advantage of its assistance. For poor, solitary mothers, whether unmarried, widowed, or abandoned by their husbands, the almshouse provided alternatives to abandonment. Many women chose to enter the almshouse along with their babies rather than leave them anonymously on streets and doorsteps.

The records of the almshouse reveal the presence of many mother-infant pairs. In 1852 the almshouse warden complained that "we have constantly from 80 to 100 women with infants in the institution who require facilities for washing *daily*."[105] In 1859 the

[104] NCH, annual report, 1880, 7. See also "Petition," in NCH, annual report, 1868, 22-23.

[105] AH, annual report, 1852, 3.

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almshouse's population included

> Women with infants, some of them very respectable, and most of them married, whose husbands have either abandoned them, or are, through sickness, misfortune, or unwillingness to work, not able to support them and their children. These women are generally very useful, doing nearly all the washing and scrubbing, and are entitled to be well taken care of.[106]

After the Civil War, when the almshouse opened, first, a separate "Infant Department" and then a foundling hospital of its own, mothers with their own babies made up a substantial part of the population.[107]

Mothers who were unmarried could take advantage of the almshouse's obligation to provide for illegitimates by extracting support from their babies' fathers. Those lucky enough to have someplace to live could apply to the almshouse for funds and remain at home and nurse their babies themselves. The nursing paybooks the almshouse kept to record their bi-weekly payments to nurses show that in many cases the babies' nurses were their own mothers.[108] In order to make this system work for them, however, unmarried mothers had to expose their plight to the almshouse authorities and name the fathers of their babies. Many did so rather than sink into the destitution that might have forced them to abandon their children.

This was the choice made by Mary Harned whose "natural daughter," Ann Louisa Harned, was the product of a liaison with the appropriately named Philander Worden. Ann, born in 1814, was at nurse with her mother on Mulberry Street.[109] Baby Elizabeth Levy, born in 1828, the "natural child" of Abner Levy and Mary Ann Tway was also at

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[106]AH, annual report, 1859, 7. For another reference to women with nursing children in the almshouse, see AH, annual report, 1856, 4.

[107] PCC, annual report, 1866, 98.

[108] For records of unmarried mothers nursing their own babies with help from the city see AH Children's Records, vols. 0123, ca.1815-1820 (which also includes records for children born as early as 1809) and 0149, 1829-1832.

[109] Ann Louisa Harned, Almshouse Childrens Records, vol.0123, p.141.

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nurse with her mother. What appears to have happened here is that Elizabeth's father lost his right to charity from the city's small Jewish community when he formed an alliance with a Christian woman and fathered their children outside of marriage. Alienation from one's ethnic group was yet another way that a parent, in this case a father, could fall outside the traditional social safety net.[110]

There was yet another alternative for unmarried mothers who did not want to abandon their babies. They could have the almshouse use the money it retrieved from their former lovers in the form of "bastardy bonds" to pay for wet-nurses so that they could return to work themselves. This was the route taken by Sarah Jane Hannah, the unmarried mother of William Henry Niblo. William's father, William Niblo, was very likely the same William Niblo who established his fame and made his fortune on Niblo's Gardens, the complex of restaurants, theaters, and hotels that opened in 1828 at the corner of Broadway and Prince streets.

Baby William Henry was born in 1816 when the elder Niblo was twenty-seven years old, newly arrived from Ireland, and working at a coffee house on Pine Street. He may have arrived in New York with cash in hand, or else he early began demonstrating his talent for earning, since in 1818 he paid the almshouse the unusually large sum of $300 to care for his illegitimate son. Niblo married a woman named Martha King - whether he was already married to her or not at the time the baby was born is unclear. The baby's mother, Sarah Jane Hannah, may have been the same "Miss Hanna" who, an advertisement in a New York newspaper states, was performing in the circus in 1827.

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[110] Elizabeth Levy, AH Children's Records, vol. 0149, p.19. Something similar seems to have happened to Emmeline and Solomon Seixas, the "natural" children of Susan Wheeler, who was probably not Jewish, and Isaac Seixas, who probably was. This couple applied to the almshouse in 1809. AH Children's Records, vol.214, pp.265 and 302. New York's Sephardic Jewish community included Levy and Seixas families. See Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America, Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 1989, 28-31 and 64.

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Such performances were standard fare at Niblo's Gardens, which may explain how young William Henry came to be conceived. Hannah was evidently committed to her work, since the unusual size of the bastardy bond the almshouse collected for her did not stop her from placing her baby with a nurse, presumably so she could return to the stage.[111]

A committed member of the city's demimonde like Sarah Jane Hannah was not the kind of woman Mary Du Bois was interested in helping. The women she sought to receive at the Nursery were a different breed, not, she suggested, the common run of immigrant slum dwellers, and certainly not acrobats in tights, but instead previously virtuous country girls who came to hide their accidental pregnancies in "the vortex of the city." These American-born women, in her opinion, possessed the moral sensitivity needed to understand the blackness of the crime they had committed. They were women whose "dread of discovery is greater than their love of life..."[112]

Mary Du Bois presented the Councilmen's committee with an "interesting statement of the Foundling Hospital in London, an institution similar to which she deems will be adapted to the city of New York," the committeemen reported. Du Bois described the "strict discrimination" practiced in London, and argued that in New York, as in London, there "must be a strong probability the reception of the child will be the means of rescuing the mother from that course of sin and shame on the brink of which she

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[111] The case of William Henry Niblo is in AH Children's Records, vol. 0123, p.312 and vol.0161, February 18, 1820. The records begin on September 18, 1818 when William Henry is almost two. On William Niblo and Niblo's Gardens see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 585; Jackson, *Encyclopedia of New York City*, "Niblo's Gardens"; "William Niblo (1789-1878)," DAB; Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, 2:490, 546, 605 and 3:372, 540-541. Niblo was in New York by 1816, see the listing for him at 45 Pine Street in *Longworth's American Almanac , New York Register and City Directory* (New York: David Longworth, 1816). According to the *DAB* the coffee house Niblo apprenticed at in these years was at 43 Pine Street. There are several Hannas listed in this directory, but no Sarah. For "Miss Hanna" see Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, 3:295.

[112] Alice Barlow, NCH, annual report, 1866, 6; Mary Du Bois, "Petition," in NCH, annual report,1868, 23.

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stands."[113]

Two of the councilmen's advisors did not agree with Mary Du Bois's easy conflation of foundlinghood with illegitimacy. One of these was Samuel Halliday. Halliday presented the Councilmen's committee with the information that not more than one-quarter to one-third of almshouse infants were illegitimate. In light of that fact he recommended calling the new institution by the neutral name of "Infant Home" rather than "Foundling Hospital." Meredith Reese similarly maintained that legitimately-born children should not be housed in an institution that was publicly identified as a foundling hospital. He argued that the city should establish two institutions, one called the "Foundling Hospital," and the other the "Infant Home" so that the legitimate children could be, in effect, quarantined from the illegitimate. He made both medical and moral arguments to support this suggestion. Half of all illegitimate children, he claimed, "were born constitutionally diseased, and it would be imprudent to allow healthy children to live with them." Not to speak, he added, "of the odium which would attach through life to any one who should emanate from a Foundling Hospital."[114] The councilmen adopted Halliday and Reese's suggestion for a name - they called the foundling asylum they decided to build the "Infant's Home" - yet they gutted it of meaning, since the new Infant's Home was to be specifically for illegitimate children.

Of all the advisors who provided the committeemen with material for study or testified before their meetings, the one who appears to have had the most influence was Mary Du Bois. In late November, 1858 the Councilman's Committee recommended building its Infant's Home on city-owned lots adjacent to the Nursery's own newly erected building on Fifty-first Street between Lexington and Third Avenues, in the

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[113] Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 4-5.

[114] For Halliday's testimony see Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 6; for Reese's, 4.

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northern, still sparsely populated reaches of Manhattan. $25,000 were to be allotted for the project. Administration of the publicly funded Infant's Home was to be handed over entirely to the Nursery and Child's Hospital, and the Nursery's rules would be duplicated at the Infant's Home. Unlike the London Foundling Hospital, where mothers were firmly separated from their babies so that they could get started on the road to redemption, the Infant's Home, like the Nursery and Child's Hospital, admitted mothers if they agreed to work in the Nursery as wet-nurses, feeding their own baby along with one motherless one. At the Infant's Home, as at the Nursery, mothers would learn to mend their ways by emulating the moral example set by the lady managers - middle- to upper-class women like Mary Du Bois and Arabella Mott. Yet like the London Foundling Hospital, the Infant's Home would admit only those babies whose mothers could demonstrate their candidacy for "entire reform."[115]

7. The Murder of the Innocents.

Only a few months after the Councilmen's Committee resolved to build their Infant's Home the newspapers focused once again on precisely the same territory that Mott and Halliday had covered in 1857 - the homes of the poor women who worked for the almshouse as nurses for its foundlings and other babies. The incident that attracted the papers' attention this time occurred in late January or early February, 1859. A gentleman named J.W. Barker took a policeman and went to visit the home of a servant, Mary Cullough, to retrieve some stolen household items.[116] What Barker saw at Cullough's apartment on East Thirty-fourth Street made him forget his lost bedclothes

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[115] Galpin, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*, 7-8.

[116] Mary Cullough's name sometimes appears as Carlock in the press coverage of the incident, probably an interpretation of how her name was pronounced. I am presuming that her name was Cullough. Other names are similarly garbled, often appearing more than one way in the same article.

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and shirt collars: on dirty beds in Cullough's apartment were three ill and starving babies apparently at the point of death. All three were almshouse babies, and Mary Cullough, in addition to the domestic day labor she performed in Barker's home, was an almshouse nurse.

Horace Greeley's crusading *New York Tribune* was the first to run the story, and it made the most of it. Under the headline "Murder of the Innocents," the *Tribune* described the children's condition:

> They were found in a dark room! They reeked with filth, strangers to fresh water! Their beds, and their rags stank with foulness! They had not strength to cry! Not even if pinched! They were motionless with exhaustion! Their limbs were shrunk to an inch in diameter, and their hands looked like bird's claws! One of the little innocents, in the agonies of starvation, had sucked its arm to an unnatural shape! They had evidently been drugged! Their eyes were idiotic and ghastly! And all within a stone's throw of the palaces! Do you hear, mothers, who live in the great houses–close beside you–systematized child-murder by slow degrees![117]

"And now," the *Tribune* concluded, "shall we have a reform, or only a spasm of horror?" The *Tribune*, as well as the other papers that reported on the incident, made much of the

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[117] "Murder of the Innocents," *New York Tribune*, February 5, 1859. It wasn't until the 1870s that the baby-farming scandal fully erupted in England and the United States. New Yorkers could read about the scandal's progress in England in their own press. See for instance: "Slaughter of the Innocents. Baby Farming in England–A Description of the Business–Some Startling Statements," *New York Times*, August 20, 1871. The New York press published articles about the abuses of baby farmers in New York from the 1870s into the early twentieth century. A sampling of such articles from the *New York Times* includes: "Slaughter of the Innocents," August 6, 1874; "Baby Farming Practices. Evils to Which They Lead," July 22, 1880; "The City's Baby Farms," February 23, 1887; "Trafficked in Babies at Five Dollars A Head. Woman Charged with Farming Out 700 Infants," July 19, 1905. Even though baby-farming had not yet developed into a fullblown scandal in the late 1850s when the two city foundling committees were meeting, they were aware of the dangers present in the homes of baby farmers. While Alexander Mott was giving his testimony the president of the board of city councilmen walked into the room and stated his belief that "children put out to nurse were notoriously and most abominably treated..." "The Projected Foundling Hospital," *New York Times*, June 9, 1858.

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baby who sucked on its arm, apparently to relieve a sore. The heavy symbolism of this was not lost on *Harper's Weekly*, which reported that the resulting "excrescence" could be compared to a "female nipple," access to which was the very thing this baby lacked.[118]

The governors of the almshouse - who had just devoted so much effort to rectifying this very problem - were furious at the *Tribune* for exposing this lapse. Less than a week after the article came out the governors met and heard affadavits gathered from witnesses to Mary Cullough's good character. The witnesses included neighbors; a fifteen-year-old girl who worked for Cullough caring for the children; Aletta Frost, a "visitor" the almshouse governors had appointed to check up on the babies at nurse around the city; William Bevins, a doctor who had visited the apartment to see the babies; and even a woman who kept cows in the Yorkville section of the Upper East Side of Manhattan who supplied Cullough with milk.

Almshouse governor Washington Smith - who had been a member of Isaac Townsend's three-man foundling committee only a year earlier and was now the chair of the department's Committee on Outdoor Poor - gave the longest and most passionate defense of his department. Referring to the *Tribune*'s description of the baby who sucked its arm and raised what looked like a nipple, Smith attacked the paper for its sentimental manipulation of this gruesome manifestation: "Now, how perfectly figurative this is, how perfectly figurative!" he raged, "It is a beautiful theme to go to the tender-hearted mother and kind parent and harrow up the feelings of each and every one of them, and of every person who has a sympathy for these little suffering ones of the city." Smith argued that if the babies the almshouse farmed out to city nurses were sickly, that was how they were received and it was not the fault of the nurses or of the department. "Every member of this Board knows," he ranted,

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[118] "How the Alms-House Children are Reared," *Harper's Weekly*, February 19, 1859, 117.

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> and every gentleman who visits this department, if they will observe, knows that we have many children brought here who are constitutionally diseased; many of them are almost perfectly destroyed with scrofula or with syphilis from their parents; so that when you take them up into your hands you have nothing but a putrefying mass of sores; I have witnessed that myself.

Dr. William Bevins, the doctor who had visited Mary Cullough, seconded Smith's impression. He testified that he believed that Cullough was so trusted a nurse that the city gave her the most hopeless children to care for. Most of the children in her charge died, he revealed, but "I did not consider it her fault," he told the governors, "her children were *debilitated*..."[119]

Governor Smith angrily suggested, and his colleagues concurred, that the *Tribune* publish the proceedings of their meeting with its testimony on behalf of Mary Cullough. The *Tribune* did so, but they also assembled their own witnesses for the other side, resurrected William Mott and Samuel Halliday's report of two years earlier (which the two investigators, on reading the *Tribune*'s first article about the case, visited the paper's office to deliver on their own initiative) and published the whole thing under the following headline: "The Murder of the Innocents. Revenge of the Governors. Abusive Tirades Against the Press. The Other Side. Children are Crucified. Disease, Dirt and Death."[120] The witnesses the *Tribune* assembled included a group of neighbors less friendly to Cullough than those the almshouse governors had found, plus some the governors had already heard, including the almshouse visitor Aletta Frost and Catharine MacMahon, the Yorkville dairywoman, this time giving somewhat different stories. The portrait of Cullough this group of neighbors collectively painted was of a woman who

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[119] "The Murder of the Innocents. Defense of the Governors...," *New York Tribune*, February 9, 1859. The doctors name is given as Bibbins, Bevins, and Beviss. I chose Bevins as the most likely possibility.

[120] "The Murder of the Innocents," *New York Tribune*, February 9, 1859. For Halliday's account of his and Mott's delivery of their report, see Halliday, *Little Street Sweeper*, 156.

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drank, had a violent temper, entertained bad company late at night and mistreated the children she took from the almshouse.

One of Cullough's neighbors reported that she had bragged about being able to get as many children to nurse from the city as she wanted. Cullough evidently accomplished this with bribery. The neighbor, Mrs. McCartee, claimed that Cullough had bought a scarf with a "bad two dollar bill" and used it to pay off "some one who had something to do with giving out the children." This practice was evidently not limited to Mary Cullough. Mrs. McCartee testified that another woman who lived in the building also worked as a nurse for the almshouse and that she, Mrs. McCartee, had lent this woman fifty cents which she afterwards saw the woman give "to the person who carries out the children from the Hall."[121] It would be a decade before the Tweed Ring reached the height of its power, but bribery's greasy give and take was already oiling the wheels of New York's municipal machinery. From the testimony of Mrs. McCartee it appears that the almshouse's system for boarding its foundlings with poor women depended, like so much else that made the city run, on graft.

The *Tribune* also heard from Cullough herself. In the midst of the accusations made against her, Cullough's statements about herself are oddly unemotional, suggesting the practiced poise of the habitual malefactor, skilled at dodging uncomfortable questions or, just as likely, the exhausted apathy of a woman beaten down by life. She made no effort to defend herself against her accusers, but instead offered that she was separated from her husband, a drunkard, and that she had one child of her own. In addition to her work for the almshouse department, she explained, she did washing for Mr. Barker and other households. She made no effort to refute Barker's accusation that she had robbed his house.

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[121] "The Murder of the Innocents," *New York Tribune*, February 9, 1859. The "Hall" referred to here is city hall.

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Amidst this tangle of conflicting stories, it is difficult to know if Mary Cullough was the murderer her accusers said she was, or if she was doing the best she could in difficult conditions and according to her own less than genteel standards. That her life was difficult is testified to by the fact that she was poor enough to take in babies from the almshouse for the paltry fee of one dollar per week (a rate, the *Times* bitterly remarked, "at which it would not be easy to keep a thoroughbred pointer in perfect condition") and to give in to the temptation to steal odd items of clothing from Mr. Barker's laundry.[122]

On the Saturday after this article appeared Washington Smith, still not satisfied that the reputation of his department had been restored, led a small delegation on a tour of the homes of the women hired by the almshouse department to care for its abandoned babies. The group of seven was led by Smith and Henry Boswell, the department's "baby clerk." Reporters were invited from the *New York Times* and the *New York Tribune*, and assorted almshouse officials also attended. What they discovered was very much the same as what Mott and Halliday had found two years earlier. Some children were in as poor shape as those found in Mary Cullough's apartment. On Third Street the delegation entered a building whose ground floor was occupied by a liquor shop - a marker, to any urban reformer of this era, of the evil of intemperance. They climbed to the top floor, on the way up becoming increasingly overwhelmed by the stenches "altogether too complicated to be analyzed" and unnerved at the sight of the "dirty and curious faces" who peeked out from behind doors to see them ascend. At the top they were greeted by what the *Times*'s reporter called a "dirty Irishwoman." She showed them into her dimly lit and imperfectly cleaned room where the group found two almshouse babies in advanced stages of illness. Horrified, the group fled back down the stairs. "The sight," the *Times*'s reporter wrote, "with the close, damp air of the room,

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[122] Material for the above section comes from "The Slaughter of the Innocents," *New York Times*, February 17, 1859, unless otherwise noted. On city patronage jobs in New York in the 1840s and 1850s see Spann, *New Metropolis*, 350-351.

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was sickening, and the pure atmosphere outside, which was reached as speedily as possible, was the best and surest relief."[123]

In other homes it was apparent that the babies were as healthy, happy and comfortable as these poor families could make them. Mrs. Ward, a "woman of very respectable appearance" kept her home on Avenue C tidy and "tolerably clean." Her oldest child cried when the visitors lifted almshouse baby Rachel Logan out of her cradle to be inspected. The child had grown attached to Rachel and feared she would be taken away from them. On East Thirteenth Street twenty-month-old John McMahon was "dirty and fat; eating beefsteak and screaming between mouthfuls. Well enough off," the *Tribune* observed drily.

A Mr. Goss, whose children's hair was uncombed and whose table was piled with dirty dishes, was proud of the progress made by the baby his wife had taken from the almshouse a year earlier. When the delegation asked what the baby was called, the Goss children yelled out "Horace Greeley," causing the visitors to explode in laughter, certainly their only opportunity to do so that day. "'We've taken as good care of it as we have of our own childers'" Goss told them, bouncing the baby up and down. The *Times* described this baby as "stupid" and "sickly-looking," but the *Tribune*'s reporter, perhaps in tribute to his employer, described young Horace as "thriving and fat," and commented that he was "as well cared for as the average of children in that condition of life."[124]

This spate of press attention uncovered not only the welfare of the abandoned babies the almshouse department sent out to nurse, but also the mire of conflicts and animosities that the practice of farming out babies in class-divided, ethnically antagonistic, politically corrupt New York stirred up. Aletta Frost, the visitor the

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[123] "Foundling Babies. How They Are Cared For," *New York Times*, February 14, 1859.

[124] "Foundling Babies," *Times*, February 14, 1859; "The Foundlings of the City. Munificent Charity of New-York," *New York Tribune*, February 14, 1859.

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almshouse department paid to inspect the babies in the homes of their nurses, was viewed as an enemy by the women who nursed for the department. Almshouse nursing was a business for these women and Mrs. Frost had, and used, the power to take away infants and the money they brought in. The fact that she redistributed some of these infants to herself and her own mother doubtless detracted from her popularity. A widow still wearing mourning for her husband, Mrs. Frost was assailed with taunts of "the damned black bitch" when she went into the nurses' neighborhoods. She feared to go there after dark as the women, she said, threatened her life.[125]

The press accounts also hint about threats and suggestions made to the witnesses. Mary Hyde, one of Cullough's neighbors, reported that "a person" visited her to say that if she spoke on behalf of Cullough - which she did - all the neighbors would go against her and it would be "the worse" for her. Her unidentified visitor elaborated that he "did not like to see American women taking part with the low Irish." Aletta Frost received a visit from Samuel Halliday who, demonstrating a surprising facility with the tactics of forceful persuasion, warned her against testifying on Cullough's behalf, arguing that since the almshouse governors had "got themselves into a scrape...let them get out of it the best way they can."

It also appeared that the doctor's statements had been tampered with. Almshouse governor Benjamin Pinckney admitted that Dr. Bevins had been "made to say" that he visited more almshouse children than he really had. This does not take away from Bevins' observations about Mary Cullough, whom he really did visit, but reveals, as do the other threats made over the course of this incident, and the apparently routine bribes that Cullough allegedly offered to almshouse officials, that intimidation and corruption

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[125] The *Tribune* politely reported the epithet the nurses threw at Frost as "the d–d black b–h." I have restored the missing letters. "The Murder of the Innocents," *New York Tribune*, February 9, 1859.

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were a part of the process of placing out almshouse babies.[126]

Tensions between reformist newspapers, such as the *Times* and the *Tribune*, and city government came into play during this incident. Aletta Frost embodied these tensions when she gave a "blowing up," or angry piece of her mind, to the *Tribune* reporter when she happened to meet him in the Jefferson Market courthouse.[127]

Nativist, anti-Irish feeling was integral to this conflict between the reformist press and the municipal machine, which was driven by immigrants' votes. The anti-Irish tone of the Mary Cullough scandal is made explicit by the illustration of a story on the topic that appeared in *Harper's Weekly*. In it Cullough appears gorilla-like, stooped and heavy browed, with clawlike hands, while Mr. Barker and the policeman look entirely human. The artist was employing a standard anti-Irish caricature of this era, the simianized Irishman. English cartoonists and caricaturists first began drawing the Irishman as gorilla in the 1840s, but the practice reached a height in England and the United States in the 1860s and lasted into the twentieth century. Illustrated magazines such as *Harper's* were full of drawings of ferocious Irish men and women with low brows and prognathous jaws.

These drawings were the byproduct of a combustible mixture of science, pseudoscience, and anxious social conditions. Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published in 1859, and even prior to its appearance scientists had begun a debate about the beginnings of life. British scientific expeditions abroad which, among other things, made the English aware of the existence of the gorilla, together with new ideas that linked race with cranial dimensions, combined with older ideas about the relationship of physiognomy to character, all contributed to the atmosphere that made the development

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[126] All of this testimony and information comes from "The Murder of the Innocents," *Tribune*, February 9, 1859.

[127] "The Murder of the Innocents," *Tribune*, February 9, 1859.

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of such an artistic caricature possible. The question of whether humans were descended from Adam and Eve or from the ape was, in a century of unsettling change, one of the most unsettling things for many people to accept. In New York, where genteel native-born Protestants saw the immigrant Irish as a dangerous element (as in Britain where the "wild Irish" were agitating for home rule) it was more comfortable for readers of magazines like *Harper's* or *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* to believe that the Irish, rather than themselves, were descended from apes.[128]

Harper's also slandered the city's poor women, many of them Irish immigrants, in print when it editorialized that: "It is absurd to expect sagacious nursing or liberal treatment from the class of women who, in the city, take Almshouse children to nurse at a dollar a week. They would be false to their condition, and exceptions to their class, if they exhibited a kindliness, generosity, or care to the infants hired out to them. It is natural that they should neglect, and, in most cases, maltreat the poor little creatures." Such "slovenly, besotted, wicked women," the *Tribune* added, could not be trusted to nurse the city's tender infant charges. The *Times* was more sympathetic toward the "poverty-stricken souls upon whom this great Metropolis has thrust the awful responsibilities of a mercenary maternity" but, like the others, it concluded that the system was irreparably broken. The solution, the papers argued, was to remove the city's foundlings from their nurses and place them in a "Foundling Hospital," such as the one the Councilmen's committee had just agreed to build.[129]

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[128] "How the Alms-House Children are Reared," *Harper's Weekly*, February 19, 1859, 117. Thomas Nast, who worked for *Harper's*, drew many simianized Irishmen, but he joined the magazine in 1860, so this drawing, which is unsigned, is probably not by him. For a longer treatment of this theme see L. Perry Curtis, Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971), especially 94-108. For the "gorilla craze" of the 1860s see Curtis, *Apes and Angels*, 99 and Browne, *Darwin: The Power of Place*, 156-160. Darwin himself was often caricatured as a monkey or a gorilla in illustrated magazines during the evolution debate.

[129] "The Foundlings of the City," *New York Tribune*, February 14, 1859; "The Slaughter of the Innocents," *New York Times*," February 17, 1859; "New York as a Nursing

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8. New York's First Foundling Asylum - The Infant's Home.

On a stormy day in December, 1859, a group assembled at the corner of Lexington Avenue and Fifty-first Street to witness the laying of the cornerstone of New York's first foundling asylum, the Infant's Home. Mary Du Bois was nominally in charge of moving the stone into place but, the *New York Times* informed its readers, the hefting was done "really and truly by two laborers." The Rev. Henry Montgomery of the Church of the Incarnation presided over the ceremony, and his address echoed the themes Du Bois had presented to the Councilmen's committee. The soon-to-be built Infant's Home, he told the sparse, shivering group gathered around the cornerstone, was "designed for the illegitimate children of fallen women of previous good character, whose reception into such an asylum would in all probability, be the means of replacing the mother in the course of virtue and in the way of an honest livelihood." These goals were "precisely the same," as those professed by the London Foundling Hospital. The *Times* blamed the poor turnout on the stormy weather - much worse weather for the new institution was soon to threaten.[130]

The first disaster to befall the Infant's Home was the loss of two of its most visionary supporters. In April, 1860 Isaac Townsend died. Mary Du Bois eulogized him, remembering his "kind heart" and lamenting that "he died before his desire [of opening a foundling hospital] was accomplished." Even if Townsend had lived, however, it is not clear what his role at the Infant's Home might have been since in 1860, the year of his death, the city abolished the almshouse department and dismissed its board of governors. In its place the city created a new department to care for its paupers and criminals, the

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Mother," *Harper's Weekly*, February 26, 1859, 130.

[130] "The Infants' Home. Laying of the Corner Stone–Address by Rev. H.E. Montgomery," *New York Times*, December 29, 1859.

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Department of Public Charities and Correction, which was headed by four commissioners appointed by the city comptroller. One of the earliest acts of the new administration was to remove all of its foundlings and other babies from the homes of the poor women who served as their nurses. Since the Infant's Home was still under construction, the babies were all moved to the almshouse on Blackwell's Island. This step appears to have been a response to the depredations uncovered during the Mary Cullough scandal of 1859. Certainly it was a realization of the worst fears of the child who cried when threatened with the possibility of losing her foster sister, almshouse baby Rachel Logan. It must also have been a blow to the many poor women who for years had been used to counting on the almshouse for work nursing abandoned babies.[131]

Then, in January of 1861, Mary Du Bois, in whom the city had entrusted the administration of the Infant's Home, resigned from her post as "first directress," of the Nursery.[132] She gave ill-health as a reason, but the diarist George Templeton Strong, who was her neighbor in Gramercy Park and also the husband of one of the Nursery's managers, Ellen Ruggles Strong, had a more insightful understanding of what was wrong with her. Strong made this observation in his diary:

> Had that lady ordinary health and physical vigor instead of being, as she is, a mere embodiment of "Neurology," a bundle of active diseases and morbid changes of structure, unable to speak but in a whisper, and paralyzed suddenly at intervals by disease of the heart, she'd found a dynasty and die Imperatrix of the United States with a secured succession

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[131] On the reorganization of the almshouse department, see *Sub-Agency History Record.* On the foundlings' move into the almshouse, see PCC, annual report, 1860, 6, and Folks, *Care of Destitute*, 22. Folks guesses that the babies were returned to the almshouse between 1863 and 1866, but the new department's first annual reports pin the date down clearly as the second half of 1860. For Isaac Townsend's death see his obituary: "Death of Mr. Isaac Townsend," *New York Evening Post*, April 2, 1860. For Mary Du Bois's recollection of him see NCH, annual report, 1879, 9.

[132] On Du Bois's retirement see NCH, annual reports,1861, 9-10 (the text of her "farewell letter") and 1865, 7.

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> to her issue, therein probably beating Louis Napoleon. I look with absolute awe on her.[133]

Other observers made similar comments about Du Bois's powerful yet damaged personality. Abraham Jacobi, a physician who came to work at the Nursery during the Civil War, described the "power of that strong and reckless mind, whom so many either know too little or fear too much..."[134] Jacobi may or may not have known about an 1855 incident in which a group of the Nursery's lady managers accused Mary Du Bois of high-handedness. Soon after the Nursery opened a faction on the board protested that they were "never consulted," that "the meetings are only held, that the ladies may approve, but are in no way to express a contrary opinion," and "the Ladies are reluctant to express an opinion at the meeting lest they should be considered *personal* or lest they should be *put down* or made to feel uncomfortable and therefore, though the ladies disapprove, they never speak--" Du Bois countered with blind bravado: "I think I can look around me with confidence," she replied to her accusers, "and feel there must be very *few* who *imagine* I could wish to put *any* one down or make any one uncomfortable."[135]

Strong's description of Mary Du Bois's condition sounds like what neurologist George M. Beard would, after the Civil War, term "neurasthenia." Neurasthenia was the name applied to the vague yet debilitating collection of physical and psychological symptoms experienced by significant numbers of women beginning around the middle of the nineteenth century. Neurasthenics had fainting fits, headaches, bouts of weakness, and other incapacitating symptoms that could not be explained by the presence of any

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[133] George Templeton Strong, *Diary of George Templeton Strong*, ed. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (New York: Octagon Books, 1974), 2:263-264.

[134] Abraham Jacobi, "In Re the Nursery and Child's Hospital," in Golden, *Infant Asylums*, 166.

[135] The complaints of Du Bois's accusers and her own reply are written out in Du Bois's handwriting in a document titled "Mrs. Van Buren charge 1855." New York Nursery and Child's Hospital Records, New-York Historical Society.

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disease that physicians of that era could identify. For women like Mary Du Bois, neurasthenia might be explained as a physical manifestation of the ambivalence that resulted when forceful, ambitious personalities collided against contemporary expectations of silence and passivity in women.[136]

Mary Du Bois was not unlike another, more famous neurasthenic, Florence Nightingale. Nightingale spent the first part of her career vigorously reforming British nursing practice in the Crimea, and then, as if appalled at her own unladylike behavior, retreated into the safety of nervous exhaustion. She spent the rest of her life issuing directives from her bed.[137] Du Bois's life followed a similar pattern. Even though she was what her neighbor George Templeton Strong called an "embodiment of 'Neurology,'"and despite the whispery voice that Strong evokes for us, Du Bois founded and ran an institution and wrested funds for it from the state legislature. She accomplished all of this with what Strong described as "the application of her indomitable will." Du Bois's colleagues at the Nursery also used the word "indomitable" to describe their leader. They recalled how "...all obstacles to the success of the Nursery

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[136] On neurasthenia see Barbara Sicherman, "The Uses of a Diagnosis: Doctors, Patients and Neurasthenia," in Leavitt and Numbers, eds., *Sickness and Health* and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America," in Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*. Hysteria, which Sigmund Freud wrote about, is another name for essentially the same phenomenon. See Sigmund Freud, *Dora, An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (New York: MacMillan, 1963). Another nineteenth-century neurasthenic was Alice James, the sister of novelist Henry James and psychologist William James. Evidently as brilliant as these two brothers Alice spent her adult life alternately suffering or recovering from debilitating "attacks." Alice James failed in her struggle, as Jean Strouse, her biographer writes, to "balance the claims of traditional femininity with those of an independent self." See: Jean Strouse, *Alice James: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 106. Neurasthenia sometimes appeared in men - Samuel Halliday's "nervous prostration" was probably a manifestation of something like it.

[137] Florence Nightingale, *Ever Yours, Florence Nightingale: Selected Letters*, ed. by Martha Vicinus and Bea Nergaard (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). Stephen Smith named his daughter after Florence Nightingale.

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she has founded and firmly established were crushed beneath the indomitable determination to work out this problem of helping tender, neglected infancy to live...."[138] Yet like Nightingale, Du Bois periodically fled into infirmity. Nightingale and Du Bois both unsteadily tread the line between *being* powerful and effective and *seeming* fragile and helpless. Both alternated between action - a particularly female kind of caring action on behalf of needy others: wounded soldiers in Nightingale's case, neglected children and wronged women in Du Bois's - and the fragility that was positively associated with Victorian femininity. Du Bois composed a "farewell letter" to the lady managers on her departure from the Nursery in 1860 that is a masterpiece of passive aggression. "My friends," she wrote to her rivals for power, "you no longer need me...My love is all I can leave with you..."[139]

Most damaging of all to the future of the Infant's Home was the outbreak of the Civil War. The war was all-absorbing, drawing away the funds and also the personal energies of people who had in previous decades been occupied with reform. The war also affected the poor, having the opposite yet related effects of easing poverty for destitute men, who were absorbed by the army, while increasing it for the women and children left behind. The lady managers of the Nursery were burdened and distracted by the war. They took in children whose parents were "rendered destitute" as a result of the conflict, and they complained about the "new and unusual trials" the war imposed.[140]

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[138] Strong, *Diary*, vol.2, 264; NCH, annual report, 1861, 6.

[139] Mary Du Bois, "Farewell Letter of First Directress," NCH, annual report, 1861, 9-10.

[140] In 1863 the PCC reported that: "The effect of the war upon the Department has been favorable in the reduction of the number of our inmates, as will be seen by a reference to the figures. This reduction may be accounted for, so far as the male portion of it is concerned, by the enlistment of men who have heretofore been driven to crime, or fallen into habits of inebriation and folly. In regard to the female portion, war continues to keep up an increased supply." PCC, annual report, 1863, viii. The Nursery's managers remark on the same phenomenon, see NCH, annual reports, 1863, 7; 1865, 3, 4.

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The foundling issue even played a very small part in the sectional debate that took place before the war. A few pro-slavery voices sought to make New York's foundlings part of their argument against what they believed was the depravity of the urban north. The pro-slavery polemicist George Fitzhugh raised the specter of Rousseau to condemn what he considered to be the moral laxity of the North. "John James Rousseau, from whom Mr. Jefferson, Mr. Franklin, and all of our new lights, learned their philosophy, sent all his children to the foundling hospital so soon as they were born, and never inquired about them afterward. Now, all Yankee philosophy and morality (there is no Yankee religion) tends to this end."[141] A New York organization that called itself the "Pro-Unionist, or Anti-Abolitionist Society" advertised a pamphlet gleefully titled *Abolitionism Unvailed!* which they promised would contain "a graphic account of a foundling hospital in this city for black and colored girls..." When the pamphlet was published it contained no such description and, in fact, there was no such institution in New York.[142]

As for the Infant's Home, it was completed just before the war broke out but was then quickly requisitioned as a hospital for wounded soldiers. So it remained for the

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[141] George Fitzhugh, "Our Athenian Friend," *Debow's Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 29, issue 1, July 1860, 88. For more on Fitzhugh's beliefs about foundlings and foundling asylums see Harvey Wish, *George Fitzhugh, Propagandist of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943). Other southern authors also commented on the immorality of foundling asylums, see: James Stirling, *Letters From the Slave States* (London: J.W. Parker and Son, 1857), 252-254 on his objections to Charleston's foundling asylum, and E.G., "Slavery in the Southern States," *The Southern Quarterly Review* 8, issue 16, October, 1845, 347, in which the unnamed author compares the condition of a fictional "foundling pauper" with that of southern slaves.

[142] The advertisement appears in "Editor's Department, New Books," *De Bow's Review* 8 (April, 1850), 406. The pamphlet was [H.F. James], *Abolitionism Unveiled! Hypocrisy Unmasked! And Knavery Scourged! Luminously Portraying the Formal Hocusses, Whining Philanthropists, Moral Coquets, Practical Atheists, and the Hollow-Hearted Swindlers of Labor, 'yclept the "Northern Abolitionists,"* (New York: T.V. Paterson, 1850). The spelling "unvailed" appears in the advertisement.

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duration.[143]

9. Conclusion.

There is no reason to doubt that the city councilmen, almshouse governors, physicians and reformers who gathered in 1857 and 1858 to debate the outlines of the proposed new foundling asylum were truly interested in the welfare of abandoned babies. Their effort was, at least in small part, a response to the rising number of foundlings. And yet they could not justify the new institution simply as a means to save infant life. For one thing, it did not seem at all certain that a foundling asylum could do that. Townsend's committee, for instance, admitted that the mortality of foundling asylums in Europe, although improving as a result of better nutrition and sanitary conditions, was still quite high in many places. "We must not omit to remark," they admitted, that in the early years of the London Foundling Hospital there was an "enormous mortality." At the foundling asylum in Paris mortality was still "very great, although much less than formerly, when it was truly frightful." The foundling asylum in Dublin suffered from "frightful" mortality during its early years, although increased hiring of wet-nurses had halted much of the carnage. At the foundling asylum in St. Petersburgh they blamed the high death rate on the primitive practices of benighted Russians. In St. Petersburgh, they shamelessly repeated, the Archbishop routinely baptized infants in a hole carved out of the frozen Neva River. If one slipped in accidentally and disappeared under the ice the Archbishop "has been known to say, '*God has taken this child, hand me another.*' If such be the general recklessness, what is to be expected in their hospitals...?" And furthermore, Townsend and his colleagues asserted, referring still to St. Petersburgh, "...it is very fallacious to compare 200 foundlings with 200 children born under happier

[143] For the completion of the Infant's Home just before the Civil War and its use as a military hospital see Du Bois, "Thirty Years," 20.

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circumstances, the product of vice, misery, and frequently of disease."[144]

In this era few believed that much could be done to save the lives of foundlings, the frailest of all young children, given the degree of danger all infants were in. Physician George T. Elliot, who served the Nursery as an attending physician from its opening in 1854 until the outbreak of the Civil War, used the flowery rhetoric of the Victorians to describe the fragility of all infants: "these little ones, innocent and pure, [who] drift by us like the snow-flakes, and melt away in the warm breath of disease." Arabella Mott, secretary of the Nursery and wife of the man who had argued in favor of a foundling hospital since he believed it would prevent abortions, spoke more plainly, referring to the sickly foundlings and illegitimate babies the Nursery received. "A common idea prevails," she wrote in her secretary's report for 1859, "that if infants are placed in so fine a building, with ladies to watch the nurses, and good food provided, the children would not get sick or die....The issues of life or death are not in our hands; we pretend to do no more than this: we keep them clean, warm, well-fed, and provide well-ventilated apartments..." But those infants admitted to the Nursery in poor physical condition, this wife and daughter-in-law of doctors stated firmly, "*must* die."[145]

Given these realities it is not surprising that it took other concerns, such as the American Medical Association's anti-abortion crusade, to stimulate the city into action on behalf of foundlings. The deaths of unwanted waifs, disturbing though they were, were simply not enough to provoke action. Foundlings, all agreed in 1859, could not be saved.

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[144] Townsend, et al, *Report of the Select Committee*: Dublin, lxxviii-lxxix; London, lxiv-lxv; Paris, xliii; St. Petersburgh, lxxix-lxxx, lxxxv.

[145] Elliot made this comment at the inauguration of the Nursery's children's hospital in May, 1858. See "Inauguration of the Nursery and Child's Hospital," 10-13, in New York Nursery and Child's Hospital Records, New-York Historical Society. He made similar comments a decade later in the *Medical Record*, November 16, 1868, 427. For Arabella Mott's remarks see NCH, annual report, 1859, 5-6.

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CHAPTER FOUR - THE FOUNDLING ASYLUMS OPEN.

1. Introduction.

The Civil War monopolized all the money, time, and attention that charitable and reform-minded New Yorkers had to give. But as soon as the war was over, four foundling asylums opened in New York. One of these, but not the first, was the long-planned Infant's Home, the shared project of the city and the Nursery and Child's Hospital. Usurping the Infant's Home's place as first to open was the New York Infant Asylum, another Protestant-run institution. The New York Infant Asylum opened its building on Morningside Heights in the spring of 1865, sputtered and failed, then reopened in November, 1871. The Infant's Home thus came second, opening in its new building adjacent to the Nursery and Child's Hospital in December, 1865.

The Infant's Home, which was quickly incorporated into the Nursery, was unable to absorb all of the city's foundlings, whose numbers had increased during the Civil War.[1] Both its size and its restrictive entrance policies limited the number of abandoned babies it could take.[2]

As a result, the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction - the successors to the old Board of Governors of the Almshouse - embarked on a process of upgrading the

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[1] Mary Du Bois recalled the increase in the number of foundlings and infanticide cases during the Civil War: "In 1865 the crime of child murder had increased to such an extent, that our police reports were filled with accounts of new born infants found in open lots, the public docks, and not infrequently in the most thickly populated streets of our city." NCH, annual report, 1879, 7. This anecdotal information is backed up by data from the Department of Public Charities and Correction and its predecessor, the Almshouse Department. From 1849 through 1859 the number of infants the almshouse department reported receiving each year averaged approximately 323. For figures and sources see chapter three, note 10. During the Civil War the number increased, averaging 519 per year. For post Civil War figures see PCC, annual reports, 1860, p.238; 1861, p.293; 1862, p.173; 1863, p.10; 1864, p.171.

[2] On lack of space at the Infant's Home see NCH, annual report, 1868, 4: "Since the establishment, some two years since, of the new branch of their charity, consisting of a 'Hospital for Foundlings,' the managers have frequently been greatly inconvenienced by the want of sufficient and suitable room."

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almshouse's accommodations for foundlings. These efforts culminated in the construction of a separate, city-run foundling asylum, called the Infant's Hospital, on Randall's Island in the East River. It opened in August, 1869. Just a few months later, in October, 1869, the Catholic Sisters of Charity opened their own foundling asylum, which they called the New York Foundling Asylum. Thus within the space of only six years New York had four foundling asylums - the New York Infant Asylum, the Infant's Home of the Nursery and Child's Hospital, the public Infant Hospital on Randall's Island, and the New York Foundling Asylum of the Sisters of Charity - after long years in which it had no foundling asylums at all.

2. The Infant's Home Opens.

The Civil War threw the plans for the Infant's Home into disarray. Because the building was completed just before the war broke out, it was occupied not by needy babies but by wounded soldiers. The coalition between the Nursery and the city frayed during the war as well. The building and the lots it sat on were owned by the city, and immediately after the war the Nursery had to fight to get the building back for its original purpose. "During the war," Mary Du Bois recalled afterward, "many had seen how admirably this building was arranged, and it was only after many contests, that it was finally restored and occupied as originally designed."[3] Mary Du Bois rose from the sickbed she inhabited during the trauma of the war to reclaim her place as head of the Nursery and lead these "contests." The prize was a perpetual lease for the building.

In December, 1865, the Nursery and Child's Hospital's Infant's Home finally opened its doors to foundlings and their mothers. The new building included a lying-in asylum, or maternity ward, so that the managers of the Nursery could fulfill their goal of reforming unwed mothers. The lying-in asylum "enabled us," the Nursery's secretary,

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[3] NCH, annual report, 1876, 8-9.

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Alice T. Barlow, wrote in 1866, "to strike still deeper at the root of the evil...our earnest hope and endeavor being to save women from the ghastly crimes of infanticide and suicide, by first bringing them succor, comfort, and hope in their agony and trial, and then to commence the work of reformation."[4]

By 1865 the Nursery had moved well beyond its original mission of assisting wet-nurses and their children. It now included a children's hospital, a foundling asylum, and a lying-in asylum. Its dispensary, servant's school, and wet-nurse placement service were important auxiliary functions. As time went on and the parentless children in its care grew older, the Nursery established relationships with placement and training organizations - including Charles Loring Brace's Children's Aid Society. In 1870 the Nursery opened a "Country Branch" on Staten Island - where Mary Du Bois and her family had moved.[5]

The opening of the Nursery's foundling asylum - the name "Infant's Home" was dropped as soon as the new building opened, a sign of its full incorporation into the Nursery - helped to redefine its post-Civil War mission.[6] After the Civil War the Nursery fully committed itself to the salvation of fallen women. As at the London Foundling Hospital, the Nursery chose babies - including those still in utero - based on the moral qualifications of their mothers. Above all, these unwed mothers were supposed to be "previously virtuous" and penitent. Women who could, paid for their board, and were

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[4] NCH, annual report, 1866, 5-6.

[5] For the opening of the Nursery's "Country Branch," see NCH, annual report, 1876, 9. The branch at first inhabited a house, but cottages were built later on. The Country Branch was later destroyed in a fire. See Walsh, *History of Medicine*, 826 and NCH, annual report, 1892, 7.

[6] For the absorption of the Infant's Home into the Nursery and the consequent loss of its name, see NCH, annual report, 1866, 12, where the secretary of the Nursery's medical board refers to "the important addition made to the Institution by the incorporation of the building recently known as the 'Infant's Home,"..." The Nursery's annual reports do not refer to it as the Infant's Home again - except retrospectively.

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permitted to leave as soon as they wanted. In 1875 this fee was $25, or $5 a week if a woman entered before she was in labor. In an era when domestic servants - who largely made up the ranks of abandoning mothers - earned between $4. and $10. per month, this was a significant sum. Women who could not pay in dollars were required to pay in labor. Each woman was asked to stay at least three months, and nurse her own child and one other. If a mother wanted the privilege of leaving her child at the Nursery in order to return to work, she had to remain at the Nursery for at least a year before leaving.[7]

Thus, as in London, the Nursery's admissions policies defined its clientele: poor women rather than those who could afford the fee, and women who could prove their essential virtue by having "fallen" only once. The poor and penitent women who remained at the Nursery were those deemed best able to benefit from the moral example set by the well-to-do and socially respectable managers who administered the wards. During their months at the Nursery, while they were required to "strictly conform to all the rules of the Establishment, and yield implicit obedience to the authority of the Matron and Physician," and bear the Nursery's heavy load of daily chores, the "erring, penitent" mothers were also supposed to look to the Nursery's managers for models of proper feminine behavior. Mary Du Bois and her colleagues took it as their mission to "surround them with purifying and elevating influences, and by thus doing, furnish them a stimulus to overcome, by their future lives, the effects of their previous misfortune and crime."[8] In this scheme babies, while still important in the rhetoric and program of the Nursery, were secondary. The Nursery continued to admit solitary foundlings - but its main work was with fallen women.

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[7] NCH, annual reports, 1875, "Rules for the Lying-in Wards, 41-42; 1880, 6; 1885, 10, and "Rules of Admission." The figure of $4-$10 per month is for 1857 and it is from Penny, *Employments of Women*, 424-426. In 1889-1890 Lucy Maynard Salmon found that women servants in the Eastern United States were earning on average $3.60 per week. Lucy Maynard Salmon, *Domestic Service* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 88.

[8] NCH, annual reports, 1869, 7; 1876, 10.

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3. The New York Infant Asylum Opens and Closes.

The institution that beat the Nursery's Infant's Home as New York's first foundling asylum was the New York Infant Asylum. The New York Infant Asylum was founded by Sarah Richmond, founder and "directress" of the House of Mercy, a Protestant Episcopal residence for "fallen women" located in Inwood, at the northern tip of Manhattan. Her husband was the Rev. William Richmond, rector of St. Michael's Protestant Episcopal Church at Amsterdam Avenue and Ninety-Ninth Street on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Both Richmonds worked with poor women who had been sexually compromised or were in danger of becoming so. The Rev. Richmond's subjects were the poor, unmarried women he met in the maternity wards of Bellevue Hospital as he did his ministerial rounds. To these pious charitable reform workers the link between the catastrophes of sexual downfall and infant abandonment was evident.[9] William Richmond died before the couple's project to open a foundling asylum took shape, so it was Sarah Richmond who traveled to Albany in the winter of 1865 to have the new asylum chartered by the state.

Among the members of the Infant Asylum's board of managers were Stephen Smith, its first secretary, a physician and sanitarian and the author of the bill that created New York's Metropolitan Board of Health, the city's first permanent health board; James A. Roosevelt; physician Joel Foster, who later became a tenacious defender of the New York Infant Asylum; the same Rev. Montgomery who presided over the cornerstone

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[9] For a reference to Sarah Richmond's founding role see NYIA, annual report,1872, 11. The New York Infant Asylum cites Sarah Richmond as its founder, but James J. Walsh claims that her husband came up with the idea among the "unfortunate young women" he saw at Bellevue. Walsh, *History of Medicine*, 827. For the House of Mercy see *Valentine's Manual*, 1860, 342 and King, *King's Handbook*, 402. Sarah Richmond founded the House of Mercy in 1850. For St. Michael's Church, see King, *King's Manual*, 329. Valentine says the House of Mercy was "for the instruction and protection of homeless, friendless girls, from the ages of twelve to twenty" but George Templeton Strong implies that the institution was for prostitutes. See Strong, *Diary*, 2: 318.

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laying of the Nursery's Infant's Home; and another man with a close link to the Nursery, Edward Delafield, Mary Du Bois's brother. Dr. Delafield was the New York Infant Asylum's first president.

The New York Infant Asylum's original board of managers also included several city officials with links to the city's Democratic machine. These men, who may have been serving in an ex-officio capacity, included John T. Hoffman, a Tammany leader who was later elected mayor of New York and then governor of the state. and John T. Keyser, a plumber and close confederate of the Tweed Ring who became a millionaire on inflated city contracts. Keyser's wife served on the Infant Asylum's board of lady managers. None of these politicians lasted long on the New York Infant Asylum's board.[10] By the time the New York Infant Asylum regrouped, the Tweed Ring was on the verge of collapse. Ultimately the New York Foundling Asylum, the institution run by the Catholic Sisters of Charity, would be much more closely tied to Tammany Hall - and with disastrous consequences when the Tweed Ring fell in 1871.

No women served on the Infant Asylum's original board of managers. Sarah Richmond is not recorded as a participant in the managers' meetings, and her title was "superintendent," probably a reflection of her hands-on role at "Woodlawn" in upper Manhattan.

The New York Infant Asylum was in many ways similar to the Nursery. Both

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[10] For references to Hoffman and Keyser see NYIA, minutes, May 12, June 27, 1865; Feb 28, 1870; May 12, 1871. Hoffman resigned from the board on June 27, 1865. He was elected mayor in 1866 and governor in 1868. See Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 927 and King, *King's Handbook*, 234. Keyser was still on the board as late as May 12, 1871. Mrs. Keyser is listed as a member of the board of lady managers, June 8, 1871 (her full name is not identified in the minutes). Callow describes Keyser as a "plumbing tycoon," see Alexander B. Callow, *The Tweed Ring* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966) ,194. For further reference to the ex-officio members of the NYIA's first board see "A Foundling Asylum for New-York–The Project of the Grand Jury," *New York Times*, March 7, 1868. Also listed is "Tweed," (NYIA, minutes, May 12, 1865) but it is not clear if this is William M. Tweed himself, or a Tweed relative.

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were Protestant institutions. The New York Infant Asylum's first board meetings were held at the Church of the Incarnation at Madison Avenue and Thirty-fifth Street where Henry Montgomery was rector. Stephen Smith, who was active in the New York Infant Asylum for the whole length of its existence, had carried religious tracts along with his surgical equipment when he served in Union military hospitals during the Civil War.[11] Both the Nursery and the New York Infant Asylum established residential programs for unmarried mothers, and both were committed to the reform of fallen women. The two institutions were also linked by their ties to Henry Montgomery and Edward Delafield. There was one important difference, though, and that was that while the Nursery was an all-woman institution, the New York Infant Asylum, although founded by a woman, was initially led by an all-male board of managers.

The New York Infant Asylum was immediately attacked by disasters. The asylum's rented building, "Woodlawn,"on 104th Street and West End Avenue, just a few blocks from St. Michael's Church, was "an old wooden structure and scarcely fitted for occupation," "utterly unfit...during inclement weather" and funds were in short supply. Worst of all, the foundlings the new asylum took in did not thrive. Of the 182 babies admitted between May 11, 1865 when it opened, and December 15 of the same year, when it closed, ninety-seven died. Stephen Smith remembered that the "patients died in such numbers as to completely thwart the purposes of the organization." Elisha Harris recalled that the "pious Mrs. Richmond" "watered with her tears for the fearful death-rate that prevailed" in the early Infant Asylum.[12] This was an experience that would be

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[11] Gert Brieger, "Stephen Smith: Surgeon and Reformer," (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1971), 196-197.

[12] Woodlawn is variously described as being on 104th Street and 105th Street. Possibly it took up the block between both streets. For death statistics see NYIA, minutes, December 15, 1865. Comments of Elisha Harris are in "Medical Society of the County of New York, Adjourned Meeting, Oct. 12, 1868," *Medical Record* 3, November 16, 1868, 426. For Smith's recollections of the first incarnation of the New York Infant Asylum see "Address by Dr. Stephen Smith of the State Board of Charities," in NYIA,

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repeated at all of the city's foundling asylums. Opened, in part, to preserve the lives of abandoned babies, the foundling asylums experienced high death rates within their own walls.

Sarah Richmond's health soon failed, and this meant that her involvement in the new institution was both limited and brief. In May, 1865, when the asylum opened, she was appointed its superintendent. In December, ill-health forced her to resign, and she died on January 1, 1866. In a memorial minute the managers of the New York Infant Asylum praised Mrs. Richmond's work "for the forlorn and fallen of her own sex, and more recently for the outcast children." She was "so truly," they enthused sadly, "the Florence Nightingale of New York."

The New York Infant Asylum closed its doors when Sarah Richmond departed for her deathbed, and the surviving children were transferred to the newly opened Nursery. The only relic of the failed institution they brought with them was their names. Following the practice of European foundling asylums, the New York Infant Asylum had named some of its foundlings after its building and its founders. An infant Henry Montgomery, and Josephine, Alice, and Clara Woodlawn were among the children transferred from the failed New York Infant Asylum to the Nursery. A baby Walter Scott, after the popular novelist, was also among the number, but given the death rate among this group of foundlings, it is probable that he did not live to follow in the footsteps of his namesake.[13]

4. The Sisters of Charity and the New York Foundling Asylum.

The New York Foundling Asylum was urged into existence in 1869 by

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annual report, 1900.

[13] NYIA, annual report, 1872, [11]; minutes, May 12, December 15, 1865; January 16, May 18, 1866; "Foundling Hospitals," Letter to the Editor from "One of the Trustees" of the New York Infant Asylum, *New York Times*, March 22, 1868, 5:5.

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Archbishop John McCloskey, who suggested the idea to Mother Mary Jerome, the mother superior of the Sisters of Charity, an order of Catholic nuns that specialized in teaching and nursing. Like others who recognized the difficulties involved in caring for sickly infants, and "doubtful of public sympathy and support" because of the morally problematic nature of foundlings' origins, the Sisters of Charity hesitated at first.[14] They ultimately acquiesced, however, and Mother Mary Jerome plucked Sister Mary Irene Fitzgibbon, then in her forties, from her job as head of the school associated with St. Peter's Church on Barclay Street and appointed her to be the head of the new foundling asylum. Sister Irene, as she was known, remained as head of the New York Foundling Asylum until her death in 1896. Like Mary Du Bois, Sister Irene was the dominant personality at her institution. Most of the letters left by desperate mothers with their babies were addressed directly to her. Happily for her colleagues, though, Sister Irene, unlike Mary Du Bois, appears to have been able to lead with real executive skill, rather than by coercion or intimidation.[15]

Archbishop McCloskey's suggestion came within the context of the same Civil War-era rise in the number of foundlings and infanticide cases that Mary Du Bois and the Commissioners of Public Charity and Correction noted. "Each morning's paper," the Sisters recalled afterward, "brought its lengthened record of infanticide. The necessity of an asylum for the poor waif was evidently increasing...."[16] Just as critically, Archbishop and the Sisters of Charity realized that a need had arisen for an institution that, like other

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[14] "Souvenir of 1889," in NYFA, biennial report, 1888-1890, 17.

[15] "End of a Noble Nun. Sister Mary Irene Dies Here at an Advanced Age." Unattributed newspaper clipping, Sisters of Charity Archives; "Sister Irene Passes Away," *New York Tribune*, August 15, 1896; "Sister Mary Irene Dead," *New York Times*, August 15, 1896. These obituaries conflict about the date when Sister Irene arrived in the United States. "Souvenir of 1889," in NYFA, biennial report, 1888-1890, 16-17. Letters from mothers addressed to Sister Irene are at the New York Foundling Hospital Archives.

[16] NYFA, biennial report, 1869-1871, [1].

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Catholic charitable organizations in the city, would serve their own constituency. As Protestant institutions, the Nursery and the New York Infant Asylum posed a threat to the faith of New York's many Irish-Catholic immigrants.

The New York Foundling Asylum was part of a great wave of Catholic institution-building that began in the 1840s under New York Bishop, later Archbishop, John Hughes. Churches, including St. Patrick's Cathedral - its cornerstone was laid in 1858 and it opened in 1879; schools; colleges, including Fordham University, which opened in 1841 to train an American generation of priests; and hospitals, including St. Vincent's Hospital, 1849, were all part of this wave. New York's Catholic leaders also created a series of charitable institutions for the Catholic poor in order to provide an alternative to the city's Protestant-dominated system of private charity. The Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum, founded in 1817, predates the great mid-century wave of immigrants from Ireland; the Catholic Protectory, a reform school, was organized in 1863. There were also organizations for Catholic women that, like the Protestant American Female Guardian Society or the Nursery, chose their clientele by their sexual status. The House of Mercy (a different institution from the Protestant Episcopal House of Mercy founded by Sarah Richmond) was founded by the Sisters of Mercy, an order of nuns who arrived from Dublin in 1846 to assist Irish Catholic women of "good character." The House of the Good Shepherd, founded in 1857 by the Irish Good Shepherd sisters, was for the "fallen."[17]

In New York schools and charities were often the frontline in interreligious struggle. New York's Catholic leadership sought to rectify a situation in which their poor, young, and vulnerable were cared for by Protestant charities where active

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[17] For New York's Catholic institutions see: Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 748-752; Jay Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); Maureen Fitzgerald, "'The Perils of 'Passion and Poverty:' Women Religious and the Care of Single Women in New York City, 1845-1890," *United States Catholic Historian* 10 (1991): 45-58.

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proselytizing was typically an important part of the program.[18] Nativist disdain could also color relations between administrators of Protestant charities and their Catholic clientele. A spat over hiring practices at the Nursery demonstrates just how the simmering anger over Protestant treatment of the Catholic poor could boil over. In 1856 a letter appeared in the Catholic *Freeman's Journal* describing the Nursery as a "Proselytizing Nursery Trap" with the "hidden object" of getting hold of Catholic children and making them attend Protestant Sunday schools where "their holy faith will be calumniated." The author of the letter was moved to write when he saw an advertisement for help placed by the Nursery that specified "Protestants preferred." Mary Du Bois's response to the letter makes her anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant bias clear. Du Bois protested that the nurse and cook the Nursery wanted to hire would not be involved in teaching the children, but instead would care for them "with that solicitude and intelligence which (as regards food and medicine pardon me for saying it) which we had not found in Catholics of that class, who for the most part are foreigners and uneducated."[19]

Just as Mary Du Bois turned to a Protestant example, the London Foundling Hospital, when she designed her foundling asylum, the Sisters of Charity consulted Catholic ones. The foundling asylums of European Catholic countries such as Italy and France were state-run, church-controlled, and nationwide in scope. These were mass

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[18] Protestant organizations like the Children's Aid Society or the Public School Society described themselves as "nonsectarian," but this simply meant that their boards of directors were composed of members of different Protestant denominations. Catholics were reluctant to commit their children to institutions where Protestant values were openly preached. See Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805-1973, A History of the Public Schools as a Battlefield of Social Change* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

[19] Two unsigned letters in the handwriting of Mary Du Bois, one headed "To the Editor of the New York Freeman's Journal," 1856, another unsigned draft headed "Mrs. Du Bois's hand." New York Nursery and Child's Hospital Records, New-York Historical Society.

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systems that spawned networks of support services. Rural wet-nurses, midwives, transporters of infants and nurses, doctors, priests and bureaucrats were all in the pay or under the direction of the state-run foundling asylums.[20]

The Sisters of Charity could never hope to fully duplicate this system in the United States. In this era American charity was carried out by local governments and very often by private charity, which was typically Protestant. With the exception of pensions for war veterans, the federal government played no role in social welfare, and would not until the twentieth century.[21] The separation of church and state in the United States is a more complicated matter. While the constitution of the United States prohibits the kind of church-state collaborations in social welfare efforts, such as national foundling asylums, that were typical of Catholic countries in Europe, New York city and state routinely funneled public money to private, religious charities in the nineteenth century. As the Catholic population grew, and as the Democratic machine fattened on immigrant votes, Catholic charities became significant beneficiaries of public funds, typically outstripping Protestant and Jewish ones.[22]

Despite the limitations specific to the American charitable landscape within which American Catholic charities had to work, the European Catholic model of charity still

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[20] For complete descriptions of these systems see Fuchs, *Abandoned Children* and Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor*. The Russian system also worked this way, see Ransel, *Mothers of Misery*. A contemporary description of the networks set up by these countries to operate national foundling systems can be found in Jacobi, *Raising and Education*.

[21] For the way networks of charitable organizations sprang up in growing cities in the nineteenth century, the product of private efforts, often the efforts of women, sometimes with the help of local governments, see, Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[22] For a table showing the numbers of children in Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish institutions in New York City from 1890-1904, and the sums paid to these institutions by the city to support these children, see State Charities Aid Association, annual report, 1904, 10-11.

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provided a rich lode of ideals and practices for Sister Irene to mine. One practice that she adapted for the New York Foundling Asylum was the one that best characterized the Catholic system. This was the turntable or wheel - "*tour*" in French; "*ruota*" in Italian. Located in niches in the walls of foundling asylums, these secret nooks allowed abandoners to rotate babies to the inside of the building without being seen themselves. Instituted first in Italy perhaps as early as the fourteenth century, the wheel was used in France until the 1860s, and lasted several decades longer in Italy.

Mary Du Bois referred disdainfully to this practice, remarking that the Protestant Nursery operated "(with wise discrimination) only on the English plan condemning 'the basket at the door,'..."[23] It was exactly this "basket at the door" that Sister Irene adopted. In the entry of New York Foundling Asylum the sisters placed a large wicker cradle. Over the years thousands of babies were laid in this basket.[24] Some twenty years after the New York Foundling Asylum opened, missionary and author Helen Campbell hid herself near the Foundling Asylum one night to see how the basket worked. She observed a woman approaching the building with a baby in her arms,

> ...with a burst of tears she laid it in the basket and silently hurried down the steps. Crouching again in the friendly shadow she waited, her face turned toward the door-way, till a baby's wail followed by a sharp little cry was heard, and she half sprung up and stretched her arms toward the basket. The door opened even as the cry came. A woman with a calm gentle face stood for a moment, the flood of light from the hall bringing out every line of her face and figure, then stooped and lifted the bundle to her shoulder, pressing the little face close to her own. The baby nestled to her as she passed into the hall; the door closed, and the woman crouching

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[23] For a description of the turning wheel see: Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 433; for its demise, Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor*, 155. "Basket at the door," NCH, annual report, 1879, 9.

[24] For descriptions of the New York Foundling Asylum's wicker reception cradle see: "The Foundling Asylum. One of New York's Most Noble Charities," *New York Herald*, March 4, 1871; "The Little Waifs. The Opening of the New Foundling Asylum," *New York Herald*, October 22, 1873; "History of a Cradle. A Visit to the Foundling Asylum of New York City," *Moline Dispatch and Chimes* (Moline, ILL), February 8, 1889.

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in the darkness stole away, bearing her secret with her.[25]

The New York Foundling Asylum opened on October 11, 1869 in a rented house at 17 East Twelfth Street. The Sisters of Charity received a foundling on the very first day they opened; during their asylum's first month they took in unwanted infants at the rate of one or two per day; after a year the new asylum had accepted 1,377 babies and its small building was overflowing.[26]Daniel Connolly, "New-York Foundlings," *Appleton's Journal* vol. 8 issue 177, August 17, 1872, 182. This necessitated a move to a larger building on fashionable Washington Square, where the foundlings had the benefit of taking their exercise in Washington Square Park.[27] Babies continued to pour in and soon Washington Square also grew tight. In 1873 the New York Foundling Asylum moved to its first, permanent building, located on the block enclosed by Lexington and Third Avenues and Sixty-Eighth and Sixty-Ninth Streets on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The Nursery, which was less than a mile to the south, had pursued the same geographical trajectory, starting in crowded lower Manhattan, then moving north to the still suburban

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[25] Helen Campbell, *Darkness and Daylight: Or, Lights and Shadows of New York Life, A Woman's Narrative of Mission and Rescue Work in Tough Places...The Whole Portraying Life in Darkest New York by Day and by Night* (Hartford, CT: A.D. Worthington and Co., 1891), 382-383.

[26] The Foundling Asylum's first admissions book shows that between October 12, 1869, when it took in its first foundling, and the last day of November, 1869, it took in forty-nine babies. Admissions Book, 1869-1892, New York Foundling Hospital Archives. For the number received during the year between October 1, 1870 and October 1, 1871, see NYFA, biennial report, 1869-1871, 12. In November, 1871 the Sisters told the *Herald*'s reporter that there were about one hundred children in the asylum, and seven hundred more were nursing out. "The Foundling Asylum," *New York Herald*, November 11, 1871. In 1875 the *Herald* reported that the Asylum received approximately thirty-five infants each month, "Foundling Asylum," *New York Herald*, November 11, 1875. After the New York Foundling Asylum opened the number of foundlings received by the almshouse went down. See: PCC, annual report, 1869, Table B, 88. For commentary on this phenomenon see PCC, annual report, 1870, 267. For another reference to the decline of admissions at the almshouse after the New York Foundling Asylum opened see

[27] For the move to Washington Square and exercise in the park see NYFA, biennial report, 1869-1871, 8.

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center of the island. And like the Nursery's large uptown building, the Sisters of Charity's new foundling asylum was built on plots provided by the city, and with funds granted by the state.[28]

Unlike the Nursery, which accepted mothers along with babies, since its primary goal was the reform of fallen women, the Sisters of Charity initially planned to accept only babies. They changed their minds very soon after opening when they were faced with a mother who threatened suicide if she was turned away, and who offered to breast-feed her own infant and another if the Sisters would allow her into the asylum with her baby. The Sisters realized the valuable service lactating mothers could provide, and they began to accept mothers along with their babies. Once they made this shift in policy the Sisters, like the managers of the Nursery, hoped to teach unmarried mothers "to walk in the way of virtue."[29]

The Sisters of Charity also tried to follow the tradition established by foundling asylums in Catholic countries and accept as many babies as they could, with no questions asked. Limitations of space and funds made this challenging. One way the Sisters coped was to farm out babies with independent nurses, just as the city did. Another was to limit their admissions. As at the London Foundling Hospital and the Nursery, the New York Foundling Asylum's rules of admission revealed its understanding of the qualities that made a baby deserving, so to speak, of abandonment. As at both those Protestant institutions, the Sisters of Charity admitted babies based on the moral qualifications of their mothers, when mothers presented themselves for admission along with their babies.[30]

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[28] For details of the NYFA's founding and early years see "Souvenir of 1889" in NYFA, biennial report, 1888-1890.

[29] NYFA, biennial report, 1869-1871, 4.

[30] For an extended discussion of the way the London Foundling Hospital's admissions rules defined what a "proper foundling" was, see Weisbrod, "How to Become a Good Foundling."

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The Sisters refused to accept the children of wet-nurses since they believed that women who chose to breast-feed other women's babies for pay were neglecting the path of true motherhood in favor of their own physical comfort and monetary gain. Such behavior, the Sisters believed, "...exhibits a heartlessness and an absence of maternal duty which we feel ourselves obliged to oppose, and against which our moral sense revolts."[31] This is a reversal of the tactic adopted by Mary Du Bois at the Nursery. Like the Sisters of Charity, Mary Du Bois and her colleagues at the Nursery suspected that some poor lactating women chose to put their own comfort and gain above the well-being of their babies by hiring themselves out as wet-nurses to the well-to-do. Women hired by middle-class families to work as live-in wet-nurses typically received better pay, better food, and better lodging than other domestic servants. This was all for the benefit of the baby, but the image of the live-in wet-nurse as an excessively powerful and demanding figure who threatened to walk out if her material needs were not met, circulated among middle class homes in the nineteenth century. The fact that wet-nurses were typically poor, unmarried mothers made them seem like threatening presences in the homes of the well-to-do families who employed them, and their demands irritatingly outlandish.[32] Thus the women of the Nursery could be scathing about what they took to be a selfish choice. Arabella Mott remarked on the Nursery's difficulty in convincing the women it admitted, many of them wet-nurses, to remain with their own babies in the institution: "...women in the station they occupy are seldom found with the maternal instinct strong

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[31] NYFA, biennial report, 1871-1872, 7, and on the same theme:1879-1881, 14. Also: "The Feeble Foundlings. Report of the Sisters of Charity on the Condition and Future of the Asylum in Washington Square," *New York Herald*, April 27, 1873.

[32] For a comprehensive look at the social status of the wet-nurse in the United States, see Golden, *Social History of Wet Nursing*. Wet-nursing was never as widely used in the United States as it was, for instance, in France. See Sussman, *Selling Mothers Milk*. Despite the relative rarity of its use in the United States, wet-nursing was an emotional flashpoint for social reformers, physicians, and others, since it raised issues about the duties of maternity at a time when the status of motherhood was being redefined.

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enough to induce them to remain and nurse their own infants," she sniffed. The comfortable quarters and relatively high wages private wet-nurses commanded were enough, she suggested, to tempt poor women to abandon their own babies, even to death.[33] Despite all this the Nursery interpreted its responsibility toward wet-nurses in precisely the opposite way that the Sisters of Charity did. The Nursery was initially founded specifically for the children of wet-nurses, and continued to accept them after it added its foundling asylum. Perhaps Mary Du Bois believed that nothing could change the behavior of these women, while the more forgiving Sisters had greater hopes for their reformation.

Both Mary Du Bois and the Sisters of Charity were attempting to address an issue, the neglect of wet-nurses' children, that shocked all who were concerned about the welfare of poor babies in the city. Yet both institutions, focused as they were on what they believed to be the degraded state of maternal feelings among poor, immigrant women, overestimated the degree of choice these women were able to exercise. Neither institution worked to alleviate the isolation, poverty, and homelessness that might make a woman decide to take advantage of the greater value her lactating state temporarily gave her in the overcrowded, undercompensated market for domestic servants. Families who hired wet-nurses typically did not allow them to bring their own babies with them, since they did not want to share the milk that they had paid for. Despite this harsh reality, neither institution appears to have considered that the families that hired wet-nurses might share some blame for the abandonment of their wet-nurses' babies.

The women who ran the Nursery and the New York Foundling Asylum seem not to have taken seriously the *un*comfortable aspects of live-in wet-nursing. In the cultural context of the mid-nineteenth century, wet-nursing was a demeaning job. Not unlike prostitutes, wet-nurses were asked to sell the most elemental aspects of their physical

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[33] NCH, annual report, 1859, 7.

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womanhood at a time when the moral, maternal, and sentimental value of womanhood was supposed to lie in its very distance from the rough commercial values of the marketplace. A wet-nurse might be well-fed and well-housed, but her value lay not in her skills or her knowledge or any other personal qualities, but only in her body's ability to produce milk. As the wet-nurse ate and fed and ate and fed, the baby's real mother was there to supply all those aspects of motherhood thought to require more refined sensibilities.

Another one of the rules of admission at the New York Foundling Asylum, this one enacted by the early 1880s, specified that babies would be accepted only from their mothers. "It is a rule with the Sisters to take no child from other parties than the mother, as she is the rightful person to abandon it." One of the tragedies of infant abandonment, the Sisters believed, was that it was, among other things, a demonstration of a failure of maternal devotion. And yet, paradoxically, the rules of the New York Foundling Asylum decreed that if any abandoning was to be done it was the mother who should do it. This rule did not take into consideration the possibility that the impetus to abandon may not have come from the mother at all, but perhaps from an out-of-work husband, an angry father of an unmarried young girl, or the employer of a domestic servant.

The Sisters also refused to admit legitimate babies: widows and widowers who tried to gain admission for their babies were turned away. The Sisters argued that "this is not the place for such cases, and kindly assure them that it is their parental duty to care for their children themselves."[34] This rule thus enshrined the notion that a foundling was an illegitimate. The Sisters, while recognizing that poverty was one of the causes of infant abandonment, thus eliminated it as one of the evils they were attempting to eradicate.

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[34] NYFA, biennial report, 1879-1881, 18.

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In reality, the presence of the New York Foundling Asylum's wicker reception cradle made its admissions rules at least partially moot, since they only applied to people who presented themselves and/or their babies for admission. As a result, the Sisters of Charity continued to accept more babies than they could house even in their own new, large building on Lexington Avenue. They coped with this by adopting the tactic of sending babies out to live in the homes of wet-nurses - the practice used by foundling asylums in Europe, in Catholic countries as well as at the London Foundling Hospital. New York's almshouse had also long placed its foundlings with outside wet-nurses, but, as a result of the Mott and Halliday investigation and the Mary Cullough scandal, had abandoned the practice in 1860. Despite the well-publicized experience of the almshouse, the New York Foundling Asylum chose to place babies with independent wet-nurses - some of whom may have been the same poor women who had been put out of work by the almshouse - because it simply never had the room to keep all the babies in their building without dangerous overcrowding.[35]

The Sisters learned to package their "out-door department," as the program was called, positively for public consumption. They made the nurses' monthly visits to the asylum to present their foundlings for inspection and receive their pay into an occasion at which the press was welcome. The Danish journalist and social reformer Jacob Riis called this event "one of the sights of the city."[36] On pay-days, the Foundling Asylum boasted, "There may be seen gaily-dressed Italians, thrifty-looking Germans, smiling Irish matrons, and a few colored folk." But the boast was edged with wariness, an expression of the unease these rough, slum-dwelling women aroused in the Sisters, as in

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[35] NYFA, biennial report, 1869-1871, 8, 9. For the institutionalization of foundling wet-nursing in a rural region of France, see Fitch, "'*Les Petits Parisiens*." On the difficulty of finding rural wet-nurse in the United States, see Jacobi, "Raising and Education," 42. Jacobi comments that American country people are less poor than those of Europe, and are therefore less likely to want to work as wet-nurse.

[36] Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, 146.

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most reformers who dealt with New York's tumultuous poor: "Order reigns in spite of the constant influx," they added, "for two police-officers are in attendance, and marshal the nurses by groups to the pay-office."[37] On several occasions the *New York Daily Graphic* sent an artist to capture the scene. He too pictured the monthly gathering of these poor and ethnically various women as a colorful big-city spectacle, yet from the discontented faces he gave many of them it appears that, like the Sisters, he believed these women of the tenement districts were capable, if not restrained, of bringing chaos to the Sister's scrubbed and orderly institution.[38]

Dr. Jas. B. Reynolds, the Foundling Asylum's physician, had his doubts about the healthfulness of the placing-out program. "The great mass of our infants are boarded out about the city and in the surrounding country," he wrote in 1871, but although many did well, "a proportionally greater number at wet-nurse outside fail and are returned to us in a dying condition." The reasons he gave for the unsatisfying mortality rate both inside and outside the asylum were the same as those given by everyone who wrote about the terrible fragility of foundlings. "It would be unfair," Dr. Reynolds argued, "to attribute the larger mortality in Foundling Hospitals, chiefly to causes found within the hospital. We should consider the condition in which they are received." Exposure to cold, infection with syphilis, parents from the "lowest walks of life, with constitutions exhausted by disease, excess, and want," all of these factors, Dr. Reynolds believed, made the physical rescue of foundlings a hopeless task.[39]

Even with the restrictions on entry it was forced to enact, the New York Foundling Asylum was still a far more welcoming institution than the Nursery or, after

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[37] NYFA, "Souvenir of 1889," 23; biennial report, 1888-1890, 9.

[38] *Daily Graphic*, (New York) March 14, 1873, 3-4; May 25, 1885. See also: "Poor Little Waifs!" *New York Herald*, January 16, 1872.

[39] Dr. Reynolds' report: NYFA, biennial report, 1869-1871, 9, 13.

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1871, the resuscitated New York Infant Asylum. The administrators of the Nursery and the New York Infant Asylum ministered to their largely destitute, immigrant clientele from behind the barrier of class and ethnic divisions. The Sisters of Charity created their foundling asylum for their own poor, rather than for a population of alien others.

As a significant benefactor of the Irish Catholic immigrant poor, whose votes fueled the Democratic machine, the New York Foundling Asylum attracted the support of the leaders of Tammany Hall. The person through whom much of this support flowed was Mary Schenck Townsend Connolly, a member of the Foundling Asylum's "Ladies' Society,"a group of lay women who supported the Foundling Asylum by organizing fundraising events, and met there regularly to sew for the children.[40] She was also the wife of Richard Barrett Connolly. Connolly, who was known to his enemies as "Slippery Dick," was the city's comptroller and a central figure in the spectacular rise and fall of the "Tweed Ring," the bribe-fueled cabal led by the Tammany leader William M. Tweed.[41]

Mary Schenck Townsend, a Protestant and "the daughter of an old New Yorker,"

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[40] For a description of the Ladies' Society see NYFA, biennial report, 1869-1871, 17-18, 20. This report notes that a group of women "have kindly volunteered to obtain donations and to contribute towards the personal comfort of the Foundlings, and have formed a voluntary Society for those purposes," 20. The meetings and duties of the Ladies' Society were also described in the press, see: "The Hospital for Foundlings," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, December 25, 1869, 219; "The Foundling Asylum. One of New York's Most Noble Charities" *New York Herald*, March 4, 1871; "The Foundling Asylum. First Monthly Meeting of the Board of Managers," *New York Herald*, October 11, 1876; "The New York Foundling Asylum," *New York Herald*, October 17, 1877.

[41] For Richard Connolly's career see: obituary, Richard Barrett Connolly, *New York Herald*, June 1, 1880; Homburger, *Scenes From the Life*, 141-211; James D. McCabe, Jr., *Lights and Shadows of New York Life; or, the Sights and Sensations of the Great City...* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Co., 1872; reprint ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), 105-106.

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according to the *New York Herald*, made a most unusual choice when she married the Irish immigrant and political climber Connolly around 1837.[42] During the early years of their marriage the Connollys lived at a succession of addresses in the rough immigrant districts east of the fashionable squares inhabited by the likes of Mary Du Bois and George Templeton Strong. Once Richard Connolly gained access to the spoils of the comptroller's office, however, the family's addresses began to reflect their improved fortunes. They first moved to a house at 42 Park Avenue, and then began building themselves a mansion at Fifth Avenue and 130th Street, far north of the crowds and dust, north even of what Edith Wharton called the "inaccessible wilderness"of the area around Central Park.[43]

Mary Connolly put both her husband's money and his political connections to work for the Foundling Asylum. In December, 1869, less than two months after the Foundling Asylum opened, she wrote Sister Irene: "Mr.Connolly and I have been talking over the matter to night and feel that you must have an Institution." When a list of the Foundling Asylum's benefactors was published soon afterward, it was headed by the central figures of the Tweed ring. William M. Tweed, then at the height of his powers as "Grand Sachem" of Tammany Hall, headed the list with a gift of $1,000. City chamberlain Peter B. Sweeney - often referred to as the "brains" of the Tweed Ring - gave $500, and Mayor A. Oakey Hall contributed $100. The rest of the listed contributors gave sums between $10. and $100., while others gave smaller sums.[44] (For at least one

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[42] "Obituary. Richard Barrett Connolly," *New York Herald*, June 1, 1880; Homburger, *Scenes From the Life*, 150.

[43] Homburger, *Scenes From the Life*, 151, 185. Edith Wharton's fictional Mrs. Manson Mingott built herself "a house of pale cream-colored stone...in an inaccessible wilderness near the Central Park." Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1920; repr. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 33.

[44] Mrs. R.B. Connolly to Sister Irene, December 8, 1869, 1870, New York Foundling Hospital Records, Sisters of Charity Archives. "The Asylum for Foundlings. Munificent Subscription to the Fund–A Lady's Work in the Cause," *New York Herald*, December 5,

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subscriber, the Hon. Smith Ely, Jr., an interest in the Foundling Asylum may have arisen from personal experience. On December 6, 1839, exactly thirty years before he handed in his donation of ten dollars to the Foundling Asylum, a servant living in the house of merchant Smith Ely, presumably Ely Jr.'s father, discovered a two-day-old boy left in a basket on Bond Street at two o'clock in the morning. It may have been the recurrence of the anniversary date of young Alexander Bond's discovery that stimulated Ely's gift.)[45]

Early in 1870, as Sister Irene was approaching the state legislature for funds for a building of its own, Mary Connolly assured her that "Mr. C. will do all he can in Albany to forward your Petition."[46] That year the state legislature awarded the New York Foundling Asylum $100,000. for the construction of its building on Lexington Avenue. The state granted its $100,000 with the proviso that the asylum come up with matching funds in an equal amount. When the proceeds of a fair fell short by almost $30,000, Mrs. Connolly set to work making up the difference among her friends. These once again included her husband, Mayor Hall, Tweed, Peter Sweeney, and others, among them such Democratic tycoons as financier August Belmont and department store magnate A.T. Stewart.[47]

The Sisters of Charity were not alone in turning to unsavory elements in government for assistance with their institution. Mary Du Bois did the same. She

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1869. The rest of the fifty-eight major contributors listed here gave between $10. and $100. These included at least fifteen more government officials. The "lady" referred to in the title of the article was the wife of John Fox, a minor Ring figure, see Callow, *Tweed Ring*, 23.

[45] Alexander Bond, AHFV-NYHS, #106, December 6, 1859. Note that Ely Jr.'s gift is recorded in the article in the *Herald* dated December 5, 1869.

[46] Mrs. R.B. Connolly to Sister Irene, February 8, 1870.

[47] NYFA, Biennial report, 1869-1871, 28; NYFA, "Souvenir of 1889," 21; "The Foundling Asylum. Returns for the Institution from the Late Fair," *New York Herald*, February 12, 1871, 3:2; Fitzgerald, "Passion and Poverty," 52.

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formed an alliance with newspaper editor and nativist politician Erastus Brooks. In 1853, shortly before the Nursery was founded, Brooks was elected to the New York State Senate as a member of the "Know Nothing," or American Party, which espoused an anti-immigrant policy. He was the Know Nothing party's unsuccessful candidate for governor in 1856. In the state senate Brooks clashed with Archbishop John Hughes over the Church Property Act, a bill that sought to take away the property tax exemption from New York's Catholic church.

Du Bois was linked to Brooks through her son, Eugene, who was married to Brooks' daughter. They were also neighbors on Staten Island, where Du Bois lived after the Civil War. When Du Bois applied to the state government for funds Brooks helped to smooth the way. He delivered addresses at the cornerstone laying and inauguration of the Nursery's children's hospital, and he was a member of the small crowd that braved the cold to attend the Infant Home's cornerstone laying in December, 1859. Brooks helped Du Bois regain the new Infant Home building after the Civil War, first interceding with the city to have it cleared of wounded soldiers, then helping to beat back the other groups that coveted it. According to Du Bois one of these groups was "the Roman Catholics [who] wanted it for a school."[48] By the early 1870s Brooks was a member of the Nursery's advisory board.[49]

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[48] Du Bois, "Thirty Years," 21, and J.B. Wald, Mayor's Office to Erastus Brooks, June 9, 1865, NCH Records, New-York Historical Society.

[49] For Brooks' life and career see "Erastus Brooks (Jan.31, 1815-Nov.25,1886), *DAB*; "Erastus Brooks Dead," *New York Herald*, November 26, 1886 and "A Veteran Editor Gone," *New York Times*, November 26, 1886. In addition to his political career Brooks was the co-editor, with his brother James, of the Whig newspaper the *New York Express* from 1843 to 1877. For his assistance to the Nursery with state funds see: "Petition of the First Directress of the Nursery and Child's Hospital, in behalf of the Board of Managers, praying that the State Convention, in regulating the charities of the State, will consider the claims for a Foundling Hospital," 1868, in NCH, annual report, 1868 and in NCH Records, New-York Historical Society, where it is identified as no.37. The version at the New York Historical Society made Brooks' role as presenter of the petition clear. Concerning an earlier petition see Erastus Brooks to Mrs. Du Bois, April 19, 1856, NCH

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George Templeton Strong, Mary Du Bois's neighbor when she still lived on Gramercy Park, recorded his acute disdain for Brooks in his diary. As a member of the city's Republican elite Strong was also anti-Irish, but he was far more genteel than the Maine-born editor and politician Brooks. Gramercy Park neighborliness was such that Strong sometimes found himself in unwilling company with "Rat Brooks,"as he called him. On an October evening in 1856 Strong complained that he had to spend "an hour in a dresscoat at Mrs. Du Bois'." "Dirty little Erastus Brooks there," he reported, "looking quiet, stealthy, and malignant....If men are to develop into animal forms, each according to the law of his individual being, Erastus will be a very ugly, cunning and vicious rat..."[50]

Another institution that took an interest in the Sisters of Charity's foundling asylum was the *New York Herald.* The *Herald* was founded by Scottish immigrant James Gordon Bennett in 1835, part of a new trend in newspaper publishing - the penny press. These cheap newspapers aimed at a wide, working-class audience. Bennett's *Herald* led the pack - by 1865 it had become the leading daily newspaper in both New York City and the United States.[51] To attract these readers papers like the *Herald* relied on sensationalism. This made the New York Foundling Asylum a natural part of the *Herald*'s regular beat. Bennett devoted space in his paper to New York City news, and his sympathies were generally on the side of the poor. He was also a Catholic and an

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Records, New York Historical Society. For his roles at cornerstone layings and the hospital inauguration see "Address of the Hon. Erastus Brooks at the Laying of the Cornerstone of the Nursery and Child's Hospital, in the City of New-York, June 22, 1957," NCH Records, New-York Historical Society; "Inauguration of the Nursery and Child's Hospital, Address of Erastus Brooks," NCH Records, New-York Historical Society; and "The Infant's Home. Laying of the Corner Stone..." *New York Times*, December 29, 1859. For his role as an advisor see NCH, annual report, list of officers, n.p.

[50] "Rat Brooks," Strong, *Diary*, 3:256; Du Bois' party, 2:302-303.

[51] Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald*, 151.

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opponent of Protestant reform efforts. All of these reasons made the Catholic foundling asylum a subject of his paper's interest and sympathy.[52]

The New York Foundling Asylum became the darling of the *Herald.* Soon after it opened, the *Herald* began assisting in its fundraising effort, reminding its readers that "there are so many ways in which the Sisters can be assisted, and which will readily suggest themselves to every charitable heart...The poor can contribute their mite as well as the rich their hundreds..." The *Herald* congratulated itself on its efforts on behalf of the Foundling Asylum, reporting that its "frequent notices of the establishment caused contributions to flow in rapidly." These contributions included gifts of milk, medicine, cribs, and bedding, in addition to funds.[53] The relationship between the New York Foundling Asylum and the *New York Herald* was a symbiotic one. The *Herald* publicized the Foundling Asylum's need for support and funds, while the Foundling Asylum was a bottomless source of sentimental stories about the "poor little waifs of sin and shame."[54]

Reporters from the *Herald* periodically visited the Foundling Asylum, where they were met by Sister Irene and taken on a tour around the buildings. Their stories provide vivid word pictures of life at the New York Foundling Asylum. "Now that the lenten season has commenced," a *Herald* reporter remarked in the spring of 1871, "one cannot do better than pay a visit to the New York Foundling Asylum and take a peep at the babies that the good Sisters of Charity have taken under their motherly protection." The

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[52] Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald.* Crouthamel does not mention the New York Foundling Asylum but writes more generally about Bennett's and the *Herald*'s interests.

[53] "Foundlings. The Hospital for Foundlings in East Twelfth Street–How it was Established by the Sisters of Charity and How it is Succeeding–The Innocent Little 'Anonymas' of the Great Metropolis–A Work for the Charitable," *New York Herald,* November 22, 1869.

[54] "Poor Little Waifs! The Foundling Asylum," *New York Herald,* January 16, 1872.

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"spotless marble steps" of the Foundling Asylum's house on Washington Square made the reporter hesitate before marring them with his muddy boots. Inside, he found everything "airy, cheerful and clean." Upstairs, in "the domain of the babies" he found rooms full of cribs, each with its "appointments of snowy whiteness." The sights and sounds of the children reminded him "strongly of the nursery at home" and reminded him that "these babies and your own darlings are equally near to God."[55]

In 1881 a *Herald* reporter asked Sister Irene for a description of the foundlings' day,

> "Oh," she replied, her dimpled face beaming with pleasure as she glanced toward the children in her own ward, "we keep them occupied all the time. Each day has its regular routine of exercises and is passed before we know it. The children are accustomed to it and expect it. They rise and retire at six o'clock. It is so arranged that each nurse [these were the unmarried mothers who lived at the Asylum with their children] has her cot bed at the side of the crib containing her charges. These are either two infants or an infant and one able to run about, who sleep at each end of the cribs, covered with a canopy of white net. The nurse dresses both of the little ones. Breakfast is followed by morning prayers for those old enough to lisp the words, the play hour and singing for the youngest, and lessons in the schoolroom for the older ones, occupy the time before the dinner hour. Then comes the favorite kindergarten hour, with its employments so fascinating for the little ones. The singing of simple songs, play in the yard or playroom, with lessons for the older ones, prayers before supper–they are too sleepy afterward–and then preparations for the night.

This reporter agreed that the hour when the kindergarten was in session was the best time of the day. "Then those of two, three, or four years of age are seated at tables arranged around the room, and when the little ones are all busy it resembles a fairy workroom..."[56]

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[55] "The Foundling Asylum. One of New York's Most Noble Charities," *New York Herald*, March 4, 1871.

[56] "New York Foundlings. How the Little Ones are Cared For in the Asylum–Kindly Treatment, Good Nursing and Elementary Instruction," *New York Herald*, May 22, 1881. Other articles about the New York Foundling Asylum in the *Herald* include: "A Haven for the Innocent Waifs," November 13, 1869; "Foundlings. The Hospital for Foundlings...," November 22, 1869; "The Asylum for Foundlings," December 5, 1869; "The Foundling Asylum," February 12, 1871; "The New York Foundling Asylum: Its Good Work...," December 21, 1871; "The New Foundling Asylum of the Sisters of Charity," October 19, 1873; "The Foundling Asylum," October 16, 1874; "The

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Other newspapers were also susceptible to the charms of the New York Foundling Asylum and Sister Irene's evidently considerable personal magnetism. Two years later a reporter from the *New York Tribune* described his tour through the Foundling Asylum's building on Lexington Avenue in similar terms. By this time a maternity hospital had been added, where the reporter found "an odorless purity of consummate cleanliness."

> Through ward after ward of the same snowy whiteness and unimpeachable sweetness and cleanliness the reporter threaded his way from floor to floor and from wing to wing, past great wardrobes filled with all manner of seasonable clothing carefully selected and daintily made on the premises–sixteen sewing machines on the top floor going all the time and mainly under the hands of "mothers" and penitents being reclaimed–past great lavatories, and inviting dining and store rooms with burnished tins and culinary ware; through the quiet hospital wards where the same gentle, skilled solicitude was manifested, through great store-rooms, with judicious supplies of all needful things, through the great kitchen with its mammoth ranges and reservoirs, where great piles of fragrant loaves are in waiting...

This reporter's extravagant admiration for the Foundling Asylum - his description borrows the language of fairy tale to make this institution for abandoned babies sound like a magical castle run by industrious elves - was not shaken by Sister Irene's frank admission that the institution's mortality figures were, in her word, "appalling." After all, no better was to be expected. "It must be borne in mind," Sister Irene reminded him, "that offspring of crime are unwelcome, often ante-natal sufferers,–born of wretched and distracted mothers, who often are both ignorant and brutal; that they are frequently

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Foundlings. A Field Day Among Humanity's Waifs...," December 3, 1874; "The Foundling Asylum," October 11, 1876; "The New York Foundling Asylum," October 17, 1877; "Foundling Asylum Reception," May 12, 1878; "The Foundlings' Home," April 1, 1883; "Religion for the Waifs. The New Chapel for the Foundling Asylum Dedicated," October 21, 1884; "Children of the State. Little Inmates of the Foundling Asylum Who Grow up to be Citizens," October 30, 1887. This is just a selection. The *Herald* was not the only publication that reported admiringly on the Foundling Asylum See, for example: "The Hospital for Foundlings," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, December 25, 1869 and Herbert W. Burdett, "Institution Life. I. Foundling Asylum," *The Illustrated American*, May 17, 1890, 308-310.

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consumed with disease, are brought here exposed to all kinds of inclement weather scantily clothed, improperly cared for and sometimes, almost stricken with death." "This," Sister Irene summed up, "is the fatality hanging over all foundlings."[57]

5. The New York Infant Asylum Comes Back to Life.

The Protestant-run New York Infant Asylum propelled itself back into action very slowly, and then only when it was prodded. In 1868 a grand jury met to investigate the rise in the number of infant abandonments and infanticides - the same rise that had worried the Sisters of Charity just before they opened their foundling asylum. The conclusion of the grand jury was that New York ought to have a foundling asylum. Ignoring the Nursery, whose restrictive policies radically limited its effectiveness, the grand jury discovered that a state charter had been issued three years earlier to establish the New York Infant Asylum, and demanded that the defunct institution reassume its responsibilities. A member of the New York Infant Asylum, who identified himself only as "One of the Trustees," defended his moribund institution in a letter to the *New York Times*. He reminded readers of the *Times* of the great disaster that the New York Infant Asylum had been, and gently argued that even though the trustees were willing to act, or to "resign the trust to those who might possibly execute it better than they," the New York Infant Asylum would not be able to get back onto its feet unless "the community are prepared for such an institution," and, even more importantly, "the benevolently-disposed are willing to contribute of their means to the object."[58]

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[57] "The Foundling Asylum. A Glimpse into its Workings," *New York Tribune*, June 10, 1883. For a reference to the new maternity hospital and a children's hospital set to open on June 1, 1882, see NYFA, biennial report, 1881-1882, 7-8.

[58] "A Foundling Hospital for New York–The Project of the Grand Jury," *New York Times*, March 7, 1868; "Foundling Hospitals," (letter to the editor from "One of the Trustees") *New York Times*, March 22, 1868. For more commentary on the grand jury and the responsibility of the Infant Asylum to open, see Stephen Rogers, "Neglected Causes of Infant Mortality in New York," *Medical Record*, September 14, 1868, 345.

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For the moment, that was that. Despite the embarrassing furor, the board of the Infant Asylum did not meet to address the grand jury's charges. Finally, in February, 1870, the trustees of the Infant Asylum met again for the first time in almost two years - but only to discuss the possibility of merging its remaining assets with the Nursery and Child's Hospital. After a month during which unsuccessful talks were held with the Nursery, this plan was abandoned and the Infant Asylum's trustees once again subsided into silence.[59]

Finally, in the spring of 1871, three years after the grand jury pointed its accusing finger at them and six years after the disastrous winter in which the first New York Infant Asylum closed its doors, the trustees of the Infant Asylum took positive steps to reopen. They drafted, published, and circulated two documents, one was titled "Appeal in Behalf of the New York Infant Asylum, Chartered by the State of New York, and Organized Under the Management of Representatives from the Protestant Denominations of the City"; the other was "A Statement in Behalf of the New York Infant Asylum." These were probably composed by Stephen Smith. The "Statement" was signed by eleven prominent physicians, including Smith himself. By Christmas the texts of the "Appeal" and the "Statement" had found their way to the offices of *Harper's Weekly*, which used them as source material for a cover story, complete with an illustration of a policeman lifting a foundling from a doorstep as both are soaked in a windy rainstorm.[60]

In April, 1871, in response to circulation of the "Appeal" and "Statement," the New York Infant Asylum held a public meeting at Association Hall (which belonged to the Young Men's Christian Association) where they stated their goals and called for funds and support.[61] On Smith's probable authorship, see minutes of the NYIA's board

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[59] According to its minutes, the old New York Infant Asylum met for the last time on May 18, 1866. It then met again on February 28, 1870.

[60] "The Foundlings," *Harper's Weekly*, December 23, 1871, and cover illustration.

[61] Both the "Appeal" and "Statement" are undated, and the "Appeal" is unsigned. The

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for April 18, 1871, in which it is reported that Smith read a paper on foundling hospitals which was approved by the board and ordered to be signed by physicians, printed and sent with circulars calling the public to the meeting to be held at Association Hall on April 27. For the Association Hall meeting see: "Aid for Helpless Infants. Meeting at Association Hall to Organize an Infant Asylum and Foundling Institute," *New York Herald*, April 28, 1871, and "The New York Infant Asylum. The Reorganization," [April 28, 1871], unattributed clipping at Sisters of Charity Archives. This appeal was a success, and in November the New York Infant Asylum reopened at 24 Clinton Place on Manhattan's Lower East Side.[62]

There were a number of reasons why the New York Infant Asylum came back to life when it did. One was continuing alarm about the growing number of foundlings in the city. Whether this was the result of an epidemic of abandonment in the aftermath of the Civil War, or simply a rise in numbers that went along with the city's rise in population, the sight of so many babies on the street frightened those who saw them. The "Statement" asserted, probably exaggeratedly, that there were nearly 3,000 babies abandoned in New York in 1870, the same number, the document claimed, of illegitimate births in the city that year. Stephen Smith, the probable author of the "Statement" and a member of the Metropolitan Board of Health, had access to city statistics through his colleague Elisha Harris, the Board of Health's registrar of vital statistics. Harris was also a trustee of the New York Infant Asylum and a signer of the "Statement." In reality, despite Harris's expertise, Smith's figures on illegitimacy and the estimate of the number of foundlings that he based on them were no better than guesses. There was no truly

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"Statement" is signed by the following physicians: E.R. Peaslee, Isaac E. Taylor, B. Fordyce Barker, James Anderson, Joel Foster, Alfred Underhill, H.D. Bulkeley, Stephen Smith, S.T. Hubbard, Job Lewis Smith, and Elisha Harris.

[62] For the New York Infant Asylum's reopening on Clinton Place see NYIA, annual report, 1872, 12.

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accurate way that Smith and Harris could have told how many illegitimate babies were born in the city since New York, in common with most other places in the United States, did not gather statistics on illegitimate births.[63]

The fact that tells more about the alarm felt by Smith and the ten other physicians who signed the "Statement" was the evidence of their own eyes. Like Thomas Coram, who was horrified when he saw "young Children exposed, sometimes alive, sometimes dead, and sometimes dying" on his walks through early eighteenth-century London, the physicians who signed the "Statement" reported that the number of foundlings on the streets of New York was so great that, astonishingly, they "literally crowd our daily walks." It seems likely that these physicians did see babies abandoned on streets and doorsteps as they walked around the city visiting patients at odd hours. It was probably this visceral evidence, rather than a set of frightening statistics cooked up to shock the deep-pocketed audience at Association Hall, that helped awaken their concern. (The doctors of the Infant Asylum continued to have visceral experiences like this. A few years later a month-old baby was left on the doorstep of Joel Foster, a signer of the "Statement" and a member of the Infant Asylum's reconstituted board.)[64]

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[63] In the nineteenth century the United States lacked the kind of centralized systems for gathering vital statistics that were common in Europe. New York City had a law requiring the registration of marriages and births since 1847 (and an earlier law requiring the registration of deaths), but, as the Metropolitan Board of Health complained in 1866, lack of compulsion made for irregularity in reporting. The birth certificate form used by the city had no blank in which to record illegitimacy. See, Metropolitan Board of Health, annual report,1866, appendix C, 8. In 1860 the City Inspector complained that all birth records were inaccurate, "owing to the neglect of physicians, clergymen, and others, to report...," *Valentine's Manual*, 1860, 245. As late as 1920 New York City still did not require registration of information about illegitimate births, see: Emma O. Lundberg and Katherine F. Lenroot, *Illegitimacy As a Child Welfare Problem*, (Washington DC: United States Department of Labor, Children's Bureau, 1920), 19. In 1870 Elisha Harris lost his job as registrar of vital statistics, probably as a result of the Tweed charter that took effect that year. See biographical entry on Harris in DAMB.

[64] McClure, *Coram's Children*, 19; "Statement," 6. The New York Infant Asylum's admissions book includes the following entry for May 7, 1875: "Foundling left at Dr. Foster's door." NYIA, Admissions Book, Children, 1871-1877, volume 87c, entry #496.

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Another factor that pushed the trustees of the New York Infant Asylum back into action was the success of the Sisters of Charity. The Sisters' New York Foundling Asylum opened in 1869 while the Protestant New York Infant Asylum was closed. In a city in which Catholic and Protestant charities were carrying on a heated competition for the souls of the poor, and particularly poor children, the Sisters' success - measured by the steady flow of babies they received, many more than the Protestant Nursery, and their positive notices in the press - created ambivalent feelings among the trustees of the New York Infant Asylum. They were glad to see that the needs of abandoned infants were being met, and yet they did not like the idea of Protestant children disappearing into a Catholic institution.

All three of the privately-run foundling asylums advertised themselves as "ecumenical" - open to babies and mothers of all religions. And yet all three were also committed to winning souls for their own faiths. The *Herald* noted that the Sisters of Charity's foundling asylum "prescribes neither creed, nor class, nor color–and there was a goodly representation from every source." The Foundling Asylum's admissions book shows that during its first months it received "A little Jewess!" It also took in Protestant babies, black as well as white.[65] In 1871 a *Herald* reporter peered into a crib and reported that "something mysteriously dark is seen above the white sheets, and you find by further inspection that the little wrinkled black faces belong to Sambo and his twin sister..." The appearance of these African-American babies at the New York Foundling Asylum upset one of the nursing mothers resident in the institution. The reporter described how

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[65] "The Foundlings. A Field Day Among Humanity's Waifs...," *New York Herald*, December 3, 1874. For another description of black babies at the New York Foundling Asylum, see Connolly, "New-York Foundlings," 184. Connolly also estimated that approximately two thirds of the children admitted were "of non-Catholic parentage." The reference to the "little Jewess" is in the NYFA's first admissions book, #13, November 3, 1869. #31, November 20, 1869 is recorded as a Protestant, and #98 December 23, 1869 is listed as "mulatto." These are just a few examples. The Sisters were probably able to tell the babies' religions and ethnicities by the notes left by mothers, or from information provided by mothers who presented themselves along with their babies.

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> The little blackamoors came late at night, and the good Sister, who knows no difference between black and white, called one of the Irish nurses to attend to their wants. But Bridget had not arrived at the advanced spiritual state required for such an act of leveling, and she answered, "I'd do anything that ye'd [t]old me 'cept put a nager to me breast." However, in spite of Biddy's prejudices, the young Africans are doing well.[66]

The trustees and supporters of the New York Infant Asylum acknowledged the work of "the good sisters of the Roman Catholic Foundling Asylum," but asserted firmly that a foundling asylum was still required for the "Protestant portion of the community." With only the limited resources of the Nursery to rely on, they argued, Protestant mothers would bring their unwanted infants to the "Asylum of the Roman Catholic Sisters."[67]

There was yet another force compelling the New York Infant Asylum to reopen in 1871 - this was the developing alarm over baby-farming. Baby farmers, poor women who cared for groups of babies and young children in their homes, were often accused in this era of making unwanted children disappear through neglect, starvation, or outright murder. In some cases baby farmers were known to abandon their charges on the street because of nonpayment of board by their parents; more often baby farmers brought children directly to the almshouse when they were not paid. Sometimes this was a prearranged plan between baby farmers and parents in which abandonment was accomplished by proxy. After the Mary Cullough affair of 1859 the almshouse was so frightened by the damage baby farmers could do - both to the babies and to its own reputation - that it pulled all of its infants out of their hands and returned them to the almshouse.

Baby farming did not emerge as a full-blown scandal, though, until a particularly notorious case unfolded in London in 1870. This case led to an investigation by a select

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[66] "The Foundling Asylum. One of New York's Most Noble Charities," *New York Herald*, March 4, 1871.

[67] "Aid for Helpless Infants," *New York Herald*, April 28, 1871"Appeal," 2, 5.

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committee of the British House of Commons, and ultimately the passage of England's Infant Life Protection Act of 1872, which regulated private child care.[68] As always, concerned New Yorkers kept a close eye on social welfare practice in England. The *New York Times* reported on the investigations carried out by the British Select Committee on Infant Life Protection, and soon the paper was reporting on similar cases in New York. "There is no disguising the fact," the *Times* warned, "that many children are sent out to 'nurse' with the distinct understanding that they are to be 'put out of the way' by means that shall elude the law and defy detection." Noting that many of the children who fell victim to baby farmers were illegitimate - since single mothers were the ones who had the greatest need for the services of baby farmers, both benevolent and malevolent - the *Times* argued (in 1874) that "Foundling asylums afford the readiest means of escape from this threatened death."[69]

The trustees of the New York Infant Asylum and their supporters were attentive to the issue of baby farming, and saw their institution as a weapon to combat it. The "Statement" and "Appeal" made reference to baby farmers, "a class of immoral women, who care little for the life of either mother or child." In the "private institutions" run by baby farmers, as well as the abortionists and midwives they were alleged to work in league with, the "Statement" reported, there was a "distinct understanding of all parties that they [the babies] would not long survive."[70]

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[68] This was the Margaret Waters and Sarah Ellis Case. See Arnott, "Infant Death," and Lionel Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Great Britain, 1800-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 93-114. A similar law, the Roussel law, was passed in France in 1873. See Alisa Klaus, *Every Child a Lion: The Origins of Maternal and Infant Health Policy in the United States and France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 56-57.

[69] "Slaughter of the Innocents. Baby Farming in England–A Description of the Business–Some Startling Statements," *New York Times*, August 20, 1871. "Slaughter of the Innocents," *New York Times*, August 6, 1874.

[70] "Statement," 4, 5. See also, "Appeal," 2. Eric Homburger describes the way abortionists, midwives, and baby farmers worked together to make unwanted babies

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Essentially, though, the goals of the New York Infant Asylum were exactly the same as those of the Nursery. "Our aim," the New York Infant Asylum proclaimed in an early annual report,

> is to thwart and prevent suicide, infanticide and murder, those demons that follow hard upon the track of the unfortunate, and to shield, save and restore them as well as to protect their innocent offspring. They may have been ever so pure, ever so young, ever so much respected, before the one terrible false step, yet what a fearful future seems in store for them, a future of despair and in most cases of crime. When all else seems forbidding and pitiless, our Institution receives them.[71]

Like Mary Du Bois and her colleagues, the trustees of the New York Infant Asylum understood the abandoning mother as a previously pure woman ruined by seduction, so overwhelmed by shame that she was in danger of killing her infant and then herself. If she lived, prostitution was inevitable. As with the abortion question, it was the illicit sexual doings of women of their own class that galvanized reformers. The New York Infant Asylum, like the Nursery, did not attempt to address the problems of limited employment possibilities and low wages for poor women, the vulnerability resulting from immigration, or the sexual double standard that blamed women for the birth of unwanted children but exonerated men. The English novelist George Eliot (a pseudonym that hid a woman, Mary Ann Evans), whose novels teem with abandoned children (Daniel Deronda, the murdered infant in *Adam Bede*, little Eppie in *Silas Marner*), made a remark around this time that helps to explain New Yorkers' unsettlement about the female behaviors that produced foundlings: "Anything is more endurable," she wrote, "than to

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disappear. Homburger, *Scenes from the Life of a City*, 105-108. Mary Cullough, it appears, also worked as a midwife. See the reference to the "California widow" who gave birth in her home and to whom she gave baby clothing intended for the almshouse children she was caring for, see "The Murder of the Innocents," *New York Tribune*, February 9, 1859.

[71] NYIA, annual report,1873, 11.

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change our established formulae about women."[72]

Once it reopened the New York Infant Asylum also operated very much like the Nursery. While the Infant Asylum accepted babies left on its doorstep, it preferred taking in mothers and babies together, since the reformation of fallen women was a central goal. Only a few months after opening the trustees of the Infant Asylum, unhappy about the prospect of women arriving at the asylum with the expectation that they could leave their babies but not remain themselves, voted to decide each case individually rather than adopt a blanket regulation. While they considered it "highly inexpedient" for the Infant Asylum to "to take their children off their hands," they realized that occasionally it would be necessary to accept a baby without a mother.[73]

For the illegitimate mothers who agreed to be admitted, the New York Infant Asylum functioned as a model home where they could learn to amend their ways. Inside they received copious doses of sewing and housework - necessary to maintain the house, but also to prepare its inmates for futures as trained domestic servants. A "devotional committee" led these women, most of whom were probably Catholic, in "singing and various [doubtless Protestant] religious exercises" as they sewed and mended bed linen, towels, and clothing. They had lessons in reading and writing - which may have been more welcome than the other ministrations they received - and attended Bible classes and religious services. "Idleness finds no place within the walls of the New York Infant Asylum," reported the Asylum's lady managers in 1877. That year the busy inmates turned out 1,402 garments - a number that rose to 2,430 in 1880. Once the inmates' moral transformation was complete and their domestic training accomplished, they were placed as servants.[74]

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[72] Quoted in Hrdy, *Mother Nature*, 27. Eliot made this comment in 1855.

[73] NYIA, minutes, February 20, 1872.

[74] NYIA, annual reports, 1873, 16; 1875, [13]; 1877, 13; 1880, 30.

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Like the Nursery and the New York Foundling Asylum, the New York Infant Asylum began downtown, near the homes of the poor, then, when overcrowding in the institution became acute, moved to larger, less expensive quarters in the more sparsely settled region uptown. In November, 1872, one year after opening, the New York Infant Asylum bought a house at Sixty-first Street and Tenth Avenue, just across town from the Nursery, on Lexington Avenue and Fifty-first Street, and the New York Foundling Asylum, on Lexington and Sixty-eighth. Two years later they built an addition onto the Sixty-first Street building, while retaining the house on Clinton Place for a "reception house." Like the Nursery, the New York Infant Asylum acquired a country house. The Infant Asylum's first country house, which opened in June, 1872, was in Flushing, Queens, then still an area of farmland and villages. In 1879 they bought a second country house in Mount Vernon, in Westchester County, north of the city. In 1877 the Infant Asylum added a maternity ward.[75]

Despite its efforts to prevent overcrowding and provide the mothers and babies with the salutary benefits of fresh air, the New York Infant Asylum, like its sister institutions, had difficulty keeping foundlings alive. In 1875 the Infant Asylum's medical committee reported the not excessive death rate of twenty-three percent for the children. But the foundlings died at a higher rate than the babies who lived in the institution with their mothers. Dr. Job Lewis Smith, Stephen Smith's brother and the physician in charge of the Sixty-first Street house, found that while ten percent of the babies with their mothers died, the death rate for babies living at the Asylum without mothers was forty percent. The cause, he argued, was the lack of enough breast milk for these unwanted babies, "...infants under the age of six months, who are entirely bottle-fed, in any hospital or asylum within the limits of New York, almost invariably die during the hot months..."

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[75] NYIA, minutes, November 19, 1872 (purchase of the 61st Street house). NYIA, annual reports, 1873, [15]-16; 1875, 10-11; 1878, 9-13; 1880, 29-30.

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This was a "fact which past experience in the management of the foundlings in this city fully verifies..."[76]

When the New York Infant Asylum came back to life in 1871, it formed a board of "lady managers."[77] The trustees sought to gain for their institution the kind of tender maternal sympathy that they believed only women could provide, but they certainly did not envision turning their Infant Asylum into a female-dominated institution like the Nursery. In typical fashion, the male trustees tended to view the lady managers as an undifferentiated female bloc. The minutes of a board meeting held in 1872 record the attendance of eight male trustees, each listed by name. The presence of a larger flock of eleven lady managers was recorded as an afterthought. None of them were named.[78] Nonetheless, one of the most active and committed members of the New York Infant Asylum was a woman, and it is through her journal and letters that we are able to see what life at the New York Infant Asylum was like.

Abigail Hopper Gibbons was a reformer and a Quaker in an age when Quakers were often in the forefront of reform movements. She and her husband, James Gibbons, were abolitionists who harbored escaping slaves in their New York home. Their daughter, Sarah Emerson (who was the widow of a nephew of Ralph Waldo Emerson), commented drily on her mother's encounter with the visionary but violent abolitionist John Brown. Just before heading to Virginia for his disastrous raid on Harper's Ferry, Brown, who was accustomed to gathering funds and support in abolitionist and Transcendentalist circles, paid Mrs. Gibbons a visit. In the privacy of her parlor Brown

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[76] NYIA, annual report, 1875, 27.

[77] For discussions of the lady managers and their role, see NYIA, minutes, May 18, 1866; March 8, 1871; November 28, 1871.

[78] NYIA, minutes, November 19, 1872.

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told Gibbons "the full particulars of his plan for the uprising at Harper's Ferry. While sympathizing with the end he had in view–the freeing of the slaves–Mrs. Gibbons felt convinced that the scheme was not practical."[79] The practical Mrs. Gibbons was right.

Gibbons was also active in prison reform. In this, as in abolition, she followed in the footsteps of her father, Isaac T. Hopper, founder of the Prison Association of New York. She held leadership positions at the Women's Prison Association - which was originally the Female Department of the Prison Association until it constituted itself as a separate organization in 1853 - for many years. She spent most of the Civil War in army hospitals in and around Washington DC, nursing the wounded (Mary Du Bois, by contrast, spent the war in her bed, far from the enervating spectacle of national conflagration). In January, 1863 the Gibbonses illuminated their house in honor of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. This evidently made it a target for the draft rioters the following summer. The house was attacked by the rioters, who were mostly poor, Irish immigrants, enraged at the $300. fee required to buy a substitute and at the prospect of freed slaves coming north to take their jobs. After the war Gibbons co-founded the New York Committee for the Prevention of State Regulation, which opposed the legalization of prostitution.[80]

In the midst of her full-time, lifelong, job of saving the world, Abigail Hopper Gibbons found time to work with the New York Infant Asylum. She was one of the original members of the Infant Asylum's "ladies' board." In 1871 she was its vice-

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[79] Emerson, *Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons*, 261.

[80] For Gibbons' life see Margaret Hope Bacon, *Abby Hopper Gibbons: Prison Reformer and Social Activist* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000) and Emerson, *Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons*. For Quaker women as activists, see Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). For the New York Committee for the Prevention of State Regulation, see Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 185. The Committee was founded in 1876. For Gibbons' role at the Women's Prison Association see Freedman, *Sisters' Keepers*, 24-30; 35.

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president. In 1873 Gibbons was appointed to the Infant Asylum's house committee, and by 1878 she was the house committee's chair.[81] As a member of the house committee, Gibbons kept a close eye on the well-being of the "family," as she called the women and children of the Infant Asylum. She kept track of the women's sewing and laundry work and rejoiced at the occasional marriage that took place between inmates and their baby's fathers. She was also able to laugh at inevitable slip-ups, such as the events that caused a blanket, a pair of baby's shoes, and a slice of bread to appear mysteriously on the front lawn of the Infant Asylum's house at Sixty-first Street and Tenth Avenue. The shoes, it turned out, were old ones thrown away by a mother who had come to bring her child a new pair. "As regards the blanket," she recorded in her house committee minute book, "the disposition is, the wind seized it - but it was rescued - the slice of bread must be of very rare occurrence - as in all our goings to and fro, we never met with a like adventure."[82]

Gibbons could be light-hearted, but she also took seriously her responsibilities as a straightener of twisted souls. She was very displeased about the behavior of one of the Infant Asylum's inmates, a woman named Kate. Kate gave birth at the Infant Asylum in January, 1877 and left in May, leaving her baby behind. The baby died, "as children abandoned by their mothers generally do," Gibbons observed. Before the year was out, Kate, pregnant again, was back. As at the Nursery, repeat offenders were not ordinarily allowed to return - but the managers relented and let Kate in again. Gibbons protested: "...the New York Infant Asylum should be protected against all such offences, which are

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[81] On Gibbons' vice-presidency of the ladies' board see NYIA, minutes, June 8, 1871. Her appointment to the house committee on May 30, 1873, is recorded in a note in the back of her New York Infant Asylum journal. The journal is at the Manuscripts Division of the New York Public Library, where it is cataloged as "Abigail Hopper Gibbons (1801-1893), Personal Miscellaneous."

[82] Gibbons journal, NYPL, Feb. 14, 1878.

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in direct violation of our rules, and the spirit of our established laws..."[83]

Gibbons was more enthusiastic about Dr. Anna Angell, who began working as the Infant Asylum's resident physician in 1877.[84] On a cool summer day in 1879 Gibbons went to visit the children at the Infant Asylum and there observed some of Dr. Angell's daily routine. Up at five, Angell supplied the children with glasses of milk then sent them "over the river" or "down on the Elevated for a trip on the Staten Island Boat" to take advantage of the healthful breezes. "She is a rare woman," Gibbons wrote her daughter the next day, "and only a woman with genuine sympathies would put her shoulder to the wheel as she does."[85] Abigail Gibbons valued the thirty-four-year-old Angell's motherly capacity to administer to children as much, perhaps even more, than she did her medical expertise.

The Women's Prison Association provided Gibbons with an important model for her work at the New York Infant Asylum. The central project of the Women's Prison Association was the Isaac T. Hopper Home, a residential halfway house for women discharged from New York's prisons. As at the New York Infant Asylum, the inmates of

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[83] Gibbons journal, February 14, 1878.

[84] Anna Angell (1844-1906) had been a resident at Mt. Sinai Hospital, where she worked with Dr. Mary Putnam Jacobi, Abraham Jacobi's wife, to set up a dispensary Even though she graduated from the New York Infirmary, supplemented her medical education with additional study in Germany, and was the first woman doctor to hold a residency in a New York hospital, she never established a private practice for herself. Instead, Angell spent her career working in institutions and, like many other early women doctors, even ambitious ones like Mary Putnam Jacobi and Elizabeth Blackwell, attended primarily to women and children. See biographical entries on Angell and Mary Putnam Jacobi in DAMB, and Regina Markell Morantz-Sanchez, *Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians in American Medicine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 146. Morantz-Sanchez speculates that Angell's "superior training couldn't protect her from 'self-distrust and lack of 'push'." For references to Angell's career at the New York Infant Asylum, see: NYIA, annual reports, lists of personnel, 1877 and 1878.

[85] Abigail Hopper Gibbons to Sally, August 13, 1879, in Emerson, *Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons*, 202-203.

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the Hopper Home agreed to jettison their former way of life in exchange for religious instruction and training in domestic accomplishments. Once this program was complete the female ex-offenders of the Hopper Home, like the unwed mothers of the Infant Asylum, were placed as domestic servants.

Like the inmates of the New York Infant Asylum, many, probably most of the residents of the Hopper Home belonged to the category of "fallen woman." By the middle of the nineteenth century, as agitation about the "fallen woman" rose, increasing numbers of women went to prison for sexual crimes. In crowded cities like New York more and more women were arrested for prostitution, vagrancy which gave the appearance of soliciting, and unseemly public behavior. Convictions for abortions may also have contributed to the number of women in prisons, since it was just at this time - the mid 1840s - that New York State law made women criminally liable for abortion.[86]

In 1845 Margaret Fuller, whose influential feminist book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* had just come out, published an appeal for the Hopper Home - then still a part of the Female Department of the Prison Association of New York - in the *New York Tribune*. She asked the paper's readers to support "those who have not been guarded either by social influence or inward strength from that first mistake which the opinion of the world makes irrevocable for women alone."[87] Had Fuller not drowned in a shipwreck off the coast of Fire Island in 1850, she might have written exactly the same

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[86] Freedman, *Sisters' Keepers*, 7, 11-12, 14. The number of women convicted for abortion was probably small, since, according to Michael Grossberg, the laws passed in New York in 1845 and 1846 that made women complicit in the crime of abortion were relatively ineffective. At the same time, though, the number of abortions performed was rising, which may have contributed to the absolute numbers. See Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth*, 173. Freedman also speculates on the contribution that convictions for abortion made on the number of women in prisons in the mid-nineteenth century. See Freedman, *Sisters' Keepers*, 13.

[87] *New York Tribune*, June 19, 1845. This article is unsigned, but Estelle Freedman identifies it as Fuller's. Freedman, *Sister's Keepers*, 31.

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thing twenty years later in support of the New York Infant Asylum. For Abigail Hopper Gibbons, the compromised women of the Hopper Home and their fallen sisters at the Infant Asylum must have seemed very much the same.

Just as Abigail Hopper Gibbons was acquainted with fallen women long before she got to the Infant Asylum, so was she also familiar with foundlings from her by then long-established habit of paying annual Christmas visits to the city's young wards at Long Island Farms and, after 1848, Randall's Island. Her companions on these visits included her husband, James Gibbons, and often friends, such as the novelists Catharine Sedgwick and Louisa May Alcott.[88]

In 1875 the author of *Little Women* accompanied Abigail and James Gibbons to Randall's Island. Traveling over on the boat with them were the mayor, a city commissioner, and a reporter from the *Tribune*. According to Alcott, Abby Gibbons besieged the "rotundities" - Alcott's witty appellation for city officials fattened on graft - with her suggestions for "what *ought* to be done for the poor things on the Island."[89] The officials gathered up their girths and fled from what must have seemed to them like annoying female interference, but the two women attracted the admiration of the young *Tribune* reporter. He stuck to them throughout their visit, gathering copy for his paper while helping Alcott and the Gibbonses distribute toys and candy to the children.[90]

Alcott noted things in good order on the island at what was, doubtless a carefully

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[88] For references to the Gibbons' visits to Long Island Farms and Randall's Island, see Emerson, *Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons*, 134-135, 187-188, 244 and Dewey, *Catharine M. Sedgwick*, 420-421. The annual reports of the almshouse also frequently mention Gibbons' visits. See, for instance, AH, annual report, 1855, 108, and PCC, annual reports, 1876, 121 and 1881, 71.

[89] Louisa May Alcott, letter "To the Alcott Family," December 25, 1875, in *Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*, ed. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern, associate editor (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 210.

[90] The reporter's observations of the day are in: "The Christian Festival. Christmas Cheer in New-York," *New York Tribune*, December 27, 1875, 5.

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prepared for event, but she also saw much that disturbed her. At a ceremony in the chapel Alcott saw "a flock of girls in blue gowns and white aprons" in the audience of neatly dressed children and observed "...what a pretty group they made, with gay ribbons in their hair...But among forty girls, I counted fifteen with defective eyes, [probably due to ophthalmia, which was common in children's institutions] nine deformed, and seven lame ones for the blight of poverty, neglect and bad birth, was on nearly all, if one examined closely."[91] Alcott also saw infant foundlings in the Infant Hospital on Randall's Island. Of these Alcott remarked: "Pauper women are nurses; and Mrs. G. says the babies die like sheep, many being deserted so young nothing can be hoped or done for them."[92]

Despite the sadness of what she saw, Alcott enjoyed her visit to Randall's Island. "Next week we go to the Tombs," she wrote her family with somewhat incongruous enthusiasm, "and some day I am to visit the hospital with her, for I like this better than parties, etc." Alcott was so entranced by her visit to Randall's Island that she repeated these sentiments in her journal: "A memorable day. Make a story of it. Enjoy these things more than the parties and dinners." The story she wrote appeared in the *Youth's Companion* the following spring.[93]

Alcott observed that Gibbons also enjoyed her visit to Randall's Island, despite the sad sights. After their visit there together in 1875 Gibbons breathed to Alcott, "There now, I shall feel better for the next year!"[94] Gibbons' work at the New York Infant

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[91] Louisa May Alcott, "A New Way to Spend Christmas," *Youth's Companion*, March 9, 1876, 76.

[92] Alcott, "To the Alcott Family," in Alcott, *Selected Letters*, 212.

[93] "To the Alcott Family," in Alcott, *Selected Letters*, 212; *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, ed. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 197. For more of Alcott's impressions of this day see: Madeleine B. Stern, *Louisa May Alcott* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), 253-5.

[94] "To the Alcott Family,"212; Louisa May Alcott, *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*,

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Asylum brought her the same kind of pleasure. In 1874, during a bout of illness that confined her to her room and the perhaps overscrupulous care of her daughter Julia, she wrote another daughter Sarah longingly: "I believe if I was allowed Infant Asylum delights it would renew life and action; but I name the lovely charity of which I am so fond, at my peril, in the presence of Julia." The doctor who cared for her during this illness was Stephen Smith who, as the secretary of the Infant Asylum's board, may have been more sympathetic to her longings than Julia. After she recovered she wrote to a friend: "Now, however, I am well and on duty as usual. Plenty to do, and I enjoy the work; especially the mothers and babies of the Infant Asylum..."[95]

Hands-on charity work at the Isaac Hopper Home, Randall's Island, and the Infant Asylum provided more than pleasure for Gibbons - it was also a necessary source of consolation. In 1832, when her three-year-old half brother died, she wrote to friends: "We all loved him too much, and I have made up my mind never to allow myself to become so devotedly attached to any child..." This resolution was tested when her year-old son James died in 1844; five and half-year-old Isaac in 1847; Willie, after an accident in 1855 while a student at Harvard; and much later, her fifty-three-year-old daughter Julia. In all she bore six children, and only two, daughters Sarah and Lucy, survived her. She suffered the most from Willie's death, and when for a while it threatened to drown her in grief, she found, as she had during previous crises, that charitable work was the thing that could carry her back to solid ground. "Is there not an angel of consolation in the activity of benevolence?" Catharine Sedgwick wrote her, "You are wise in yielding to its heavenly influence."[96]

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ed. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 197. For more about this visit see Madeleine B. Stern, *Louisa May Alcott* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), 253-5 and Emerson, *Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons*, 187, for Gibbons' description.

[95] Emerson, *Abby Hopper Gibbons*, 180-182.

[96] Bacon, *Abby Hopper Gibbons*, 25, 50, 74-79, 166; Emerson, *Life of Abby Hopper*

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All of the foundling asylums were driven by an engine of grief that was fueled by tears shed over the premature deaths of children. Visitors to the Sisters of Charity's foundling asylum noticed that the women of the "ladies' society" that supported the institution with chores and fundraising were often receiving consolation in return for their work. In 1871 a reporter for the *Herald* remarked that the women of the ladies' society included "many a mother, pining for her lost children," soothing "her heartache by making pretty things for these abandoned ones." Missionary Helen Campbell made a similar observation twenty years later. She noted the presence of women volunteers at the Sisters' institution who donated "food, money, and bundles of little garments, often from the drawer where they had been laid with tears, as the bereaved mother folded them away in memory of the little one who had put on angel raiment."[97]

Mary Du Bois, who lost a young son, may also have used her foundling asylum work to sublimate sorrow. In at least one instance she used the memory of that sorrow to gain assistance for the Nursery. Twenty-two years after this boy's death Du Bois evoked his memory in a letter to one of his friends, now a state legislator at the beginning of his career. Asking for his assistance with a petition before his colleagues in state government, she began: "I presume you have entirely forgotten me and will wonder when I tell you that you once uttered a prophecy since fulfilled and which I now beg of you to repeat. When you were but just able to speak, and I was overwhelmed with affliction for the loss of an only son nearly your own age you said to me 'Do not cry for there are stars in the skies for you yet.'"[98]

Gibbons, 1:139, 248. Sedgwick wrote this line to Gibbons in 1847, at the time of Isaac's death, see Emerson, *Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons*, 139.

[97] "The Foundling Asylum. One of New York's Most Noble Charities," *New York Herald*, March 4, 1871 and Campbell, *Darkness and Daylight*, 384.

[98] Letter, Mary Du Bois to J.H. Anthon, [November or January] 16, [1856]. Nursery and Child's Hospital Records, New-York Historical Society.

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Foundling asylum work was a source of consolation for the women (and also the men) who ran these institutions. But if these well-meaning members of the middle class were unable to keep their own children alive, they were even less able to keep alive these sickly and unwanted castoffs.

6. The Randall's Island Infant Hospital.

The appearance of three privately-organized foundling asylums after the Civil War did not absolve the city from its responsibility toward foundlings. Immediately after the war the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction established an "Infant's Department" in the almshouse on Blackwell's Island to accommodate the babies who had been removed from their nurses in 1860. In 1869 the commissioners moved all the babies into a newly constructed foundling asylum they called the "Infant's Hospital" on Randall's Island. This was the city's fourth foundling asylum, and the only one that was wholly publicly run.

The 1860 removal of the foundlings from their independent nurses - neglectful, even abusive women like Mary Cullough, but also poor but "very respectable" women like Mrs. Ward of Avenue C, who had cared for the much-loved almshouse infant Rachel Logan - represented some kind of an effort - or at least an effort at obscuring any failures from the scrutiny of the press and public. Its result was death for most of the babies. "The diet was found improper," the commissioners later admitted ruefully, "adequate medical attendance was not provided; the nurses, infirm old women, inmates of the Alms House, were anxious to escape from their unpaid duties, and these duties terminated with the death of the infants committed to their care."[99]

Job Lewis Smith, Stephen Smith's brother and the physician the commissioners

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[99] In 1866 the commissioners estimated that the death rate among infants at the almshouse had been over eighty percent. PCC, annual report, 1866, xvii-xviii.

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appointed to care for its foundlings in the almshouse during this period later recounted the dire situation there. "These waifs," he recollected,

> were intrusted to the pauper women in the almshouse. Each woman occupied a cot, under which were the dirty clothes and broken utensils brought from her shanty or tenement-house in the city. Foundlings were transported every day to the almshouse, and distributed by the superintendent, who informed me at my first visit that it would be an act of humanity if each foundling were given a fatal dose of opium on its arrival, since all of them died.[100]

"The steamboat every morning brought foundlings to the island," he added in another recollection, "and every afternoon removed an equal number for burial in Potter's field."[101]

On June 1, 1866 the commissioners, in a bid to ameliorate this situation, established a separate Department for Infants in the almshouse on Blackwell's Island. "An Infant Department," they proudly reported, "has been created, where the foundling infants hitherto distributed among the wards of the Almshouse, and consigned to the mercies of reluctant attendants, have been gathered under the care of a matron and kind and attentive nurses."[102]

The new Infant Department kept babies up to the age of about two and a half (later this age was raised to three or four, and it was probably always somewhat flexible). Like all of the city's foundling asylums the Infant Department accepted mothers as well as babies, and pressed them into service as wet-nurses for the unaccompanied foundlings.

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[100] Smith, "Hindrances," 95.

[101] Harold K. Faber, "Job Lewis Smith, Forgotten Pioneer," *Journal of Pediatrics* 63 (1963), 797. Smith made a career for himself in the emerging field of pediatrics. He worked as a visiting or attending physician to the New York Infant Asylum, the Nursery and Child's Hospital, and to the Infant's Hospital on Randall's Island after it opened in 1869. Russell Viner notes that, as a committed Christian, like his brother, he was a member of the social gospel movement. Russell Viner, "Politics, Power, and Pediatrics," *Lancet* 355 (January 16, 1999), 233.

[102] PCC, annual report, 1866, viii.

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The children fell into two categories: "nurse children" to refer to the fact that these foundlings and other solitary babies were cared for by nurses rather than their own mothers, and "mother's children," babies accompanied by their destitute mothers. Children old enough to toddle were called "walking children."[103] A house physician was appointed, two physicians from the medical board of the city-run Charity Hospital began making regular visits, and diet, clothing, and "the whole regime" were subjected to "radical changes."[104]

The babies came to the Infant Department from the same sources that had always supplied the almshouse: streets, stoops, baby farmers cheated out of their pay by absconding parents, and the police. By this time the police, in the middle of a process of professionalization that began with the founding of the city's first professional police department in 1847, officially added the retrieval of abandoned babies to its list of "incidental duties of the department" along with rescuing persons from drowning, returning stolen money to lodgers, and enforcing the Sunday liquor law.[105]

The Infant Department also received foundlings from a new source: this was the city's Emigrant Hospital on Ward's Island. In 1868 the department's house physician speculated that "no small proportion" of the foundlings in the Infant Department were "born in the Hospitals of the Commissioners of Emigration, of women lately arrived in

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[103] For the categories of babies see PCC, annual report, 1866, 98 or 1867, 385. For a reference to "walking children," see PCC, annual report, 1868, 334. For more such definitions see PCC, annual report, 1869, 118.

[104] PCC, annual report, 1866, xviii.

[105] Metropolitan Police, annual report, 1860-1861, 102. The police department also began recording the numbers of foundlings it picked up. In 1860-61 the table cited above lists this number as 104. A table published in 1869 reported that between 48 and 176 foundlings had been picked up annually from 1864 to 1869. See Metropolitan Police, annual report, 1869, 65. These numbers represent only a fraction of the foundlings taken in by the Infant Department. In 1887 the department's annual report estimated that no more than thirty percent of foundlings passed through the hands of the police. Police Department, annual report, 1887, 46.

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this country..."[106] Women who arrived in the port of New York, pregnant and unmarried, could give birth at the Emigrant Hospital. But the Commissioners of Emigration threw these women out as soon as they recovered and required them to find work immediately. The rule requiring them to go to work was an effort on the part of the Commissioners of Emigration to prevent vagrancy, since a poor, unemployed immigrant, they believed, would necessarily become a nuisance on the city's streets. Most of the women who were ejected from the Emigrant Hospital went to work in private homes as domestic servants. As domestic servants they typically could not keep their babies with them, and were consequently left with no choice but to leave them behind in the hospital. These babies were then delivered straight from the Emigrant Hospital on Ward's Island to the almshouse Infant Department on Blackwell's. Like the conflicting rules of entry at the Nursery and the New York Foundling Asylum, this was yet another of the bureaucratic conundrums that buffeted poor single mothers in the city.[107]

Despite the improved conditions at the new Infant Department, one of the visiting physicians there had to admit that the almshouse "is, and always must remain an unsuitable place for the rearing of Infants."[108] In 1867, after a year's experience with the new regime, the commissioners had to report that although there was "some"

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[106] PCC, annual report, 1868, 311.

[107] On the Emigrant Hospital, see PCC, annual report, 1866, "Report of Arbitrators," 410-423; 1868, 311-312, 346. The presence of these babies in the Infant Department was a source of contention between the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction and the Commissioners of Emigration. In 1866 the Commissioners of Emigration and the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction feuded over who should pay the expenses of these infants. Since they were born on American soil they were American citizens and, the Commissioners of Emigration argued, their expenses should be paid for out of the regular funds of the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction, not the funds especially set aside to pay for the needs of poor immigrants. The Commissioners of Emigration lost this dispute in arbitration, and so continued to pay for the infants of new immigrants out of their funds, but the Infant Department continued to take them in.

[108] PCC, annual report, 1866, , 102.

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improvement, and the babies were now "treated with tenderness and care," the "mortality continued at the same frightful ratio." It ranged, they estimated, between eighty-five and one hundred percent. In an effort to stem this flood of death they imported about fifty women from the city's two general hospitals, Bellevue, and the Charity Hospital on Blackwell's Island, to work as wet-nurses in addition to the mothers already in residence.[109]

Public hospital patients in this period, when hospitals provided more shelter than cure, were poor people; hospital nurses were typically recovered patients who had no homes to return to, and thus remained to live and work in the hospital.[110] Thus these newly imported wet-nurses were poor, sick women who, happening to be lactating, and probably without any place else to go, agreed to take their own infants and live in the almshouse Infant Department to feed foundlings for a while. The offer may have seemed tempting for them. At the Infant Department they were housed in separate wards, away from the general almshouse population, and fed well in a separate dining room, receiving such "extra diet" as ale, eggs, and milk. They were also released from manual labor and clothed in "distinctive dress," which probably represented a meaningful gift of new clothing to them.[111]

The work of the wet-nurses at first appeared to lead to a "manifest and

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[109] PCC, annual report, 1867, 24-25.

[110] For the history of hospitals and nursing, see: Susan M. Reverby, *Ordered to Care: The Dilemma of American Nursing, 1850-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Charles Rosenberg, *The Care of Strangers: The Rise of America's Hospital System* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); and Morris J. Vogel, *The Invention of the Modern Hospital, Boston, 1870-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[111] PCC, annual report, 1867, 391-392, and 1868, 308. For the average daily number of babies in the Infant Dept. see PCC, annual report, 1867, 302. On hospital patients, see Rosenberg, *Care of Strangers*. On January 1, 1867 there were ninety-nine "mothers' children" - the term used to describe babies nursed by their own mothers - on hand in the Infant Department, so I am concluding from this that there were ninety-nine mothers. This number presumably fluctuated from day to day. PCC, annual report, 1867, 302.

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immediate" improvement. More babies survived, and more ward space had to be cleared to house them. In January 1868, in search of this extra space, and in an effort to improve the babies' hygienic surroundings, the department was moved out of the Blackwell's Island almshouse, up the East River to the newly completed but still empty Inebriate Asylum on Ward's Island.[112] Despite these changes, the commissioners' optimism was stillborn. What had at first looked like a "manifest and immediate" improvement turned out only to be a pattern of fluctuation, in which the mortality sometimes fell, but at other times rose "to nearly the old rate." The commissioners had to concede that the "mortality was a scandal to the [medical] profession and the Department."[113] Like all the city's foundling asylums, the Infant Department created excellent conditions for the propagation and spread of infection, but did not have any means to combat infection.

Dr. Stephen Rogers, a critic of the Infant Department, toured its new quarters in the Inebriate Asylum on Ward's Island in the summer of 1868. He found the babies hot, uncomfortable, and pestered by flies and mosquitoes. The babies' food, care, and surroundings were all, according to Dr. Rogers, inadequate. Dr. Rogers also noticed that the number of wet-nurses was insufficient, since the commissioners had difficulty convincing them to remain on the island.[114] This was a situation the commissioners struggled with bitterly. The wet-nurses, pleased as they may have been by the special treatment they received in the Infant Department, were not as docile as the Commissioners wished. Lactating women willing to work as wet-nurses were in high

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[112] PCC, annual report, 1868, [307], 340.

[113] PCC, annual report, 1867, 24; 1868, 23. The commissioners reported that of the 1,535 babies that passed through the Infant Department in 1867 (191 remaining from the previous year, and 1,244 admitted in 1867) 1,237, or 81%, died. Of the 1,535, 928 were specifically identified as foundlings, or "nurse children"as they were called to distinguish them from babies who entered the Infant Department with their mothers. PCC, annual report, 1867, 302, 385.

[114] Rogers, "Neglected Causes,"342.

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demand among families in the city. Accordingly, representatives of domestic service agencies crossed the river to Ward's Island to lure these poor women with their valuable breast milk away. The agents' offers of well-paid jobs in private homes were evidently tempting to the wet-nurses, living, as they were, in an empty building on a lonely East River island, nursing sick and dying infants without pay.

The officials of the Infant Department did not see it that way. Like the Sisters of Charity and the lady managers of the Nursery and Child's Hospital, they viewed these poor women's decision to maximize their earnings and seek greater comfort for themselves as a failure of their maternal instincts. According to a special committee of physicians organized by the commissioners to investigate the department's continuing high death rate, the newly formed Infant Department had become nothing but a "great depot for wet-nurses," and the "desire to be free from all restraint–even that of an offspring–" was what motivated these women to board the Manhattan-bound ferry with the wet-nurse agents, leaving their own babies behind.[115]

Despite the committee's pique it is clear that working conditions for wet-nurses in the Infant Department were difficult and even dangerous to the health of the women and their own babies. The volume of babies that passed through the Infant Department was overwhelming and the death rate, particularly among the foundlings, was tragically high. Wet-nurses in the department were required to nurse two babies, their own and a motherless foundling, but the death rate was such that the women actually nursed not one foundling, but rather a succession of sick and dying ones. Compared to this, the promise of nursing a single healthy infant in a comfortable home, even if it meant boarding her own baby elsewhere or even leaving it on the island must have been tempting.

A glance at the numbers the commissioners reported during the Infant Department years graphically demonstrates just why they were alarmed - and why the nurses deserted

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[115] PCC, annual report, 1868, 308, 346.

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them. Between June 1, 1866 when the Infant Department opened, and the last day of the year, the department received an average of sixty-seven foundlings per month, or 466 for the whole June to December period. 412 foundlings - eighty-eight percent of them - died. During the same June to December period 258 babies entered the department with their own mothers. Their experience, in contrast to that of the foundlings, was much closer to the general experience of babies with mothers living at home in New York: sixty-seven, or twenty-six percent of these "mother's children" died.[116]

Two years later, despite the commissioners' efforts at improvement, the figures were no better. In 1868 the Infant Department admitted eighty-three foundlings per month, for a total of 994. Of this number 889, or eight-nine percent, died. The death rate for the 583 babies admitted with their own mothers that year was 150 or twenty-six percent. In total, the Infant Department cared for 1,577 babies in 1868, of whom 1,039 died, a death rate of sixty-six percent, a figure that was much inflated by the presence of foundlings.[117]

Infant Department officials were acutely aware of the difference between the death rates of foundlings and that of babies accompanied by their mothers. One of the visiting physicians put this phenomenon into perspective: "In accordance with the universal experience, it is among the first class, the Foundlings, that the death-rate is incomparably higher." He made the same observations that all caretakers of foundlings made. Foundlings, he explained, suffered from the rigors of exposure, including extremes of weather and lack of food during the hours that passed before babies were

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[116] PCC, annual report, 1866, 200-201. Appendix C of this report lists a different set of figures. Since the author of this appendix, visiting physician J. Bayley Done, remarks that his information is "imperfect" and the records he was working with incomplete, I have chosen to use the figures presented by warden James Owens on pp.200-201. However, all figures from city departments in this period of great corruption in city government must be viewed skeptically.

[117] PCC, annual report, tables on pp.314-316.

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plucked off stoops or out of tenement entryways by the police or kindly strangers. Most of all he blamed foundlings' loss of access to sufficient breast milk. The department's difficulty retaining wet-nurses meant that some foundlings had to be bottle-fed. This was a dangerous procedure in this period before cow's milk could be kept reliably free of bacteria - even before the role of bacteria in illness was understood. Digestive illnesses, probably picked up from impure milk and water, accounted for "the immense majority of deaths" among foundlings.[118] The department's house physician noticed that after "an exclusive course of bottle-feeding," foundlings suffered a mortality of "practically 100 per centum." The death rate of foundlings, he concluded, was "fearful" and "it cannot be otherwise than with the most profound interest that the subject must be considered."[119]

The committee of physicians assembled to investigate the Infant Department's death rate did not feel hopeful that the situation could improve. The task of keeping abandoned infants alive, its members warned, "enlists all the best sympathies of our nature; it is one that would be unendurable if we were not to recognize the incontrovertible fact that an appalling mortality is inevitable."[120]

The following year the committee, whose members were Stephen Smith, Job Lewis Smith, Abraham Jacobi, Austin Flint, Isaac E. Taylor, and George T. Elliot, was

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[118] PCC, annual report, 1866, 99-100; 103. In re digestion this doctor, J. Bayley Done, writes: "However, it is apparent to any one who is at all familiar with this Department, that the immense majority of deaths are occasioned by defective assimulation,[his spelling] and such diseases as acknowledge this, as their cause." According to a table listing causes of death among babies in the Infant's Bureau, diarrhea accounted for 172 deaths, while other gastric diseases, including cholera infantum, dysentery, enteritis, enterocolitis, gastritis, and marasmus accounted for an additional fifty-three deaths out of a total of 479. Hydrocephalus, convulsions, and tuberculosis also carried off significant numbers. PCC, annual report, 1866, 202.

[119] PCC, annual report, 1868, 328-329. For more commentary on the high death rate of foundlings as compared to the babies nursed by their mothers, see "Annual Report of the Infant Hospital"in PCC, annual report, 1869, 82.

[120] PCC, annual report, 1868, 348-349.

made into a permanent medical board for the Infant Department. All were prominent members of the city's medical establishment, and Abraham Jacobi and Job Lewis Smith were pioneers in the emerging field of pediatrics. Jacobi, Elliot, and the Smiths were also on the medical staffs of the Nursery and the New York Infant Asylum. George T. Elliot had been the chair of the committee; he became the president of the Infant Department's new medical board.[121] Dr. Elliot put his committee's bleak warning into a broader though equally grim context when he spoke at an 1868 meeting of the Medical Society of the County of New York:

> ...I have been condemned to feel, as a father and as a physician, that do what we may, we cannot lay the spectre of the inevitable mortality of childhood. This discussion cannot be conducted in the elevated spirit that should characterize it, until full confession is made of this inevitable mortality. You must not confine your view to one city, to one country, to one zone. Go through the whole world; take reports of exploring expeditions; examine the statistics of mortality in families placed under the most favorable hygienic conditions in the world; go among your own patients of the most favored classes–where is the family that has succeeded in raising all its children, even under the best conditions and with the best medical advice?[122]

This was the unhopeful state of medical practice with children in 1868. But there was something new in the anxious attention the commissioners and the members of the Infant Department's medical board now chose to pay to foundlings. This was, in itself, a departure from the fatalism, even revulsion, toward abandoned infants manifested by all of the city's antebellum charities for women and children. J. Bayley Done, one of the Infant Department's visiting physicians, commented on this turn in attitudes in the year the department was founded. "In former years," he wrote, "it has been generally the feeling, pervading all classes of the community, that, to these waifs of society, death is a

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[121] For the membership of the "Special Committee, Infant's Hospital," see PCC, annual report, 1868, 339. For the membership of the medical board see PCC, annual report, 1869, [115].

[122] *Medical Record*, November 16, 1868, 427.

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happy result. It is gratifying now to observe that a view more creditable to humanity is being adopted..."[123]

The Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction began building the Infant Hospital, as they called their foundling asylum, on Randall's Island, probably in early 1868.[124] On August 9, 1869, with the building still incomplete, the babies, mothers, nurses, and "walking children" of the Infant Department made the short trip from their temporary home in the inebriate asylum on Ward's Island to their new one on adjacent Randall's Island. The Infant Department's herd of twelve cows did not accompany them. There was no room for them an Randall's, so they remained behind at the Ward's Island farm. The children lost the company of the cows but not their milk which, the farmer assured the commissioners, would still be delivered morning and night.[125]

Randall's was already the site of the department's Nursery Department for destitute children ages four to sixteen. The placement of the Infant Hospital near the Nursery Department was logical, and it was also convenient, since babies from the Infant Hospital who beat the odds and survived past infancy - and were neither adopted nor returned to their families - were transferred to the Nursery Department when they reached the age of about four.[126]

Like the buildings of the Nursery Department, constructed twenty years earlier,

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[123] PCC, annual report, 1866, 100.

[124] The 1869 PCC annual report states on page 13 that: "The Infant Hospital, which has been in course of construction for the past two years, has been partially completed."

[125] For the move see PCC, annual report, 1869, 117. For the cows, see page 493. Randall's and Ward's islands are now joined by landfill, but at the time they were separate.

[126] For the Nurseries' acceptance of children four and up, see PCC, annual report, 1868, 24. For the reference to the ages of the children - four to sixteen - at the Randall's Island Nurseries, see Richmond, *New York and its Institutions*, 563.

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the Infant Hospital was a grand hopeful gesture in masonry. Standing on the western (Manhattan) side of the island, and facing the green hills of the Bronx (then part of Westchester County) to the north, the three-story brick and stone building consisted of a central pavilion with wings extended east and west. Festooned with porches, gables, and turrets, and with a jaunty American flag flying from the top of the central pavilion, the building was, according to one observer, "in the most approved style of modern hospital architecture."[127] The Infant Department's house physician E.S. Dunster agreed, calling it a "noble building," and the best the department had erected so far, particularly "in the matter of light, ventilation and the capacity of the wards."[128] But Dunster also had serious criticisms to make. The building, despite its seeming grandness, was not large enough for all the babies, and he looked forward to the completion of an additional wing. Without more space, the smells created by hundreds of babies crowded together would only increase.

According to the medical knowledge available to Dr. Dunster in 1869, bad odors were not only unpleasant - they were also dangerous. "All smell is disease," claimed the influential English sanitarian, Sir Edwin Chadwick. Disease, physicians and sanitarians then believed, was caused by impurities that fermented in the air. Smells signified the presence of these "miasmas" of deadly disease. A bacteria-based understanding of disease transmission did not begin to take shape until the early 1880s with the discoveries of the tuberculosis and cholera bacilli by the German bacteriologist Robert Koch, and even then it was still years before the germ theory was fully accepted by physicians.[129]

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[127] Richmond, *New York and its Institutions*, 564. My description is based on a picture of the Infant Hospital in my possession.

[128] PCC, annual report, 1869, 122-123.

[129] On the miasmatic and zymotic theories of disease, especially as they related to infants, see Meckel, *Save the Babies*, 15-16. On Robert Koch see Rosenberg, *Cholera Years*, 199-200 and Rosenberg, *Care of Strangers*, 160.

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Thus in 1871 Dr. Dunster, with his needs for space still unmet, complained about the "unpleasant and injurious odors that pervade the building, especially at night." "All my efforts," he insisted, "have been directed to economizing life, and this can only be done at expense of constant purity of air."[130]

Dr. Dunster also disapproved of the commissioners' habitual use of convicts and paupers as workers at their institutions. He objected especially to the use of convict and pauper nurses in the new Infant Hospital. To expect these women to give the infants good care was, he remarked bitterly, "simply chimerical."[131] He accused these women of "indifference, neglect, and sometimes almost criminal carelessness." "It must be remembered," he warned the commissioners,

> that all these attendants come from one of the two classes,–paupers or criminals,–and as regards the last mentioned, I have repeatedly pled for the abolition of such help in any capacity, about institutions for the rearing or education of children. Each year's experience only corroborates and intensifies the conviction that to rely on such assistance is not only an unwise and costly economy, but also the worst possible policy, in view of the degrading influences, and directly disastrous consequences to health and life that inevitably attend contact with such creatures.[132]

Abraham Jacobi also deplored the use of convict labor at the Randall's Island Infant Hospital. "The poorest country woman," he argued, would be better than these "corrupt, lazy, whimsical, or malicious women."[133]

Dr. Dunster pled in vain. The commissioners were willing to provide some paid nurses for the department, but they would not relinquish their free and constantly replenished supply of captive labor. They were particularly unwilling, really unable, to give up the valuable milk provided by those female inmates of the hospitals, almshouse,

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[130] PCC, annual report, 1871, 203-204.

[131] PCC, annual report, 1869, 268.

[132] PCC, annual report, 1870, 202.

[133] Jacobi, *Raising and Education*, 40-41.

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workhouse, and other public institutions. Abraham Jacobi, much as he deplored the use of convict and pauper nurses, realized that these were all that the Infant Hospital could get. Only the "sickly, the profligate, the very poor" would agree to work as wet-nurses on Randall's Island and "no married woman, as a rule...will ever consent to become a wet-nurse to any of our children."[134]

In its use of convict and pauper labor the new Infant Hospital was following the practice established long ago by the almshouse department. All of the institutions run by the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction - the almshouse department's successor - used their inmates as their principal source of labor. Incarcerated men and boys did all the building and landscaping. Women and girls in the prison, almshouse, workhouse, nursery, hospitals, and insane asylum nursed their fellow inmates, washed, cleaned, mended and produced an endless stream of sewing and mending. The twenty thousand "new shirts and chemises" produced by female inmates in one year were, the commission's storekeeper estimated, "enough for an army"- in this case a captive army of the poor.[135]

A wet-nurse in the Infant Hospital lived in a building built by inmates of the Blackwell's Island Penitentiary, made of stone quarried and dressed by them on the islands. The rooms she spent her days in were probably dusted and mopped by women from the workhouse, sent over as "help." She may have slept on sheets made by female inmates of the lunatic asylum, worn a dress made by a jailed prostitute, and had her apron mended by a little girl in the Nursery Department. Her laundry was among the 390,000 items that passed through the Randall's Island wash house yearly. Her breakfast probably included eggs and milk from the Ward's Island farm, rowed over to Randall's by a convict boatman. The cabbages she ate for dinner might have been grown on the

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[134] Jacobi, *Raising and Education*, 41.

[135] PCC, annual report, 1875, xx.

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grounds of the almshouse on Blackwell's Island. The seawalls that protected her from the river's rough currents were built by prisoners and male inmates of the workhouse. These men also graded the roads she walked on and planted the trees whose shade she enjoyed. When she wasn't tending to her own baby and the foundling assigned to her, she probably spent her time sweeping, sewing, and mending for her fellow inmates. And if she was unfortunate enough to die before she could leave the island, there was a shroud ready-made for her by the busy fingers of the insane and a grave in Potter's Field.[136]

Despite Dunster's accusation of "costly economy," the commissioners believed that they were operating efficiently and correctly. The wardens of all the institutions bragged about the vast amounts of food and clothing they produced, about the money they saved, and about the lessons in hard work absorbed by their charges who, according to the era's tenets of charity, were presumed to be naturally indolent. The man who supervised work at the Ward's Island farm reported that in 1869 the farm yielded $3,941.26 worth of vegetables. "Every pound of vegetables raised may justly be considered as so much money saved," remarked the storekeeper who distributed this produce. The exact attention paid by these two functionaries to the cash value of each parsnip contrasts strangely with the loose accounting that characterized so many financial transactions during this, the height of the pillaging Tweed era.[137]

Labor was also carefully measured. The warden of the penitentiary computed that the men in his institution logged a total of 106,944 days of labor and the women 25,054

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[136] For a summary of pauper labor used by the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction, see McCabe, *Lights and Shadows*, "The East River Islands and their Institutions," 631-647. Note especially the illustration of the Blackwell's Island Almshouse (page 637) showing rows of what look like cabbages growing in front. All of the reports of the commissioners describe the inmates at work. For the activities described here see: PCC, annual reports, 1869, 261, 313-315, 436-437, 454-456, 491-492, 495; 1875, xii.

[137] PCC annual report, 1869, 495 (Ward's Island farm); 1875, xxii (storekeeper).

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days over the course of one year. The supervisor of the workhouse reported that his inmates "have been kept continually at work, breaking stone, grading and repairing sea wall, cultivating the grounds. Tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, horse shoers, painters, have been diligently kept at work, performing a large amount of work for the various institutions..."[138] All of this certainly accomplished the goals intended, but an unintended consequence was the airless, hermetic feeling created by a closed system. The older children who lived on Randall's Island must certainly have felt it.

The location of many of the city's charitable and correctional institutions on islands added to their atmosphere of melancholy isolation. Dr. Stephen Rogers made note of this when he visited the Infant Department at the inebriate asylum on Ward's Island in 1868. In the time that it took foundlings to travel to the island, he complained, they could die of starvation. Infants, he reported, were "often delivered to the hospital almost moribund." Ward's Island's remoteness also made it difficult for visitors to get there. These visitors, he suggested, might have included charitable citizens willing to make donations, families wanting to adopt, and mothers ready to reclaim their abandoned babies. He angrily compared the remoteness of the commissioners' hideaway for their destitute and dying babies to the all-too-visible prominence of the Fifth Avenue home of the notorious abortionist Madame Restell:

> ...inasmuch as the finest street of our city counts among its palaces one which, to the disgrace of our people, is a gaudy monument to infanticide, placed where the crowds on their evening drives to our Park may gaze upon it, the asylum for those infants who escape this iniquitous institution should have an equally conspicuous and accessible place.[139]

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[138] PCC annual report, 1869, 436 (workhouse), 456 (penitentiary).

[139] Rogers, "Neglected Causes." Dr. Rogers' criticisms touched off a volley of indignant responses from doctors associated with the Infant Department, including Abraham Jacobi, George T. Elliott, and Elisha Harris. See *Medical Record*, 3 (1868), 404, 426, 464, 466, 499, 580 for these criticisms and Dr. Rogers' responses to them. Russell Viner speculates that Stephen Rogers, a physician with an interest in the diseases of women and

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The isolation of the city's public institutions for the poor had been a subject of comment for decades. As early as 1855 Isaac Townsend, then president of the almshouse department's board of governors, noted irritably that "the locations of our principal Institutions are such as to take them from the general examination and observation of similar Institutions elsewhere, and our citizens generally are in total ignorance of their extent or the service required to do justice to their organization or their inmates." The result, he complained, was neglect from city and state governments when it came time to allocate funds. Townsend's observations were backed up by an article in the *Tribune* from around the same time which referred to the Randall's Island nurseries as "this almost unknown channel through which flows one of the City's noblest charities." As late as 1887 Infant Hospital officials were still complaining about how hard it was to get to Randall's Island, particularly in the winter when there was ice on the river. The commissioners begged city officials for a steam launch to replace the small, exposed, and utterly inadequate rowboats they were forced to use.[140]

But the islands' isolation also served several positive purposes, according to public and official opinion. One author went so far as to call the East River islands "a sort of moral rampart to the great metropolis" erected to protect responsible citizens from contamination. At the same time the wayward and the potentially wayward, such as the children on Randall's Island, were removed from urban temptations and learned to mend their ways.[141] In the self-sustaining ecosystem of the institutions of charity and

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children who held a post in the city coroner's office, may have seen himself as politically opposed to Abraham Jacobi, and thus an enemy to the Infant Department's medical board. The tone of Dr. Rogers' attack is angry and unreasonable in parts, and sounds as if it may have been generated by some personal or political disagreement. Viner, "Healthy Children for a New World," 237-240.

[140] AH, annual report, 1855, x; "Presentation of a Flag to the Randall's Island Boys," *New York Tribune*, January 17, 1854; PCC, annual report, 1887, v-vi.

[141] Richmond, *New York and its Institutions*, 562.

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correction, alcoholics, vagrants, pickpockets, prostitutes, and destitute children learned to accustom themselves to hard work.

Inmates were assisted in this process, most urban reformers believed, by exposure to the islands' rural beauty. Many reformers, at this time of bewilderingly rapid urbanization, accepted the romantic belief that the countryside had the power to soothe and restore the bodies and souls of people deformed by city life. Visitors to the institutions on the East River islands often commented on their beauty. The abolitionist and author (and friend of the Hopper family) Lydia Maria Child, on visiting the penitentiary on Blackwell's Island, described the island's "quiet loveliness of scenery, unsurpassed by anything I have ever witnessed....[the island] abounds with charming nooks–open wells in shady places, screened by large weeping willows; gardens and arbours running down to the river's edge, to look at themselves in the waters; and pretty boats, like white-winged birds, chased by their shadows, and breaking the waves into gems." How "wise and kind," she concluded, "to place the erring and the diseased in the midst of such calm, bright influences."[142] Catharine Sedgwick described Randall's Island as "that lovely island in its rich natural beauty."[143]

If the islands were beautiful, then they were also beautiful prisons. Randall's, Blackwell's, Ward's, and the other islands were not easily accessible to the public and, of course, most of their residents were forbidden to leave. None of the sixteen ferry lines that busily worked the East River, illuminating the water at night with their colored lights, stopped at the islands.[144] Only the boats of the Commissioners of Public Charities

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[142] Letters From New York, Number 29, Lydia Maria Child, *A Lydia Maria Child Reader*, ed. Carolyn L. Karcher (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 319. Child was the author of a biography of Abigail Hopper Gibbons' father, Isaac T. Hopper, and lived with the Hoppers in New York during a period when she was in New York writing for the *Anti-Slavery Standard.*

[143] Dewey, *Catharine M. Sedgwick*, 421.

[144] McCabe, *Lights and Shadows*, 299.

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and Corrections docked there.[145] Charles Dickens described the experience of being rowed to the islands in one of these boats: "I was taken to the Institutions by water, in a boat belonging to the Long Island Jail, and rowed by a crew of prisoners, who were dressed in a striped uniform of black and buff, in which they looked like faded tigers."[146] For the children of Randall's Island the city must have seemed worlds away - and the beautiful ferries a cruel temptation.

The East River islands were hard to get to, but the curious and charitable, people like Alcott, Gibbons, Child, Sedgwick, and Dickens, were generally willing to make the effort. In 1874 William H. Rideing, author of a series of articles in *Appleton's Journal* about city life, visited the Infant Hospital on Randall's Island. Like many visitors to the East River islands, Rideing appreciated the beauty of the approach. The "children's island," as he called it, was tainted by "sin all in its area, to be sure," but at the same time it was "pretty and salubrious in its situation." "You must have seen it," he reminded the readers of *Appleton's Journal*, "and admired its undulating greenness in the summer-time." Ferry riders would be familiar with the Infants' Hospital building since, with its outstretched wings and jaunty turrets, it was "a prominent object as the Harlem boat bears you swiftly down the river."

Once landed at Randall's Island, Rideing saw an inscription over the Infant Hospital's door: "I was sick, and ye came unto me." Walking in he was assaulted by a "vociferous throng," "twenty or thirty little scamps," who attacked their visitor with "violent demonstrations of friendship." These were the two and three-year-old "walking

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[145] McCabe, *Lights and Shadows*, 631. This is a reference to Blackwell's Island.

[146] Dickens, *American Notes*, 142. Dickens was a little vague about where he was going, thus his inaccurate reference to the "Long Island Jail." He described this visit as a trip to "the different public institutions on Long Island [, or Rhode Island: I forget which]." Dickens, *American Notes*, 140.

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children." Rideing was pleased with their appearance: "They are livelier and ruddier than most charity children," he found, "and are evidently better cared for and fed." Their dress was "common but neat." He was particularly impressed with the boldness of one little girl:

> One young lady marches coolly toward us, thrusts her companions aside, and, after reaching for our hands, strokes them fondly. This is but a prelude; for, having ingratiated herself with us, she dives her busy little fingers into our overcoat pockets, and brings out all they contain. As she finds only the morning newspaper and a handkerchief, and is not disappointed, we suppose her only motive is the inborn curiosity of her sex. Her sharp eyes detect our glasses dangling before us, and she holds them to her impudent little nose, archly turning her face upward and smiling at us angelically. Until now we do not perceive how sweet the siren is. Her hair is golden, her eyes are the darkest blue, and her skin is like a peach. "A foundling, aged two years and seven months." That's all the history of this frail, dear little blossom.

Rideing was somewhat less impressed with the babies he saw, "pulpy little creatures, ticketed in white cots." The doctor who accompanied him on his tour through the hospital showed off some of the healthier specimens, among them a baby found abandoned in a graveyard. "'Came to the nursery almost a skeleton.'" The doctor explained tersely, "'Been here ten months. Age sixteen months.'" But Rideing also noticed the occasional "wasted, pining, suffering child, tossing himself in pain and fever on his narrow bed." And, like everyone else who spent time at the Infant Hospital, he had something to say about the female convicts, paupers, and destitute, unmarried mothers who worked there as nurses. Some, he noted approvingly, had a "spruce" appearance and were careful in their work, and others were the babies' own mothers. But, he observed, "The most suitable women are not always available for the service, and many who are coarse and brutal foist themselves upon the hospital."

All in all, he concluded, it was better not to be brought up in the Infant Hospital: "Sick or well, the waifs have a sadness about them which is painful to the observer, though they may be unconscious of it themselves. The exuberance, the independence, and

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the frankness, that give to home-bred children their greatest charms, have only a very limited scope in the liliputian unfortunates of the almshouse."[147]

7. Conclusion.

The people who founded, supported, and ran New York's foundling asylums had high expectations. They hoped to stop abortion, prostitution, infanticide, and suicides of "erring" mothers. The physicians who supported the Infant Home, the very first foundling asylum planned for the city, sought to strike a blow at their "irregular" competitors and thereby elevate their own status. Mothers and fathers of dead children used their work at the foundling asylums to sublimate their grief. Ambitious women like Abigail Hopper Gibbons, Mary Du Bois, Mary Connolly, and perhaps also Sister Irene Fitzgibbon, enjoyed exercising their administrative talents in these institutions in a world that allowed women very few opportunities to be effective in the public sphere. Sanitarians like Stephen Smith and Elisha Harris must have seen their efforts for the foundling asylums as an extension of their public health work.

All of the people involved with the three private foundling asylums were motivated by Christian piety, whether Catholic or Protestant. The Sisters of Charity sought to rescue Catholic babies from the hands of Protestant charities - and, by means of baptism, create Catholic babies out of the bits of humanity that arrived on their doorstep without religious identity. The organizers of the two Protestant foundling asylums sought to counter the success of the Catholic New York Foundling Asylum and capture some infant souls for their own faith. Democratic politicians saw the foundling asylums as nurseries in which to cultivate their own reputations. The city's newspapers used the foundling asylums as sources of sentimental stories.

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[147] W.H. Rideing, "The Children's Island," *Appleton's Journal* 2 (January 10, 1874): 46-47.

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Perhaps most of all, the people involved with the foundling asylums wanted to rescue fallen women. The situation of fallen women in the years after the Civil War was articulated by the Nursery's secretary: "The unwed mother is the leper of our social life. She is thrown off by her family - disowned by kindred and friends - all shrink from her, as the Jew of olden time did from the leper..."[148] It was powerful images such as this one, contrasting so harshly with the Victorian notion of wifehood and motherhood, the "angel in the house," that was the central motivation behind the opening of the three private foundling asylums. Female purity concerned these reformers more than female poverty. The ribald light-heartedness of previous centuries - as expressed by Fielding in *Tom Jones* or Shakespeare in *A Winter's Tale* - was gone, evaporated in the earnestness of the anxious nineteenth century.

Despite their many high aims, the organizers of New York's foundling asylums did not expect to be able to save foundlings' lives. While their concern about the welfare of babies abandoned in the street was the stimulus that pushed them into action, it was what foundlings signified about the behavior of women that worried them the most. At best, they hoped to mitigate the suffering at the end of foundlings' short lives as much as they could. Given the realities of infant mortality of this era, this was the best they felt they could do. Their action, while limited, was to their credit in light of the cruel apathy of the earlier part of the century. As late as 1882 Mary Du Bois, acknowledging the difficulty of keeping foundlings alive, nonetheless argued that it was still the Nursery's duty to receive them, because at least there, "they *must* get better care and attention, and can die in comfort."

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[148] NCH, annual report, 1872, 11-13. The secretary who wrote this was Mary M. Sullivan, who succeeded Mary Du Bois as "first directress" of the Nursery after Du Bois's death.

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CHAPTER FIVE - OUT-HERODING HEROD

1. Introduction.

Louisa May Alcott's and W. H. Rideing's commentary about sad faces and sore eyes at the Randall's Island Infant Hospital would not have surprised anyone who spent time in any of New York's foundling asylums. These were the expected results of institutional life. What had worried the founders of the asylums much more was the view held by "many excellent and influential people" that a foundling asylum was "a cloak, if not an encouragement, to vice." This belief had helped to prevent the opening of foundling asylums in antebellum New York. Even well into the second half of the nineteenth century it still retained enough power to keep the asylums on the defensive. Ten years after the Nursery and Child's Hospital opened its Infant Home for foundlings it still felt the need to invite critics "who think that the Institution encourages Sin, instead of diminishing the evils in the World" to "come and see" the institution's work for themselves.[1] As it turned out, truly damaging criticism of the foundling asylums came from a different and more powerful source. While the foundling asylums' role as a "cloak to vice" was still disturbing to some, their appalling death rates raised the hackles of a physician who would be a leader in the emerging field of pediatrics - Abraham Jacobi.

Abraham Jacobi, a member of the medical board of the Randall's Island Infant Hospital and, since the middle of the Civil War, an attending physician at the Nursery and Child's Hospital, concluded, based on his observations at both these institutions and on the results of a study he carried out on behalf of the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction, that conditions inside New York's foundling asylums were fatal

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[1] "...many excellent and influential people..." NYIA, annual report, 1878, 12, this comment refers specifically to the asylum's maternity department which accepted unmarried women; "...a cloak, if not an encouragement, to vice..." "Poor Little Waifs!" *New York Herald*, January 16, 1872; "...encourages Sin, instead of diminishing the evils in the World..." NCH, annual report, 1875, 9.

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to the frail infants the asylums were founded to save. The solution he proposed was to close the foundling asylums down and place the babies with rural wet-nurses instead. Jacobi made his suggestion in 1870, when all of the foundling asylums were less than a decade old; the New York Infant Asylum reopened in the midst of the turmoil Jacobi's accusations aroused.

Abraham Jacobi, who came to be known as the "father and founder of American pediatrics," was a representative of a new laboratory-based medicine that was centered in Germany and France and brought to the United States by European physicians, like Jacobi, and American physicians who studied in Europe.[2] Medicine based on scientific investigation gained authority as it became increasingly effective over the second half of the nineteenth and particularly during the twentieth century. As the ideas Jacobi represented gained power, the religious, charitable model adopted by all three private foundling asylums, with its emphasis on moral reform of unmarried mothers, its importance as an arena for flexing female power, and its passivity in the face of a high infant death rate, increasingly came to seem obsolete, a relic of the years before the Civil War.

2. Abraham Jacobi and the Nursery and Child's Hospital.

This conflict of two paradigms was initially manifested in a clash between two powerful, unbending personalities: Abraham Jacobi and Mary Du Bois. Jacobi and Du Bois possessed some temperamental similarities, but their backgrounds could not have been more different. In 1830, the year that Abraham Jacobi was born into a Jewish family in the Westphalian village of Hartum, fifteen-year-old Mary Delafield was probably still busy acquiring feminine attainments at Miss Pierce's school in the

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[2] Jacobi's principal modern biographer, Russell Viner, notes that Jacobi was "universally acknowledged as the 'father'" of American pediatrics. Viner, "Healthy Children," 2.

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Connecticut town of Litchfield. In November 1853, just four months before Mary Delafield Du Bois opened her Nursery for the Children of Poor Women, twenty-three-year-old Jacobi arrived in New York after escaping from a German jail. If the ladies of the Nursery and Child's Hospital came to deplore what they judged to be Jacobi's violent manner, they were only, unknowingly, repeating Friedrich Engels' assessment of the young Jacobi's "warlike Westphalian way of behaving."[3]

Like his close friend Carl Schurz, Abraham Jacobi was a product of the German revolution of 1848. His political principles as well as his choice of a medical career resulted from his experiences as an ardent and involved young man at a time of dramatic revolutionary upheaval. The twenty-year-old Jacobi was a medical student at the University of Bonn when he joined the underground Cologne branch of the Communist League. In April, 1851 he went to Berlin, where he passed his medical licensing examination. Remaining in Berlin he "plunged into the secret radical life of the capital," according to his biographer.[4] His immersion in this world, and his career as an active Communist radical in revolutionary-era Germany, were to be very brief. In May, 1851, just one month after he passed his licensing exam, Jacobi was arrested along with other members of the outlawed Cologne Communist League. After confinement in German jails for a year and a half, Jacobi escaped in May, 1853 with the help of a sympathetic jailer.[5]

Jacobi's philosophy of medicine, no less than his political philosophy, was a

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[3] As quoted in Russell Viner, "Abraham Jacobi and German Medical Radicalism in Antebellum New York," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 72 (Fall 1998), 438.

[4] Viner, "Healthy Children," 36.

[5] For Jacobi's experiences in the Cologne Communist League and his trial, imprisonment, and escape, see Viner, "Healthy Children," 31-42 and Viner, "Jacobi and German Medical Radicalism." Also: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Cologne Communist Trial*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971) and Rhoda Truax, *The Doctors Jacobi* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1952).

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product of his experience in revolutionary Germany. Years later, referring to his own youthful experiences he remarked that "among the revolutionary youth that died on the battlefields or pined in dungeons, not a few were students of medicine."[6] Like the scientist-statesman Rudolph Virchow, whose example he emulated, Jacobi believed that poverty and political oppression were the enemies of good health and therefore medicine and social reform had to be integrally linked. "Physicians," wrote Jacobi, quoting Virchow, "are the natural attorneys of the poor."[7] To be an "attorney of the poor" was Jacobi's mission throughout his career.

As an ally of the poor Jacobi rejected antebellum notions about the relationship of moral behavior to disease. Such ideas had colored the way physicians and public health officials dealt with New York's cholera outbreak of 1832, for instance, seeing it as a logical result of the filthy living conditions, intemperance, and immoral behavior of the poor.[8] Ideas like these were also central to the way New York's antebellum reformers had regarded foundlings. The sickliness of foundlings that so many commented on, and their feeble hold on life, seemed like evidence of the poison that necessarily infected them as byproducts of sin. Jacobi had no use for such ideas. He believed that foundlings were worth saving, and that the republican United States, where so much was possible for the rootless individual, was their ideal home. He expounded on this theme in his report on European foundling asylums:

> The United States, with their uniform laws and institutions, their freedom from legal religious prejudices and ties, their immunities from petty or powerful individual sovereigns, their wealth and conservative magnanimity, their readiness to receive every stranger, rich or poor, amongst their citizens, their knowledge of the importance of every

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[6] Abraham Jacobi, "Virchow as Citizen," delivered at a Virchow celebration held in October, 1901, and published in *The Medical News*, October 19, 1901, 264.

[7] Jacobi, "Virchow as Citizen," 264.

[8] Rosenberg, *Cholera Years*, 13-98.

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> newcomer as an additional means of wealth and power, with the general principles of the Declaration of Independence pervading the communities of the country, are more than every other country of the globe entitled to the honor and duty of caring for the neglected and poor of every age and station. Thus no means have been spared, no attempts will remain untried, to save as many newborn and to raise them into healthy men and women and good citizens. Their salvation is the country's good.[9]

This passage, aflame with the ardor of the adopted citizen, makes it hard to escape the idea that Jacobi's equation of the isolated foundling with the rootless immigrant, both outcast yet bearing the seeds of success, evolved at least partly as a result of his own experience as an exile finally finding a home in the United States where he succeeded so well and felt so much at home. It is also an idea that is at odds with Mary Du Bois's understanding of the foundling and the foundling's mother as permanent inhabitants of the lower class.

After his escape from jail Jacobi fled to England, arriving, foundlinglike, on the doorstep of Karl Marx and his family who were living in exile in London. Jacobi remained with the Marxes for a week. When it became clear that there were no employment prospects for him in London and the straitened circumstances of the Marx household could not support him indefinitely, he left for Manchester with a letter of introduction from Marx to Friedrich Engels.

Jacobi had no better luck in Manchester than he had in London. Employment prospects were dim there also and, on top of everything else, Engels, one of only a handful of people he knew in England, disliked him instantly. In a tetchy letter to Marx, Engels described Jacobi's unexpected arrival in the middle of the night: "Who the devil can this Jacobi be?" Engels groggily wondered, "finally the little man pulled your letter out of his pocket, somewhat taken aback at not being instantly welcomed with open arms, stranger though it was - whereupon it occurred to me that he was, as your letter

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[9] Jacobi, "Raising and Education," 26.

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confirmed, the communist trial Jacobi to whom I hadn't given a thought, believing him long since well and truly lodged in a Prussian jail cell." In a tone of surprisingly bourgeois outrage Engels went on to complain to Marx about Jacobi's "warlike Westphalian way of behaving," and "the doltishness of spending a whole week in London and then choosing a train that arrives in the middle of the night and, on the pretext of not knowing what's what, turning a man's house upside down and imposing himself..."[10]

England's German revolutionary exile community, it appeared, was not prepared to offer Jacobi a useable welcome. Finally, after rejecting an unsatisfactory job offer in Glasgow, he obtained a position as a ship's physician and sailed for America. After a brief and unsatisfying interlude in Massachusetts, Jacobi arrived in New York in November, 1853. There he settled, ready to restart his life in "that longed for republican paradise," the United States.[11]

Abraham Jacobi's acclimation to the United States was swift and successful. He settled in *Kleindeutschland*, the section of the Lower East Side where German immigrants lived. There he joined fellow forty-eighters - refugees from Germany's failed revolution of 1848 - among them other radical physicians with whom he formed lasting personal and professional ties. Initially, he was supported by the *New Yorker Socialistische Turnverein* (New York Socialist Gymnastic Association) out of funds they had collected to assist defendants of the Cologne trial. As early as November, 1853 he had set up a medical office at 20 Howard Street, where he served the German and Irish

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[10] Engels to Marx, July 9, 1853, cited by Viner in "Healthy Children," 43-44.

[11] I am largely indebted to Russell Viner for this account of Jacobi's early life. See: Viner, "Abraham Jacobi and German Medical Radicalism," 437-439 and Viner, "Healthy Children," 41-47; 72, 74. Engels lived in Manchester where he spent at least some of his time working in his father's thread manufacturing firm. The rest of the time he carried on his political work, and made the observations that resulted in his 1844 investigation of English working class life. See Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (New York: Oxford, 1993).

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immigrant poor and their children.[12]

Jacobi managed to settle comfortably and with remarkable speed into two different worlds: the world of radical German emigre physicians, and the one composed of New York's largely American-born, socially respectable, "regular" physicians. Jacobi maintained his communist links during these years. In the fall of 1857 he was among the founders of the New York Communist Club. He also maintained communication with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels throughout the 1850s - despite the cool reception he received from them in England - even serving as their "chief American contact point."[13] At the same [time] as he collected affiliations to add to his radical resume, Jacobi set his feet on the rungs of the New York medical establishment and began to climb securely upward. Within a few years of his arrival in New York Jacobi began contributing translations of articles from European medical journals, mostly on the diseases of children, to the *New York Journal of Medicine*, which was edited by Stephen Smith. In 1860 he took the chair in the diseases of children at the New York Medical College. This was the first chair in the fledgling field of pediatrics to be established in the United States. (The New York Medical College's building ultimately burned down, taking Jacobi's papers with it, and a new Tammany Hall was built on its East Fourteenth Street site. This gave Jacobi the opportunity to quip blackly: "Over the ashes of my property Tammany Hall was erected, which refuses to burn, at least in this world.")[14] In 1862 he cofounded the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Diseases of Women and Children.* In

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[12] Abraham Jacobi, "Author's Preface," Abraham Jacobi *Collectanea Jacobi*, ed. William J. Robinson (New York: Critic and Guide Co., 1909),1:8; Viner, "Abraham Jacobi and German Medical Radicalism," 440-441.

[13] For the founding of the Communist Club see Viner, "Abraham Jacobi and German Medical Radicalism,", 450. Viner claims that "Throughout the middle and late 1850s, he [Jacobi] was to act as the chief American contact point for Marx and Engels," 442.

[14] Jacobi, "Author's Preface,"Jacobi, *Collectanea*, 1:9.

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1865 Jacobi took the chair of diseases of children at the medical school of the University of the City of New York (the ancestor of New York University, not of today's City University of New York). And in 1870, the same year he launched his attack against the foundling asylums, he joined the faculty of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, where he remained for the next thirty-two years.[15]

In appearance Jacobi was short, with dark, sad eyes, a bearded face, and an aggressively curling head of hair. A friend described his "short, slight but elastic frame, his whole person dominated by the large, splendid head, leonine, magisterial, with its crown of hair, the living embodiment of some great high-priest of knowledge of old." As this passage from an admiring obituary suggests, Jacobi was a charismatic figure with the power to either awe or repel, attracting devoted, life-long friends, and equally devoted enemies. The same friend recalled him as "large-minded, big-hearted, intensely human, his conversation flavored with delightful banter..."[16]

Jacobi's appointment as attending physician at the Nursery came to an explosive end in 1870. By then Jacobi was forty years old and had moved from Lower East Side to West Thirty-fourth Street, an address more in keeping with the requirements of the established - if still not entirely genteel - physician he had by then become. On January fifteenth of that year he delivered a lecture at the clinic he had established at the Nursery. There, with characteristic bluntness, he told the assembled medical students that the

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[15] For Jacobi's early career see his "Author's Preface," in Jacobi, *Collectanea*, 1:8-9, and Viner, "Healthy Children."

[16] F.H. Garrison, "Dr. Abraham Jacobi," (obituary) *Science*, August 1, 1919, 102-104. Embedded in Garrison's description of Jacobi was his broader understanding of what Jews were supposed to look and sound like, and the Old Testamentesque impressions they were supposed to make. Jacobi might have been surprised to hear himself compared to "some great high-priest of knowledge of old." Garrison quotes Jacobi saying of himself: "I am a Hebrew by race, but not clannish, not a sectarian."

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Nursery's facilities were "the very worst refuge for infants, well or sick," and that this was a fact "well known to every one of your medical staff, to everybody, in fact, who visited it with anything like attention."[17]

Jacobi's conclusions about the dangers of large institutions for infants were the product not only of his firsthand knowledge of conditions at the Nursery and the Randall's Island Infant Hospital, but also of his observations at European foundling asylums, which he toured in 1869. Jacobi made this trip at the behest of the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction just as they were opening their Infant Hospital on Randall's Island.[18] Jacobi wrote up the results of his investigation in a report titled *The Raising and Education of Abandoned Children in Europe, With Statistics and General Remarks On That Subject*, which he read to his colleagues on the Infant Hospital's medical board, and which the Bellevue Hospital printing office subsequently published as a thick pamphlet.[19]

The impressions Jacobi formed on his European visit were undoubtedly fresh on his mind when he gave his inflammatory lecture at the Nursery only a few months after his return. One thing he learned was that the methods New York's foundling asylums employed were, by European standards, completely out of date. By the time of his visit European foundling asylums were in the process of closing down their turning wheels. The process began in France in the 1850s. In Italy, the birthplace of the foundling asylum, turning wheels began to close in the late 1860s. The turning wheel at Florence's

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[17] On the NCH clinic, Jacobi, "In re," 138. For Jacobi's account of what he said at the NCH clinic on January 15, 1870, Jacobi, "In re," 140.

[18] For Jacobi's trip to Europe on behalf of the Commissioners see: PCC, annual report, 1871, ix-x; Viner, "Healthy Children," 240; Jacobi, *Raising and Education*; Jacobi, "In re," 158.

[19] Jacobi, *Raising and Education.*

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venerable foundling home, the *Spedale degli Innocenti*, closed in 1875 after 215 years.[20] The wicker basket that the New York Foundling Asylum left in its entryway for anonymous night deliveries was thus truly anachronistic from the moment the Sisters of Charity set it in their entryway in 1869.

Another obsolete method still in operation in New York was the housing of abandoned infants in large institutions. Death rates in European foundling asylums had risen to such perilous heights during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that by the time of Jacobi's visit foundling asylums in Russia and in most European cities had been transformed into depots where infants remained only briefly until they could be sent to wet-nurses in the countryside.[21] New York's foundling asylums had death rates that matched those in Europe before this change. "The worst figures of the European foundling hells of former centuries," Jacobi fumed, "are not more fearful than ours." Softening his tone only slightly he continued: "Modern civilization, planning for the best,

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[20] By 1888, the number of turning wheels in Italy was nearly half of what it had been during the first decades of the century. By the close of the century Italy, Spain and Greece were the only European countries left whose foundling asylums still operated turning wheels. The *Spedale degli Innocenti* opened in 1445 and set up its turning wheel in 1660, see Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor*, 81. For discussions of the closing of wheels in France and Italy see Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 111, and Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor*, 154-161. According to Kertzer, there were 1,163 turning wheels in Italy in the early nineteenth century (with most located in the south), and 594 remained in 1888. Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor*, Table 7.1, p.160.

[21] Jacobi found that death rates ranged from a low of fifty percent in St. Petersburg in 1830-1833 to a high of one hundred percent in Irkutsk (no date). The rates in Paris, Vienna, Madrid, Dublin, Brussels, Belgium as a whole, and Moscow ranged from fifty-four percent (Belgium, 1823-1833) to ninety-eight percent (Dublin, 1791-1798). Jacobi, *Raising and Education*, 32. On the use of foundling hospitals as depots from which foundlings were quickly transferred to rural wet-nurses, see 10-11 (Prague) and 41. For rural wet-nursing in France see Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 155-156. For Russia, Ransel, *Mothers of Misery*, 176. Italian foundling homes used a mixture of internal and external wet-nurses, see Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor*, 123-153. The London Foundling Hospital sent babies out to live with wet-nurses, but then claimed them back after a few years to live out the rest of their childhoods in the Foundling Hospital, see McClure, *Coram's Children*, 94-95.

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but mistaken about the means, has succeeded in out-heroding Herod."[22]

Anything, Jacobi argued, even placement in tenement households, was better than housing young children in large institutions. "The younger the children, and the larger the institution–the surer is death," he stated firmly. But Jacobi was also aware of the city's previous experiences with urban wet-nurses - including women like Mary Cullough - which he characterized as "terrible and heart rending." His recommendation, based on what he observed in Europe, was to close New York's new foundling asylums and place the foundlings in the homes of rural wet-nurses. There they would have the benefits of individual maternal care, and have the opportunity to escape the "damaging influences of city life and city atmosphere."[23]

Jacobi realized that rural wet-nurses were more difficult to come by in the United States than they were in Europe. The attending physician at the New York Foundling Asylum, Dr. Reynolds, had already found this out. "We can provide only a few wet nurses in the rural district, within any reasonable distance of our city;" he wrote, "for our small farmers have no necessity to tax their wives and families with the care of nurslings."[24] As a source for rural wet-nurses, the American countryside, with its mobile, hopeful, well-fed population, could not compare with the perennially impoverished rural regions of France, Italy, and Russia where the wet-nursing of unwanted waifs was a cottage industry for generations of women.[25]

He also must have realized that his plan would meet resistance from the Nursery

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[22] Jacobi, *Raising and Education*, 37.

[23] Jacobi, *Raising and Education*, 37, 38, 41.

[24] NYFA, biennial report, 1869-1871, 9. For another comment by Dr. Reynolds on this theme - this time after he had read Jacobi's report - see NYFA, annual report, 1872, 12. For Jacobi's comment on this theme see Jacobi, *Raising and Education*, 42.

[25] For the institutionalization of foundling wet-nursing in a rural region of France, see Fitch, "'*Petits Parisiens.*'"

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and the trustees of the still dormant New York Infant Asylum, since their goal was reform, and for that they needed to keep mothers and babies under their direct supervision. Without inmates for whom to model appropriate female behavior, the lady managers of the Nursery would be bereft of what was to them a crucial spiritual task. Of this task Mrs. Lemist, the Nursery's secretary, wrote in 1867: "We do not disguise the fact that *it is* laborious." But, she insisted, the opportunity to accomplish "*more* than the improving of bodily necessities," the chance to "snatch *one* from the grasp of sin" was a "richer reward."[26]

It was this moral model, which made reform the paramount value, that Jacobi so deplored. In his report Jacobi's harshest criticism was for the London Foundling Hospital, which had been the model for the Nursery. Jacobi railed against the "cruelty and hypocrisy of a legislation like the English..." whose Protestant morality closed English hearts to the plight of children produced outside of marriage.[27] He disdained the London Foundling Hospital's admission practices - the very same ones that Mary Du Bois so admired - which focused on the morality of the mother rather than on her pecuniary needs or on the requirements of her innocent infant. He also hated the use of the London Foundling Hospital as a center for music and art for people of fashion to visit - the very thing Isaac Townsend had admired and wanted to emulate in New York. Jacobi's picture contrasts with that painted by Townsend a decade earlier:

> The philanthropic visitor who goes on Sunday to see the institution, attend the service, and watch the public feeding, like the proceedings in a Zoological Garden, involuntarily comes to the conclusion that the children are retained there for nothing but the show of philanthropy, for no other education but Sunday choir singing and–withering.[28]

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[26] NCH, annual report, 1867, 8.

[27] Jacobi, *Raising and Education*, 23. For Jacobi's commentary on the English foundling system and the London Foundling Hospital see Jacobi, *Raising and Education*, 20-24.

[28] Jacobi, *Raising and Education*, 23.

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The London Foundling Hospital, Jacobi sputtered, "is meant to exclude the infants, not to receive and raise them."[29] Russia and the Catholic countries of Europe, which accepted many more babies with many fewer questions asked, were ultimately more humane, Jacobi concluded.[30]

After his January fifteenth lecture - and a rather self-conscious repeat performance a week later during which Du Bois and two other lady managers unprecedentedly rustled into the lecture room and took seats in the gallery - Jacobi protested that his comments had been made purely in the spirit of science. "The remarks I made were not at all destined to be secret; they are scientific facts which students ought to learn and physicians to know, and managers to take into consideration. They were stated *sine ira et studio*, without shrinking and without my ever expecting them to give rise to any commotion."[31] But they were also rooted in an utter lack of sympathy with the Nursery's evangelical intentions, and they were certainly impolitic. Looking back forty years later on the commotion his comments caused, he admitted: "Perhaps the revolutionary spirit of my youth and a warm temperament which boiled at a low temperature, made me overlook the slow pace at which reforms are established."[32]

Mary Du Bois responded swiftly to Jacobi's negative public comments about her institution. Immediately after the lecture she initiated the process of getting him fired. Jacobi, his hackles up, resisted his ouster for nearly a year, during which he and the Nursery's managers traded charges. These charges were in part personal. Jacobi, drawing on the language of his revolutionary experience, compared the power Mary Du

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[29] Jacobi, *Raising and Education*, 23.

[30] Jacobi, *Raising and Education*, 18.

[31] Jacobi, "In re," 140-141. For the appearance of Du Bois and colleagues in the balcony see Jacobi, "In re," 143-144.

[32] Jacobi, "Author's Preface," *Collectanea*,1:11.

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Bois wielded at the Nursery to "the curse of monarchy."[33] As the fracas proceeded Dr. Delafield warned Jacobi that the "enmity of the ladies," including his sister, Mary Du Bois, had become "uncontrollable."[34] The fact that Jacobi did not feel inhibited by what Du Bois would certainly have judged his social failings as a foreigner (he must have spoken with a German accent), a Jew, an atheist, and a former inhabitant of a German jail cell, must have been particularly irritating to this daughter of New York's mercantile elite.[35]

One of the accusations Du Bois made against Jacobi was that he behaved improperly toward the inmates of the Nursery. His manner with the women and children was rough, she claimed; he was excitable, even violent; he used "low and coarse language" and he "blasphemed Providence."[36] "It was rumored about town," Jacobi protested bitterly, "that my treatment killed the children; so that a prominent *savant* and practitioner of the city had to ask if Dr. Jacobi did not place the children on a shelf and shoot at them with pistols."[37] Such rumors, Jacobi accused, were spread by "some of the ladies" who were "very busy about town spreading reports which they meant to be damaging to my reputation as a physician and a gentleman."[38]

Some of Du Bois' charges resulted from an incident in which Jacobi became angry at the mother of a baby with croup when she refused to allow him to perform a

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[33] Jacobi, "In re," 153.

[34] Jacobi, "In re," 144.

[35] Jacobi's family had baptized him in infancy for practical reasons; as for his own beliefs, he was an atheist. An antisemite, however, would not have failed to identify him as a Jew.

[36] Jacobi, "In re," 139, 142, 146.

[37] Jacobi, "In re," 139, 142-143.

[38] Jacobi, "In re," 146.

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tracheotomy. Croup, which is closely related to, and in this period was not clearly differentiated from, diphtheria, was a common and often fatal infectious disease of young children. The disease caused a membrane to form in the throat which made breathing difficult and could strangle the patient. As a result, croup was a particularly violent and frightening disease for children and for the parents and physicians who had to watch its agonizing progress knowing that there was not much they could do to stop it.[39]

French author Gustave Flaubert had witnessed a child strangling with croup and he used this memory in his novel, *Sentimental Education*, published in 1869. Flaubert's fictional little boy

> kept frowning and dilating his nostrils; his poor little face had grown paler than his sheets; and his breathing became shorter and shorter, dry and metallic, producing a whistling sound with every intake of breath. His coughing was like the barking noise made by the crude devices inside toy dogs....Now and then the child would sit up all of a sudden. Convulsive movements shook his chest-muscles, and as he breathed in and out his stomach contracted as if he were choking for breath after a race.[40]

It was evidently the terror and desperation caused by a scene such as this that made Jacobi lose his temper with the unwilling mother. Disapproving observers of the encounter noted that Jacobi became so angry with this woman that he almost struck her - an observation that evolved into the accusation that he had struck her. Jacobi did not deny that he had used strong language on this occasion. "You see doctor," he commented to a nearby colleague, "how easy it is to have children and how difficult to save one!" And when the mother objected that she did not want her child killed by an operation, Jacobi reportedly retorted: "Never you mind; you can make another one in

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[39] Anne Hardy, "Tracheotomy Versus Intubation: Surgical Intervention in Diphtheria in Europe and the United States," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 66 (1992): 536-559.

[40] Gustave Flaubert, *Sentimental Education*, trans. Robert Baldick (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), 279. Flaubert based this description on a tracheotomy he saw performed at the Sainte-Eugenie Hospital, Flaubert, *Sentimental Education*, 425, n.51.

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five minutes."[41]

In an open letter he wrote to the Secretary of the Nursery in October, 1870, Jacobi evoked the real horrors of croup to defend his outbreak of temper: "I ask the ladies, have they seen a child getting strangled with membranous croup, and can they understand the 'excitement' of a physician who is refused the only possibility of saving its life?"[42] This "only possibility" Jacobi referred to was tracheotomy, an operation in which a physician or a surgeon made an incision in order to free the breathing passage. In 1870, it was the only viable method with which to restore a croup patient's breathing.[43] As a pioneer in the diseases of children, Abraham Jacobi was especially interested in croup - a particularly dangerous strain of which emerged in the 1850s, just as he was beginning his medical career in the United States.[44] Jacobi became an experienced practitioner of

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[41] In his version of this incident Jacobi wrote that the board of managers and the matron of the Nursery reported that he said: "Never you mind; you can..." Jacobi, "In re," 148. Virginia Metaxas Quiroga fills in Jacobi's elipses and cites the quote as I give it here. See Quiroga, *Poor Mothers and Babies*, 78.

[42] Jacobi, "In re,"148. For more on this incident see Truax, *Doctors Jacobi*, 140-144 and Quiroga, *Poor Mothers and Babies*, 76-78.

[43] Jacobi would subsequently champion intubation, a less invasive method that was introduced in 1885 by another physician, Joseph O'Dwyer, at yet another of New York's foundling asylums, the New York Foundling Asylum. Like Jacobi, O'Dwyer found the masses of parentless infants in the city's foundling asylums ready material for his experiments. This proved to be the case again in 1894 when the city's Health Board inoculated all the children at still another foundling asylum, the New York Infant Asylum, with their newly developed diphtheria anti-toxin. As the historians of this incident sardonically comment: "Fortunately, the children all survived." Hardy, "Tracheotomy," 537, 547-548. Elizabeth Fee and Evelynn M. Hammonds, "Science, Politics, and the Art of Persuasion: Promoting the New Scientific Medicine in New York City," in David Rosner, ed., *Hives of Sickness: Public Health and Epidemics in New York City*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press for the Museum of the City of New York, 1995), 173.

[44] Anne Hardy reports that a "highly virulent and fatal form" of diphtheria emerged in France after 1855, then spread to England. The result was that diphtheria, formerly a "fairly obscure disease" became "a very constant focus of medical concern." Hardy, "Tracheotomy," 540.

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tracheotomy. By the 1880s, when tracheotomy had become widely accepted among physicians, Jacobi, by then acknowledged as an expert on diphtheria, was responsible for approximately half of all the procedures performed in the United States.[45]

The reality was that the mother Jacobi so bitterly fought was not wrong to be anxious about the results of tracheotomy, since its rate of success in saving lives was, in fact, low. Physicians in England and France in this period reported recovery rates after tracheotomy of no more than twenty-five to thirty percent. Recovery was further complicated by the fact that even if a tracheotomy saved the patient in the short term from strangling, death might still result from the infectious nature of the disease itself.[46] But in the excitement of the moment Jacobi blamed the anxious mother for daring to oppose her soft, maternal obscurantism to his hard, scientific knowledge.[47] The fact that his knowledge was not, in fact, infallible, did not hinder his sense, bolstered both by his training and his gender, that his authority was the most authentic.

On the whole, Jacobi had no use for the values that dominated the Nursery. One of these was Protestant evangelicalism. Another was "irregular" medicine. Jacobi commented bitterly about the fact that the managers of the Nursery were followers of homeopathy. Homeopathy, whose tiny, essentially harmless doses of medicine were a relief to Americans weakened by such "heroic" medical tactics as bleeding with leeches

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[45] Physicians Robert W. Lovett and James C. Munro produced a study in 1887 that stated that the medical literature reported that 1,327 tracheotomies had been performed in the United States. Abraham Jacobi reported that he had performed more than 600 tracheotomies before 1887. Robert W. Lovett and James C. Munro, "A Consideration of the Results of 327 Cases of Tracheotomy at the Boston City Hospital from 1864 to 1887," *American Journal of Medical Science* 94 (1887): 170, and Abraham Jacobi, *Therapeutics of Infancy and Childhood* ed ed. (London: J. Lippincott, 1903), 243, both cited in Hardy, "Tracheotomy," 546. For Jacobi's reputation as an expert on diphtheria see Viner, *"Healthy Children"*, 182-183.

[46] Hardy, "Tracheotomy," 541, 542-543, 545.

[47] Hardy, "Tracheotomy," 540-544.

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and dosing with large quantities of calomel (mercury), was an important medical sect in the United States starting in the mid-1820s. It had its own training schools, hospitals, and practitioners, all outside the realm of, and in competition with, the regular medical establishment to which Jacobi belonged.[48]

Most of all, however, Jacobi resented the fact that women with no medical training were in charge of making decisions at the Nursery. (The editors of the *Medical Record* were also appalled at the power women wielded at the Nursery. They chided the members of the Nursery's medical board for allowing the lady managers to dictate Jacobi's ouster.)[49]

Jacobi, like other regular physicians of his era, established himself as the enemy not only of quackery, but of all the medical services that in previous centuries had traditionally been provided by women. These included informal nursing, midwifery, abortion, the dispensing of herbal remedies, and the circulation of information and advice among women. His "Rules for the Management of Infants During the Summer Months" published by the city in 1868 for distribution in the tenements, advised mothers: "When you see the doctor, trust in him and not in the women. They do not know better than you do yourself."[50]

Jacobi castigated the managers of the Nursery who failed to follow his medical advice and dared to follow their own experience and common sense instead. His nemeses at the Nursery, he asserted, were the same women "to whom I had occasion to repeatedly speak of the impropriety of distributing crackers and candies in wards

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[48] On homeopathy see Ronald L. Numbers, "The Fall and Rise of the American Medical Profession," in Leavitt and Numbers, *Sickness and Health in America*,187. For Jacobi's comments on homeopathy at the Nursery see Jacobi, "In re," 140.

[49] "Nursery and Child's Hospital, and the Expulsion of a Physician by the Staff!" *Medical Record*, January 2, 1871, 494-495.

[50] Cited in Viner, "Healthy Children," 236.

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crowded with babies and children, sick and well, at improper times, and without direction or advice." They would have done better, he sputtered, to heed his advice and that of his colleagues on the medical board who were "so far as pathology and therapeutics go, in all probability the superiors of some of the Lady Managers who collect ten-dollar contributions, attend a few monthly meetings, and sell ball tickets once a year."[51]

All of this is not to say that Jacobi was a downgrader of the abilities of women. In fact the opposite was true. Jacobi was a supporter of medical education for women. His clinic at the Nursery was open to medical students, in his deliberate words, "both male and female."[52] He found it "comical" that in Germany women were excluded from medical careers because of their supposed physical limitations, while "consumptive, dwarfish, ill-formed, lame or sickly" men were allowed to practice medicine. It was, he joked, "as if every one of us practicing physicians were a trinity of Apollo, Hercules, and Methusalem."[53] In 1872, "without much ado," as he briskly expressed it, he admitted the first woman physician to the Medical Society of the County of New York.[54] This was physician and woman's rights advocate Mary Putnam, whom he soon after married. What Jacobi objected to was not women per se, but the prescientific medical practices that he associated with quacks and with traditional female healers.

Despite Jacobi's European medical training, he actually had very little to offer the city's foundlings in terms of real medical therapy. His central proposal, that foundlings should be farmed out to wet-nurses in the countryside, was essentially a sanitary rather than a medical measure.[55] His insistence on deference from the women of the Nursery

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[51] Jacobi, "In re," 139.

[52] Jacobi, "In re," 138.

[53] Abraham Jacobi, "Women Physicians in America," in Jacobi, *Collectanea*, 7:306.

[54] Jacobi, "Women Physicians,7:307, and Truax, *Doctors Jacobi*,136-141.

[55] This insight is the product of a conversation with Jerry Markowitz, for which I thank him.

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was at least as much a product of the medical politics of his day than of any truly earned professional authority. It would be decades before physicians or anyone else understood how to save the lives of foundlings. Even then, all would agree that the best cure for what ailed foundlings was never to be abandoned - or perhaps never to be born - at all.

Some of Jacobi's rage over the incident at the Nursery - particularly his encounter with the mother who resisted tracheotomy for her dying baby - was surely the product of his personal experiences. Mary Putnam was Jacobi's third wife - his first two had died, along with five children. Two out of Abraham and Mary Putnam Jacobi's three children died in childhood. One of these, seven-year-old Ernst, died of diphtheria. For a physician specializing in the diseases of children, this parade of Jacobi children into the grave, one after the other, must have been a proof of professional impotence as demoralizing as it was heartbreaking.

In all, Jacobi fathered eight children of whom only one, Ernst's younger sister, Marjorie, lived to be an adult.[56] He was widowed for the third time when Mary Putnam Jacobi died in 1906. Like Abigail Hopper Gibbons and many, probably most, of the women who worked in New York's foundling asylums, Jacobi carried a burden of grief that he learned to exorcize by devoting his working life to ill and needy young children. Unlike the women, however, he did not need to claim grief as a justification for his work.

Jacobi's departure from the Nursery - which came in November, 1870, when the medical board, acting on Mary Du Bois's behalf, finally fired him - only enhanced his standing in the eyes of his medical colleagues.[57] Honors accrued to him based, in part, on

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[56] For Jacobi's first two wives and the births and deaths of his children, see Truax, *Doctors Jacobi*, 160, 178, 184, 189-190, 197-199. Ernst died on June 10, 1883.

[57] For Jacobi's firing see NCH Medical Board, minutes, November 10, 1870.

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his open criticism of medical conditions at the Nursery and his championship of foundlings. In 1870 Jacobi joined the faculty of the prestigious College of Physicians and Surgeons. In 1871 the Medical Society of the State of New York appointed him chairman of a committee of physicians assembled to investigate the high mortality of foundlings. The report this committee completed a year later restated the points Jacobi made in *The Raising and Education of Abandoned Children in Europe*, including the parts that were critical of the Nursery.[58] In 1872 Jacobi became the president of the New York County Medical Society. He used his inaugural speech to restate his criticisms of the Nursery, this time in front of a roomful of fellow physicians.[59] Jacobi's appointment to leadership positions by his medical colleagues even as he was being booted out of the Nursery demonstrates just how little Mary Du Bois's opinion mattered to New York's community of physicians. As medicine accrued knowledge and gained authority after the Civil War the evangelical, voluntaristic, woman-headed model of charity for the sick poor declined accordingly. Mary Du Bois may have succeeded in expelling Abraham Jacobi from her institution, but she could not counter the trend that he represented.

3. The Placing-Out Debate.

Jacobi's view that the countryside was best for infants was based on his own observations and the observations of others that filthy, overcrowded, nineteenth-century cities had a deleterious effect on the health of the poor and particularly poor children. His view also owed something to ideas about the virtues of the countryside and country people that in the United States dated back to Thomas Jefferson.

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[58] Abraham Jacobi, "Foundlings and Foundling Institutions," in Golden, *Infant Asylums*, 33-136. The other members of the committee were Dr. White of Buffalo; Dr. Dean, Rochester; Dr. Thomas Hun, Albany; and Dr. Hutchinson, Brooklyn. Much of the language of this report is lifted directly from *Raising and Education.*

[59] Viner, "Healthy Children," 244; *Medical Record*, December 1, 1870, 449-52; "Infant Asylums. Dr. Jacobi's Views...," *New York Times*, January 19, 1872.

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There was significant truth to Jacobi's inference that infants placed with wet-nurses in rural homes were more likely to stay alive than infants housed en masse in city institutions. Jacobi argued, based on what he learned on his European trip, that the death rates of all city children were higher than those of their rural counterparts. For institutionalized infants, who were more likely to be exposed to infection, and who lacked individual care and a regular source of breast milk, the danger was even greater. At the Nursery and Child's Hospital, Jacobi argued, babies who entered in good health sickened in the institution and died there at a rate of 66.25 percent. "I mean to prove the absolute impossibility of raising infants in a large institution, a fact that has been ever so many times proved in Europe" he wrote.[60]

The belief that the noxious environments produced by crowded, industrial cities directly contributed to the ill-health of the poor, and particularly poor, young children was also one of the central tenets of the linked sanitary reform and child welfare movements of the mid- to late- nineteenth century. Jacobi's reluctant host, Friedrich Engels, was one of the most influential of the urban observers to make this point. Like the many physicians and social reformers who investigated the teeming poor districts of big cities in the industrial age, Engels took a tour through Manchester and was shocked at the unsanitary housing conditions endured by the poor. The Old Town of Manchester gave Engels an appalling impression of:

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[60] "Infant Asylums. Dr. Jacobi's Views..." *New York Times*, Januay 19, 1872. This is a report of Jacobi's speech on his inauguration as president of the Medical Society of the County of New York. Jacobi's observations about the greater infant death rates in cities have been borne out by Samuel Preston and Michael Haines, who find that living in a city was one of the chief determinants for a high rate of infant mortality in the late nineteenth century. See Preston and Haines, *Fatal Years*, 36-37, 210. Preston and Haines are looking at the period around the turn of the century, but they note that a connection between urban-dwelling and ill-health can be made back to the middle ages. Jacobi's argument that babies entered the Nursery in good health is counter to what most foundling asylum administrators claimed - that foundlings entered in poor health, even close to death in many cases.

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> filth, ruin, and uninhabitableness, the defiance of all considerations of cleanliness, ventilation, and health which characterize the construction of this single district, containing at least twenty to thirty thousand inhabitants. And such a district exists in the heart of the second city of England, the first manufacturing city of the world. If anyone wishes to see in how little space a human being can move, how little air–and such air!– he can breathe, how little of civilization he may share and yet live, it is only necessary to travel hither.[61]

Twenty years later New York's Metropolitan Board of Health, echoing Engels, complained of New York's "bad air, impure water, insufficient food, and ill-ventilated dwellings." The members of the Board of Health saw that infants and young children died at higher rates in cities than they did in the countryside and they believed that it was the miasma-producing filth of cities that endangered "these delicate beings."[62]

Among poor children, foundlings were the most vulnerable to the dangers of city life. In 1872 the *Medical Record*, a New York medical journal that editorialized in favor of Jacobi's placing-out plan, alleged that "the mortality of Foundlings in cities is actually three times that in rural districts."[63] The causes of this carnage, as the editors of the *Medical Record* understood them, were overcrowded and dirty streets and dwellings; impure supplies of milk, water, and food; the "vitiated" air thought to carry the seeds of miasmatic disease; and weak constitutions passed on to infants by their morally profligate immigrant parents.[64]

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[61] Engels, *Condition of the Working Class*, 65.

[62] Metropolitan Board of Health, annual report, 1866, 10, 11.

[63] "The Farming-Out System for Foundlings," *Medical Record*, November 15, 1872, 513.

[64] Dr. George T. Elliott elaborated on his notion of immigrant parents as the bearers of transmittable diseases both physical and moral in the 1858 report of the Nursery and Child's Hospital: "...it is not surprising," he wrote, "that the children of parents dying or dead from consumption, ill-fed, drugged, neglected, inheriting not only the weakness of their parents, but the results of their vices, should succumb at an early age..." NCH, annual report, 1858, 5. In 1866 New York's health board, reporting on the city's high infant mortality rate, commented on "the bad constitutions inherited from parents" which were "made virulent by the sins of ancestors." Metropolitan Board of Health, annual report, 1866, 10. For broader commentary on the link between immigrants and infection,

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Jacobi's plan sought to remove foundlings from these well-documented dangers of city life, but the plan did not take into account the difficulties and dangers associated with placing children in the country. He argued that "the poorest country woman who takes charge of a society's child, under the superintendence of the proper authority, under the eyes of her neighbors, and with motherly feelings developed in the poorest one bound in marriage and family ties, will succeed in saving a nursling from certain death."[65] But it had not always worked out that way. The Sisters of Charity, who had attempted to place foundlings with rural wet-nurses, had already discovered that in the United States rural women willing to work as wet-nurses were not as readily available as they were in Europe.[66] Even when the Sisters of Charity and the almshouse commissioners - the two groups that had previously tried to locate rural wet-nurses - did manage to find them, the experience was not always successful.

The eighteenth-century and antebellum almshouse had distributed infants to nurses wherever it could find them, in nearby streets or as far away as rural Westchester County to the north of the city. Older children were even more frequently bound to farmers in the countryside. But rural placement was no guarantee of health or happiness for either infants or older children. In 1792 the almshouse commissioners acknowledged that there had been frequent complaints made on behalf of almshouse children "placed at

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see: Howard Markel, *Quarantine! East European Jewish Immigrants and the New York City Epidemics of 1892* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1997) and Alan Kraut, *Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace"* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

[65] "Infant Asylums," *New York Times*, January 19, 1872.

[66] Even Jacobi admitted that "our population adjoining the large cities" was neither as large nor as poor as that adjacent to European cities, and therefore contained fewer destitute women willing to work as wet-nurses. Jacobi is quoted in an editorial: "The Proper Care of Foundlings," *Medical Record*, March 1, 1871, 14. For the difficulty of finding rural wet-nurses, see the comment of Dr. Jas. B. Reynolds, attending physician at the NYFA: "...our small farmers have no necessity to tax their wives and families with the care of nurslings." NYFA, biennial report, 1869-1871, 9.

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a distance in the country." These children, it appeared, had been "very illy treated by the persons with whom they live."[67]

The New York Foundling Asylum had no more luck when it placed foundlings in the homes of Long Island nurses. In 1871 the Foundling Asylum's attending physician complained that "our experience with nurslings upon a large part of Long Island...has not been at all gratifying."[68] Dr. Joel Foster, a trustee of the New York Infant Asylum and an opponent of Jacobi's placing-out plan, argued that

> it is well known to all physicians who have practised in the country, that very little attention is paid to sanitary science, and that the most absurd ideas prevail among the greater portion of the common people...[69]

Another problem was that the United States lacked a national system of social welfare that would have linked cities to rural areas - such as existed in Russia and the Catholic countries of Europe that had set up extensive foundling systems. While these systems tended to breed corruption and to permanently mark their charges with the stigma of foundlinghood, they appealed to Jacobi because they seemed efficient when compared to New York's fragmented and underfunded methods of foundling care. Jacobi proposed establishing such a centralized, state-run program in New York. He

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[67] Almshouse and Bridewell minutes, December 3, 1792. These children may have included the infant whom the almshouse put to nurse with Phebe Orser of Sing Sing in Westchester County in 1791, see July 7, 1791. In May, 1840 the almshouse placed an infant with Sarah Jewell of Nyack, New York, an "old nurse" whose own child was one year old. AHFV-NYHS, nurse section, May 4, 1840. Nyack is in Rockland County, north of the city on the west side of the Hudson River.

[68] NYFA biennial report, 1869-1871, 9. This physician, Jas. B. Reynolds, explicitly and at greater length, argues against placing infants out in the homes of wet-nurses. He believed that "the chances of rearing infants in a well regulated institution, with large, sunny, well-ventilated walls, are fully as good as in the outside nursing or boarding."

[69] Joel Foster, "A Minority Report on Foundlings and Foundling Institutions," *Medical Record* 8, 1873, 424. Foster was a member of the state medical society's Committee on Foundlings and Foundling Institutions that Jacobi chaired. The committee was formed in February 1871, but Foster joined some time in 1872 (Foster "Minority Report," 422). Foster opposed Jacobi's views, which were those of the majority of the committee.

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envisioned a system in which a state "department of the foundlings," with officials appointed by the governor, supervised the distribution of unwanted babies to rural nurses at taxpayer expense.[70] He argued that New York's foundlings were a state responsibility, and that there was nothing, in his word, "unrepublican" about such a centralized foundling system. State responsibility toward foundlings was only the "performance of a duty of the commonwealth toward the feeble and dependent young."[71]

Such a system would have been particularly hard to establish in the United States in the early 1870s. These were the years when political corruption in the Grant administration in Washington, in the newly reconstructed governments in the South, and in the city government of New York, where the excesses of the Tweed Ring were being daily exposed by the press, made many Americans skeptical of government bureaucracies such as the one Jacobi proposed. Joel Foster argued that a government-run foundling system would quickly devolve into a vehicle for corruption. A placing-out system, Foster claimed, would "create numerous foundling bureaus in every large town in the state, with paid superintendents, agents, and clerks, with a central distributing reservoir, and would soon become a political engine - an asylum for worn-out politicians, instead of a refuge for the unfortunate and despairing mother and her helpless infant."[72] Corruption had played a part in the almshouse's system for placing out foundlings before the Civil War, as the career of Mary Cullough demonstrates.

A less tangible factor behind Jacobi's proposal was an idealization of the countryside that many nineteenth-century urban reformers shared. Many urban reformers originally came from farms or small towns and villages. This was a characteristic they

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[70] "Infant Asylums," *New York Times*, January 19, 1872. For more on Jacobi's proposed state system see "Foundlings and Foundling Institutions," 135-136.

[71] Jacobi, "Foundlings and Foundling Institutions," 136.

[72] Foster, "Minority Report," 424.

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shared with many urban residents at a time when most people were country-born and the city's population was made up largely of migrants from other, mainly rural, places. The chief advocate of rural life for poor city children, Charles Loring Brace, was born in Litchfield, Connecticut. Litchfield, where the young Mary Delafield went to school, was an important Connecticut town, but it was not a city on the scale of New York.[73] Samuel Halliday was born on a farm in New Jersey. It was Halliday who wondered: "Why do the needy thus crowd together in our over-populated towns?"[74] The physician brothers Stephen and Job Lewis Smith were born on a farm in upstate New York. In old age Stephen Smith, an important urban sanitary reformer, credited the rigorous farm work he did in his youth, in part, for his longevity (he lived to be almost one hundred years old).[75] Arabella Mott of the Nursery and Elisha Harris of the New York Infant Asylum and the Metropolitan Board of Health were from Vermont. Harris would later champion what he called "child-planting in the west" as a means to help delinquent, neglected and abandoned children.[76] Abraham Jacobi himself had left the rural village of his childhood, where he lived in a smoky cottage and suffered from rickets, for the greater attractions of Berlin.[77]

It was to the eyes of these transplanted country or small-town people that the unfamiliar noise, the physical and moral risks, the frightening complexity of big city life seemed most dangerous, especially when compared to the remembered arcadia of their

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[73] Brace was born in Litchfield in 1826. For a description of Litchfield in 1810 see Sklar, *Catharine Beecher*, 15-16.

[74] Halliday, *Lost and Found*, 1859, 247.

[75] "Dr. Stephen Smith Dies in 100th Year," *New York Times*, August 27, 1922.

[76] Elisha Harris, *The Educational and Correctional Treatment of Juvenile Delinquents, and of Depraved, Neglected, Abandoned, and other Children in Danger of Falling into a Criminal Career* (New York: National Prison Association, 1877), 5.

[77] Truax, *Doctors Jacobi*, 147-149.

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youths. The fact that each of them had once eagerly turned their backs on that arcadia may have contributed to their nostalgia for it later on.

Abraham Jacobi did not originate the idea of placing poor city children in the countryside. During the era of the foundling asylums the prevailing model for placing-out poor city children - typically older children, but occasionally infants - in the countryside was created by Charles Loring Brace, founder of the Children's Aid Society. The Children's Aid Society's first orphan train left New York for the West in 1853, the year the society was founded. Headed for Michigan, it carried forty-six children, aged seven to fifteen, accompanied by an agent. By 1890, the year Brace died, the Children's Aid Society had swept approximately 90,000 children off the streets of New York and sent them to rural homes in New York, New Jersey, the New England states, the South, and the Midwest.[78]

Like Police Chief Matsell, Brace worried that the city's "embryo courtezans and felons" were more than a nuisance - they also carried the threat of future civic disorder on a disastrous scale. If they remained unreached by "the civilizing influences of American life," Brace warned, "...we should see an explosion from this class which might leave this city in ashes and blood."[79] Brace wanted to rid the city of these young saplings of social disorder, but he also wanted to give urban street children the particularly American opportunity to remake themselves on the western frontier. Brace opposed the use of institutions for poor parentless children like foundlings, and argued instead that "the best of all Asylums for the outcast child, is the *farmer's home.*"[80]

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[78] "The Children's Aid Society of New York, Its History, Plans and Results, Compiled from the Writings and Reports of the Late Charles Loring Brace," National Conference of Charities and Correction (20th: Chicago: 1893) in *History of Child-Saving in the United States* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1971), 30.

[79] Brace, *Dangerous Classes*, 29.

[80] Brace, *Dangerous Classes*, 225.

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All of the foundling asylums had to cope with the problem of what to do with their parentless foundlings as they grew older. The New York Infant Asylum and the Nursery sent some of its grown foundlings west on the orphan trains of the Children's Aid Society.[81] Brace believed that the alliance between the Nursery and the Children's Aid Society was a success.[82] "It is astonishing," Brace wrote Mary Du Bois, "when you consider the parentage of these children, how well they have done."[83]

The experience of a boy named Willie, who left the Nursery for the west in 1900, exemplified Brace's ideal. "I am getting along well," this former unwanted waif of the urban streets wrote the Nursery, "I go to school, I do chores and husk corn. I go after the cows horseback and ride a horse to Sunday School, two and a half miles from here." The Nursery's annual report, in which this letter is printed, commented that Willie was "an enterprising little chap" who planned to "buy a watch by his own earnings."[84]

The New York Foundling Asylum did not consign its older children to the Children's Aid Society, since Brace's organization was explicitly Protestant and the Sisters of Charity wanted to be sure that their foundlings went to Catholic homes. But

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[81] In 1880 the Nursery reported sending seven children west with the Children's Aid Society, see NCH, annual report, 1880, 6. In 1885 the Nursery's annual report stated that it sent children west with the CAS two or three times a year, see NCH, annual report, 1885, 8. For additional references to Nursery children on the CAS orphan trains, see NCH, annual reports, 1884, 9; 1895, 10-11; 1903, 9, and an undated letter from Mary Du Bois to "Dear Sir," New York Nursery and Child's Hospital, New-York Historical Society. For the New York Infant Asylum's experience with the Children's Aid Society see NYIA, annual reports, 1886, 23,45.

[82] In a letter to Mary Du Bois, Brace called it a "uniform record of success." Reprinted in NCH, annual report, 1903, 9. Brace died in 1890, and this letter is undated. He reported that the whole number of children placed was ninety.

[83] C. Loring Brace to Mary Du Bois, undated letter printed in NCH, annual report, 1903, 9-10.

[84] NCH, annual report, 1900, 21. The report does not say if Willie went west with the Children's Aid Society or under some other auspices.

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the Sisters emulated Brace's methods, sending its three- to five-year-olds to Catholic homes in western states. By 1890 the Foundling Asylum had placed more than six thousand children in western homes.[85] According to Homer Folks, the New York Foundling Asylum could "justly be regarded as one of the largest placing-out agencies in the country"even though its numbers did not approach the leader in placing-out - the Children's Aid Society.[86]

The almshouse had been in the practice of binding out its children in city and countryside long before Brace invented the orphan train.[87] Since at least the end of the eighteenth century almshouse placements had been divided between the city and surrounding rural areas, but by the middle of the nineteenth century, as the density and squalor of the city began to increase, almshouse officials began voicing a wistful preference for a rural future for their children. "It has always been most desirable," reported George Kellock, the Superintendent of Outdoor Poor," to place these children as far from the City as practicable, and a majority of them have been so disposed to respectable farmers and mechanics, in the country towns of this and adjoining states."[88]

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[85] NYFA, biennial report, 1888-1890, 10. Linda Gordon states that by around 1904 about one third of the thirty-five thousand children who had passed through the Foundling Asylum had been sent west. Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.

[86] Folks, *Care of Destitute*, 124. In the 1890s Folks was the executive secretary of the State Charities Aid Association and in 1902 he became New York's Commissioner of Public Charities. Peter Romanofsky, "Saving the Lives of the City's Foundlings: The Joint Committee and New York City Child Care Methods, 1860-1907," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 61 (1977), 60, 63.

[87] For children placed out in the country, see the report of the almshouse visitor, John McGrath, in AH, annual report, 1847. McGrath found boys in Yorktown, East Hampton, Portchester, North Castle, Bedford, Southold, Oyster Bay, Hempstead, Bridgehampton, Southampton, Marbletown, Coventry, Ulysses, Liberty, Fallsburg, and other rural locations, 88-91. By at least 1851 the almshouse was placing children with farmers in New Jersey. See AH, annual report, 1851, 128.

[88] AH, annual report, 1853, 102. On this theme see also Kellock's similar statement in AH, annual report, 1858, 281.

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Older boys on Randall's island were assigned to work in the island's farm and garden. Labor on the land - albeit a waterbound, city-surrounded sliver of land - was supposed to teach them "industrious habits, as well as to make them familiar with a farmer's life."[89]

By at least the mid-fifties the almshouse was sending its children as far away as Iowa where, according to Kellock, the "Western Country presents opportunities of providing comfortable homes for this class."[90] Kellock's connection in Iowa was a Protestant missionary named Charles C. Townsend who ran an institution called the Orphan's Home of Industry in Iowa City. Townsend sent glowing reports of the forty-six children (a group that included three infant foundlings) sent to him from the New York almshouse. Children at the "Home of Industry" were being educated, some at the Home, others at a "select school" in Iowa City. The education of two boys was being sponsored by churches back east; Townsend spoke hopefully about college for these boys. Townsend also reported that a few of the children had been placed in the homes of "the good families of the country" where they were "contented and happy."

All the Iowa children were treated to Protestant church services and Sunday school, where Townsend deputized some of the older girls to work as teachers. The fact that some, possibly most, of these children were born to Catholic parents probably only sweetened Townsend's task which, as he defined it, was to "train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, for usefulness here and blessedness hereafter."[91]

Even though Townsend was a less than regular correspondent, Kellock believed

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[89] AH, annual report, 1856, 211.

[90] AH, annual report, 1858, 281. Information about Charles Townsend comes from two letters he wrote to George Kellock, one in December, 1858, the other in January, 1860. They are reprinted in AH, annual reports, 1858, 281-284, and 1859, 295-297. Townsend mentions children who have been with him since 1854. There is no other mention of when the Iowa program began. AH, annual report, 1858, 283.

[91] AH, annual report, 1859, 296.

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he knew enough about his Iowa City operation to be satisfied. The children there, he reported to his superiors in 1858, were doing so well that "no one of them would wish to return."[92]

A few years later, however, a visitor to Townsend's institution gave a very different report of conditions there. This was George W. Du Bois, another brother of Mary Du Bois. The Du Boises were interested in the Iowa Home because the Nursery also placed children there. George Du Bois reported back to his sister that conditions there were "most unfavorable." The buildings were inadequate, ophthalmia was rampant, and overall the children appeared neglected. The older girls, he reported with distaste, looked "slatternly," a term that signified slovenliness in appearance and behavior, with an undertone that implied careless sexuality. A penciled document titled "Caution to the Charitable Public" that accompanied Du Bois's letter, possibly a copy of a printed notice, warned that the children at Townsend's Iowa City institution were in a "pitiful and destitute condition."[93] Once again the countryside, even the bracingly wholesome American west, did not always live up to expectations.

4. The Foundling Asylums vs. the Countryside.

Jacobi's attack was directed specifically at the Nursery, but it came at a particularly bad time for the New York Infant Asylum, which began preparing to reopen

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[92] AH, annual report, 1858, 281.

[93] George W. Du Bois to Mrs. Cornelius Du Bois, Dubuque, September 22, 1865 and "Caution to the Charitable Public." New York Nursery and Child's Hospital, Records,New- York Historical Society. The "Caution" mentions that Townsend received children from a "house of reception" on Staten Island, as if the writer, who may have been an Iowa City local, did not realize that the Nursery was a separate institution. The almshouse department's 1859 report, with Townsend's letter dated early 1860, is the last mention of the Iowa City home in the almshouse department's annual reports. The report for 1866 shows that the Department of Outdoor Poor has placed no children in Iowa. It is possible that Kellock found out about conditions in Iowa before the Nursery did.

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in the spring of 1871, and opened the following fall. This unfortunate timing meant that it faced the scorn of Jacobi and his followers just as it was attempting to raise funds and gather support. The editors of the *Medical Record* castigated the trustees of the Infant Asylum for their "persistent stupidity in refusing to learn from the experiences of others." The *New York Times* concurred: "Let these ladies," the *Times* editorialized, referring inaccurately to the board of the New York Infant Asylum, "instead of crowding the little helpless creatures in one building, contrive a machinery similar to that of the 'Children's Aid Society' of this City, for placing these infants with kind hearted respectable nurses in the country." Charles Loring Brace used his book about his work with the Children's Aid Society, published in 1872, to weigh in on the question: "Why will our benevolent ladies and gentlemen keep up the old monastic ideas of the necessity of herding these unfortunate children in one building?...Let us not found in New York that most doubtful institution–a Foundling Asylum–but use the advantages we have in the ten thousand natural asylums of the country." Jacobi himself tore apart the Infant Asylum's "Appeal in Behalf of the New York Infant Asylum" piece by piece at a meeting of Medical Society of the County of New York at which he presided.[94]

The New York Infant Asylum's determination to stick to its methods in the face of this criticism is a testament to just how strongly its trustees valued their role as reformers of fallen women over their role as saviors of infant lives. To use their building simply as a depot for infants en route to wet-nurses in the country, as Jacobi suggested, did not fit with their plan to make their institution a model home for unwed mothers and their babies. The Nursery also resisted Jacobi's suggestion, and for the same reason.

The Nursery and the Infant Asylum resisted placing-out, but they agreed with Jacobi's assertion that the countryside was healthier than the city. Like many other

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[94] "The Care of Our Foundlings," *Medical Record*, February 1, 1872, 541; "Foundling Asylum," *New York Times*, December 26, 1871; Brace, *Dangerous Classes*, 415-416;"Infant Asylums," *New York Times*, January 19, 1872.

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reformers who worked with the urban poor, they subscribed to the belief that fresh air was a corrective to the sickening miasmas of congested cities. This was the view of Mary Du Bois. "In regard to a proper location of a building for a Nursery or Home for Mothers and Children," she wrote, "of course a place in the country is best, where pure air, good water, and well drained ground can be obtained," she wrote. But, she added, "Such places are not, however, appreciated by the poor, who really enjoy the crowded rooms of tenement houses more than the benefits of salubrious surroundings. They complain of being lonely when there are no liquor shops to welcome them, and where a fight now and then is more exciting than the rules of a well-ordered Institution."[95]

Both the Nursery and the Infant Asylum opened "country homes" in order to give their children the benefit of fresh air. The New York Infant Asylum found itself a place in the country, first in Flushing, Queens in 1872, and then in Mount Vernon, a suburban town just north of the city, in 1879.[96] The Nursery opened its country branch on Staten Island, near the Du Bois family's new home, in the summer of 1870, as the conflict over Jacobi's ouster raged. Jacobi immediately condemned it as "the ruin and death of the children sent out there." The "Staten Island Grave," as Jacobi called it, was, according to him, nothing but a "cheap burying ground for the babies." The only reason it existed, according to Jacobi, was that "Mrs. Du Bois's indomitable will and fruitful resources will not give up."[97] Jacobi knew his opponent too well to believe that the opening of the country branch was a gesture of conciliation. He recognized it instead for what it was - an expansion of the Nursery's institutional facilities in the face of his suggestion that they be abandoned in favor of placing-out.

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[95] Du Bois, "Thirty Years," 23-24.

[96] For the purchase of the New York Infant Asylum's country home in Flushing, formerly the Patriot Orphan Home, see NYIA, Minutes, December 14, 1871 and May 21, 1872, and annual report, 1873, [9], [15]-16. For the opening of the Mount Vernon country home, NYIA, annual report, 1880, 29-30.

[97] Jacobi, "In re," 164-165.

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The New York Foundling Asylum's history with placing-out, and its reaction to Jacobi's suggestion, was slightly different from that of its Protestant counterparts. Always the most flexible and the least restrictive of the private foundling asylums, the Foundling Asylum had long been in the practice of placing its infants with outside wet-nurses, both inside and outside the city, simply because it did not have room in its building for all the babies it accepted. The Foundling Asylum's physician, Dr. Reynolds, however, was skeptical of Jacobi's touting of the virtues of the countryside. One problem, Reynolds had discovered, was the difficulty in finding rural wet-nurses. Referring to Jacobi's report, he argued:

> We were led to suppose from reports to kindred institutions, and from the experience of continental Foundling Hospitals, that country life (wet-nursing in the rural districts) afforded the only chance of saving the lives of foundlings; but whatever it may be in the future, at present our farmers will not take nurslings into their families...

Even when rural wet-nurses could be found, there was no guarantee that they would be able to provide the kind of wholesome country life dreamed up by urban reformers. "...The poorer class of people in the country who will take them," Reynolds continued, "are more careless than the same class in city tenement houses."[98]

It was Reynolds' experiences that led him to come to a different conclusion than Jacobi. An experiment in the summer of 1870, in which a temporary "summer country hospital" was set up for the foundlings on the grounds of the Catholic Protectory in Westchester County, was a terrible failure. The summer was hot - in nineteenth century New York the infant death rate typically went up in the summer, due to rampant growth of bacteria in milk and water - and the "great majority" of the babies sent there from the Foundling Hospital died.[99] His attempts to place babies with wet-nurses on rural Long

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[98] NYFA, annual report, 1872, 12.

[99] NYFA, biennial report, 1869-1871, 8. For a reference to summer heat as a cause of infant death see Metropolitan Board of Health, annual report, 1866, 10. The Board of Health understood heat as a catalyst for disease-causing odors from rotting garbage.

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Island had also been a failure. "Not an infant have we been able to raise in the rural districts of Long Island," he reported in 1872.[100] Reynolds acknowledged that "hospital air" could be dangerous for infants, but he concluded that in spite of that "the chances of rearing infants in a well regulated institution, with large, sunny, well-ventilated walls, are fully as good as in the outside nursing or boarding."[101]

The only foundling asylum that complied with Jacobi's suggestion was the Randall's Island Infant Hospital, on whose medical board he served, and at whose behest he had carried out his study of European foundling asylums in 1869. In 1871 the Infant Hospital experimentally placed fifty foundlings with lactating women in private homes in Westchester County.[102] The following year the Hospital adopted the placing-out program as a regular policy. Motherless foundlings from the Infant Hospital were placed with Westchester County farm wives, and a local doctor was appointed to oversee them.[103]

One child who benefitted from the Westchester program was Annie Martin, a two-week-old girl rescued from a stoop on St. Mark's Place on a cold January evening in 1883. When Annie was found she was wrapped up in a shawl; a bundle left with her contained two changes of clothing. Nestled into the shawl with her was a bottle of milk; a rubber tube connected the bottle to her lips. Annie's mother was probably a German immigrant. She chose a house whose sign indicated, in German, that a midwifery school was inside. The man who lived in the house, a Mr. Krumm, commented: "I've often said

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They were not yet thinking in terms of bacteria.

[100] NYFA, annual report, 1872, 12.

[101] NYFA, biennial report, 1869-1871, 9.

[102] AH, annual report, 1871, ix-x.

[103] For references to the Westchester placing-out program see AH, annual reports, 1877, xxi, 123; 1878, 82; 1879, 67; 1883, 42-43. Tables in these reports provide statistical data about the program.

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that we should find a deserted baby on our stoop some night, because people might think this was a hospital or an asylum." The matron of the police department's nursery, Mrs.Webb, who was practiced in such matters, believed that Annie was a German baby. The clothing was the clue. "Tell me that wasn't a German bab[y]. There is no mistake about it," Mrs.Webb told a reporter. "See these jackets [and] this shirt. No woman with any understanding [would] make things with ruffles on 'em like that. De[ar] [D]ear! Look at that sleeve. Do you suppose that [a bab]y could get her arm through there?"

Annie's story is full of hints about the ubiquity of infant abandonment in the post-Civil War city. Mr. Krumm was not especially surprised to find a baby on his doorstep, and Matron Webb was experienced in the care of foundlings. So was Officer Jacob Wiebe, the police officer who conveyed her to the police station. Officer Wiebe, a father of six himself, made a specialty of retrieving foundlings. The *Herald* reporter took down his words, complete with German accent: "So many children I haf handled since I was on dis post!" Wiebe told the reporter, "De cap'en and sergeants all send for me to look out for dose young ones."

The *Herald*'s story described how Annie was conveyed smoothly through the city's foundling system, passed from one practiced hand to the next. After the facts of her discovery were recorded in the police station's blotter, Officer Wiebe carried her to Matron Webb's nursery at the Police Department's central office on Mulberry Street. There Matron Webb fed her, changed her, and put her to bed for the night. She confiscated the baby's bundle of clothing to redistribute among other foundlings who came less well provided for. In the morning Mrs. Webb sent the baby to the Department of Charities and Correction building at Third Avenue and Eleventh Street. There she joined three other foundlings. The baby's only name up until that point was "8," the number assigned by the clerk at the Charities and Correction Office when she arrived. The Superintendent of Outdoor Poor gave all four babies new names in preparation for their next phase of life, and wrote them on cards which were tied around their necks with

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string. "Annie Martin" was suggested by the reporter.

From the Charities and Correction Building all four foundlings were taken in a horse-drawn van to the Bellevue Hospital dock on the East River at Twenty-Sixth Street (Annie made this trip in the arms of a woman who was going to visit an inmate of the insane asylum on Blackwell's Island.) A nurse met the four foundlings on the ferry, and after stops at Blackwell's and Ward's islands, the boat arrived at Randall's Island, where the Infant Hospital was their destination. Annie was bathed and examined by the house physician, and Dr. James Healy, the medical superintendent of the Infant Hospital, recorded her arrival.

It was at this point that Annie's fate diverged from that of her companions. A woman arrived at the door of the Infant Hospital with a note from Dr. Archibald Campbell of Mount Vernon, the physician who supervised the foundlings in Westchester, authorizing her to take a child to her Westchester home to nurse. The appropriate forms were completed, and Dr. Healy handed Annie over to her new foster mother. The *Herald* editorialized on the good luck that this change in Annie's fate represented, but it feared for the future of the babies left behind in the Infant Hospital. Annie's "little sisters in misery, left in the pauper hospital, have small prospect of future happiness. It may be better for them that they soon find a grave in the Potter's Field, as we read is the case with a great proportion of the infants left in the city's care."[104]

The Infant Hospital's Dr. Healy also believed that the Westchester program gave the foundlings a better chance. He judged the placing-out program a success. Motherless infants lodged with families in Westchester had a better rate of survival than those who remained in the Infant Hospital (although their death rate was still higher than that of the infants who lived at the hospital with their own mothers). Between 1872, the official first

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[104] Annie Martin's story comes from the following articles in the *New York Herald*: "A Pauper Two Weeks Old," January 23, 1883; "The Foundling Farmed Out," January 24, 1883; "The City's Infant Wards," January 24, 1883.

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year of the program, and 1888, Dr. Healy estimated that infants nursed by their own mothers in the Infant's Hospital died at a rate of fifteen percent; motherless foundlings in the Infant Hospital died at a rate of fifty-two percent, and the death rate of foundlings sent to Westchester was twenty-five percent.[105] The Westchester program also had the side benefit of freeing up space in the crowded Randall's Island building. Healy believed that the death rate in the building had been lowered as a result.[106]

Despite the Westchester program's success, the Infant Hospital made no more than a partial commitment to it. The Infant Hospital never placed more than a fraction of its motherless babies in Westchester. During the first eight years of the program's operation the Infant Hospital regularly maintained between fifty-five and eighty foundlings in Westchester.[107] For most of these years the Infant Hospital maintained an average of 550 motherless infants each year.[108]

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[105] PCC, annual report, 1888, 106.

[106] PCC, annual report, 1886. 62. For another reference to the Westchester program as a relief to overcrowding on Randall's Island see PCC, annual report, 1884, 64.

[107] PCC, annual report, 1883, 42. The number the PCC "maintained" is lower than the number they initially farmed out (see table in note 108, below) because they subtracted the number adopted, returned to their families, discharged, and died.

[108] The first eight years of the Westchester program's official operation (there was an experimental effort in 1871) were 1872 to 1879. There are no Infant Hospital reports available for 1872, 1873, and 1874, so my estimate is based on Infant Hospital census information for 1875-1879. By "motherless infants" I mean the category the Infant Hospital identified in this era as "orphans," or babies who were housed in the Infant Hospital alone, without their mothers. Within that category the Infant Hospital sometimes further designated a category of foundlings, but they did not do it consistently enough to draw any quantitative conclusions. The PCC consistently identified the children placed in Westchester as foundlings, but I am including all motherless babies in my calculations. All information listed below comes from the annual reports of the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction.

Year	"Orphans"Maintained	Farmed out	Foundlings Rec'd.	Source
1875	601	118	NA	1875, pp.[81], 82
1876	609	150	NA	1876, p.122

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Dr. Campbell, the Mount Vernon medical supervisor, was an enthusiastic supporter of the program. "To my mind," he wrote to an inquirer, "any moral family, however humble their circumstances, will afford a better home for these children, than found within the palatial walls of our city asylums." He hoped that the Westchester foundlings could remain in the country in permanent adoptive homes. Some did, but Campbell believed that the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction were not doing enough to make this happen:

> It has seemed to me that if especial efforts were made nearly all of these children could be placed in homes, relieving the State of the burden of their support & themselves of the odium of pauperism. I would venture the statement that there are today one hundred homes in Westchester County who desire to adopt a child but do not know where to go to look for one. I do not know what your ideal home for these waifs may be, mine is that afforded by the artisan or the farmer, where they will of necessity be taught to work & thereby become useful citizens.

Like just about everyone who entered the nearly hopeless lives of foundlings, Dr. Campbell derived pleasure and satisfaction from his work. "Pardon my rambling & rather lengthy reply to your question," he apologized to his correspondent, "but you touched upon my hobby..."[109]

In November, 1883, after nearly thirteen years of successful operation, the Infant Hospital stopped the Westchester program and returned all the infants then living in Westchester to Randall's Island. This was only ten months after Annie Martin was

1877	574	87	210	1877, pp.xxi, 125
1878	509	146	121	1878, pp.82, 85
1879	456	91	117	1879, pp.67, 70

[109] Arch. M. Campbell to Charles W. Woolsey, committee chairman, Westchester County Temporary Home for Protestant Children, August 9, 1880. Isaiah Williams Papers, NYPL. I would like to thank Iris Towers for discovering this letter and bringing it to my attention. For a reference to Campbell by the Infants Hospital, see PCC, annual report, 1878, 82.

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delivered to Westchester; if she were still alive, she would have been among the group returned to the Infant Hospital. One reason for this abrupt decision was probably cost. In 1882 it cost forty-two cents per day to maintain an infant in Westchester, and only twenty-nine cents to keep one on Randall's Island. An unspecified "question of its legality" was also a factor. James Healy, the Infant Hospital's medical superintendent, was dismayed. He recommended a "speedy return to the farmed out system." It was costly, he admitted, but it saved lives.[110]

Dr. Healy got his wish in 1885, when the Infant Hospital began placing-out foundlings in Westchester again.[111] In 1887 Healy reported triumphantly that "To praise the Farmed-out System would be quite superfluous, as the accompanying Tables amply show the many benefits still accruing from its continuance."[112] In acknowledgment of this success, the Infant Hospital placed more children in Westchester, and the almshouse commissioners granted it an additional ten thousand dollars for the purpose.[113]

The program continued until 1892, then it was abruptly stopped again.[114] The reason again appears to have been cost; politics may also have been a factor. On December 31, 1892, the last day of his administration, Tammany mayor Hugh Grant was presented with a report from the city's accounting department charging that the

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[110] PCC, annual report, 1883, 42-43; 1884, 64-65. See also, Romanofsky, "Saving the Lives," 58.

[111] PCC, annual report, 1885, 69.

[112] PCC, annual report, 1887, 53.

[113] PCC, annual report, 1888, 106. For more praise of the Westchester program for the period after 1885, see PCC, annual reports, 1886, 62; 1887, 53; 1889, 59.

[114] Romanofsky finds that the program stopped in 1891, but PCC reports show that it was still in place in 1891, but gone in 1892. Romanofsky, "Saving the Lives," 58. PCC, annual report, 1891, tables A (97) and D (100) make reference to "farmed-out children"; in comparable tables in the 1892 report this category has disappeared, see tables A-G, pages 79-85.

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Department of Public Charities and Correction was "extremely lax and inefficient; so bad, in fact, that large loss to the City was caused thereby." Mayor Thomas F. Gilroy, another Tammany minion, took over in 1893. In their report to the new mayor the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction fumed about the accounting department's accusations. The fact that the accusations were made at such short notice only proved, the commissioners angrily reasoned, "that they were brought with some other object than the good of the City. Whatever the object, the only legitimate effect could be to embarrass your administration at the start."[115] Mayor Gilroy, who took cost-cutting seriously, instituted changes at the Infant Hospital.[116] In this environment of acrimony and parsimony the costly but life-saving Westchester program was doomed, this time for good.

5. Conclusion.

Abraham Jacobi's challenge to the Nursery was the first in a series of challenges that would ultimately put three out of the four foundling asylums (the Sisters of Charity's institution survived) out of business by the first decades of the twentieth century.[117]

In 1870, when Jacobi suggested that the foundling asylums close their doors and place city waifs with wet-nurses in the countryside, he spoke as an advocate for medical rather than moral care for the poor. And yet medicine did not as yet have much to offer

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[115] PCC, annual report, 1893, 9-10. The Accounting Department report was presented to Grant on December 31, 1892, his last day in office, just before Gilroy took over. The Westchester program ended in 1892, during Grant's mayoralty, but its demise appears to have been insured by the accounting department's report, and by Gilroy's emphasis on economy.

[116] PCC, annual report, 1893, 137-138. For Gilroy as a cost-cutter see the biographical entry on him in Jackson, *Encyclopedia of New York City.*

[117] The New York Foundling Asylum, today called the New York Foundling Hospital now runs a range of programs for poor children and parents. See *Leadership Into the 21st Century, 1999 Annual Report of the New York Foundling Hospital.*

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to foundlings. Infant mortality did not begin its long decline until the 1890s, and even then it was arguably the result of the work of sanitary reformers, not doctors. The decline was the result of the retreat of infectious diseases, the most important killers of children, but doctors had no weapons to combat these until the discovery of antibiotics in the twentieth century. The development of diphtheria anti-toxin in 1894 was a forerunner of this trend - but even with diphtheria, improved sanitation in cities may have had more to do with this fatal and terrifying disease's demise than the use of the anti-toxin.[118]

The state of treatment for croup and diphtheria is a meaningful case in point. The tracheotomy Jacobi recommended to the mother of the baby with croup at the Nursery may have been the best method for stopping the strangulation associated with the disease, but it was a less than fully effective method for curing it. Anesthesia was available in 1870, but without rigorous attention to antisepsis, infection, for which there was still no cure, made surgery a serious risk. Abraham Jacobi was an authority on diphtheria, but he could not save his own son, who died of it in 1883. The mother at the Nursery was right to impose her own opinion, and not simply to accept Jacobi's based on the medical authority he claimed for himself. Jacobi accused the women of the Nursery, including this mother, of deploying extra-medical criteria when they made decisions that, he believed, ought to be made by doctors. It seems clear, however, that factors outside the realm of medicine crept into Jacobi's decision-making too. Jacobi's character, his experiences, and his emotions all played a role in this incident and in his year-long conflict with the Nursery. Medicine may have striven for a cool objectivity but its practitioners, after all, were only human, just like the women of the Nursery.

Jacobi's attack on the Nursery and its methods was also fueled by the regular physicians' continuing struggle for supremacy over their scientifically marginal yet

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[118] For these themes see "Sickness and Health in America: An Overview," in Leavitt and Numbers, *Sickness and Health*, and Preston and Haines, *Fatal Years*.

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popular competitors, the patent medicine peddlers, practitioners of homeopathy, herbalists, midwives, abortionists and other traditional healers (many of them women). Physicians had been working hard to boost their professional status since its demoralizing decline in the 1830s, but just because they wished for greater status did not mean they were entitled to it. Scientific medicine, which fully took hold only by the twentieth century, would ultimately earn physicians the status they wanted - but in 1870 this was still in the future.

Placing-out was never more than a partial success in New York. The Infant Hospital's Westchester program showed that it could reduce mortality among foundlings - and yet their death rate, while lower than that of the foundlings that remained in the Infant Hospital, was still higher than that of the babies who remained in the hospital with their mothers. Urban reformers nostalgic for their rural roots and suffused, as Charles Loring Brace was, with ideas about the morally and physically curative powers of the countryside, could claim that simply placing city babies in a country home was beneficial. There was something to this. Nineteenth-century cities did produce a higher infant mortality rate than the country did. But there was still much to be learned about the mechanics of infection and the value of individual care for infants.

Moreover, as experience showed, the foundling networks set up in Russia and the Catholic countries of Europe, for better or worse, were very hard to duplicate in New York. Foundling asylums in those countries operated with the support of a national government and an established church. New York's Catholic foundling asylum had no such support - instead it was an agency of a beleaguered religious minority. The Protestant foundling asylums rejected the Catholic model altogether. The profoundly corrupt state of New York politics in this era meant that funding was sometimes showered on the foundling asylums and at other times wrested away - a consistent commitment to public support was impossible in this era. The difficulty of finding wet-nurses among America's geographically and socially mobile rural population was another

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problem that continually asserted itself.

After his experiences with the foundling asylums in the early part of his career, and the blow-up with the Nursery in 1870, Abraham Jacobi moved on to great success as a leader in American medicine and in his own field of pediatrics. The foundling asylums, however, were to sustain a series of blows that would ultimately finish them off.

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CHAPTER SIX - THE END OF THE FOUNDLING ASYLUMS

1. Introduction.

Abraham Jacobi's attack on New York's foundling asylums was the first in a series of challenges that weakened their foundations. Some of these challenges, such as population growth, ethnic tension, and political corruption, were products of the local situation. The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of tremendous immigration to the United States.[1] New York was an important point of entry and, as a result, its immigrant population swelled accordingly. All of the foundling asylums had been overcrowded from the start, but the flood of foreign poor strained the capacities of their treasuries and their by now aging buildings unbearably.

As the demands the foundling asylums faced increased, their sources of funding waxed and waned unpredictably. In New York, where public money flowed freely into the treasuries of private, religious charities, funding issues were always connected with Catholic/Protestant rivalry. This system also meant that city government, and particularly the corrupt Democratic Tammany Hall political machine, had the power to direct funds in such a way as to garner votes. When the Tweed Ring, Tammany's ruling circle, was exposed in the early 1870s, a system that had benefitted the foundling asylums - particularly the Sisters of Charity's New York Foundling Asylum - was threatened.

During the nineteenth century the foundling asylums also suffered from their own tendency to look toward the past rather than the future. Placing-out, which Abraham Jacobi had first advocated in 1870, became the accepted dogma of social welfare organizations by the early twentieth century. As social work evolved into a profession, the voices in favor of this position gained authority. The foundling asylums had to adapt.

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[1] For foreign immigration to the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press,1955), 14-15; 110.

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By the early twentieth century the two foundling asylums that had most vigorously resisted relinquishing their foundlings, the Nursery and Child's Hospital and the New York Infant Asylum, relaxed their resistance and set up placing-out programs.

Jacobi's belief that the sick poor required medical therapeutics rather than moral reform also became a dominant theory, as the scientific medicine that made its first appearance in the last decades of the nineteenth century gained effectiveness and authority. Medicine was democratized as the sick of all classes began to go to hospitals that were, for the first time, places of cure rather than institutions for the modification of the social behavior of the poor. All of the foundling asylums succumbed to this new thinking in the early twentieth century. Gradually all three of the private foundling asylums transformed themselves into medical institutions with a social work dimension, and the old moral tone became less dominant. Abraham Jacobi, who died in 1919, lived to see his paradigm prevail. Most important of all, by the end of the nineteenth century even the foundling asylums understood that they had failed. They failed to save lives, and they also failed to live up to their own goal of saving women from the results of sexual downfall or from sexual downfall itself.

The foundling asylum administrators, who wanted so much to reform fallen women, nonetheless missed the opportunity to make real changes in these womens' lives. Rather than work to expose their society's sexual double standard, mount a protest against the limited employment choices available for women, or even provide the women under their care with any education other than training in household skills, the foundling asylums simply spit poor, single mothers back out into the domestic service market where they faced the same conditions that brought them to destitution in the first place.

More hopefully, by the 1890s the general infant mortality rate began its long decline from the heights it had reached during the nineteenth century - a decline that continued its dive through the twentieth century. As a result, Progressive era physicians and reformers no longer believed that a high death rate for even the feeblest foundlings

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was necessarily inevitable. This spirit of hopefulness was at least a part of what made three out of the four foundling asylums close their doors during the first decades of the twentieth century. The old fatalism about infant mortality that had pervaded thinking about foundlings began to fade in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Infant abandonment continued even as the foundling asylums stumbled and failed, although it declined over the course of the twentieth century. Ideas about foundlings also changed. New Yorkers were more willing to be hopeful about foundlings in the Gilded Age and into the twentieth century - and even to think of the foundling's life as a paradigm for social mobility. The press in this era told and retold the ever-popular foundling story. Often they used the language of fairy tale, recast in local terms. Babies discovered in alleys could wind up on Fifth Avenue. The reverse was also possible: babies of well-dressed, evidently refined mothers could be abandoned in Grand Central Station and taken off to Randall's Island along with every other doorstep waif. As infant abandonment as a real phenomenon began to decline over the twentieth century New York's real foundlings were forgotten, while the stories that were made up about them blended with the centuries-old tradition of foundling tales, and continue to resonate in the imagination.

2. Mary Conolly, Slippery Dick, and the New York Foundling Asylum.

The early 1870s were a difficult time for the foundling asylums, none of which was yet a decade old. Abraham Jacobi's attack on the Nursery created an atmosphere of hostility that affected the New York Infant Asylum as well. The New York Foundling Asylum also suffered a setback during these years when the Tweed Ring, which had been among its supporters, collapsed in 1871.

Mary Connolly, the wife of city comptroller Richard Connolly and an important member of the Foundling Asylum's Ladies' Committee, was able to pour the stolen dollars of the Tweed Ring into the treasury of the New York Foundling Asylum for only

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a short time. Journalist James D. McCabe described how the members of the Ring "gave sumptuous entertainments, they flaunted their diamonds and jewels in the eyes of a dumbfounded public, they made ostentatious gifts to the poor, and munificent subscriptions to cathedrals and churches, *all with money stolen from the city...*"[2] The New York Foundling Asylum had been among the recipients of this money, but no more.

As comptroller of the city, Richard Connolly oversaw the system of phony vouchers and padded bills that kept the pockets of Tweed ring members flush with cash. In November, 1871 Comptroller Connolly, after first betraying his colleagues on the Tweed Ring, and then being betrayed himself, was arrested. (Abraham Jacobi, who was working on his report for the State Medical Society's Committee on Foundlings and Foundling Institutions as the downfall of the Ring unfolded, drew an analogy between the corruption of the Ring and the complex bureaucracies of foundling asylums. Foundling asylums with their many managers, Jacobi wrote, are "meddlesome, fidgety, inconsistent, incongruous," nor, he added, "is the transaction of business by a ring, if we are well informed, cheap or expedient...")[3] Connolly's bail was set at one million dollars, but on New Year's Day, 1872 he forfeited the stolen million and fled to Europe. His wife fled with him.[4]

Edith Wharton offers some insight into how it was that Mary Connolly was able to abruptly leave behind her home and her work at the Foundling Asylum and the other

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[2] McCabe., *Lights and Shadows*, 87. For McCabe's account of the downfall of the Ring, see McCabe, *Lights and Shadows*, 75-117, also Callow, *Tweed Ring*.

[3] Jacobi, "Foundlings and Foundling Institutions," 127. The *New York Times* began publishing stories about the Tweed Ring's crimes - which had been leaked to it by a disgruntled insider - in July, 1871, see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 10009. The State Medical Society appointed Jacobi chair of its Committee on Foundlings and Foundling Institutions in February, 1871, see Jacobi, "Foundlings and Foundling Institutions," 33. The committee's findings were reported in the *Medical Record* on November 15, 1872.

[4] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 1008-1012; Homburger, *Scenes From the Life*, 206-207.

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charities she supported: "In *their* day," Wharton has some elderly ladies reminisce in *The Age of Innocence*, "the wife of a man who had done anything disgraceful in business had only one idea: to efface herself, to disappear with him."[5] But Mary Connolly was more than simply a loyal wife - she was also culpable. A bitter critic of Richard Connolly's described him as "cold, crafty and cowardly" and, perhaps most cutting of all for a thief used to practicing on a grand scale, charged that he "lacked courage to carry through great frauds." Yet this same critic conceded that Connolly's "strong affection for his wife and children seems to have been his sole redeeming trait..."[6] Mary Connolly's reciprocal affection provided her husband with critical support as his world began to collapse around him. As her husband's enemies closed in, Mary Connolly scurried to hide several conspicuously bulky lumps of money. The largest of these was a half million dollars that she transferred to Joel Fithian, husband of her daughter Fanny and holder of several lucrative city titles, including Assistant Receiver of Taxes. Reporting on Mrs. Connolly's last-minute financial maneuvers the *Times* sneered: "It must be so consoling to the tax-payers to learn of the continued prosperity of their masters."[7] The Connollys went first to join the Fithians who, with loot in hand, had settled in Vevey, Switzerland. After a sad period of wandering in Europe, Mary Connolly died in Vevey in 1879. Her husband died in Marseilles a year later. They both returned to New York only in their caskets.[8]

For those, including the Sisters of Charity, who had known Mary Connolly as a

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[5] Wharton, *Age of Innocence*, 290.

[6] Charles F. Wingate, "An Episode in Municipal Government," *North American Review* 119, issue 245, October, 1874, 377.

[7] Homburger, *Scenes From the Life*, 200; *New York Times*, September 11 and 14, 1871.

[8] Homburger, *Scenes From the Life*, 207-210; Obituary, "Richard Barrett Connolly," *New York Herald*, June 1, 1880; "Mrs. R.B. Connolly's Funeral," *New York Times*, April 13, 1879; "Mrs. Connolly's Funeral," *New York Herald*, April 13, 1879.

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generous benefactress, none of this was enough to make them withhold their public expressions of sorrow at her death. Her funeral at the Fourth Universalist Church in New York was something of a festival of forgiveness, as friends, family, and representatives of the charities she supported chose to remember her "kindness, charity, and constant goodness" and to forget her seamy Tammany connections and the choices such connections caused her to make. Her casket was overwhelmed with masses of flowers sent by admirers, a wild Victorian melange of tree ferns, palms, violets, ivy, evergreens, roses, lilies, and calla lilies. Representatives of the Chapin Home, Hahneman and Women's Hospital, and the New York Foundling Asylum - Mary Connolly's three principal charities - served as pallbearers. The New York Foundling Asylum sent a "beautifully engraved copy of verses addressed 'To the Memory of Mrs. Connolly.'" The book was mounted in a walnut frame and placed in a prominent position near the casket. Even the vengeful *Times* - which had been a central player in the pursuit and destruction of the Tweed Ring - reported on the event respectfully, describing Mrs. Connolly's son-in-law Robert C. Hutchings - another deposed Tammany appointee - as "ex-Surrogate" without comment and forbore from mentioning Richard Connolly at all.[9]

The collapse of the Tweed Ring deprived the New York Foundling Asylum of one of its most energetic fundraisers and her generous circle of friends. But the exposures of corruption in city government had wider ramifications for all the foundling asylums - in fact for all of the city's private, religious charities that had benefitted from the Ring's generosity.

In 1869, when Mary Townsend Connolly and her friends gathered to form a ladies society in support of the newly organized New York Foundling Asylum, her husband and

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[9] "Mrs. Connolly's Funeral," *New York Herald*, April 13, 1870; "Mrs. R.B. Connolly's Funeral," *New York Times*, April 13, 1879. For Hutchings' role as Surrogate (and also Fithian's appointments), see Homburger, *Scenes From the Life*, 177.

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his cronies were at the height of their power.[10] The Tweed Ring's support of parochial schools, charities, and job-generating public works earned Boss Tweed the title of "champion of the immigrant" at a time when the majority of immigrants to the city were Catholic.[11]

Tweed's munificence was not limited to the Catholic poor. As a member of the state assembly's Committee on Charitable and Religious Societies, Tweed also channeled funds to hospitals run by Protestants and Jews, and to elite cultural institutions, among them the Metropolitan Museum of Art (which also counted the Episcopalian banking magnate J. Pierpont Morgan among its benefactors).[12] But even though Tweed spread his stolen dollars widely, the city's Protestant elite tended to identify the question of public funding for private charities as a Catholic outrage. The *New York Times* expressed this outrage against "sectarian and Romish influence" in an 1872 article: "Considerable interest is felt by the intelligent part of the community–those of Protestant faith– interested in the disbursement of the charities of the City, especially as the feeling has been gaining ground for several years past that no money should be voted away for sectarian purposes–in other words, to help to support a religion and a class of teaching foreign to the mass of our people in every respect." To fund private charities with public funds was, according to the *Times* to "allow the disbursement to fall into Roman Catholic, or which is the same thing, Ring hands."[13]

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[10] Connolly was appointed comptroller in 1867; the 1870 Tweed charter empowered Tweed, Sweeney, Connolly. See "Richard Barrett Connolly," *New York Herald*, June 1, 1880; For the Tweed charter, Leo Hershkowitz, *Tweed's New York* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1977), 155.

[11] Hershkowitz, *Tweed's New York*, 141.

[12] Hershkowitz, *Tweed's New York*, 129-130, 154; Jean Strouse, *Morgan, American Financier* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 141.

[13] "The Charities of New York," *New York Times*, February 17, 1872. This article is about proposed changes in the composition of the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction. This issue was addressed by the 1873 charter. The article lists charities and

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In fact, since Catholic institutions served the largest group of immigrant poor, they did absorb the bulk of public funds granted to private charities. This was as true for the foundling asylums as it was for the city's other religious charities.[14] All of the foundling asylums benefitted from a state law passed in 1866 that directed the city to grant a per capita allowance to inmates of private charitable institutions. The per capita allowance became, according to one historian, "the lifeblood of children's institutions."[15] Mary Du Bois, whose Nursery was the first of the foundling asylums to receive the per capita funding, was grateful for the passage of this law to which, she believed, her institution owed whatever financial security it had.[16] The New York Foundling Asylum, which had a larger population than either of the two Protestant foundling asylums and therefore received more in per capita funds, had even more reason to be grateful.

Reform forces, fueled by Protestant resentment over public money disappearing into the coffers of Catholic charities, periodically mounted attacks on the city and state's system of distributing public money to private, religious institutions. One of these

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the among of funds each received, and breaks down funding amounts by religion.

[14] The State's initial granting of building funds to the three foundling asylums had also been unequal. The Catholic New York Foundling Asylum had received $100,000 in state building funds, as compared to the $30,000 the state granted to the New York Infant Asylum, and the Nursery's $10,000. This situation continued into the twentieth century. In 1903, when the New York Foundling Hospital received eighty-eight percent of its funds from the city, the New York Infant Asylum received fifty-seven percent and the Nursery and Child's Hospital only thirty-two percent. See Romanofsky, "Saving the Lives," 53.

[15] Peter C. English, "Pediatrics and the Unwanted Child in History: Foundling Homes, Disease, and the Origins of Foster Care, 1860-1920), 701. The law is Chapter 774 of the laws of 1866, "An Act Making Appropriations for Certain Public and Charitable Institutions," passed April 24, 1866, in *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the Eighty-Ninth Session of the Legislature*, vol. 2, January 2 - April 20, 1866 (Albany: William Gould, 1866), 1674-1678. At the time the law was passed only the Nursery and Child's Hospital was in existence. The other foundling asylums were subsequently added to the list of institutions that received per capita funding.

[16] Du Bois, "Thirty Years," 25.

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attacks was mounted at the New York State constitutional convention of 1867 where an amendment was proposed prohibiting the use of state funds for private charities. Mary Du Bois, with the assistance of Erastus Brooks who was chair of the convention's committee on charities, protested the amendment. Her opposition was based on the notion that private charities, such as the Nursery, performed services that public ones could not. The almshouse, Du Bois claimed, was good enough for "women who have no shame or modesty left which would prevent their seeking refuge in a public charity." Du Bois ended her petition to the state legislators by invoking the image of an "immense number of children now left at our doors, and in our docks, sewers, and open lots, [who] call piteously for legislative action."[17]

The 1867 amendment failed, sparing the Nursery's funding, but in 1873 the issue came up again. In the aftermath of the Tweed Ring's downfall, reformist forces in the state legislature once again proposed to limit public funding to private, religious charities. The vehicle this time was a new city charter. The reformist city charter passed in 1873 contained a clause forbidding the expenditure of city funds on religious charities.[18] The

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[17] Du Bois, "Petition," in NCH, annual report, 1868, 23-24. The version of the petition presented by Brooks to the convention is in Records of the New York Nursery and Child's Hospital, New-York Historical Society. On the 1867 amendment and its failure, see Folks, *Care of Destitute*, 116-117. Folks notes that the issue of limiting private funds to public charities was also raised at the state's 1846 constitutional convention. The state signaled its ambivalence toward private charities again in1894 when a state constitutional convention stopped the legislature's practice of compelling localities to support private charities. The convention also gave the job of evaluating and supervising private charities to the State Board of Charities as a way of tightening control over admissions and public spending at these institutions. See Folks, *Care of Dependent*, 124-125, and State Charities Aid Association, annual report, 1904, 9-10. Public funding of private charities continued to be an issue into the twentieth century.

[18] "An Act to Reorganize the Local Government of the City of New York," passed April 30, 1873, Chapter 757, section 10, Appendix I. For a brief mention of the reformist character of the 1873 city charter see Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 1028-1029. For articles in the *New York Times* tracking the charter's passage through the legislature, see 1873, January 8, 9, 12, 31; February 17, 19, 20, 22, 22, 25, and others.

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New York Foundling Asylum, which benefitted the most from public funds, suffered the most when these funds were threatened. The *Herald* sprang to the Sisters' defense, urging that "some sure provision will be made for this institution, and that the famous anti-sectarian clause may be so amended as to avert the possibility of closing up or suspending so noble a work."[19]

The Sisters' work was, in fact, under still another threat at the time that the charter reform was passed. In 1872 the city reduced its per capita allowance to the foundling asylums to match the rate paid to the public Infant Hospital on Randall's Island. The reasons for the cut are multiple and somewhat obscure. One of them appears to have been competition for funds between the public foundling asylum and the private ones, since it was at the behest of the Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction that the cut was made. The precipitating reason for the cut appears to have been the revival and rechartering of the New York Infant Asylum. The New York Infant Asylum opened at an inhospitable moment for the foundling asylums. Abraham Jacobi had just attacked their core principles, and the atmosphere of corruption that surrounded the distribution of public funds just at this moment as the excesses of the Tweed Ring were being revealed must have further turned the legislators against funding yet another private, religious, albeit Protestant, institution. For anyone reading the newspapers at this time the atmosphere of pervasive government corruption was clear: alongside coverage of the reform city charter's passage through the state legislature were articles about the trial of William M. Tweed, and the Credit Mobilier scandal, which was unfolding in Washington at the same time.[20]

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[19] "The Charter and the Charity," *New York Herald*, March 2, 1873.

[20] Stephen Smith stated that the cut was made because the Commissioners of Public Charity and Correction opposed the rechartering of the New York Infant Asylum, and therefore sought to limit the public funds it could receive. "Address by Dr. Stephen Smith of the State Board of Charities," in NYIA, annual report, 1895, 4. The New York Infant Asylum's revised charter was issued in April, 1872. Section 22 shows the

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Although the cut in per capita funding was meant to most directly affect the New York Infant Asylum, it was the New York Foundling Asylum, with its greater reliance on public funds, that suffered the most.[21] The Sisters were forced to bring their reception crib indoors so as to limit the number of foundlings left at their door. The result, they claimed, was death for "the unfortunates who were refused, for cases of infanticide were again frequently reported."[22] The *Herald*, as always, rushed to support the Sisters, arguing that the cut "tends to increase greatly the heavy burden under which the institution is at present laboring, and makes the duties of the good ladies in charge more wearing and wearying on them."[23]

The emergency was averted when Governor John A. Dix, after visiting Sister Irene at the Foundling Asylum, agreed to sign a bill restoring some of the lost funding.[24]

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reduction in the per capita rate. In NYIA, annual report, 1873, 46-47. For articles about the Credit Mobilier scandal and the Tweed trial, see the *New York Times*, January and February, 1873.

[21] Stephen Smith recalled that although the cut in funding meant that the New York Infant Asylum could not hire wet-nurses or buy artificial food, the Asylum "however, accepted the situation, rented a building at Eighth Street, near Broadway, and began operations." "Address by Dr. Stephen Smith," 4-5. (This building barely exists in the records and must have been used for only a very short time.) In the histories of the New York Foundling Asylum, this funding cut is presented as a central crisis. See NYFA, "Souvenir of 1889," 21-22 and Walsh, *Sisters of Charity*, 76-78.

[22] NYFA, *Souvenir of 1889*, 22; Fitzgerald, "Passion and Poverty," 52-53.

[23] "The Charter and the Charity," *New York Herald*, March 2, 1873.

[24] For accounts of this incident and Governor Dix's role, see NYFA, "Souvenir of 1889," 21-22; Walsh, *Sisters of Charity*, 76-78; "Sister Mary Irene Dead," *New York Times*, August 15, 1896; "A True Sister of Charity. Sister Irene Gone to her Eternal Reward," [1896] unattributed clipping at Sisters of Charity Archives. Elisha Harris wrote the governor, pleading for the restoration of funds, see Elisha Harris to Governor John A. Dix, May 7, 1874, New York Foundling Asylum Records, Sisters of Charity Archives. The bill that restored funds in 1874 is Chapter 644, "An Act to Amend the Charter of the Foundling Asylum of the Sisters of Charity, in the City of New York," Passed June 23, 1874. Elisha Harris had asked that each foundling be allotted thirty-eight cents per day, and that is what the law granted.

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Despite this deliverance times remained stressful for the foundling asylums. In 1873 the United States suffered an economic crash that was followed by a depression that lasted several years. In 1875 the New York Infant Asylum nervously recorded that the depression had undermined its ability to attract funding from its supporters.[25]

The collapse of the Tweed Ring, damaging as it was to the New York Foundling Asylum on its own, came at a time of multiple crises that magnified its effects. The Tweed collapse thus added to the difficulties of the foundling asylums' earliest, and in many ways hardest, years. In the midst of it all, as always, the people who were the least to blame, and who suffered the most, were the foundlings.

3. Placing-out Becomes the Order of the Day.

During the last third of the nineteenth century Abraham Jacobi's stand against institutionalization for dependent children gradually became the dominant position among the new public and private social welfare organizations that were founded during this period. By the early twentieth century placing-out, or foster care, as it eventually came to be known, became the preferred mode of care for these children. This was the case not only in New York, but nationally. In New York, however, alarm over institutionalization was the result, in part, of the unintended consequences of New York's Children's Law, passed in 1875.

Almshouses had long had a reputation for squalor, as nineteenth-century observers like Ezra Stiles Ely and reformers like Dorothea Dix reported. In almshouses petty criminals, prostitutes, the insane, and the ill mingled with the destitute, genteel elderly - and also with children. In 1875 William Pryor Letchworth, a commissioner of the New York State Board of Charities and, by the end of the century, an important voice

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[25] NYFA, annual report, 1875, 11. For the Panic of 1873 and its effects see Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1867). Also, Strouse, *Morgan*, 151, and Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 1020-1038.

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in national child welfare reform, proposed a bill recommending that children be removed from the state's almshouses. The state complied, and in 1875 passed its "Children's Law" which forbade the placement of healthy children between the ages of three and sixteen in almshouses.

Letchworth hoped that children removed from almshouses as a result of the Children's Law would be placed with families or in "fitting asylums."[26] As it turned out, the children were placed not in families, but in private, religious institutions. This was because of the so-called "religious clause" of the Children's Law, which designated that children removed from the almshouses be placed in institutions run by people of the same faith as their parents. The religious clause was an effort to avoid stirring up the religious rivalries that had long existed between New York's Catholic and Protestant charities. Its unintended result was the ballooning of the size and number of private, religious institutions for children in New York State, as children released from almshouses, and those who came later, were redistributed among them and public money for the children's upkeep followed.[27]

The Children's Law did not benefit the foundling asylums to the same extent that it did the state's orphanages, because it only applied to children over the age of three (in 1878 the law was amended and the age was lowered to two). But it did affect the city's foundlings in two important ways. The first was the effect the law had on the "Children's Island," Randall's Island, site of the Infant Hospital. At the end of 1875, in compliance

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[26] William Pryor Letchworth, "What Shall be Done With Pauper Children?" in Bremner, *Children and Youth*, 252.

[27] Letchworth, "Pauper Children?" and "An Act to Provide for the Better Care of Pauper and Destitute Children," both 1875, in Bremner, 252-254; Letchworth, "History of Child Saving," 181-183. Also, Folks, *Care of Destitute*, pp. 75-77 and Reena Sigman Friedman, *"These Are Our Children": Jewish Orphanages in the United States, 1880-1925*, Ph diss., Columbia University,1991, pp. 7-9. The law was amended in 1878 to lower the age to two. See Folks, *Care of Destitute*, 77.

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with the Children's Law, the city nurseries, located there since 1848, were closed. Left behind on Randall's Island were all of the children not covered by the law: the inmates of the Idiot Asylum and Hospital, the juvenile delinquents of the House of Refuge (which was a private institution), and the foundlings of the Infants Hospital. Now that only the ill, the mentally insufficient, and the unwanted remained, the fate of Randall's Island as a site of unmitigated bleakness was sealed.[28]

The second way the Children's Law affected foundlings was that it set back the movement in favor of placing-out. But this setback, it turned out, was only temporary as the rise in the number of institutionalized children in the state caused by the Children's Law created a backlash against institutionalization. Members of the state's social service agencies, including Letchworth himself and others who had originally supported the Children's Law, watched with alarm as the number of institutionalized children grew. The public also took alarm. Letchworth noted that the massive increase in institutionalization meant that asylums for children began losing their "hold upon popular favor."[29]

The rise in the number of institutionalized children in New York State after the passage of the Children's Law was enormous.[30] In1875 there were 9,363 children being cared for in public and private institutions in the city. In 1894, when the state stepped in to amend the law, the number had risen to 33,558.[31] The State Charities Aid Association

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[28] On closure of the nurseries: PCC, annual report, 1875, vi, 271; 1876, xv. The Idiot Asylum was originally part of the Nurseries. It was meant for children, but it contained young adults who had grown up there and never acquired the skills to leave. See Louisa May Alcott's description of them in Alcott, "A New Way to Spend Christmas."

[29] Letchworth, "History of Child Saving," 182.

[30] On the expansion of institutions after the passage of the Children's Law, see Folks, *Care of Destitute*, 120-124 and Letchworth, "History of Child Saving," 181-182.

[31] Josephine Shaw Lowell, New York State Board of Charities, Twenty-third Annual Report, 1889, in Bremner, 281; SCAA, annual report, 1904, 10. In 1894 the revised New York State constitution gave the State Board of Charities the right to regulate admissions

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of New York, a private group established in 1872 to inspect conditions in the state's public institutions, commented that this growth was much faster than "the growth of population or industrial conditions would warrant."[32] As a result of their concern over the rising numbers of institutionalized children in the state, social welfare organizations such as the State Charities Aid Association and the New York State Board of Charities, a public body founded in 1867 to oversee the operation of charities in the state, committed themselves to the principle that dependent children ought to be placed in homes and not in institutions. By the early twentieth century most social welfare workers not only in New York State but nationwide had come to believe that home placement was best and institutionalization ought to become a thing of the past.[33]

At least some of the alarm expressed by the mainly Protestant members of the new social welfare organizations had to do with the fact that most of the children's institutions funded by the Children's Law were Catholic.[34] By 1894 approximately 83% of institutionalized children in the state were in Catholic institutions. The trend continued into the twentieth century as the numbers of children in Catholic institutions remained high, and thus more public funding was channeled into Catholic institutions than Protestant ones.[35] The State Charities Aid Association carefully charted the comparative

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of children who were public charges to private charities, see SCAA, annual report, 9-10.

[32] SCAA, annual report, 1904, 9. For the founding and functions of the SCAA, see Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 34-35.

[33] Romanofsky, "Saving the Lives," 50-52. In 1906 the State Charities Aid Association printed its two goals prominently on the title page of its annual report. The first was to improve conditions in charities statewide, the other was "to assist public authorities in placing destitute children in carefully selected homes."

[34] Folks, *Care of Destitute*, 123-124.

[35] The SCAA plotted this phenomenon from 1890 to 1904. In 1890 there were 9,986 children in Catholic institutions; 3,040 in Protestant institutions; and 1,524 in Jewish institutions. In 1904 there were 11,847 children in Catholic institutions; 2,376 in Protestant ones; and 1,940 in Jewish ones. SCAA, annual report, 1904, 10-11.

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population and funding statistics of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish charities after the passage of the Children's Law.[36] Josephine Shaw Lowell, a commissioner of the State Board of Charities, believed that Catholic and Jewish charities had rushed to take advantage of the religious clause of the Children's Law. There is no doubt, she wrote, "that these institutions were established in consequence of the passage of that act, and to take advantage of the facilities granted for the education at public cost of large numbers of children in the Roman Catholic and Hebrew faiths."[37] Her inclusion of Jews is curious, since Jewish children were institutionalized in the smallest numbers, falling behind Protestants as well as Catholics.[38] Her condemnation of Catholic alacrity to take advantage of public funds is also unbalanced. The greater number of Catholic institutions for poor children was probably a reflection, more than anything else, of the poverty of the state's immigrant Catholic population which, by the last decades of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth had expanded to include Italians as well as Irish and Germans.

The anti-institutional feeling created by the Children's Law resulted in greater scrutiny of conditions in children's institutions, including the foundling asylums. The State Charities Aid Association's method was to send visiting committees to inspect each of the state's public charities, county by county. In 1888 the State Charities Aid Association's New York County Visiting Committee was dismayed by conditions at the Randall's Island Infant Hospital. Everything, the visitors observed, was going wrong there:

> The plumbing is undergoing renovation, and the hospital is in great

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[36] See the chart in SCAA, annual report, 1904, 10-11.

[37] Josephine Shaw Lowell, "The Subsidy System in New York," in Bremner, *Children and Youth*, 281.

[38] In 1890, one year after Lowell wrote these words, there were 1,524 children in Jewish institutions and 3,040 in Protestant ones. See SCAA, annual report, 1904, 10.

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> disorder; rats still abound. Winter cloaks for the babies were not furnished till March. The mothers are often untidy; being kept till their babies are two years old, there seems no reason why they should not be required to do a moderate amount of work in return for their livelihood. The Committee believes the whole system to be wrong–a premium upon idleness and vice.

Worst of all, they found that not one child admitted during the eighteen months prior to their visit had managed to survive to the age of one.[39] Medical superintendent Healy admitted to the "defective state of our plumbing" (although he noted that it was being repaired), but he denied the visiting committee's worst charge. "Our records show eleven who have attained and passed that age [of one year]," he reported indignantly. The committee, he suggested, had simply missed seeing them since they had been adopted and were thus out of the institution. "There is every reason to believe" he added with the lack of specificity typical of the bureaucracies that ran New York's complex of public institutions in the nineteenth century, that they "are now alive and well." On rats, cloakless infants, and idle, sloppy mothers Healy remained silent.[40]

The State Charities Aid Association remained concerned about conditions at the Infants Hospital through the 1880s and 1890s. Between 1895 and 1897, the organization discovered, foundling death rates there ranged between ninety-nine and one hundred percent - just what they had been at mid-century. The *New York Tribune*, reporting on this finding in its Sunday edition, noted that "this frightful state of affairs appealed to the public imagination as few things could."[41] In 1898, the State Charities Aid Association

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[39] SCAA, annual report, 1888, 40-41.

[40] PCC, annual report, 1888, 106-107. This annual report also refers to a broader investigation of the department's institutions by the SCAA, the result of "serious complaint in the public press" about poor diet, overcrowding, improper attendants. The SCAA's report confirmed these conditions, but, according to the Commissioner of Public Charities and Correction, failed to find that they were the result of "failure of duty on our part." 13.

[41] SCAA, annual report, 1898, 27-28; "Saving the Foundlings," *New York Tribune*, April 28, 1901; Romanofsky, "Saving the Lives," 59.

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decided to step in and effect a change. That year, with the assistance of funds provided by a private benefactor, the Association and an older charity organization, the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, formed the Joint Committee on the Care of Motherless Infants. In January the Joint Committee approached the Commissioner of Public Charities for Manhattan and the Bronx and offered to remove a group of foundlings from the Infant Hospital and place them with foster mothers in the surrounding countryside. Their proposal was nothing more than what Abraham Jacobi had suggested in 1870, and what the Infant Hospital had intermittently attempted in the two decades between 1871 and 1891.

The program began in April, 1898 with an experimental group of twenty-five foundlings, but quickly expanded.[42] By the fall of 1900 the Commissioner of Public Charities had agreed to hand over to the Joint Committee all Protestant foundlings retrieved from the streets of Manhattan and the Bronx. In December, reflecting the integration of the five boroughs into Greater New York, the Committee began including foundlings from Brooklyn and Queens also.[43] Because the Joint Committee only accepted Protestant foundlings, a group called the Guild of the Infant Savior was organized to place Catholic foundlings. In early 1901 the Commissioner of Public

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[42] Information about the history of this placing-out effort comes from: SCAA, annual report, 1898, 27-32; SCAA/AICP Joint Committee, annual report,1901, 5-21; Romanofsky, "Saving the Lives"; Virginia M. Walker, "How to Save the Babies of the Tenements," *Charities*, August 5, 1905, 975-980; "Saving the Foundlings," *New York Tribune*, April 28, 1901; "Will Look After New York Foundlings, Guild of Infant Saviour Incorporated...," *New York Herald*, June 10, 1901; "Care of City's Foundlings," *New York Herald*, June 3, 1902.

[43] The Joint Committee reported that in December 1900 the Commissioner of Public Charities for Manhattan and the Bronx asked it take over all Protestant foundlings and the Committee agreed. However, the reports of the PCC show that the two committees were not taking all of the foundlings. The PCC's 1902 report shows that the Joint Committee and the Guild of the Infant Saviour combined were only taking 139 foundlings. In 1903 the two organizations took a combined total of 145. SCAA/AICP Joint Committee, annual report, 1900-1901,13; PCC, annual reports, 1902, 59-60; 1903, 97-98.

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Charities began delivering Catholic foundlings to the Guild for placement in Catholic foster homes.[44]

This separate treatment of Protestant and Catholic foundlings was, once again, an attempt to step carefully around the ever-present tension between Catholic and Protestant charities in the city. Catholics were alarmed at the efforts of Protestant-run placing-out agencies, such as Charles Loring Brace's Children's Aid Society, to place city waifs, many of whom were Catholic, with Protestant farm families. When it came to placing infant foundlings, the situation was more complex than it was with older children. Some foundlings were left with religious medals, notes explaining their origins, or other indicators, but many were not, thus it was not always possible to tell the religion or ethnicity of abandoned babies. By the 1890s the Commissioner of Public Charities had worked out a solution for this problem: foundlings were baptized alternately by a Catholic priest or a Protestant minister, regardless of their actual, usually unknown, ethnic origins.[45] After these ad hoc assignments of religious affiliation a representative of the Commission on Public Charities named the babies in a similarly random manner. By the early twentieth century Bellevue Hospital, where these ceremonies were by then performed, had created two large books, one containing names for boys, the other, names for girls. Irish and Anglo-Saxon names were mixed in equal parts, a few Jewish names

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[44] On the formation of the Guild of the Infant Savior, see "Saving the Foundlings," *New York Tribune*, April 28, 1901; "Will Look After Foundlings, Guild of the Infant Saviour Incorporated to Care for Little Ones, and Asks Assistance," *New York Herald*, June 10, 1901.

[45] For references to alternate baptism see: "Abandoned to the City's Care," *New York Herald*, January 14, 1895; "Catholic Waif in Protestant Hands," *New York* Herald, August 22, 1901; New *York Herald*, Sunday magazine, March 27, 1904; "Ashcan Baby Finds a Home in Fifth Avenue," *New York Herald*, Sunday magazine, December 26, 1909; "What's My Name?" *New York Tribune*, April 18, 1948. Alternate baptizing, which eventually did include Jews, lasted until the 1960s. See Nina Bernstein, *The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care* (New York: Pantheon, 2001), 58.

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were added, and all were spread evenly throughout both books. As each foundling arrived it was assigned the next available name regardless of perceived heritage. In 1909 a reporter for the *Herald*'s Sunday magazine regaled his readers with the peculiar results of what he called this "haphazard, helter-skelter method." Jewish names, he wrote, usually fell "to the lot of some fair haired, blue eyed child. Infants with the dark, oily skin of the Orient are placed among the Catholics, while snub faced, red haired boys and girls fall to the Protestants."[46]

The city's effort to be even-handed in the assignment of religion inevitably created problems. In 1901, for instance, a furor erupted when a six-week-old girl abandoned in a Third Avenue hallway with Catholic religious medals around her neck was given by city authorities to the Protestant Joint Committee with her medals missing. The medals had apparently been removed at the police station, where they were used for identification. The result, the *Herald* breathlessly reported, was "a serious religious controversy."[47]

Also problematic was the failure of the alternate baptizing scheme to designate any foundlings as Jews. By the early twentieth century Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were a significant presence among the city's immigrant communities. The practice of alternate baptizing, however, was a response to a specific, bitter, entrenched, longtime rivalry between Catholics and Protestants that simply did not take Jews (or, for that matter, members of any other religion) into account. The number of Jewish

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[46] "Ashcan Baby Finds a Home in Fifth Avenue," *New York Herald*, Sunday Magazine, December 26, 1909. Before 1896 foundlings picked up by the police were taken either to the police station or to the office of the Board of Charities and Correction and then taken to Randall's Island. In 1895 or 1896 a change was made and foundlings were taken directly to Bellevue, and then to Randall's. See "Abandoned to the City's Care," *Herald*, January 14, 1895 for a description of the older system and "Seen in Waifland," *Herald*, October 25, 1896, section 6, for the new system.

[47] "Catholic Waif in Protestant Hands," *New York Herald*, August 22, 1901.

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foundlings retrieved over the course of the nineteenth century was also quite small. This remained true in 1901 when the *New York Tribune* commented "Occasionally a baby is found with a request pinned on its clothes that it should be brought up as a Hebrew, and this desire is, of course, respected; but these cases are extremely rare."[48]

One result of the rescue effort initiated by the Joint Committee was that the number of foundlings delivered to the Infant Hospital began to lessen significantly as the Joint Committee and the Guild siphoned them off. Another result was that the mortality rate of the placed out foundlings rapidly dropped. In 1899, after one year of operation, the Joint Committee reported that the mortality rate of its foundlings was 55.9%; a year later it was 31.1%; and in 1901, after four years of operation, the Joint Committee was

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[48] "Saving the Foundlings," *Tribune*, April 28, 1901. The records of the almshouse and the foundling asylums as well as articles in the press show that there were always a small number of Jewish foundlings and illegitimate Jewish babies. See, for instance, the 1809 cases of Emmeline and Solomon Seixas, AH Children's Records, vol. 214, pp. 265, 302. (both were the illegitimate children of Isaac Seixas and Susan Wheeler); Isaac Levi,, vol.0161, November 10 and December 22, 1820; and Elizabeth Levy, vol.0149, 19, 1828, an illegitimate child who was at nurse with her mother. Esther Levinas worked as a nurse for the almshouse, see AH Children's Records, vol.0161, January 7, 1820. She signs for her pay with a mark. The fact that Jews tended to come to the United States in family groups probably protected young, unmarried Jewish women from becoming unexpectedly pregnant. Jewish women also did not work as live-in servants in any significant numbers, and servants dominated the ranks of abandoning mothers. On this theme see Gillis, "Servants, Sexual Relations," and Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria.*

Mrs.Webb, the matron of the police department nursery, noted the occasional presence of a Jewish foundling, see "One of the Waifs," *Herald*, June 24, 1883. The New York Foundling Asylum recorded the admission of Jewish foundlings, see NYFA's first admissions book, #13, November 3, 1869. Mary Du Bois reported that the Nursery welcomed unmarried Jewish women and their babies. See NCH, annual report, 1892, 8, in which the case of a Jewish women who converted to Christianity at the Nursery is recorded.

For the Jewish community's own effort to grapple with the problem of dependent Jewish children see Peter Romanofsky, "'To Save...Their Souls': The Care of Dependent Jewish Children in New York City, 1900-1905," *Jewish Social Studies* 36 (1974): 253-261. For more commentary on this effort see PCC, annual report, 1903, 25. The Hebrew Infant Asylum, founded in New York in 1896, specifically excluded illegitimate children, Hebrew Infant Asylum, annual report, 1896, 35.

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able to report that the mortality rate of the foundlings it had placed with foster mothers was only 19%. This rate, they remarked proudly, was "not greatly in excess of the estimated mortality among all children of corresponding age in New York City."[49]

The city's arrangement with the Joint Committee and the Guild of the infant Savior came to an end in 1907. During the nine years of its operation the Joint Committee cared for a total of 1,000 foundlings. It placed 407 of these in permanent, adoptive homes.[50] The end came at least in part as a result of bribe-taking in the office of the city comptroller. Hermann Metz, the comptroller, and Daniel C. Potter, chief of the comptroller's Bureau of Charitable Institutions opposed placing-out. The rhetoric of these two officials was edged with real animosity. According to Comptroller Metz, the work of the Joint Committee was no more than "professional philanthropy in its boldest, most heartless and most reckless form" and Virginia Walker, the Joint Committee's agent, was nothing but "a hired female clerk, with a basket in her arm, peddling a live baby around the city." Potter, who accused members of the Joint Committee of being "professional philanthropists and dreamers" was equally venomous.[51]

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[49] In 1902 the two committees accepted a combined total of 139 foundlings. PC, annual report, 1902, 59-60. These foundlings came from Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens, reflecting the creation of Greater New York in 1898. The death rate reported for the year ending March 31, 1901 was 18 9/10 %, SCAA/AICP Joint Committee, annual report, 1901, 7 and "Saving the Foundlings," *New York Tribune*, April 28, 1901. Historians Michael Preston and Samuel Haines find that the death rate of children under five in the United States in 1900 was 18%, Preston and Haines, *The Fatal Years*, 208.

[50] PC, annual report, 1907, 311-312, SCAA, annual report, 1907, 34-35. The Joint Committee handed over the babies it had remaining on hand to the Department of Public Charities which immediately turned them over to the New York Infant Asylum. The Guild of the Infant Saviour likewise handed over its remaining babies and the city distributed them among institutions. In both cases some children were returned to their families: the SCAA returned 193 babies to relatives, the Guild, fourteen. By this time the SCAA and the AICP had split and the SCAA was running the placing-out program on its own.

[51] As cited in Romanofsky, "Saving the Lives," 66.

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Metz and Potter's actual accusations against the placing-out program were in fact rather vague. In 1905 Potter charged that since the Joint Committee was only an unchartered experiment, the work it was carrying out was illegal. When this charge did not take hold Potter accused the Joint Committee of placing babies in "unfit homes and with drunken guardians." This accusation was denied by Homer Folks, head of the State Charities Aid Association and a leader in the national movement in favor of placing-out (in 1902-1903 Folks had also served as the Commissioner of Public Charities) and, according to the *New York Times*, "many others."[52] Metz insisted that the children should only be cared for by institutions "possessing buildings and equipment for the actual physical care of children" even though, as the beleaguered Joint Committee pointed out, institutionalization by this time was well known to be death to foundlings.[53] It appears that at least one of the reasons behind the Comptroller's attack on the placing-out program was that Potter had received a $500 bribe from representatives of Catholic charities who benefitted from the per capita rates paid out of public coffers and were threatened by placing-out programs that took children, and the funding that came with them, out of their hands.[54] Once again the fate of the city's foundlings was determined by political battles roaring over their heads.

Despite this serious setback, by the first decade of the twentieth century placing-out was widely accepted among the new social work professionals of the Progressive era as the best method for caring not only for abandoned infants, but for all poor and parentless children. In 1908 a new city department, the Bureau of Child Hygiene, took over the care of foundlings. Its head, the physician and Progressive reformer Sara

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[52] "Homer Folks," *DAB* supp.7.

[53] Romanofsky, "Saving the Lives," 65; SCAA, annual report, 1907, 32-41; "Wants City Aid Cut Off. Two Children's Societies Accused of Improper Care of Charges," *New York Times*, January 23, 1907.

[54] Romanofsky, "Saving the Lives," 65-68.

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Josephine Baker believed that placing-out, even with poor women in the tenement districts, was preferable to keeping foundlings in institutions.[55] The following year a widely influential White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children supported Dr. Baker's view, judging that home life was preferable to institutional life for dependent children, and where the child's real home was unavailable, a foster home was best. This idea was adopted by professional social workers and local welfare officials nationwide and remained in force through the twentieth century.[56]

Ultimately even the New York Infant Asylum and the Nursery succumbed to the new thinking on placing-out. In 1902 the New York Infant Asylum formed a boarding-out department which placed some of its foundlings. By 1915 the boarding-out department of Nursery and the New York Infant Asylum - which had merged to form one institution, the New York Nursery and Child's Hospital, in 1910 - was no longer housing babies in its building at all - all were placed with wet-nurses or foster mothers in homes.[57]

The New York Nursery justified this radical shift in policy by allying itself with the authorities of the day, including the 1909 White House Conference.[58] "Today the most advanced social worker endeavors to make the healthy foundling one of a family group....that it [boarding-out] is the surest way to help our little foundlings and waifs to better health, there seems little doubt" the merged institution claimed in 1915.[59]

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[55] Charles-Edward A. Winslow, *The Life of Hermann M. Biggs: Physician and Statesman of the Public Health* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1929), 214-215. S. Josephine Baker, *Fighting for Life* (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 118-122. Baker's memoir was first published in 1939.

[56] English, "Pediatrics," 700.

[57] See reports of the boarding-out department in New York Nursery and Child's Hospital (subsequently to be referred to as NYNCH), annual reports, 1914-1915, 20-21; 1915-1916, 19-23; 1921-1922, 48-49.

[58] NYNCH, 1915-1916, 19.

[59] NYNCH, annual report, 1914-1915, 21.

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In fact, boarding-out was not a new idea at all, but one that had been practiced in New York as early as the eighteenth century, and with disastrous results in the first half of the nineteenth. The key difference, however, between boarding-out as the New York Nursery practiced it in the first decades of the twentieth century and the "old system of 'baby farming,' under which almost any indigent female who wished to turn an honest or dishonest penny could get children to board for the asking..." was skilled oversight.[60] The boarding-out department and local health boards investigated the homes of potential nurses before placing out children, and the children were visited once or twice a week or even more frequently by trained nurses. When medical care was necessary, the children returned to the New York Nursery's children's hospital. The New York Nursery tried to place most of its children outside the city, and in middle-class, rather than poor homes, with working fathers present and no other young children to distract the foster mother. One home in Jersey City was described by the boarding-out department in 1916 as an ideal. It was "an old-fashioned, two-family house with a yard where the children play together. The children sleep in big, sunny rooms, each in a crib or cradle; each one has a tooth-brush, comb and towel. The children's physical condition proves that the food is abundant and wholesome, and the little fellows' happiness and their evident fondness for the home and family are gratifying proof of a normal, happy life."[61]

In order to maintain oversight over the boarded-out children the New York Nursery had to keep them relatively close by. Children were placed within a radius of no more than twenty miles from New York City - on Long Island, in New Jersey, and in the city's five boroughs.[62] This represented a retreat from the ideals of Charles Loring Brace, who believed that the best home for the urban waif was a farm on the American frontier.

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[60] NYNCH, annual report, 1915-1916, 20.

[61] NYNCH, annual reports, 1914-1915, 23; 1915-1916, 21, 23.

[62] NYNCH, annual report, 1915-1916, 21, 23.

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By this time the dangers of placing children alone in faraway rural homes were increasingly recognized, particularly by the Western states who were left with the responsibility for caring for cases that went wrong. The orphan train program of the Children's Aid Society ended in 1929.[63]

Also not in keeping with Brace's original vision for foundlings and other poor city children was the New York Nursery's reliance on Italian immigrant women as wet-nurses. While the New York Nursery idealized the middle class suburban home as the best for its babies, it actually had very good success with immigrant Italian women living with their families in East Harlem and Little Italy. The New York Nursery placed its youngest babies, including some small premature ones, with Italian wet-nurses and marveled at the success they had, even with the most fragile of them. It was evidently the intense, loving attention that these poor, immigrant women paid to their charges that bolstered their chances for survival.

The Joint Committee and the Guild of the Infant Savior had also relied on Italian wet-nurses to care for some of its foundlings. Both the New York Nursery and the Joint Committee marveled at the warmth of these Italian mothers, and at their ability to help previously unwanted infants thrive. "The natural love of the Italian wet-nurses for babies is great," the New York Nursery observed. The Joint Committee similarly noted that "there is a physical vigor and warmth of nature in the Italian mother which makes her a most desirable nurse."[64] The press also enjoyed watching the Italian wet-nurses at work. In 1904 the *Herald*'s Sunday magazine described how

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[63] Miriam Z. Langsam, *Children West: A History of the Placing-Out System of the New York Children's Aid Society, 1853-1890* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the University of Wisconsin, 1964).

[64] NYNCH, annual report, 1915-1916, 21-22 and SCAA/AICP Joint Committee, annual report, 1903, 21. For more on this theme see also Walker, "How to Save the Babies," 976.

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> the babies boarded out in Little Italy soon become, for the time being, virtually Italian babies, and it is rather ludicrous to see one of the little mites in its Latin environment. Perhaps the baby presents every race characteristic of its Irish or German or Scandinavian parentage, and sometimes, but not often, the little face bears the unmistakable trace of Hebrew ancestry. But whatever its race or nationality may be, it seems to imbibe with its milk all the cunning ways of the real Italian child.[65]

Despite the success of the Italian wet-nurses, the gap in culture between them and the representatives of these organizations also created problems. Miss Entwhistle, the agent for the Guild of the Infant Savior, complained that the Italian nurses' "very virtues become their greatest fault. They will insist upon spoiling the children with over-attention, and in their motherly pride of them they are prone to break al the rules of health and hygiene." These included feeding babies macaroni and dressing them in "gorgeous robes of lace and embroidery" that they made and paid for themselves. "It is a common sight," Miss Entwhistle reported, " to walk into an Italian's house and find the foundling baby literally bowed down with its wealth of beads and amulets, all precious keepsakes of its foster family."[66]

The New York Nursery and the Joint Committee also had reservations about the Italian wet-nurses. They appreciated the maternal magic the nurses worked with their foundlings but they did not think these immigrant Italian households were suitable as permanent adoptive homes. For Miss Entwhistle of the Guild of the Infant Savior cultural differences and lack of education, particularly in the new sanitary ideals, were the problem. For the Protestant New York Nursery and the Joint Committee religion was also an issue. When the time came to separate the foundlings from their Italian foster mothers, many tears were shed. "The foster mother learns to love the little 'bambino' for whom she cares with a strength she does not appreciate until the parting," the Joint

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[65] "Some Foundlings Who Have Landed in the Homes of the Well-to-Do," *New York Herald*, March 27, 1904.

[66] "Some Foundlings Who Have Landed in the Homes of the Well-to-Do," *New York Herald*, March 27, 1904.

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Committee reported, "and it is very difficult to resist the pleadings that must be refused, when a desirable home for adoption has been found for the baby." The New York Nursery agreed that these moments were "very sad."[67]

The New York Nursery judged their placing-out program to be a success and chose to forget how bitterly their predecessors had resisted it in the past. The New York Nursery even claimed, entirely erroneously, to be among the first in New York to board out babies. With this claim they erased from history Abraham Jacobi's 1870 effort to close New York's foundling asylums and place foundlings in the country instead. They also forgot the Westchester program of the Randall's Island Infant Hospital, and the New York Foundling Asylum, which had been placing babies in the homes of wet-nurses since soon after it opened in 1869.[68]

By the Progressive era placing-out had become so accepted a trend among social welfare professionals that it was very hard to resist, even by the New York Nursery. As with other measures for the welfare of children, such as child labor and laws and laws regulating the production and sale of milk, the professionals of the Progressive era brought to fruition an ideal that reformers had agitated for since at least the middle of the nineteenth century.

4. The Demise of the Foundling Asylums.

The first of the foundling asylums to collapse was the Randall's Island Infant Hospital. The State Charities Aid Association was not the only group to lose faith in the Infant Hospital. The public also came to think of the Infant Hospital as a place where babies went to die. In 1884 a *Herald* reporter asked a baby farmer if the respectable-

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[67] SCAA/AICP Joint Committee, annual report, 1903, 21; NYNCH, annual report, 1915-1916, 22.

[68] NYNCH, annual report, 1915-1916, 20.

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looking man and woman who had left a three-month-old girl with her had come back to take the baby away or pay for its care. "Indeed they have not," the baby farmer replied indignantly, "and I am real sorry for it, for if I am compelled to send the baby to the Commissioners of Charities and Correction it will be dead within three days."[69]

Three years later a poor father discovered that the baby farmer's assessment of the possibility of survival at the Infant Hospital was correct. When his wife died in childbirth this man, unable to care for them on his own, brought his healthy newborn twins to Randall's Island. Only a few weeks later they were delivered back to him near death and quickly died. The doctor who examined them claimed that "the poor little things had been either starved or beaten to death." He refused to grant death certificates, and referred the grieving father to the coroner for investigation.[70]

Nathan Straus, the independent reformer who advocated the pasteurization of milk and set up milk depots all over the city where pasteurized milk could be bought by the poor at cost, also noted the high death rate among the babies at the Randall's Island Infant Hospital. In 1898 he convinced the city to allow him to set up a milk pasteurization plant there. According to Straus, who was often perhaps too determined to attribute a drop in the death rate to pasteurized milk and nothing else, the plant did make a difference. In 1897, the year before he set up his plant, the death rate among the residents of the Infant Hospital was 44.36%. In 1898, after the plant was in operation, the death rate had dropped to 19.8%. The trend continued, with the death rate averaging 21.25% between 1899 and 1904.[71]

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[69] "Who Owns the Baby?"*New York Herald*, August 7, 1884.

[70] "Slaughter of the Innocents," *New York Herald*, May 25, 1887.

[71] Nathan Straus, "Infants' Milk Depots," in Lina Straus, *Disease in Milk, The Remedy, Pasteurization: The Life Work of Nathan Straus* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1917), 204-205. These figures are Straus's and they probably include not only motherless infants, but babies with their mothers. The foundling death rate was always higher - the SCAA found death rates of 99 to 100% among the foundlings there between 1895 and 1897.

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Awareness of Randall's Island's poor reputation filtered upward. By 1903 the Commissioner of Public Charities justified his decision to collectively rename the Randall's Island institutions the "New York City Children's Hospitals and Schools" on the grounds that it was "free from some objections which have come to attach to the words 'Randall's Island'..." [72]

Not all assessments of conditions on Randall's Island were negative. In the last decades of the nineteenth century some outside visitors made positive assessments of conditions at Randall's Island. These reflect efforts to bring the Infant Hospital up to current standards of hygiene. In 1880 a reporter for the *New York Tribune* went to the island to investigate accusations of dirt and "impure air." Escorted by two physicians from the island's institutions, the reporter found the Infant Hospital a model of everything contemporary sanitary wisdom prescribed. Sunshine streaming into a ward "lit up the pale faces of three little children who were playing on the floor. There were windows on both sides of this room, with flowers and creepers prettily arranged in the alcoves, the walls and the floor were perfectly clean. The beds were neatly made, the sheets and coverlets without stain, and the blankets thick and comfortable. There was no offensive odor, and the light and ventilation were perfect."[73] In 1896 a *Herald* reporter observed that Randall's Island was a "paradise" compared to the "stifling tenements" and noted

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See note 42, above. Straus served as Health Commissioner of the city for the first three months of 1898, but he set up the pasteurization plant on Randall's Island as a private citizen. The Infant Hospital reported death rates of 23.9% in 1902 and 18.63% in 1903, PC, annual report, 1903, 34. By way of comparison, the overall death rate for infants in the United States in 1902 was around 14%. See Leavitt and Numbers, *Sickness and Health*, fig. 4, table of infant mortality rates, 7. In 1910 the rate was around 10%, see No.1420, "Live Births, Deaths, Infant Deaths, and Maternal Deaths, 1900-1997," *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1999.

[72] PCC, annual report, 1903, 21.

[73] "New-York's Charities. Management at Randall's Island," *New York Tribune*, February 5, 1880.

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approvingly that the Infant Hospital was a place where "science holds sway."[74]

These mixed reports reflect two sides of a complex reality. Sanitary conditions at the Infant Hospital during the last decades of the nineteenth century were a clear improvement over those at the almshouse during previous decades. Yet despite the improved conditions, death rates for foundlings at the Infant Hospital remained high. During the 1880s the Infant Hospital admitted an average of 439 motherless babies yearly - many more than it had had to care for during the first half of the century. Sixty percent of them, on average, died each year.[75]

Virginia M. Walker, the agent for the Joint Committee (the same woman Comptroller Metz later accused of being "a hired female clerk, with a basket in her arm, peddling a live baby around the city") was attuned to this paradox in a way that the reporters from the *Herald* and the *Tribune* were not. Everything, she reported, appeared

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[74] "Seen in Waifland...Science is Their Guide," *New York Herald*, October 25, 1896, sect. 6, 5:4.

[75] These figures come from Table A, "Census Report of the Infant Hospital," published each year in the PCC annual reports. I am only including children identified as "orphans" - meaning that they were admitted to the Infant Hospital without their mothers. Foundlings were included in this category. The death rate calculations are my own. The "Total" figure includes the number number remaining from the previous year plus the number received during the year. Death rates for children with their mothers were always lower. See the comparative table for the years 1868-1883 in PCC, annual report, 1883, 41.

Year	"Received during the year"	Total	Died	Source	Death Rate
1880	406	478	291	1880, p.55	60.8%
1881	375	462	294	1881, p.72	63.6%
1882	415	495	324	1882, p.46	65.4%
1883	460	548	339	1883, p.44	61.8%
1884	489	596	396	1884, p.66	66.4%
1885	447	570	329	1885, p.71	57.7%
1886	391	475	267	1886, p.63	56.2%
1887	435	488	263	1887, p.55	53.8%
1888	467	559	321	1888, p.108	57.4%
1889	508	585	333	1889, p.61	56.9%

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to be in good order at the Infant Hospital when she saw it in 1898. The equipment, nurses, and "rows of little white beds" were up to the standards of a "properly conducted institution." Yet, she recognized, the seeming order masked the fact that the death rate at the Infant Hospital was still unacceptably high. Walker identified the cause as "mothersickness," or the absence of individual maternal care.[76]

Dr. S. Josephine Baker, the head of the city's Bureau of Child Hygiene, which took charge of the city's foundlings in 1908, came to the same conclusion. "There were the wretched little foundlings dying wholesale under fine hygienic conditions" but flourishing when placed with foster mothers in the tenements where they received "personal care from a maternally minded woman." That, she added, "was why I became and still am a firm believer in mothering for babies: old-fashioned, sentimental mothering, the kind that psychologists decry. It should not be carried to excess and it should not be continued too long, but there is little doubt in my mind that many a baby has died for lack of it."[77] Baker made this statement in a memoir published in the late 1930s - only afterward did John Bowlby give a name, attachment, to the life-supporting element she and Walker observed was lacking among New York's institutionalized foundlings.

The accumulated weight of poor reputation, new thinking, and failure in its goal of keeping motherless babies alive ultimately doomed the Infant Hospital. In September,

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[76] Walker, "How to Save the Babies of the Tenements," 975, 976. Walker was hired to be the SCAA/AICP Joint Committee's first agent in 1898. At that time the Committee described her as a "young woman, who had extended experience in this kind of work..." SCAA, annual report, 1898, 29. By 1905, when her article was published in *Charities*, her title was Superintendent of the Joint Committee.

[77] Baker, *Fighting for Life*, 121. Baker is reporting on an experiment, funded by the Russell Sage Foundation, in which she removed foundlings from one of the city's foundling asylums and placed them with tenement nurses. She does not identify the foundling asylum or when the experiment occurred, but her conclusions are essentially the same as those Walker came to in 1905.

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1905, after thirty-six years of operation, the Infant Hospital discharged its last foundling and the building was turned into a general-purpose hospital for the children of Randall's Island.[78]

The New York Infant Asylum and the Nursery and Child's Hospital were the next to go. At the Nursery an era came to an end with the death of Mary Du Bois in 1888. Her successor, Mary Mildred Sullivan, brought a more relaxed set of values to the role of first directress. Sullivan, wife of Algernon Sidney Sullivan, a prominent lawyer in New York, became involved with the Nursery soon after her arrival in the city in 1857. One of her principal interests was the Nursery's annual fundraising ball, which she managed for many years, only giving it up in 1914 at the age of seventy-eight.[79]

Sullivan was a gifted administrator. A Virginian, she succeeded at what must have been the extraordinarily difficult task of raising $20,000 from New York businessmen for the benefit of Confederate prisoners in the aftermath of the Civil War.[80] An admirer took care to point out that her business sense, "so unusual as a feminine characteristic," did not overshadow her "spiritual and loving nature."[81]

Sullivan adapted comfortably to the Progressive era's more pragmatic perspective on unmarried mothers and the poor. In 1917, when she was eighty-one years old, Sullivan observed that attitudes toward unmarried mothers had softened in the previous twenty years. Her own views had relaxed even earlier. "I can look back," she

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[78] PC, annual report, 1905, 25.

[79] Anne Middleton Holmes, *Mary Mildred Sullivan, A Biography* (Concord, NH: The Rumford Press, 1924), 85.

[80] Holmes, *Mary Mildred Sullivan*, 70-73; "Address of Mrs. George Gordon Battle," in *In Memoriam, Mary Mildred Sullivan, 1836-1933* (New York: The Mary Mildred Sullivan Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy), 21.

[81] Holmes, *Mary Mildred Sullivan*, 80.

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reminisced, "to a time when I was called very wicked for telling the unmarried girl mothers in our hospital that I hoped their babies would bring them comfort, incentive, and happiness." "In those days," she continued, "the mistaken idea prevailed that sympathy encouraged people to be bad and that punishment and ostracism were good for their souls. It was hard to get funds even for the help of the poor little babies." "I was regarded as a violent radical..." she added gleefully.[82]

By the early twentieth century neither the Nursery nor the New York Infant Asylum made the moral reform of fallen women a central goal. At the Nursery the tolerant personality of Mary Sullivan probably had something to do with this. At the New York Infant Asylum there was an awareness, by the end of the nineteenth century, that this goal had simply failed. In 1891 the chair of the New York Infant Asylum's ladies' committee admitted woefully that the "moral evils" that produced illegitimate babies were "as illimitable and unchanging as the flowing of a mighty river," a powerful and persistent natural force against which, she admitted, her institution was able to have little effect. "We stand at the mouth [of the river]" she wrote, evoking an image of profound helplessness, "appalled at its remorseless currents, and reach out our hands to such as are driven by its onrushing, to succor and save."[83]

Both institutions were also battered by the increase in the city's population, caused by the late-century waves of immigration from southern and eastern Europe, which was reflected in their own rising population figures. The New York Infant Asylum saw the number of total inmates it cared for yearly rise from 661 in 1880 to 1,375 in 1890, to 1,517 in 1900.[84] In 1888, the year of Mary Du Bois's death, the Nursery cared

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[82] "In Fifty Years City Learns to Smile When it Gives," *Evening Mail*, February 26, 1917.

[83] NYIA, annual report, 1891, 32.

[84] Table of Inmates, NYIA, annual report, 1905-1907. This is not the same as the number received yearly.

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for nearly 2,000 women and children.[85] Complaints about overcrowding appear regularly in the annual reports of the New York Infant Asylum during these years. "Our beds are always full" they noted in 1886. In 1893 they reported, not for the first time, that the house was so full that "we have been compelled to turn many applicants away."[86]

Their aging buildings could not cope with the onslaught. In 1893 the Nursery complained that its old buildings required constant, expensive repairs.[87] The New York Infant Asylum similarly reported that its "present buildings are very old, and in such a condition that they can only last a few years more."[88] Their treasuries also felt the strain. Both institutions relied on the per capita funding they received from the city, additional city money from the board of education, and private money that they raised on their own as well as dividends from investments. The public money the foundling asylums relied on was uncertain, reflecting the public's discomfort about spending public money on private, religious institutions. While this hostility was chiefly directed by Protestants toward Catholic charitable institutions, Protestant institutions, as the 1873 debacle demonstrates, could be caught in the same anti-sectarian net.

In 1900 the city again cut its per capita allowance to the foundling asylums. In the face of this catastrophe the Nursery declared that funding was the "vital question." They found that even after cutting back, their expenses still exceeded their income.[89] The New York Infant Asylum also found itself facing "considerable deficits for many

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[85] NCH, annual report, 1889, 8.

[86] NYIA, annual report, 1886, 40; 1893, 28. For more on the theme of turning applicants away due to overcrowding see 1887, 32. For more on the broader theme of overcrowding at the New York Infant Asylum see annual reports for 1885, 39 and 1891, 36.

[87] NCH, annual report, 1893, 9.

[88] NYIA, biennial report, 1899-1900, 12.

[89] NCH, annual report, 1900, 7.

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months." In response to this crisis it closed its Mount Vernon country home.[90] In 1910 the Nursery and the New York Infant Asylum merged to form a new institution, the New York Nursery and Child's Hospital. "Consolidation is the order of the day" remarked the New York Infant asylum bravely, placing itself in the company of the business monopolies and metropolitan consolidations of the Gilded Age, but the real reason, which they did not conceal, was lack of funds.[91]

The great irony of the New York Nursery's last period was the popularity of its annual charity ball - a popularity that exceeded that of the Nursery itself. The unpredictable ups and downs of public funding meant that all three of the private foundling asylums relied on fundraising events, such as fairs, concerts, art exhibitions, theatrical events, and balls. In 1865 the Nursery benefitted from the takings of an exhibition of "A Storm in the Rocky Mountains," a canvas by the western painter and photographer Albert Bierstadt.[92] The Sisters of Charity held fairs, balls, and concerts to fund their foundling asylum.[93] In 1872 the New York Infant Asylum held an evening of "tableaus" at the Union League Club's theater. *Tableaux vivants* were "living pictures" in which attractive, young society women dressed in costume and posed as the subjects of mythical or historical scenes or famous paintings for the entertainment of their friends. Edith Wharton set a scene of *The House of Mirth* at a party at which striking *tableaux vivants* - one of which featured her heroine, Lily Bart - were the central entertainment.

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[90] NYIA, annual report, 1900-1901, 10.

[91] The remark on consolidation was made in 1907 when the merger was already being planned, NYIA, biennial report, 1905-1907, 9. For an account of the merger see NYNCH, annual report, 1911, 10-11.

[92] NCH, annual report, 1866, 9.

[93] For fundraisers for the NYFA, see *New York Herald*: "The Foundling Asylum. Returns for the Institution from the Late Fair," February 12, 1871; "The Feeble Foundlings," April 27, 1873; "The Foundling Asylum," October 16, 1874; "Foundling Asylum Reception," May 12, 1878.

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Wharton's fictional partygivers, the Wellington Brys, understood that "*tableaux vivants* and expensive music were the two baits most likely to attract the desired prey..."[94] The foundling asylums also knew that events such as these were an effective way to squeeze funds out of the pockets of their society supporters. This was particularly true of the two Protestant institutions, which had greater access to the private wealth of the city than either the public almshouse or the Catholic New York Foundling Asylum did.

Of all of the foundling asylum fundraisers the most popular in elite circles was the Nursery and Child's Hospital's (after 1910 the New York Nursery and Child's Hospital's) annual charity ball. New Yorkers were long in the habit of taking to the dance floor to support their favorite charities. One observer of social life in antebellum New York remarked that "Englishmen support their charities by eating, Americans by dancing."[95] The Nursery's first ball, held at the Academy of Music, was in 1857.[96] Mary Sullivan, who was an organizer of the ball for many years before she became the Nursery's first directress, remembered what a "gorgeous spectacle" the first ball was. "Coming on to the floor we faced the whole balcony, in which, tier on tier, were banked the beautifully gowned ladies of the city....There were at least 1,000 who attended every Charity Ball in those days. And all were the best people."[97]

The ball, held at the Academy of Music, later at the Ritz Carlton and Waldorf Astoria, became an annual rite of the city's upper echelon. By the early twentieth century

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[94] Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 138. NYIA, annual report, 1873, 26.

[95] T.[homas] L.[ow] Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life* (London: Longman's, Green, 1874), 183. Nichols was an American physician and author who lived in England.

[96] Charity Ball Records in the Nursery and Child's Hospital Records, New-York Historical Society.

[97] "Mrs. Sullivan Tells of Charity Balls of Fifty Years Ago," *The Globe and Commercial Advertiser*, January 21, 1913.

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it had developed a reputation as a relic of "old New York." In 1915 the *New York Times* called it "'The Ball of our Ancestors'...the sole survival among us of our old social traditions." Mary Sullivan described it as "the one annual social event that had its origin sixty years ago and is a live and active organization which carries the imagination of the present young New Yorkers back to the time of their grandparents."[98]

The ball was also a successful magnet for funds. The first ball took in $7,200.60. A decade later the ball brought the Nursery $12,417.39, and in 1910, the year the Nursery and the New York Infant Asylum merged, the ball brought the struggling new institution $14,886.53.[99] In 1870 the Nursery's secretary reported that the "brilliant success always attendant on the Ball" allowed the Nursery to pay its debts and replenish its bank account. Best of all, the ball freed the managers from the uncomfortable necessity of asking for any more money from their friends.[100] George Templeton Strong was so impressed by the ball's success that he considered having one to support to his own charitable interests: "...the Nursery makes about $6,000 net by its ball," he commented in his diary in 1858. "Why not open St. Luke's Hospital with a ball (St. Vitus quadrille, tetanus polka, and so on)..."[101]

Despite the ball's success, the ladies of the nineteenth-century Nursery and some of their supporters had qualms about raising funds with such a showy event. "We would gladly be relieved of this method of raising funds," the Nursery's secretary wrote in 1870.

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[98] *New York Times*, January 31, 1915; Mary Mildred Sullivan, "Report of the Charity Ball Committee," in NYNCH, biennial report, 1916-1917, 39.

[99] In 1857 the Nursery only received $3,609.92 of the total, since it shared the proceeds with the Woman's Hospital. Extract of minutes, NCH board of managers, January 29, 1857, in NYNCH Records, NYHS. NCH and NYNCH treasurers' reports in annual reports, 1857-1858, 1868, 1910.

[100] NCH, annual report, 1870, 8. See also, NCH, annual report, 1868, 5, re the ball: "This has become, by common consent, the favorite mode of obtaining funds..."

[101] Strong, *Diary*, 2:263. April 3, 1856.

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"The contrast between our daily labors among wailing infants and sorrowing mothers, and the brilliant and merry ball-room is too startling..."[102] At the Nursery's annual meeting in 1858, not long after the first ball, the presiding divine, Rev. Francis Vinton, "regretted very much that it had been necessary for them to descend to such a method of raising money as by a public ball." The Nursery's report of that year also remarked on the lack of a sufficient number of "earnest workers." Apparently there were plenty of society women willing to dance, but not enough who were willing to cope with the daily drudgery of running the institution.[103]

Mary Sullivan always enjoyed the ball, but she too was disappointed that it seemed to attract more interest than did the Nursery itself. She worried that the "benefit of the Ball is but half reaped when we collect only the direct financial receipts," and she hoped to interest the society men and women who danced at the ball in the Nursery's work. Toward this end, debutantes were enlisted to sell ball attendees souvenir brochures which contained a history of the Nursery and lists of its directors, medical personnel, and committees.[104] Despite the ball's popularity, it, like the Nursery, finally wore out. The last ball was held in 1927.

During the twenty-four years that the New York Nursery survived into the twentieth century it gradually let go of the characteristics that had defined it in the nineteenth and took on new ones more in keeping with the new century. The New York Nursery reconstituted itself during these years as a modern medical and social welfare agency for women and children along Progressive lines. The New York Nursery's

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[102] NCH, annual report, 1870, 8.

[103] "The Nursery and Child's Hospital–Annual Meeting of the Board of Managers," *New York Times*, March 3, 1868, 2:6.

[104] NYNCH, biennial reports, 1916-1917, 40; 1920-1921, 51.

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boarding-out department's policy of placing all its foundlings in the homes of foster mothers meant that the Nursery no longer functioned as a model home for the unmarried mother. And it increasingly defined itself as a modern medical institution.

The Nursery and the New York Infant Asylum, like all the foundling asylums, had always had medical functions. The Nursery's children's hospital opened in 1856, and its maternity hospital in 1865. It also had a dispensary that served the sick poor in the surrounding neighborhood. The New York Infant Asylum also had a lying-in department. In 1899 the New York Infant Asylum absorbed the New York Asylum for Lying-In Women. This merger created an infusion of cash which allowed the New York Infant Asylum to build a new building (which was never completed due to lack of sufficient funds) that included a maternity floor to carry on the work of the old Lying-In Hospital.[105]

Despite these medical functions the nineteenth-century Nursery and New York Infant Asylum did not see themselves as strictly medical institutions. Instead they were part of a tradition that defined inpatient hospital care as a charitable service for the poor. In an era when hospitals were not able to provide much in the way of cure, they were essentially custodial institutions. The services hospitals delivered to the women and children they sheltered were moral as much, even more, than they were medical. Lying-in hospitals, in particular, were typically for poor women, in an era when most women gave birth at home. It was left to lying-in hospitals to care for poor married women who had been widowed or abandoned or who were far from home, and also unmarried

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[105] For a reference to the NYIA's maternity ward see NYIA, annual report, 1878, 12-13. For the NYIA's merger with the New York Asylum for Lying-In Women, also known as the Old Marion Street Maternity Hospital, see NYIA, biennial report, 1899-1900, 10. For the new building, which only reached four stories instead of the intended seven or eight, see NYIA, biennial reports, 1901-1903, 9 and 1903-1905, 9. In 1908 the New York Infant Asylum further increased its obstetrical responsibilities by taking over the "outdoor" (outpatient) obstetrical clinic previously run by the Vanderbilt Clinic together with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. See NYIA, biennial report, 1905-1907, 11.

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women, who were even more likely to be poor, friendless, and homeless.

Lying-in hospitals that accepted unmarried women could be tainted, as foundling asylums were, by accusations that they provided support services to those who practiced sex outside of marriage. The New York Asylum for Lying-In Women, founded in 1823, protected itself from such accusations by only accepting respectable married women. When the New York Infant Asylum opened its maternity hospital in 1877 it still had to combat the idea "that such an asylum increases crime."[106]

During the second half of the century, as medicine became safer and more effective, and as cities filled with people far from the support that family had traditionally provided at times of illness, hospitals began increasingly to attract a middle-class clientele. By the first decades of the twentieth century hospitals had changed their functions radically. They were no longer charitably-run institutions for the sick poor where moral reform was as important a part of the treatment as medical care. Instead they became institutions where people of all classes went to get well. Patients increasingly paid for the services they received, and did not expect to receive lectures on their moral behavior as part of their treatment.[107] The New York Nursery had to adapt to these new norms. During the first decades of the twentieth century it increased and refined its medical functions. These included the children's hospital, maternity ward, outpatient obstetrical services, dispensary and, by the twenties, a laboratory for children's diseases. There was also a formal training program for nurses, offered in conjunction with several city hospitals.[108]

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[106] NYIA, annual report, 1878, 12.

[107] For the evolution of hospitals in the United States see Rosenberg, *Care of Strangers*; David Rosner, *A Once Charitable Enterprise: Hospitals and Health Care in Brooklyn and New York, 1885-1915* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Vogel, *Modern Hospital.*

[108] NYNCH, biennial report, 1917-1918, 18; annual reports, 1923, 13, 14; 1929, 8, 29.

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One result of the medicalization of foundling care was that the women who ran the foundling asylums, particularly the all-woman Nursery, suffered a precipitous loss in authority as the pietistic model of medical charity in which their institutions were rooted faded into obsolescence. As long as there wasn't much medicine could do to help sickly foundlings, they were consigned to the moral and maternal care of women volunteers. Once physicians learned tactics that helped them battle effectively with disease and death, they took over these institutions themselves. The balance of power had shifted from the days when a board of untrained lady managers was able to throw a trained medical doctor out of their institution.

The New York Nursery's continuing work with unmarried mothers also took on the Progressive era's tone of professionalism and efficiency. By 1910, the year of the merger, the Nursery had adopted the language of Progressivism to describe the services it provided to its inmates. Unmarried mothers in the institution learned about the "different branches of home work" not only from the labor they carried out there, but "under efficient teachers." They studied cooking with teachers from the New York Cooking School, and sewing from teachers from the Pascal Institute and the University Extension Society. By the Progressive era the reformative value of hard labor and the moral example of virtuous middle-class women was no longer enough.[109]

Even after the two asylums merged they continued to experience problems with funding. In the first report of the merged New York Nursery the president reported that: "It must be admitted again that the work of the New York Nursery and Child's Hospital is greatly hampered by lack of current funds." He continued ominously: "Its income is not sufficient adequately to meet its running expenses and it is constantly hampered by this lack of means."[110] During the twenties the institution's finances were revived as a

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[109] NYCH, annual report, 1910, 8.

[110] NYNCH, annual report, 1911, 2. The president by now was a man, Jacob W. Miller.

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result of the country's overall prosperity, but it could not survive the stock market crash of 1929. In 1934, rather than having to close down entirely for lack of funds, the New York Nursery, which by this time had incorporated the Nursery and Child's Hospital, the New York Infant Asylum, and the New York Lying-In Asylum, merged with New York Hospital.[111]

After 1934 the only one of the nineteenth-century foundling asylums left standing was the Sisters of Charity's New York Foundling Asylum. Of all four foundling asylums the New York Foundling Asylum had always enjoyed the best reputation with the public and the press. This was due to its more generous entrance policies, to the charm and charisma of its first head, Sister Irene Fitzgerald, and to the fact that it appears to have been more efficiently run than the other foundling asylums in the city. The Foundling Asylum or "the Foundling" as it was familiarly called, benefitted from the full-time devotion of its resident sisters, some of them novitiates in training who established long relationships with the institution. After Sister Irene died in 1893, her place was taken by a series of administrators, many of whom had already spent years there. This was an advantage that the two Protestant foundling asylums, with their rotating pools of volunteers, or the public Infant Asylum, with its barely tolerated convict and pauper laborers and often corrupt administration, could not match.

As a result of its popularity and its administrative competence the New York Foundling Asylum was better able than the others to attract supporters and funds. In the twentieth century the Foundling Asylum established productive relationships with the New York City Fire Department, the Knights of Columbus, and even Ted Mack's Amateur Hour.[112] The Foundling Asylum also attracted the special interest of Cardinal

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[111] NYNCH, annual report, 1934, 2. The New York Nursery's boarding-out department, by this time called the foster home department, was not included in the merger with New York Hospital. An endowment from Mary Sullivan allowed it to continue functioning as a separate association known as the New York Child's Foster Home Service.

[112] Sister Marie de Lourdes Walsh, *The Sisters of Charity of New York, 1809-1959* (New

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Francis Spellman, who donated the royalties from his novel, *The Foundling*, to the Foundling Asylum.[113]

The Foundling Asylum adapted successfully to changing times. It changed its name to the New York Foundling Hospital to reflect the medicalization that all the foundling asylums had experienced. Its administrators chose to devote funds to the professional training of its staff, as professional training in social work and child psychology became a requirement.[114] By 1958 its new building on Seventh Avenue at Thirteenth Street, near St. Vincent's Hospital and only a few blocks from its original site on East Twelfth Street, was staffed with professional social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, and physicians. The eleven-story building also included nurseries for the babies and a shelter for unwed mothers. The only thing missing from the new building was the wicker basket that had accepted so many foundlings in the nineteenth century.

5. Conclusion.

Compared to the foundling asylums of Europe, some of which, like Florence's *Ospedale degli Innocenti*, lasted for centuries, New York's foundling asylums lasted only a short time. The longest-lived of the three that closed, the Nursery and Child's Hospital, lasted only from 1865 to 1910 - less than half a century. New York's experience was so brief partly because the city's foundling asylums opened at the tail end of the foundling asylum era. By the time New York's foundling asylums were opening, Europe's were winding down.

The lifespans of New York's foundling asylums were also limited by the local

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York: Fordham University Press, 1960), 100-101.

[113] Walsh, *Sisters of Charity*, 98. Francis Cardinal Spellman, *The Foundling* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951).

[114] Walsh, *Sisters of Charity*, 96.

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situation. In Russia and the Catholic countries of Europe the state, combined with the established church, created centralized, comprehensive, nationwide systems for foundling care. In the United States, where charity was a local concern shared by private charities and city, county, and state governments, there was no such national commitment to foundlings. This was part of a broader tendency in the United States, where there was no commitment to social welfare at the federal level until the New Deal. In New York City, because of the high volume of immigrants, local government officials had developed the habit of delegating care of the multitudinous poor to private charity and supplying public funds to accomplish the task. Since most private charities were run by religious organizations, this system frequently came under attack. The anti-establishment clause of the federal Constitution was mentioned remarkably infrequently by those who opposed the pumping of public funds into private charity in nineteenth-century New York City. Instead the debate typically had to do with Catholic/Protestant competition over money, votes, and souls. The infusion of political corruption into the mix only made it more combustible. As these conflicts raged, the welfare of individual foundlings was often neglected.

The local situation created opportunities, too. The United States did not establish the kind of nationwide foundling system that was typical of the Catholic countries of Europe and thus avoided some of that system's flaws, notably the permanant stigmatization that attached to its foundlings. The United States also offered much greater opportunity for social and economic mobility than did Europe or Russia. This meant that the countryside surrounding New York was never able to supply the city's foundling asylums with wet-nurses out of a population permanently entrenched in poverty, but it also meant that many fewer babies were abandoned in New York than in Paris, Florence, Moscow, or Dublin.

A positive factor that contributed to the failure of three out of four of New York's foundling asylums during the first decades of the twentieth century was the decline of

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traditionally fatalistic attitudes toward infant death. This fatalism, along with stigma against illegitimates, is what prevented charities in the antebellum period from accepting foundlings and other infants and young children at all. Even after the foundling asylums opened after the Civil War, their high death rates, while sad, seemed tolerable to most people, including physicians, because in a world where all young children had only a fragile hold on life, they did not believe that foundlings' lives could be saved. An obstetrics textbook published by a respected physician in 1849 contained the author's observation that "a child that is born does not surely belong to its parents until it has obtained its sixth year; it seems to me that such a child is a loan."[115] As late as 1883 Sister Irene Fitzgerald, whose work at the New York Foundling Asylum was generally admired, admitted frankly that the death rate in her institution was, in her word, "appalling" and that an early death was the fate "hanging over all foundlings."[116] The best that could be accomplished for abandoned infants, the administrators of the Christian foundling asylums believed, was to salvage their souls and retrieve their mothers from sin.

Abraham Jacobi was among the first to challenge fatalistic attitudes about infant death but it was not until the first decades of the twentieth century that his optimism seemed fully vindicated. Starting in the mid-1890s the infant death rate in the United States began a remarkable plunge downward.[117] The discovery of the tubercle bacillus in the early 1880s, the development of diphtheria antitoxin in the 1890s, improvements in

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[115] Charles Meigs, *Obstetrics: The Science and Art* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1849), 615-616, as cited in Viner, "Healthy Children," 166.

[116] "The Foundling Asylum. A Glimpse into its Workings," *New York Tribune*, June 10, 1883.

[117] Richard Meckel notes that the reduction of infant mortality that began in the second half of the nineteenth century is greater than any other modern reduction in mortality. Meckel, *Save the Babies*, introduction.

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surgical technique, and other medical developments that helped to prevent or halt disease certainly played a role. Probably even more important were improvements in sanitation that helped reduce the bacterial illnesses that caused the deaths of so many infants each hot New York summer.[118]

The steep drop continued into the twentieth century. In 1874, when all the foundling asylums were new, infant mortality in the United States had reached a height of 172 deaths per thousand; by 1915, the number had dropped to 99.9. In 1935 it was 55.7. In 1997 the infant death rate was 7.1 per thousand.[119] This trend was sharply apparent during the first three decades of the twentieth century, when infant mortality dropped by more than fifty percent.[120] Foundlings and illegitimate babies still died at a higher rate than those raised in the homes of married parents, but by 1934, the year the New York Nursery merged with New York Hospital, it was no longer possible to assume that nothing could be done to save foundlings' lives.[121] The awareness that foundlings might live to adulthood made the city officials in charge of assigning them names more careful. The foolish names used in the antebellum years no longer seemed appropriate. In 1909 a *Herald* reporter, watching city officials naming foundlings at Bellevue Hospital, noted the new policy: "the names must be short and sane and easily pronounced. No one has

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[118] "Sickness and Health," in Leavitt and Numbers, *Sickness and Health*, 3-10; Preston and Haines, *Fatal Years*, 208-209.

[119] Census Bureau, "Live Births, Deaths, Infant Deaths, and Maternal Deaths," and "Sickness and Health in America," in Leavitt and Numbers, *Sickness and Health*, fig.4, 7. The figures presented in this table come from *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1975).

[120] "Sickness and Health in America," in Leavitt and Numbers, *Sickness and Health*, 4-5.

[121] On the continuing high death rate of illegitimates see Lundberg and Lenroot, *Illegitimacy*, 28. This study, produced by the Federal Children's Bureau assumes that many illegitimates would live to grow up, and recommends ways to reduce stigma, and improve health and family life for children of unmarried parents.

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the right to saddle a poor little waif with a ponderous or awkward name."[122]

New Yorkers evolved other new ways to think about foundlings. Gone was the idea that foundlings were permanently stained by their mothers' sin.[123] By the end of the nineteenth century the public had come to believe that those foundlings lucky enough to live past infancy and be adopted could go on to lead successful lives. Keeping the facts of the foundling's birth secret was the key to success. Many of the foundlings sent to western homes by the New York Foundling Asylum were kept ignorant about their real origins, and their adoptive families kept the secret. The New York Nursery emphasized that "every effort is made to so care for the children that they shall find homes in which they may receive religious and intellectual instruction, and where they shall not be reminded of the place of their birth." When adults who had been foundlings appeared at the offices of the Department of Charities in the early twentieth century to inquire after their parents, they were gently deflected by officials there who replied to their questions with "a greater or less elasticity as to the recorded facts" and let them go away "without any loss of self respect and in ignorance of the true circumstances which combined to make him the city's adopted child."[124]

While there was still a stigma attached to illegitimacy, New Yorkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries decided to believe that it could be submerged

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[122] "Ashcan Baby Finds a Home in Fifth Avenue," *New York Herald*, Sunday Magazine, December 26, 1909.

[123] For a parallel phenomenon, Americans' increasing desire to believe that their children were innocent, and to drop the older notion of infant depravity, see Hoffert, *Private Matters*, 177-180.

[124] "Institution Life, I. Foundling Asylum," *The Illustrated American*, May 18, 1890, 310; NYNCH, annual report, 1911, 11; "Abandoned to the City's Care," *New York Herald*, January 14, 1895. See also: "Has Baby-Adopting Fallen Out...Some Foundlings...," *New York Herald*, March 27, 1904 and E. Wayne Carp, *Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

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and forgotten. In this they were more tolerant than Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's 1895 play "The Importance of Being Earnest." Lady Bracknell is scandalized when she learns that Jack Worthing, who wants to marry her daughter, was found in a handbag left in a checkroom in London's Victoria Station. "You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter–a girl brought up with the utmost care–to marry into a cloakroom, and form an alliance with a parcel?" Lady Bracknell exclaims.[125] A real baby discovered in a "common oilcloth satchel" in New York's Grand Central Station in 1889 was lucky to be found in a city whose citizens were more tolerant of unusual beginnings.[126]

The city's random assignment of religions and ethnicities is another demonstration of this new willingness to believe in the malleability of the foundling's identity. The press, always eager for a good story, sometimes invoked the language of fairy tale to speculate about the histories and destinies of babies picked up in the street. In the Gilded Age, when fortunes were made and lost with breathtaking rapidity, these rags to riches - or riches to rags - stories seemed timely. No matter how often Matron Webb, who ran the nursery at the police department's central office, disputed the idea that foundlings were generally found in rich clothing, the press continued to report that this was a fact, suggesting that any waif of the New York streets might have origins like Shakespeare's Perdita or Eugene Sue's Fleur de Marie.[127]

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[125] Wilde, *Importance of Being Earnest*," 369.

[126] "A Satchel full of Baby," *New York Herald*, March 22, 1889.

[127] "The clothing of the baby was new, and of fine texture throughout, similar in many respects to the clothing of other foundlings which have been left for the city to care for," "Refined Woman Deserts A Babe," *New York Herald*, May 31, 1896. For a similar comment see "Tiny Waifs Found," *New York Herald*, April 15, 1897. For Matron Webb's debunking of this idea see "Left at a Minister's Door," *New York Herald*, September 17, 1888 and "A Pauper Two Weeks Old," *New York Herald*, January 23, 1883. For a similar comment by Superintendent Blake of the Department of Charities and Correction see "Abandoned to the City's Care," *New York Herald*, January 14, 1895.

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Not only sensation-seeking reporters, but also hard-headed medical professionals could nurture fantasies about foundlings with glamorous origins. In 1889 two policemen found a baby girl abandoned in the cellar of a wrecked building. They brought her to New York Hospital, where Irene Sutliffe, the superintendent of the hospital's nursing school, took the baby under her wing. Laura York, as the baby was called, lived in the hospital, with nurses for foster mothers until she was nearly three, when she died. She appears at the center of the nursing school's 1891 class portrait in the arms of Miss Sutliffe. Lillian Wald, who graduated in that class and who would later rise to the top of her profession as the founder of the Visiting Nurses Service and a leader in the settlement house movement, is standing beside her. These trained nurses, none of whom could have been very naive about where abandoned babies came from, when commenting about Laura were "united in the opinion that she was of no common origin."[128]

The reverse story, that a baby found in the trash might rise from her humble origins and find an adoptive home on Fifth Avenue, also appealed to readers of New York newspapers, particularly the sensationalizing *Herald.* In 1909 the *Herald*'s Sunday magazine printed the story of a baby wrapped in an old blanket, placed in a dirty basket, and left on top of an ash barrel. "Another kid shoved out in the cold," the policeman who found her remarked matter-of-factly, "Too bad, baby, too bad..." Her fortunes soon improved. When a wealthy couple adopted her she became a "millionaire baby," a "dainty young lady who is already beginning to attract attention for her beauty and who rules a certain Fifth avenue mansion with a high hand." "This isn't a fairy story," the *Herald* advised its readers, "though it reads like one."[129] Even the New York Infant

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[128] The story of Laura York comes from clippings in the Historical Scrapbook, School of Nursing, New York Hospital. The photograph is in the New York Hospital Archives' photograph files.

[129] "Ashcan Baby Finds a Home in Fifth Avenue," *New York Herald*, December 26, 1909.

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Asylum was capable of evoking fairy tales about the futures of its adopted foundlings: "It would read like a romance, were we to describe the transition of many of our children, into homes of wealth and culture...." it reported dreamily.[130]

Infant abandonment began to decline during the twentieth century. One reason was the reduction of the number of household servants, the pool of women who had been most vulnerable to abandoning a baby. Another was the creation and social acceptance of a legal adoption process. This gave young unmarried women who became unintentionally pregnant an option other than abandonment. After World War Two a more securely prosperous society and a stronger - although still not strong enough - social safety net meant that fewer women reached the point of desperation that led to abandonment or even infanticide. The women's movement of the 1970s resulted in the creation of a wider and more fairly compensated array of employment choices for women. This meant that the limitations of domestic service no longer trapped so many poor working women who found they had to choose between their child or their job. The recent destigmatization of illegitimacy, while controversial, has meant that unmarried mothers and their children are no longer social lepers. Perhaps most significantly of all, legal, safe, and effective birth control and abortion have reduced the number of unwanted babies who are born.

To the few babies who are still left on doorsteps few think to apply the term "foundling." Those who do use the word probably do not even realize that it was once

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[130] NYIA, annual report, 1887, 19. For more rags to riches, or riches to rags stories about foundlings see, from the *New York Herald*: "The Woman in Black. A Richly Clad Child Abandoned by the Mother, Who is Believed to Have Drowned Herself," May 15, 1878; "Three Little Waifs," November 30, 1880; "Abandoned in Fifth Avenue. A Waif Which is Believed to Have Been Born in Bellevue Hospital," October 27, 1883; "Mystery of a Pretty Baby," May 21, 1892; "Found Two Deserted Babies. One Was Richly Dressed and the Other Was Wrapped in a Piece of an Old Skirt," April 13, 1893; "Foundling in Fifth Avenue," April 5, 1895; "Found a Waif on Christmas Eve...In a Silk Cap and Cloak," December 25, 1895; "Baby Finds a Mother," March 18, 1896; "Pretty Baby in Silks Deserted by Mother in Department Store," March 29, 1907.

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synonymous with illegitimacy. The word "foundling," with its freight of sin and shame, so meaningful to nineteenth-century New Yorkers, has been forgotten, and the whole structure of institutions and understandings erected to cope with the horror of thousands of discarded babies has collapsed.

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The newspapers I used most often were the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald*. Of all New York newspapers these have the most complete indexes, which is one of the reasons why I turned to them most frequently. The *Times*' index is published. The *Herald*'s index is in the form of 1,742 small, handwritten volumes containing entries dating from 1835 to1907, and six typewritten volumes, 1908-1920. These index volumes contain page after page of references to articles relevant to the history of foundlings in New York under entries such as "Abandoned," "Baby," and "Foundling." The *Herald* index is in the microfilm room at the New York Public Library.

Other newspapers and magazines I used include *Appleton's Journal*, *The Columbian*, *The Daily Graphic*, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, *Harper's Weekly*, *National Advocate*, *New York Evening Post*, *New York Tribune*, *Youth's Companion*, and others.

MEDICAL JOURNALS

I looked in the following current and nineteenth-century medical journals for articles about foundlings: *Bulletin of the History of* Medicine, American *Medical Times*

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(this was a weekly edited by Stephen Smith; in 1860 it succeeded the *New York Journal of Medicine*), *Medical Record*, *New York Medical Journal*, *Pediatrics*, *Transactions of the New York Academy of Medicine*, *Transactions of the New York State Medical Association*, and others. I saw these at the library of the New York Academy of Medicine.

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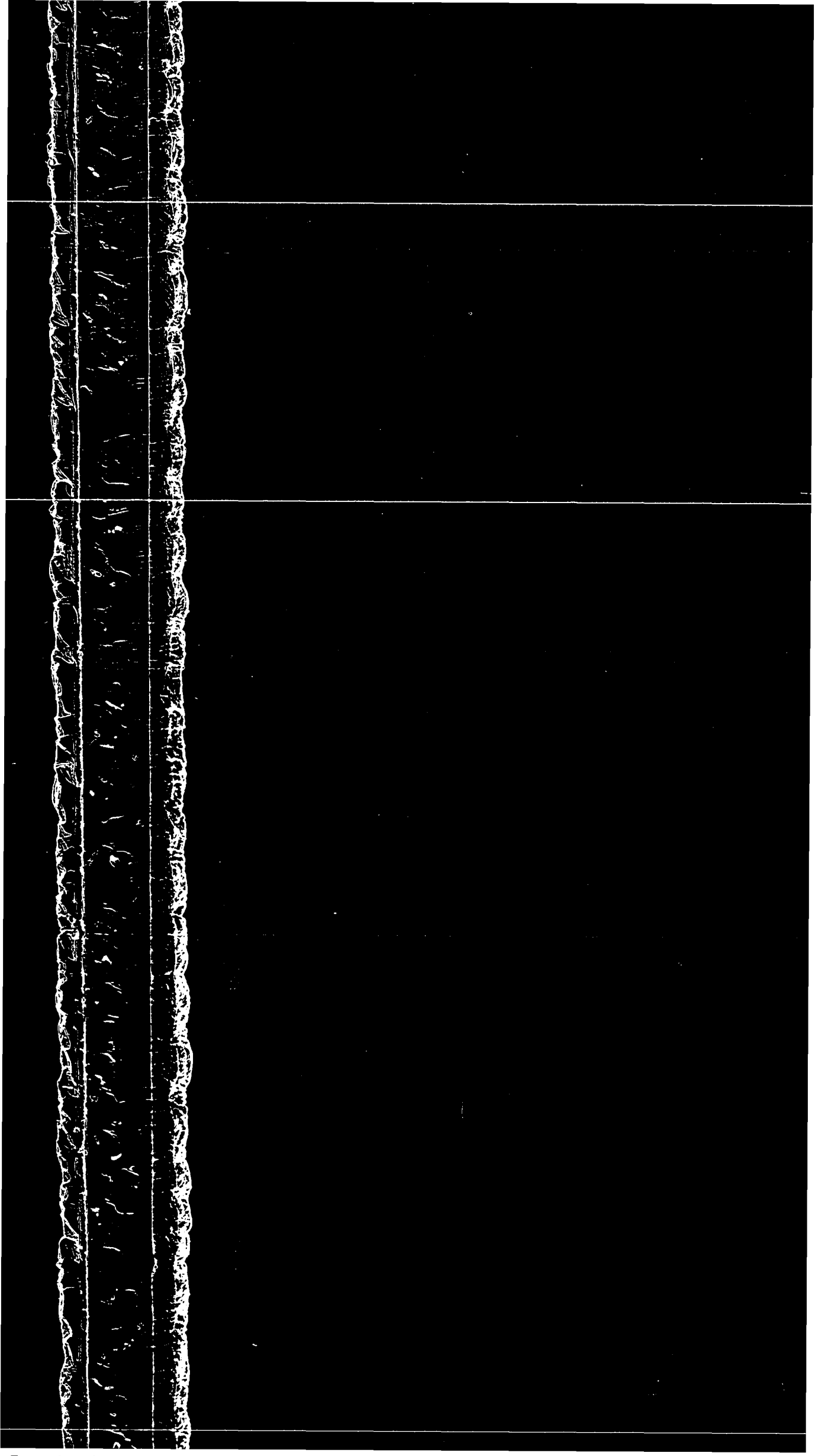
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