

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 (Protestant) 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 Edward Street and begin building. The Temporary Home & Day Nursery opened its doors at 11 Edward Street in June 1910. The home was in operation until 1951 when it became Edward Street Day Nursery that offered expanded daytime nursery facilities. Edward Street Day Nursery closed its doors in early 2000 after over 100 years of service.

The collection contains envelopes of casefiles about families who used the home as a temporary residence or day nursery from 1907-1961. Information often 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. There is 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 might 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 Wed Feb 14 and the other half on Fri Feb 16*. 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).

Each student should select 1 envelope and digitize the contents either by having a staff member utilize the Museum's scanner or by taking a high-resolution digital photograph of each item in the contents (you can do both, but their scans will likely be better than your pictures). While in the archives, please make careful notes about the outside of the envelope and any small "referral slips" contained inside, as those don't get imaged.

Later, using the digital images, you will:

- Decipher the handwriting and create an accurate transcript of the envelope's contents
- Input the exact wording of everything on the card(s) into a database
- Use that information to tell the story of one family in a narrative paper
- Prepare your digital images to be included in an online archive of Worcester history, to make it available to researchers and 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 only 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.

* If you can't go at those times, see Dr. Hangen to make other arrangements.

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 all 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.
- Any other contents if they are important or useful, such as letters, photographs, and news 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, one .jpg 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. Together we will develop a standardized naming schema for the images.
2. A completed transcript of the cards, the envelope, and its entire contents, entered into the THDN database. We will use class time to edit one another’s work in pairs, checking 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. Other resources you *can (but are not required to)* use:
 - Look up the family in the city directory for that year (at the archives or in CityLab in the Urban Studies department)
 - Note the address – check on Google or Zillow; is the house still there? Take a picture, or describe the building as it is now. Or find it on an old Worcester map.
 - Any other supplementary information (properly cited) about people, places, churches, hospitals, etc. mentioned.

See Blackboard and course website for additional instructions.

Grading – 20 points

Images = good quality, correctly named, ready to go	4 points
Transcript = accurate, precise, complete, fully entered	10 points
Narrative Paper = well-written, proofread, compellingly told	6 points