

Worcester Historical Museum: Temporary Home and Day Nursery Collection 2004.04

Overview of the Collection

The Temporary Home and Day Nursery was established to meet the needs of women & children seeking shelter due to various hardships. The home looked after their welfare while there and assisted women in obtaining work or establish their homes upon departure. It began in 1883 as part of the benevolent work of Union Church in Worcester. In 1887, the day nursery and kindergarten expanded and became too much work for one church so more churches offered assistance. In 1889, the need for a temporary home became evident and at the request of several physicians, a temporary home was added and the name changed to Temporary Home & Day Nursery. The first home at 202 Southbridge Street was used for 21 years until the site was no longer suitable for their needs.

In 1906, a building fund was started, which with several legacies made it possible in 1909 to purchase land on Edwards Street and begin building. The Temporary Home & Day Nursery opened its doors at 11 Edwards Street in June 1910. The home was in operation until 1951 when it became Edwards Street Day Nursery that offered expanded daytime nursery facilities. Edwards Street Day Nursery closed its doors in early 2000 after over 100 years of service.

The collection contains complete histories of families who used the home as a temporary residence or day nursery from 1907-1961. Information included the names of children and parents, date & place of birth, employment, reasons for entering the home and length of stay, and additional information.

The Worcester Historical Museum was given twelve boxes of records kept by the THDN, on handwritten cards, one (or more) per family. The museum is in the process of creating an index of names to the collection. The records are organized alphabetically by last name within a section of years (such as 1913-1916).

During the period we will be exploring, the superintendent of the THDN was Miss Charlotte Emerson. You may see letters or other correspondence addressed to her in the envelopes. An excerpt from her newspaper obituary on 26 December 1927 describes her this way:

“Miss Emerson had the distinction of having been longer in welfare work in this city than any other welfare worker now in service. The governing board of the Temporary Home & Day Nursery and the hundreds who were familiar with her work regarded her as one of the most conscientious social workers. Through her work at the Temporary Home and Day Nursery on Edwards Street and the Siger Street branch which was also under her supervision she became the good angel to hundreds of women and children whose genuine affection for her was frequently demonstrated. Always eager for their comfort and happiness, always willing to console, sympathize and advise, she won the confidence of the hundreds who came to the institution.

When Miss Emerson came to Worcester in 1894 the Temporary Home & Day Nursery was a small institution, having been founded in 1887. She entered into the work with spirit and zest and the

activities increased until in the last year more than 40 women and children were being cared for daily at the home and no less than 207 different children received attention during the year.

Many are the stories told of the sacrifices made by Miss Emerson, who frequently left her warm bed in the middle of the night to give kindly care to unfortunate children. But she talked little of her work herself and it was only now and then that the real extent of her service became known even to her intimates. Her energy seemed unbounded and although she was the directing head of the Institution she never shirked the more arduous labor and frequently met many emergencies by her own manual efforts.

Miss Emerson's love for children, her sympathy with women, fitted her admirably for her task and she found unusual satisfaction in her successful efforts to keep families together and homes intact. Mothers forced to leave their children in the nursery while they worked during the day time found that they received exceptional care and attention and children looked to the woman as they would a mother. Miss Emerson was born in New York and lived in Brooklyn before she came here. She was a member of the Monday Evening Club and the American Association of Social Workers."

Our Project

We will take a class field trip to the Worcester Historical Museum. Half the class will go on Feb 16th and the other half on Feb 18th. We will be combing through some of the earliest records of this collection, dating between 1900 and 1920 (these are the ones least likely to involve people still living).

We will select envelopes of particular interest – 1 per student – and digitize the contents using the Museum's scanner or by taking a high-resolution digital photograph of the contents. Later, using the digital copy, you will:

- transcribe the handwriting and create an accurate transcript of the envelope's contents
- use that information to tell the story of one family
- We will upload the digital copy and your information to an online archive of Worcester history, <http://www.digitalworchester.org> where it will be fully text-searchable and available to researchers and to the general public.

The records intersect with some of Worcester's poorest residents, many of them immigrants, at times in their lives when they needed charitable assistance. While being a partial portrait of their lives, these records suggest some of the social dimensions of the immigrant neighborhoods, workplaces, family circumstances, and personal characteristics of the residents of Worcester in the early 20th century. Please treat these historic people and their fragile records with respect and care.

During Our Visit – Please follow the WHM's Rules and Regulations and all instructions from the archivist

Use the colored cardstock markers to insert into the stack when you remove an envelope. Envelopes with multiple years on the outside, or which are thicker than the others, may be of greater interest. Feel free to look through several before settling on one, but return the others to their proper order.

When you have chosen your envelope, use the worksheet to take notes and document the relevant information about your selection. List and keep track of all the contents of your envelope.

What to scan or photograph:

- The fronts and backs of the record cards using the Museum's scanner or our photography setup. Those .jpg files will be emailed to your WSU email account so you can access them at home and in class next week.
- Any other contents if they are important or useful, such as letters, photographs, and newspaper clippings

What not to scan:

- The "referral slips" although you should make a list of them
- The envelope itself

Your completed Digital Project will include:

1. A series of scans of the cards from the contents of your envelope, 1 jpg or gif image per side. You will have 2 images (one front, one back) for each card in the envelope. You may also have additional images if your envelope contained photographs, clippings, or letters.
2. A completed (typed) transcript of the cards, the envelope, and its entire contents. You can use the worksheet as a template for your transcript. This will be a Word file. I am planning to use class time to have you edit one another's work in pairs, to check for clarity and accuracy.
3. A short (2 page) paper telling the story of the family recorded in this envelope, with as much information as you can tell from the available resources. Extra information might include:
 - If you have time, look up the family in the city directory for that year
 - Note the address – check on Google or Zillow; is the house still there? Take a picture, or describe the building as it is now
 - Any other supplementary information about people, places, churches, hospitals, etc mentioned
4. The completed "metadata" for your family. We will discuss this in greater detail later, but basically the metadata is the information ABOUT your document that helps us identify it in the digital archives.

* If you miss the field trip, you will need to consult with me to find a time to go to the Worcester Historical Museum and conduct this research on your own.