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### Course Overview

**Session Organization**

- A Community Responsibility: Taking Care of the Poor
- Cries for Reform: Quincy and Yates Reports
- Growth of Organized Settings: Systems of Care from 1850 forward

**Groups highlighted**

- Poor (widows, elderly and infirm, jobless)
- Mentally ill
- Orphans
- NOT COVERED - prisoners

**Sample records covered**

- Town records
- Overseers of the Poor
- Church records
- Probate
- Almshouses/poorhouses -
- Orphanages
- Court records

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### Session Roadmap

History	Types of Relief	Records
Elizabethan poor laws	Outdoor relief	Town and county
Colonial laws and attitudes	Indentures	Church
Jurisdictions for relief	Pauper auctions	Probate and other court records
	Apprenticeships	Institutions
	Institutions	

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**Legal Context for Colonial Poor Relief**

- Colonial America adopted language of Elizabethan Poor Laws
- “Worthy” poor
  - Orphans
  - Widows
  - Frail elderly
  - Disabled
- “Unworthy” poor
  - Vagrants
  - Drunk



Library of Congress Elizabeth I, Queen of England, 1533-1603  
<https://lcn.loc.gov/2005688185>

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**English Poor Act of 1601**

- Three categories
  - Idle poor
  - Able-bodied or deserving poor
  - Helpless due to age or illness
- Each parish:
  - Elect two Overseers of poor relief
  - Set and collect poor relief tax from property owners
  - Distribute either outdoor or indoor relief
  - Parents responsible for children and grandchildren and vis versa
  - Orphaned children to be apprenticed

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**English Settlement Act 1662**

- **Purpose:**
  - Establish the parish to which a person belonged
  - Clarify which parish was responsible for person needing Poor Relief
- **Settlement proved by:**
  - Born into a parish where the parents had a settlement
  - Hired continually by a settled resident for more than a year and a day
  - Reside in parish for 40 days without complaint being made to church officials
  - Rent property worth more than £10 p.a.
  - Married into the parish
  - Received poor relief in parish in past
  - Served a full seven-year apprenticeship to a settled resident

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**Colonial Poor Laws –  
Reluctant Public Charity**

- Mirrored existing British law
- Strong Puritan influence, even in the southern colonies
  - Religious responsibility to help poor
  - But not the “idle poor”
  - And not individuals from outside the community

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**Representative Attitudes**

- Idle poor characterized as vagabonds, beggars, drunkards
- 1645 – Virginia - Binding out of children of unemployed to prevent “sloth and idleness wherewith such young children are easily corrupted”
- 1727- Connecticut – “diverse idle and disorderly person” choose to “stroll from one country to another, neglecting labor”

Raymond A. Mohl, “Three Centuries of American Public Welfare: 1600-1932” *Current History*, Vol. 65, No. 383 (JULY, 1973), pp. 6-10, 38-39

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**Who Were the Poor?**

- Children, orphaned or in pauper families
- Sick
- Aged
- Blind or had a crippling injury
- Also seasonally employed, day laborers, immigrants, widows, runaway enslaved, abandoned families, social misfits, refugees, mentally ill

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**General Principles  
Adopted by Colonies**

- Family first - Three generations of family required to care for person
- Needy person must be a resident and eligible for relief
  - Three-month residency
- Persons capable of work must do so
- Pauper and orphaned children could be apprenticed

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**Responsible  
Jurisdictions**

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**Jurisdictions for Relief**

- Public
  - Towns
  - Counties
  - State supported Anglican Parishes
- Private
  - Charitable organizations

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## Towns

- Towns
  - Appointed Overseers of the Poor
  - Levied taxes to raise funds
  - Identified those in need and supplied relief
- Found in New England colonies
- Middle colony cities (e.g., Philadelphia)

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## Who Were the Overseers of the Poor?

- Appointed by town or city or county
- Responsibilities of Overseers
  - Determining eligibility for services (e.g., residency)
  - Assessing needs
  - Providing services
  - Warning out
- In the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century would establish a network of merchants to supply food and clothing

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**The Massachusetts Township Act, 1692**  
*The following is a selection from the 1692 Act establishing the office of Overseers of the Poor*

**F**rom *The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of Massachusetts*, 21 vols. (Boston, 1806-1922), 1:64-66. Province Laws, 2d series, 1692-93, chapter 26, "An Act for Regulating of Township, Choice of Justices Officers and Setting forth their Power"

[Sec. 4.] That the freholders and other inhabitants of each town, inhabitable at twenty pounds estate... shall choose three, five, seven or nine persons, able and discreet, of good conversation, inhabiting within [said] towns, to be selectmen or overseers and overseers of the poor, where other persons shall not be particularly chosen to that office (which any town may do as they shall find it necessary and convenient)...

[Sec. 5.] That the selectmen or overseers of the poor of each town where there are such chosen and specially appointed for that service) are hereby empowered and ordered to take effectual care that all idiotish, maimed, and lame persons of able body living within the same town or precinct thereof (not having estates otherwise to maintain themselves) do not live idly or unemployed their time in idleness, but that they be brought up in some honest calling, which may be profitable unto themselves and the publick. And if any person or persons fit and able to work shall refuse so to do, but being [et] impinged his or her time, wandred from place to place, or otherwise misorder themselves, and thereof be convicted... such person or persons shall... be sent to the house of correction and at their entrance be whipped on the naked back, by the master of such house or other such as he shall please, not exceeding ten lashes; and be there kept to hard labour until he or she be discharged by such justice or justices or quarter sessions of the peace for the same county. And if shall and may be lawful for the overseers of the poor or selectmen in each town where there are no other persons specially chosen and appointed to be overseers of the poor, [that] they are hereby ordered with the assent of two justices of the peace, to bind any poor children belonging to such town to be apprentices, where they shall see convenience, a woman child until he shall come to the age of twenty-one years, and a woman child to the age of eighteen years, or time of marriage; which shall be as effectual to all intents and purposes as if any such child were of full age and by indiction of covenant had bound him or her self.

[Sec. 6.] [Persons obtained in any manner the charge of these maimed and not warned out to be repaired inhabitants], and the proper charge of the same in case thereof was been lawless, or otherwise they come to stand in need of relief, to be borne by such town, unless the relations of each poor dependent person in the line or degree of father or grandfather, mother or grandmother, child, or grand child, be of sufficient ability; then such relations respectively shall relieve such poor persons in such manner as the justices of the peace in that county where such sufficient persons dwell shall assess.

1692 Massachusetts Law

Three months established residency if not warned out

First priority, prevent vagrancy

Poor children could be bound out - apprenticed

Family first line of support

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40 Pounds to Support of Poor

At a Town meeting orderly warned for the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1723 for ye purchase there was taken for yt day a moderator Capt John Thacher.

for ye representative 20 <sup>c</sup> toward defraying the charge of a representative	20-00-00
for the support of the poor 40 more toward ye building of the house for the poor to work in	20-00-00
for ye repairing of Great Street 02	00-00-00
to them 4 Bamberjys 5	00-05-00

1723 Barnstable, MA Town Meeting Record

20 Pounds toward Workhouse

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### Districts and Counties

- Delaware required Overseers for each “hundreds” (districts) in the county
- New York delegated authority to counties and manors
- Pennsylvania gave authority to justices of the peace and the county courts

Delaware Archives: State Map Collection  
Delaware Map of Hundreds 1700-1800

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[ 4 ]

To lay an affidavit, *And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid,* That it shall and may be lawful for the overseer or overseers of the poor to nominate and appointed, to make or lay a rate or assessment after the rate of one penny per pound, clear value of the real and personal estates of all and every the freholders and inhabitants within their respective townships, to be employed for the relief of poor, indigent and impotent persons inhabiting within the said townships, in such a manner as by this act is directed and appointed; and four shillings per head on all freemen not otherwise rated.

How the overseers are to proceed in collecting the said rate, shall procure the same to be allowed by three or more justices of the peace of the county wherein the said tax is made. And if any person or persons so rated or assessed, shall refuse to pay the sum or sums on them charged, that it shall and may be lawful to and for the said overseer or overseers, having first obtained a warrant under the hands and seals of two justices of the peace of the county where

PA Act for the Relief of Poor 1705

A compilation of the poor laws of the State of Pennsylvania, InternetArchive, p. 4

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**Anglican Parishes**

- Virginia, Carolinas, and Georgia
- Responsibility of Anglican Parishes to appoint Overseers of the Poor
- Supported by parish taxes

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*... by the authority aforesaid, That the overseers of the poor so nominated and appointed as aforesaid, together with the churchwardens of the parish, shall have the oversight, ordering and relieving of the poor of the parish, and shall have power to demand and receive all such gifts and legacies, and all such fines and forfeitures, and any other money or things whatsoever, as are given to the use of the poor, and in case of refusal to deliver or pay the same, to commence and prosecute any lawful suit or action for the recovery thereof.*

The overseers and churchwardens to have the ordering and relieving of the poor.

SC Statutes at Large 1712 p. 594

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**Private Charities**

- Religious
  - Episcopal Charitable Society of Boston (1724)
  - South Carolina Society (founded 1737 by Huguenots)
- Ethnic
  - The Scots Charitable Society (Boston, 1657)
  - Charitable Irish Society of Boston (1737)
- Other
  - Fellowship Society of Charleston (founded 1762)

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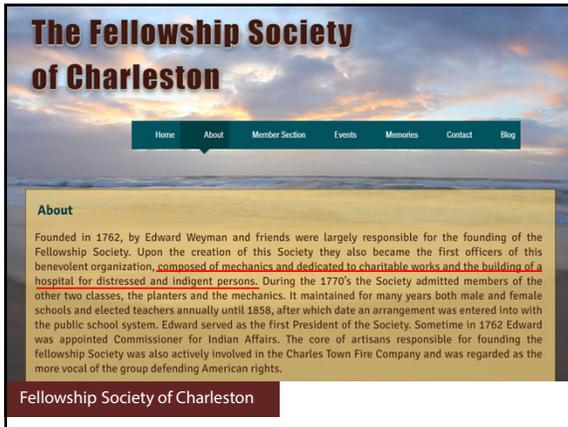
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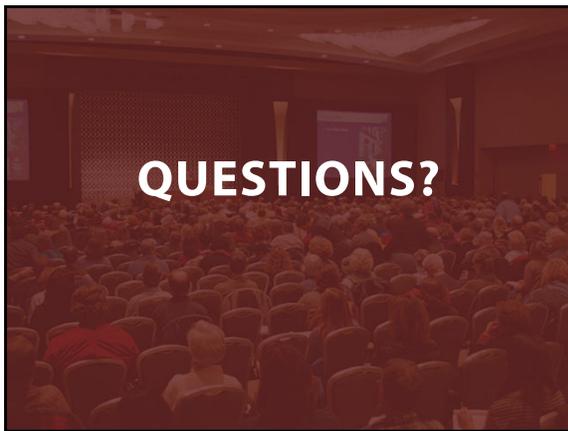
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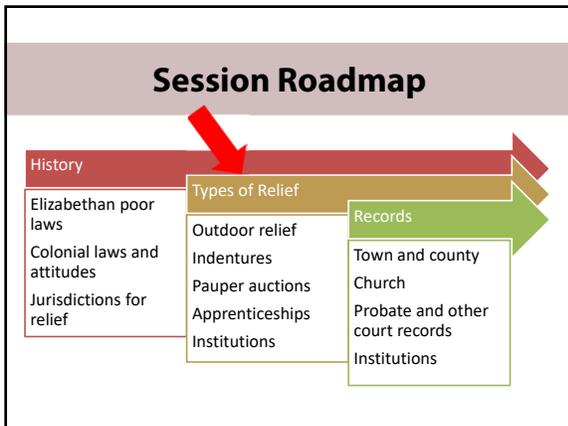
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### Outdoor Relief

- Non-institutional relief, in a home setting
- Funded by town or city taxes
- Methods:
  - Direct assistance to person - food, fuel, medicine in their own home
  - Boarding in someone else's home - host reimbursed by town
  - Pauper Auctions - town auctioned poor to lowest bidder
  - Indentures / Apprenticeships for children

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Item	Amount	Total
1 Enock Moody, his Mother	2	74
2 John W. Johnson, Molly M. Worring	3	20
3 Enock Moody, his Mother	27	20
4 David Cochrane, child, Mrs. Davis	8	50
5 Samuel Barnes, Mrs. Clark, 3 children	31	00
6 Daniel Brannon, Dacey Brannon	27	11

**Boarding Out Payments**

Town Treasurer, Danville, 1823 FHL Film 8649198, image 44

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889 quarts of pease	2	4	Direct Assistance
30 lb of beef	1	1	
10 lb of butter	1	1	
10 lb of sugar	1	1	
10 lb of rice	1	1	
10 lb of flour	1	1	
10 lb of salt	1	1	
10 lb of soap	1	1	
10 lb of tallow	1	1	
10 lb of lard	1	1	
10 lb of oil	1	1	
10 lb of vinegar	1	1	
10 lb of wine	1	1	
10 lb of beer	1	1	
10 lb of ale	1	1	
10 lb of honey	1	1	
10 lb of molasses	1	1	
10 lb of sugar	1	1	
10 lb of rice	1	1	
10 lb of flour	1	1	
10 lb of salt	1	1	
10 lb of soap	1	1	
10 lb of tallow	1	1	
10 lb of lard	1	1	
10 lb of oil	1	1	
10 lb of vinegar	1	1	
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10 lb of ale	1	1	
10 lb of honey	1	1	
10 lb of molasses	1	1	
10 lb of sugar	1	1	
10 lb of rice	1	1	
10 lb of flour	1	1	
10 lb of salt	1	1	
10 lb of soap	1	1	
10 lb of tallow	1	1	
10 lb of lard	1	1	
10 lb of oil	1	1	
10 lb of vinegar	1	1	
10 lb of wine			



### Institutional Relief

- Almshouse or Poorhouse
- Primarily in cities
  - Boston 1685
  - Philadelphia 1732
  - Charleston 1736
  - New York 1736
  - Baltimore 1773

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New-York Journal (published as The New-York Journal; or, the General Advertiser.) (New York, New York) | March 26, 1772

The following is an exact Number of the Persons supported in the Alms-House of this City, from the first Day of March 1771, to the first Day of March 1772.

On the 10 <sup>th</sup> of March 1771,	360
Entered since,	372
Discharged, or dead,	732
Now remaining in the House,	307
	415

New York Almshouse 1772

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### Session Roadmap

**History**

- Elizabethan poor laws
- Colonial laws and attitudes
- Jurisdictions for relief

**Types of Relief**

- Outdoor relief
- Indentures
- Pauper auctions
- Apprenticeships
- Institutions

**Records**

- Town and county
- Church
- Probate and other court records
- Institutions

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**Types of Records**

- Overseers of the Poor
- Town
- Church
- County
- Court
- Private

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**Overseers Records**

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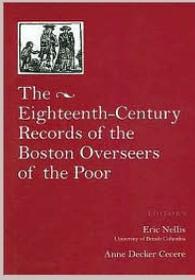
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**Finding Overseer Records**

- Town Records
  - Town Treasurer
  - Indentures
  - Bonds
  - Warning Out
  - Warrants for removal
- County Records
  - Indentures
- Published Sources



The book cover is red with a small illustration of a building at the top. The text on the cover reads: 'The Eighteenth-Century Records of the Boston Overseers of the Poor'. Below the title, it lists the editors: 'Edited by Eric Nettle, University of Oregon Libraries' and 'Anne Decker Coe'. The publisher's name 'BOSTON' is at the bottom.

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**Types of Town Records**

- Types of Records
  - Treasurer's Records
  - Town meeting minutes
  - Selectmen's records
  - Town clerk records
- What you are looking for
  - Reimbursement for services
  - Binding out to another person
  - Indication of pauper auctions
  - Apprenticeships

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**Treasurer's Records**

- Reimbursements to townspeople for services
- May be in a separate volume or interleaved with other town records
- Best source for finding the poor and women

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### Case Study – Overseers of Danville Maine

- Who were the parents of Luther Starbird?
- First appears in Greene, Androscoggin County, Maine in 1850 census with wife Susannah and son Elmer
- 1870 Census, Luther reports his place of birth as Danville

1845 Map of Maine by Sidney E. Morse and Samuel Breese. New York: Published by Harper & Brothers, 1845) viewed at David Rumsey Map Collection

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School	70	Octo Annual Meeting	11 - 53
Conting	71	Dr. Charles W. Keegan	8 - 80
Cont 1825	72	Paris Charles W. Keegan	5 - 82
"	73	Jonas W. Dingley	11 - 16
"	74	Walter S. Longwell	11 - 44
"	75	Oliver William Lyburn	13 - 23
"	76	Nicholas Starbuck	10 - 25
"	77	Cranch Overseer	2 - 25
"	78	Thomas Johnson	13 - 20
"	79	Thomas Johnson	7 - 36
Beer	80	Samuel Keegan for Luther Starbird	39 - 48
"	81	Samuel Keegan for Luther Starbird	6 - 76
"	82	Joseph Keegan	3 - 64
"	83	Jonathan Keegan	25 - 60
"	84	Samuel Keegan	1 - 33
"	85	Samuel Keegan	11 - 34
"	86	Samuel Keegan	17 - 60
"	87	Jonathan Keegan	32 - 60
School	88	Samuel Keegan	2 - 75
"	89	Wm Starbird	2 - 50
"	90	Oliver Keegan	4 - 60

Town Treasurer, Danville Maine 1826 FHL Film 8649198, image 54

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Town of Danville in and with Nathl. Starbird Treasurer			
Beer	1	Cranch Keegan	2 - 74
"	2	John W. Keegan	3 - 81
"	3	Cranch Keegan	5 - 86
"	4	David Keegan	3 - 56
"	5	Samuel Keegan	31 - 71
"	6	Samuel Keegan	27 - 11
"	7	Samuel Keegan	10 - 30
"	8	Joseph Keegan	7 - 74
"	9	Samuel Keegan	2 - 6
"	10	Samuel Keegan	7 - 87
School	11	Joseph Keegan	11 - 51
"	12	Christopher Keegan	37 - 17
"	13	Charles P. Keegan	5 - 13
"	14	James Keegan	18 - 76

Town Treasurer, Danville, 1823 FHL Film 8649198, image 44

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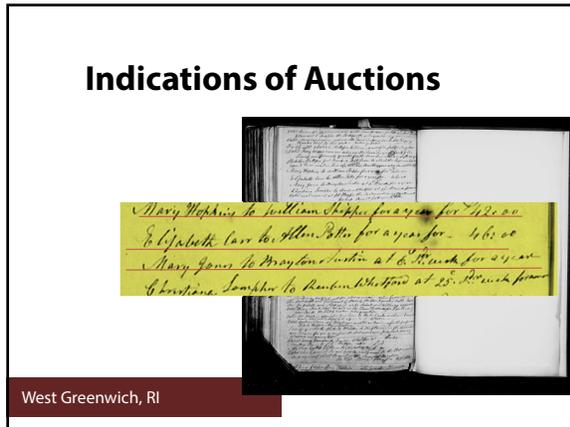
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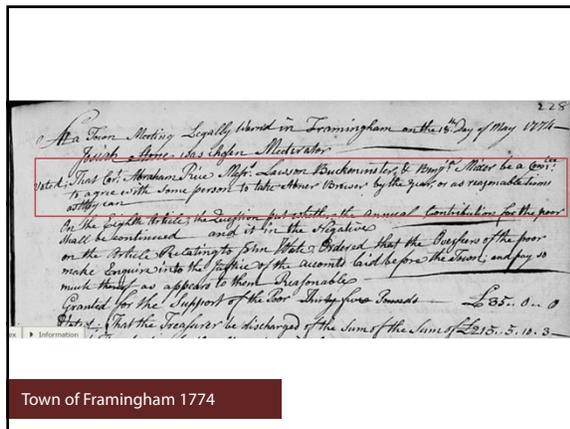
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### Child Apprenticeships

- The Boston Overseers of the Poor records show that between 1756 and 1806 over 1100 children were apprenticed .
- Boys had opportunities to learn a number of trades, although over 40% were bound out to learn husbandry (farming).
- Girls were overwhelmingly indentured for only one occupation – domestic servitude .
- Records may be in town records, court records

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Abstract "Proceedings Orphans' Court, Baltimore County 1778-1787" W8 1 Maryland

**Bailey, George William Enoch;** Parent, Enoch Bailey; Guardian, John Bailey; Securities, Robert Long & Andrew Hole; Wednesday after 2nd, Tuesday February 1779. Page 36.

**Banks, Henry,** 1 year of age; Bound to, Jacob Myers, (no trade); Wednesday after 4th Tuesday October 1781. Page 61.

**Bankson, James;** Parent, Joseph Bankson, late of Balto. County; Guardian, George Dalton; Securities, John Sleymaker & Isaac Griost; 22 June 1778. Page 20.

**Bankson, Joseph;** same as above.

**Banbaker, Archibald,** 12 entries; 9 years; Bound to Dutton Lane (?) 17. Several education; 16 October 1776. Page 28.

16 years 13 October next; Bound to George S. Griffith, shoemaker & farming business; 13 April 1789. Page 185.

**Banister, Thomas Rawson,** 16 years 1 August next; Bound to John & Robert Casey, Brickens mason; 13 April 1783. Page 185.

**Barret, Hanger,** 8 years; Bound to George Vewelbes, housework & education; 10 June 1782. Page 71.

**Barren, Charles,** 14 years October next; Bound to William Hane, house carpenter & Joiner; 11 August 1784. Page 163.

**Barth, Peter,** 16 years 18 January next; Bound to John Hillen, carrier; 13 December 1786. Page 285.

**Bass, Barbbery,** 13 years 2 months; Bound to William Baker; housework; 16 October 1783. Page 92.

**Baxter, Betty,** 6 years; Bound to Isaac Turner, housework, 11 January 1787. Page 255.

**Beard, Joseph,** 12 years; Bound to William Hrislins & Michael Horehead, taylor; 9 December 1777. Page 5.

**Beard, Joseph;** Parent, John Beard, dec'd, William Aisquith, adm. of estate; Guardian, James Walker; 10 February 1778. Page 8.

Howard, Louise Ogier, Trice, Mildred McKenney  
Guardianships and indentures involving orphans as abstracted from proceedings of the Orphans' Court of Baltimore County, Vol. 1 Maryland. Orphan's Court (Baltimore County)

Apprenticeship example - Baltimore Orphans' Court

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**RECORD OF SERVANTS AND APPRENTICES BOUND AND ASSIGNED BEFORE HON. JOHN GIBSON, MAYOR OF PHILADELPHIA, DECEMBER 5th, 1772-MAY 21, 1773.**

*Philip Sewell* aged seven years 20<sup>th</sup> November last, apprentice to Francis Springer of Phil<sup>a</sup> cordwainer, by the Managers of the House of Employment.

*Maria Elizabeth Pfeifer* last from Rotterdam servant to Jacob Hiitcheimer of Phil<sup>a</sup>

*Christian Eliz<sup>a</sup> Pfeifer* last from Rotterdam servant to Charles Lyan of Philad<sup>a</sup>

**January 18.**

*Salome Albright* a poor child aged eleven years, apprentice by Joel Zane and Joseph Thatcher Overseers of the Poor for the Northern Liberties to John Moyer, Tanner.

Philadelphia Indenture 1772-1777

Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, vol.33, issue 4, 1909

56

**INDENTURE OF APPRENTICESHIP, 1747.**

[Communicated by Miss HARRIET E. HENSHAW, Leicester, Mass.]

**T**HIS Indenture made the fourteenth day of September Anno domi 1747 by and between Luke Lincoln, Benj<sup>n</sup> Tucker, Nath<sup>l</sup> Goodspeed & John Whittemor all of Leicester in the County of Worcester selectmen of s<sup>d</sup> Leicester on the one part, Matthew Scott of Leicester aforesaid yeoman on the other part Witnesseth that the above s<sup>d</sup> selectmen by virtue of the Law of this province them empowering & with the assent of two of his Majesties Justices of the Peace for s<sup>d</sup> County hereto annexed do put and bind out to the s<sup>d</sup> Matthew Scott & to his heirs Executors & Admin<sup>rs</sup> as an Apprentice Moses Love a Minor aged two years and Eight Months with him & them to Live & dwell with as an apprentice during the term of Eighteen years & four months (viz) untill he shall arrive to the age of twentyone years—he being a poor Child & his parents not being well able to support it. During all which the s<sup>d</sup> apprentice his s<sup>d</sup> Master his heirs Executors & Admin<sup>rs</sup> shall faithfully serve at such Lawfull employment & Labovr as he shall from time to time During s<sup>d</sup> term be Capable of doing and performing & not absent himself from his or their service without

VOL. XXXIV. 28

Leicester, MA Indenture of 2-year old

NEHGR - Vol 34 p 311

57



### Warnings Out

- Practice in New England until early 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Non-residents of town examined upon arrival to determine if likely to become a public charge
- Inhabitants of a town had the right to be supported by the town if the inhabitant became unable to support themselves
- Some towns made it a practice to warn out all newcomers
- Warnings did not always mean that the person was escorted to the edge of town

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### Warnings Out

Warning Out – Clarendon, VT

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Warning Out – Pownalboro, ME

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**Vestry Minutes**

- Mostly southern colonies where the Anglican church was the official church
- Will find binding out, child apprenticeship

Ordered That the Churchwarden bind \*{ } Moxom daughter of Thor and Eliz<sup>e</sup> Moxom to John Murrey and his wife only 'till she attaine the Age of eighteen years.  
Ordered That Joseph Jacobus of the Age of fifteen years May last be bound by the Churchwarden to Matthew Hunt 'till shall attaine the Age of one and twenty years.  
Ordered That Mr. Henry Beasley Gent. Churchwarden and

Vestry Book, Christ Church Parish,  
Virginia

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Admitted Elizabeth Campbell who hath legal residence, and is very sick with a pain and dissiness in her head. Her husband Charles Campbell and who is a labourer was in the Country, and no person to take care of her, she was sent here to be provided for by Order Isaac Tatem Hopper. Debit City.

**August 16:** Admitted Isabella Johnson. This Child was bound by the Managers the 2nd June last to John C. Schneeds of this City and the Mother of said Child, finding to who it was bound, went and took her away by force. She is now in Jail and the child was brought from there to this House by a Constable with an Order signed Isaac Tatem Hopper. Debit City. [On November 17, Isabella was bound for fourteen years and one month to a farmer in Delaware.]

**August 23:** Admitted Mary Duffey a Girl about eleven years of age, of Legal residence. She was under Indenture to One Elizabeth Cathers of this City who lives in Carters Alley and keeps a boardinghouse, and has beat, and otherwise abused said Child Mary that complaint thereof was made to the Mayor who obliged the Mistress to give up the Indenture, and sent her here. Debit City. [Mary was bound again at the end of August.]

**Philadelphia Almshouse 1800**

Billy Smith, *Life in early Philadelphia - documents from the Revolutionary and early national periods*, p. 38

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**II. Almshouse records, 1735-1911** ORIGINAL CONTENT

This series consists of almshouse records, including admission and discharge registers, lists of inmates, deaths, indentures, accounts, and memoranda.

**Record book containing admissions and discharges; and list of children bound out, 1756-1790** Reel 8 Box 9 Folder 1 DIVULGED

1 bound volume containing two sets of records with indexes to each part. Images of the volume appear as one sequence and are not separated by section.

Records of admissions and discharges, 9 November 1758-27 April 1774 (images 1-49; see also images 81-93 for index to the records of admissions and discharges)

List of children born, 17 August 1758-1 May 1768 (images 53-55)

List of children bound out of the almshouse, 21 April 1756-20 January 1790, of what town, names of to whom bound, and when free. (images 63-78; see also images 97-92 for index to the list of children bound out)

Contains age, by whom sent in, and date of death if appropriate.

**Records of Admissions to Almshouse, 14 February 1763-10 May 1771** Reel 8 Box 9 Folder 2 DIVULGED

1 small disbound volume

Some entries out of chronological order.

Contains name, date of admission, age, by whom sent in, and date of discharge or death. Also contains manuscript notes of financial matters and supplies for the Almshouse on end leaves (inventories of inmates' possessions)

**Register of Admissions to the Almshouse, 12 December 1768-30 September 1788** Reel 8 Box 9 Folder 3 DIVULGED

**Boston Almshouse - MHS Records**

Massachusetts Historical Society Finding Aid, Boston Almshouse

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## Summary

- Colonial ancestors who lived on the margins of society were probably poor, ill, suffering from misfortune, old, or all the above
- Colonial systems for poor relief grew out of the Elizabethan Poor Laws
- Colonial poor relief was administered by the Overseers of the Poor, churches, or private societies and usually took the form of Outdoor Relief or Binding Out or Pauper Auctions
- At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Almshouses and Poorhouses or farms became the predominant mode of providing relief.

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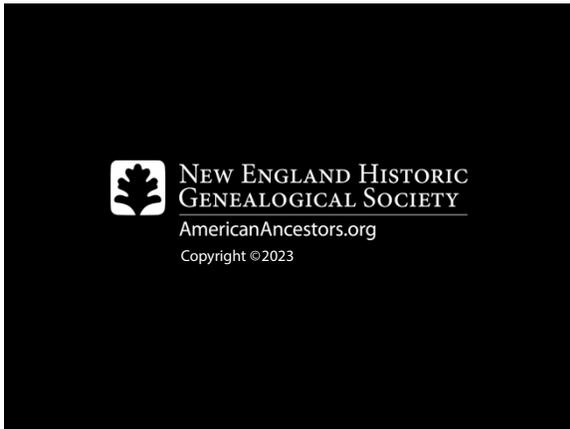
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