

6-1998

Resources File on Records of Boston Social Welfare Agencies

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Recommended Citation

Mock, Elizabeth R., "Resources File on Records of Boston Social Welfare Agencies" (1998). *Joseph P. Healey Library Publications*. 1.
<https://scholarworks.umb.edu/hlpubs/1>

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ELIZABETH MOCK

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RESOURCES FILE ON RECORDS OF BOSTON SOCIAL WELFARE AGENCIES

SABBATICAL LEAVE REPORT

JUNE 1998

Sabbatical Leave Report
Elizabeth R. Mock
June 8, 1998

From August 3, 1997, to January 17, 1998, I was on sabbatical leave from the university. The primary objective of my sabbatical leave project was to add to the data I had have collected over the years in a card resource file of information about the records of 19th and early 20th century social welfare agencies in the Boston area and to covert the file into an electronic format. My project makes the resource file more usable and accessible to researchers and archivists, and will aid in the collection development efforts in the Archives and Special Collections Department of the Healey Library.

When the archives program in the library was first being developed, I applied for and received a National Historic Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grant in 1981 to fund a feasibility study which helped formulate the collecting areas for the department and to start us on acquiring relevant material. One of the areas targeted in that study and in our collection policy was 19th century private social welfare and charitable agencies of the Boston area. As part of the grant funded project the project archivist and I began to create a resource file with entries on every organization, institution, and society that fit the category. At the end of the grant project, we had a resource file of nearly four hundred charitable and benevolent agencies that operated locally in the 19th century. Over time I have attempted to expand the file back into the eighteenth century and into the early twentieth century as well. The resource card file contained entries for the agency name, predecessor and successor agencies, client groups, founding dates, locations, funders or sponsors, etc. Additionally, I recorded any information I could find about extant records of the organizations and where

they are, including any published and printed reports.

Helping researchers find appropriate resources for their research is a major component of the archivist's job. Although there are some directories, guides and on-line databases for locating archival and manuscript collections, it is much more difficult to locate appropriate resources than it is for published materials. We still rely heavily on subject experts to locate specific collections. Because of the strong collections the department has in this area, and because of the research I have done trying to identify and locate social welfare records, I have become a well-recognized expert in this area for helping researchers find material on the history of social welfare in Boston. I also serve as a reference for genealogical searches in this area, including having given a presentation at an annual meeting of the New England Historic Genealogical Society on the records of child welfare in Boston.

In recognition of the need to encourage the collection and use of the records of the social welfare, a small working group of archivists in this region have attempted to try to create a guide to these records. Although we have not yet succeeded in this project, it is a consensus within the working group that the resource file maintained here is a vital component of any future directory or guide. By adding information to the file and converting it to an electronic format, my project has strengthen that resource.

During my sabbatical leave, I reviewed the holdings of area archival repositories to see if any records of cited organizations have been added to their holdings that are not already noted in

the file. I searched the catalogs of area libraries that would likely have pertinent collections. I also did extensive searching of the RLIN system of the Research Libraries Group which list bibliographical records of many archival collections nationwide. This is now accessible to non-members of RLIN through the web page of the National Union Catalog of Manuscripts Collections (NUCMC) of the Library of Congress. Through these searches I was able to add significant information to the resource file. This information included archival collections that I had not previously found, as well as information about collections that had been expanded. Additionally, I was able to add information to the resource file about printed sources, both of primary records and historical works, which could provide researchers with sources to supplement the archival record. In many cases these printed resources may be the only extant material available about the history of the organization.

Through this bibliographic searching, I also located a number of manuscript collections of individuals who played important roles in the social welfare institutions and organizations of the Boston area. Throughout the nineteenth century, prominent women and men often served as the founders, sponsors, or leaders of the various charitable and benevolent societies and institutions I have researched here. We occasionally will find records relating to their charitable activities in their personal papers. The manuscript collections of many of these people have been acquired over the years by some of the major repositories in our area, including the Massachusetts Historical Society and the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America. Sometimes, collections can be found in local historical societies or public libraries. These pertinent manuscript collections have been noted in the resource file.

As a major part of my project, I did extensive research in secondary sources about the various organizations and institutions in the file in order to provide fuller background information about them. This information should help researchers identify and locate appropriate agencies for their research. Many of the groups had similar names, or did similar work. Sometimes it is difficult to identify a specific one. Also, the names of the agencies changed, or various agencies merged as time went on. For example, the current Boston Children's Services Association is the product of the merger of nine earlier child welfare agencies that were established between 1800 and 1923 and that ceased or merged by 1960. In addition to the secondary sources, I referred to the many pamphlets and books published by the various agencies themselves. These included annual reports, anniversary publications, and printed and manuscript histories. The Simmons College Archives has a very extensive collection of printed annual reports from social welfare agencies of the period which were very helpful in my study. Simmons College had one of the earliest professional schools of social work in the area. These reports were originally collected by their social work library and were transferred to its archives several years ago.

When I began this project, the file only listed the agencies that were privately funded, reflecting the collection development purpose of the original file. During my sabbatical, I expanded the file to include information about public social welfare agencies. Information about public records came primarily from the inventories at the Archives of the Commonwealth, the Boston City Archives and the Boston Public Library. The file is now comprehensive from Boston's earliest history, with the records the Boston Overseers of the

Poor, through the establishment of the Mothers' Pension in the 1910s. At the end of my sabbatical, I had expanded the file to include more than five hundred entries.

In addition to significantly adding to the informational content of the file, I also had the goal of improving access to it. As part of my project, I designed an electronic database using Filemaker Pro software and entered all of the data I had originally gathered along with the additional data I had collected during the sabbatical leave. Having the file in an electronic format will allow researchers to search it much more extensively than in its card format. The database includes an entry for every society, organization, and institution that I was able to identify as part of this study. Attached to this report are several samples of the individual records of the groups in the database. The contents of each record in the database fall into three sections. These are information about the agency or institution, links to successor and predecessor entries in the file, and location of records or printed sources for each if found.

The first section provides information to help researchers identify appropriate organizations or institutions for their research. In addition to the name of the organization or institution, I included its founding and closing dates, or if it was ongoing. I also included an indication of a category of purpose, i.e. humanitarian, mutual aid, proselytizing or reform. I also created a checklist to identify its clients. Other information includes funding sources, public or private, and an indication of significant founders. As part of each record I included a field for historical notes where I could describe specific information about the organization or institution that I had gathered and that I believed could be useful to researchers. The database

allows various types of selecting, searching and sorting. In designing the database, I have attempted to include fields that researchers would use for searching. One could also select a subset of the database entries by any of the defined fields and then search or sort those. For example, someone may be interested in only looking at records for societies which cared for children or women, or which are ongoing organizations.

The second section of the record contains links to the entries in the file for predecessor or successor agencies. As you can see from the attached samples, a researcher may just hit a button ("find") on the record to take them to the entry for the society under its earlier or later name, for example. This feature was created through building a linked database with the names of all of the entries listed.

The third section of each entry informs the user of the holder of any extant records that I located during my research. For this section I built a linked database of the many archival and manuscript repositories that held collections which fit the parameters of this study. I also have noted if the current agency holds their own historical records. I also have included information about any printed records I located, primarily their annual reports. For many of these groups no extant records of any kind have been located. Any information in the file came from contemporary records and histories that I researched originally or during my sabbatical. Many entries indicate only that scattered printed records appear to have survived in local and major national libraries.

The resource file is currently available for consultation in the Archives and Special Collections Department. In its previous earlier card format, and now in its electronic version, I use it to answer reference questions that I receive. I believe this file will become an even more useful reference tool in the future. As time allows, I am working with the library's systems department to plan making the file available on our web site.

Sample Entries from Resource File

Name Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys

Date founded 1814

Date closed 1835 **ongoing** ☐ yes ☒ no

Category ☒ Humanitarian ☐ Mutual ☐ Proselytizing ☐ Reform

Client groups ☒ Children, Boys ☐ Women ☐ Poor ☐ Ethnic Group ☐ Aged, Women
☐ Children, Girls ☐ Men ☐ Prisoners ☐ Aged, Men ☐ General

Funding ☒ Private ☐ Public

Founders

Historical Notes Home for orphan and destitute boys. Merged with Boston Farm School Society to form the Boston Asylum and Farm School on Thompson Island in Boston Harbor.

Predecessors
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>

Successors
Boston Asylum and Farm School for Boys
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>

Archives University of Massachusetts at Boston Library

Archives	Collection Name
University of Massachusetts at Boston Library	

Publications Simmons College Archives: Annual Reports

Library	Publication Name
Simmons College Archives: Annual Reports	

Name Boston Farm School Society

Date founded 1833

Date closed 1835 **ongoing** ☐ yes ☒ no

Category ☒ Humanitarian ☐ Mutual ☐ Proselytizing ☐ Reform

Client groups ☒ Children, Boys ☐ Women ☐ Poor ☐ Ethnic Group ☐ Aged, Women
☐ Children, Girls ☐ Men ☐ Prisoners ☐ Aged, Men ☐ General

Funding ☒ Private ☐ Public

Founders Rev. Eleazer Wells

Historical Notes Founded as a home and farm school for boys. Purchased Thompson Island in Boston Harbor for its location. Shortly after forming, merged with the Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys.

Predecessors
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>

Successors
Boston Asylum and Farm School for Boys
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>

Archives University of Massachusetts at Boston Library

Archives	Collection Name
University of Massachusetts at Boston Library	

Publications	Publication Name
Library	

Name Boston Asylum and Farm School for Boys

Date founded 1835

Date closed 1907 ongoing ☐ yes ☒ no

Category ☒ Humanitarian ☐ Mutual ☐ Proselytizing ☐ Reform

Client groups ☒ Children, Boys ☐ Women ☐ Poor ☐ Ethnic Group ☐ Aged, Women
☐ Children, Girls ☐ Men ☐ Prisoners ☐ Aged, Men ☐ General

Funding ☒ Private ☐ Public

Founders

Historical Notes Home and school for urban boys on Thompson Island in Boston Harbor. Formed by the merger of the Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys and the Boston Farm School Society.

Predecessors	Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys	find	↑
	Boston Farm School Society	find	
		find	↓

Successors	Farm and Trades School	find	↑
		find	
		find	
			↓

Archives University of Massachusetts at Boston Library

Archives	Collection Name
University of Massachusetts at Boston Library	

Publications Simmons College Archives: Annual Reports

Library	Publication Name
Simmons College Archives: Annual Reports	

Name Liversidge Institution of Industry

Date founded

Date closed

ongoing ☐ yes ☒ no

Category ☒ Humanitarian ☐ Mutual ☐ Proselytizing ☐ Reform

Client groups ☒ Children, Boys ☐ Women ☐ Poor ☐ Ethnic Group ☐ Aged, Women
☐ Children, Girls ☐ Men ☐ Prisoners ☐ Aged, Men ☐ General

Funding ☒ Private ☐ Public

Founders

Historical Notes Home for poor or neglected boys between seven and fourteen years, natives of England or New England. When it closed, all of its assets were turned over to the Farm and Trades School.

Predecessors

	find	↑
		↓

Successors

Farm and Trades School	find	↑
	find	
		↓

Archives University of Massachusetts at Boston Library

Archives

Collection Name

University of Massachusetts at Boston Library	

Publications

Library

Publication Name

		↑
		↓

Name Farm and Trades School

Date founded 1907

Date closed 1954 ongoing ☐ yes ☒ no

Category ☒ Humanitarian ☐ Mutual ☐ Proselytizing ☐ Reform

Client groups ☒ Children, Boys ☐ Women ☐ Poor ☐ Ethnic Group ☐ Aged, Women
☐ Children, Girls ☐ Men ☐ Prisoners ☐ Aged, Men ☐ General

Funding ☒ Private ☐ Public

Founders

Historical Notes Home and school for urban boys on Thompson Island in Boston Harbor. Named changed from the Boston Asylum and Farm School to reflect change in educational emphasis.

Predecessors	Boston Asylum and Farm School for Boys	find	↑
	Liversidge Institution of Industry	find	
		find	↓

Successors	Thompson Academy	find	↑
		find	
			↓

Archives University of Massachusetts at Boston Library

Archives	Collection Name
University of Massachusetts at Boston Library	

Publications Simmons College Archives: Annual Reports

Library	Publication Name
Simmons College Archives: Annual Reports	

Name Thompson Academy

Date founded 1954

Date closed 1975 ongoing ☐ yes ☒ no

Category ☒ Humanitarian ☐ Mutual ☐ Proselytizing ☐ Reform

Client groups ☒ Children, Boys ☐ Women ☐ Poor ☐ Ethnic Group ☐ Aged, Women
☐ Children, Girls ☐ Men ☐ Prisoners ☐ Aged, Men ☐ General

Funding ☒ Private ☐ Public

Founders

Historical Notes Home and school for urban boys on Thompson Island in Boston Harbor. The school closed in 1954 and became an educational center.

Predecessors

Farm and Trades School	find	↑
	find	
		↓

Successors

	find	↑
		↓

Archives University of Massachusetts at Boston Library

Archives

Collection Name

University of Massachusetts at Boston Library	

Publications

Library

Publication Name

		↑
		↓