

A Palace for the Poor: The Knox County Infirmary and Nineteenth Century
Social Reform in Rural Ohio

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Abstract

During the nineteenth century, middle- and upper-class citizens often viewed poverty as a form of moral delinquency among members of the working class rather than as an economic imbalance influenced by the rise of industrialization. The poorhouse, sometimes called an almshouse, poor farm, poor asylum, and later infirmary or city/county home, is one among a small variety of formal, legal institutions of social reform created to manage those individuals who consciously or unconsciously digressed from the “normal” social order of the working class. The Knox County, Ohio welfare system of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries stands as an exemplary model of rural self-reliance and community preservation. The Knox County Infirmary served as a centralized location to provide relief and general care to the poor, physically disabled, elderly, widowed, orphaned, and even mentally ill of the county. What may have started as a means of separating the social classes, by the mid-nineteenth century it functioned more as a means of unifying citizens of Knox County in combatting the threat of industrialization to its traditional, agricultural roots. It was also a struggle between self and collective identities.

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to the lesser-known stories that have contributed to the growth of the American culture. I never would have known the Knox County Infirmary existed if my father had not decided to take the scenic back road instead of the main route all those years ago. I would like to thank him for that fleeting introduction, which sparked my imagination and desire to understand this magnificent structure. I would like to thank her for giving me the writing skills that have allowed me to convey my passion for this institution to the world. More importantly, I would like to thank my mother for her infinite encouragement and support, especially during the final days of this project when I needed it most. My family's unceasing strength and perseverance are a powerful, eternal inspiration.

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Introduction: Welcome to the Poorhouse

Slowly crumbling under the weight of its own decay, the Knox County Infirmary stands nearly hidden by the deep shadows cast by overgrown landscaping. For a select few, this soaring edifice and the two, small remaining outbuildings, are the only connection to the long-forgotten past, to family and friends once housed within its walls, or even a place filled with fond childhood memories. For many others, it is nothing more than a spooky old building filled with mystery and endless possibilities for the thrill-seeking adrenaline junkie. Similar to this once majestic monument to nineteenth century American welfare, the significance of its humble function as a place of genuine care for the outcasts of society has been misconstrued and misinterpreted by generations of Knox County residents. More importantly, the former occupants of the Infirmary—the superintendents, matrons, servants, and above all the inmates—have been denied what scant dignity they carried with them in life by the countless urban legends that have perpetuated the general ignorance surrounding this institution.

During the nineteenth century, middle- and upper-class citizens of a community often viewed poverty as a form of moral delinquency among members of the working class rather than as an economic imbalance influenced by the rise of industrialization. The poorhouse, sometimes called an almshouse, poor farm, poor asylum, and later infirmary or city or county home, is one among a small variety of formal institutions of social reform created to manage those individuals who consciously or unconsciously digressed from the “normal” social order of the working class. Ohio’s early welfare system is illustrative of Midwestern practices that the state and local governments implemented throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to care for the

underprivileged, poverty-stricken classes. Examination of the Knox County Infirmary demonstrates the impact of social reform movements within rural communities of central Ohio through the organization of formal institutions established for the relief and regulation of the poor and other socially neglected classes, such as the elderly, disabled, orphaned, widowed, and mentally ill.

Mention the term poorhouse, and it inevitably conjures images of colonial New England workhouses or recalls the harrowing tales of the debtors' prison and workhouse has popularized by the novels of Charles Dickens. Even in the realm of academia, the American poorhouse of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries has received little attention, and those institutions established in rural communities of the Midwestern United States even less. Many rural regions like Knox County, Ohio, created at the time of their incorporation a means of caring for the less fortunate of society, whether enacted through state laws or local institutions. The relationship between the poorhouse and other social institutions such as insane asylums, orphanages, old age homes, homes for unmarried mothers, the "feeble-minded," prisons, and rehabilitation facilities for alcoholism and drug abuse, is vague, and yet so deeply enmeshed that the poorhouse served multiple purposes of social reform and charity at any given time. Why, then, is the poorhouse narrative lacking from the historiographical record?

Social historians have cursorily explored the American poorhouse system primarily as a stepping-stone to understanding contemporary models of public welfare. It was not until the 1970s that the subject matter received serious academic scrutiny outside of social work, and was perhaps a product of the sudden increase of welfare demands beginning in the 1960s. Most notably, David Rothman in his 1971 book *The Discovery*

of the Asylum, was in many ways the first to explore American institutions of social reform (not poorhouses specifically) as a means to treat individuals of their social deviancy rather than merely as a product to corral paupers, criminals, and insane persons away from the public eye.¹ Throughout the book, he discusses the asylum, whether it be a poorhouse, mental institution, orphanage, or prison, in terms of being an alternative to traditional methods of “warning out” social deviants from the community or contracting them into indentured servitude. While he acknowledges the shifting social attitude of the time, what Rothman fails to include is the impact of economic factors, both prior to widespread institutionalization beginning in the early-1800s and immediately following. Rothman presents the asylum as more of a phenomenon of a rise in paternalistic thinking than as an outgrowth and continuation of prevailing seventeenth and eighteenth century attitudes of proper social order.

Authors Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward,² writing at the same time as Rothman and likely in direct reaction to the 1960s welfare upsurge, utilizes the nineteenth century poorhouse as an example to show the long history of Americans striving to control lower-class citizens. The first half of this study explores the development of nineteenth century indoor and outdoor relief for the poor, leading into the first major shift away from direct relief to work relief at the onset of the New Deal era. The book as a whole was designed to critique contemporary welfare policies as little better than a

¹ David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971). Also by this author and as a sequel to the former study, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1980. The latter book does little to expand upon Rothman’s earlier work, aside from scrutinizing the beginnings of the end of institutional reform rather than its beginning.

² Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (rev. ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1993). This book was originally published in 1972.

bandage to age-old problems of poverty. Similarly, Michael Katz's work³ brings attention to contemporary American welfare as an outgrowth of the earlier poorhouse system, with little improvement thereof. He divides his book into three categories, stretching from the reform movements of the early-nineteenth century to the development of Progressive Era welfare programs, to the struggles of maintaining a feasible system of welfare in contemporary society. Rather than examining poorhouses as products of a place, time, and shared national mentality, the role of these institutions in his study are primarily to demonstrate to the reader the incompetency of the American welfare system, historically and contemporarily, in its ability to wholly manage those living below the poverty line.

Of all the three pioneering books mentioned above, Katz's work is by far the most comprehensive, and has therefore been the most referenced source for all subsequent studies. However, Katz places too much emphasis on the role of urban societies as the driving force of social reform. Many urban poorhouses were assembled on the outskirts of the city, situated on small farms, as a means of rehabilitation and to teach the inmates proper work ethics, even though many who were sent there were unfamiliar with farming. Rural communities, though vastly different from urban centers, are included by Katz only as part of the crusade to remove indigents from the streets, and scrutinized almost entirely in relation to the nearest urban centers. Katz's work marks the beginning of serious research into the issue of social welfare, and establishes a strong foundation for future research into the development of welfare movements within the United States, both urban and, to a far lesser extent, rural, but does not provide guidance in understanding

³ Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

poorhouses situated communities where agricultural is the predominant occupation. The social structure of rural communities is much different from that found in urbanized localities, making it difficult to draw upon the foregoing works as a strong point of reference.

It has not been until recently that scholarship on the subject of the American poorhouse system has surfaced as an individual institution of reform. In his book, *The Poorhouse: America's Forgotten Institution*,⁴ David Wagner strives to augment the previous works by Katz and Rothman by taking a more intimate approach toward the subject matter. Wagner does not limit his research to the laws, regulations, and reform movements that shaped poorhouses and general public sentiment regarding these institutions. He analyzes the political, social, and economic trends that motivated cities and counties to establish poorhouses in their communities, but more importantly, he strives to demonstrate the relationships among all individuals associated with the poorhouse, from the overseers to the staff to the inmates. Through newspaper articles, government documents, and various poorhouse records, he examines the day-to-day experiences of affiliated parties, augmenting his tale with first-hand accounts through a handful of oral history interviews with surviving individuals connected to the poorhouses he uses in his study. Wagner focuses on New England, using six different poorhouses as case studies. Only two of these institutions are located in rural locations. Despite his efforts at a more intimate narrative of the poorhouse system, Wagner does little more than reiterate what previous scholars have already said, and completely ignores the importance of understanding the relationship between the poorhouses and the larger

⁴ David Wagner, *The Poorhouse: America's Forgotten Institution* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.)

communities that they served. The last chapter of *The Poorhouse* stresses the continuing poverty crisis in the United States, using the poorhouse both as a metaphor and as a literal construction of the contemporary state of welfare institutions.

Inquiry into the social history of communities that remained rural throughout the height of industrialization and the demographic shift toward an urban lifestyle rather than agricultural leaves much to be desired. Hal S. Barron⁵ has managed to condense many of the major issues of what he calls the “Second Great Transformation” into a single volume. Barron’s approach to understanding the rural north as it developed alongside the rise of an urban consumer culture emphasizes how many farming communities created a distinct agrarian subculture in reaction to the rising reform movements, including general programs of institutionalization. The rural north was challenged during this second great transformation to either adapt the statewide improvement plans for their own benefit, or crumble under the pressure to conform and lose all of their traditional agrarian values. The wide geographical area under examination here, stretching from New Hampshire to North Dakota, is far too wide to accurately group together in a single study, but what Barron does is to offer new avenues to approach the study of rural societies during America’s great social reform movements.

Social historians such as those mentioned above have conducted their respective studies in an attempt to understand the poorhouse as it existed in an urban setting, while very few historians have delved into gaining insight respecting its rural counterpart. The Knox County Infirmary’s story, when began in 1842 with the establishment of the Poorhouse Farm and ended in 1977 with the termination of the County home, is similar in

⁵ Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

some ways to the conventional urban poorhouse, but also deviates from the stereotypical notions of what these institutions were and how they operated. The Knox County welfare system of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries stands as an exemplary model of rural self-reliance and community preservation. What may have started as a means of separating the social classes, by the mid-nineteenth century it functioned more as a means of unifying the citizens of Knox County in combatting the threat of industrialization to its traditional, agricultural roots. This pattern of exclusion and inclusion of the financially, physically, and mentally infirm was repeated at least twice through the course of the county's history. The present study will concentrate on a period of thirty-five years, between 1842 with the purchase of the Knox County Poorhouse Farm and 1877 the completion of the four-story Knox County Infirmary building that stands on the site today.

The Knox County Infirmary's story is not unique, but it does reveal much about the way in which communities throughout rural Ohio implemented the early American welfare system as constituted by local and state governments. The Infirmary, a poorhouse by any other name, served as a centralized location to provide relief and general care to the poor, the physically disabled, the elderly, the widowed, the orphaned, and even the mentally ill of the county. Here, the inmates, so called because of the stigma attached to these unfortunates of society due to their supposed delinquency and deviation from the social norm, were able to reside in some small comfort. In the case of the Knox County Infirmary, it was not a place to keep the indigent out of sight and out of mind, as the public frequently assumes. For a rural community such as Knox County, with small towns, villages, and hamlets loosely scattered within its borders, having a

poorhouse was more efficient and cost-effective than sending overseers of the poor into the countryside to provide outdoor relief.

The first chapter of this thesis provides an historical overview of the development of the American poorhouse system in the larger context of reform movements and the development of poor laws in general. It will define the recurring themes of the “worthy” and “unworthy” recipients of poor relief, and the primary qualifications a person had to meet to receive public aid. Poor laws as they developed in the United States were strongly influenced by those established in Great Britain during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The ways that Americans adapted English poor laws to suit the needs of a budding nation are explored in the first chapter.

Chapter two provides the framework for the major social institutions that developed in nineteenth century Ohio, including mental asylums, prisons, general hospitals, orphanages, public schools, and of course, poorhouses. This framework is used to demonstrate how the state poor laws of Ohio influenced the care of the indigent populations at a localized level, including both indoor and outdoor mechanisms of relief. This chapter emphasizes the significance of institutionalization in American society as a means of social control. This chapter also provides an abbreviated social history of Knox County and its early welfare system.

The third chapter explores the physical space—the buildings, the landscaping, the farmland—as an integral part of Knox County’s approach to social reform. Architect William Tinsley’s use of the Kirkbride Plan demonstrates how the county poorhouse adapted the state poor laws and social reform movements at local level. Examination of the architectural style, floor plan, landscaping, geographical setting, and general

organization of the Knox County Infirmary's campus alongside the legislation, local, regional, and national trends, make apparent the role of social institutions such as the poorhouse had within a given community. The transference of larger themes of social reform onto agricultural communities such as Knox County at the onset of widespread industrialization served to unify these rural communities rather than divide.

Some scholars have taken a top-down approach, others a bottom-up, and some a combination of the two for a well-rounded study of the poorhouse system within the United States. Few have ventured to study social institutions like the poorhouse, mental asylum, orphanage, or public school for the disabled, as the physical representations of a society's core values within the parameters of state and national legislation created to control and regulate "proper" social order. While many communities chose to set apart poorhouses from the greater public, they are in essence a reflection of the ideal society that all communities desired. The student of historical social welfare can view the philosophy behind the poorhouse system as a type of utopian scheme, where everyone lived and worked together for the greater good of all. From the farm to domestic work, from blacksmith shops to food processing, from religious services to tuberculosis hospitals, the poorhouse was essentially a miniature model of all the surrounding communities, a type of fringe society within itself. The Knox County Infirmary was, in a sense, a way for the hoi polloi to begin anew. It was a means to divert attention away from the prevailing faults within the greater community and focus its efforts on recreating the social order and harmony that began to fade with the persistent chiming of progress.

The relationship between the general citizenship of Knox County and those residing in the Infirmary is to some extent anachronistic with the social reform

movements that occurred within more urbanized centers of the United States throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The difference, in part, lies in the stronger sense of community found within rural societies where agriculture is the main industry than in larger cities reliant on production and trade for their subsistence. Though more dispersed across the landscape, farming communities tend to have closer kinship ties, through blood or marriage, and the economic capital is distributed more evenly among all members of society. In urban centers, though more densely populated, an individual is easily lost in the anonymity of the hustle and bustle, and the social hierarchy created by an uneven distribution of wealth is more prevalent. Kinship is often limited to a small handful of relatives rather than an entire community. In addition, those living in agrarian societies are aware that, by the nature of their vocation, one day they may be in a position seeking aid. Because of this and the kinship ties mentioned above, rural inhabitants tend to be more willing to assist their neighbors with the prospect of receiving the same kindness in return in their time of need. Those living in urban environments, where it is less common to have shared experiences because of the heterogeneous character of high concentration populations, are more likely to concentrate their efforts on their own survival.

The mid- to late-nineteenth century was a period of progressive social reform throughout the United States and Europe, which saw an increase in the erection of various social institutions for the rehabilitation of inmates to proper work ethics, a return to proper moral standing, and a stabilization of the proper social order. When the new building for the Knox County Infirmary reached completion in 1877, the pride that the

county felt in this new facility was a mixture of genuine compassion for the indigent population and the need for self-commendation.



Figure 1. Cornerstone of the Knox County Infirmary. (Courtesy of the author.)

Chapter One: For the Relief of the Poor

Early politicians of Ohio were not responsible for independently creating the legislation regulating the distribution of and qualifications for receiving aid within the state, but utilized the laws developed by the United States government for the original states of the union. The American laws were largely fashioned after the English Poor Law, introduced to the people while under British rule prior to their independence at the close of the American Revolution. The early leaders continued to add to and modify the preexisting law to develop or create a system of poor relief that was best suited to this country and its unique socio-economic circumstances.¹ Even so, policy makers continued to look to England for guidance, and many of the laws were identical to or closely paralleled those of England as both policies evolved to meet the needs of the poor and appease the general public. Poverty had an extensive presence throughout the young nation, especially within cities with limited employment for the unskilled laborer. The onset of the Industrial Revolution in Europe in the late-1780s and 1790s led to the rise of a capitalist market, which widened the economic divide between the social classes and hardened the hearts of the wealthy toward the working poor. The upper classes felt threatened by their social inferiors, who began to possess more independence from their one-time overlords. The symbiotic relationship between lords and tenants became all but obsolete, and the wealthy felt less compelled to support the working class whom they saw as now emancipated and capable of making their own way. Many among the wealthy thought that assisting the poor only contributed to their moral delinquency and eradicated

¹ Billy G. Smith, "Poverty and Economic Marginality in Eighteenth Century America," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 132, no. 1 (March, 1998), 113.

all sense of proper work ethic.² The full effects of the Industrial Revolution did not arrive in the United States for several more decades. When it did, America's economic growth in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries created a philosophical shift away from the egalitarian concepts outlined within the Constitution of the United States. Formalized legislation concerning the poor lagged behind its European counterparts by as long as a quarter century as a consequence. It was only natural that Americans should look abroad for effective models of poor relief, where many of those governments had already successfully confronted issues of poverty.

Historians of social welfare generally concede that the Statutes of Labourers of 1349-1350 mark the beginning of what later would become known as the English Poor Law. The government created these statutes as a direct response to the devastating effects of the Bubonic Plague. Between the years 1348 and 1349, nearly an entire third of England's population died from the Plague, leaving the country in a severe economic crisis. With fewer laborers available to fill the extensive vacancies within the skilled and unskilled trades, the workforce was in the prime position of being able to negotiate with potential employers for higher wages. The working poor were able to remove themselves from their former dependence under a lord and perhaps one day be rewarded with upward social mobility.³ Not only did the working poor demand higher wages within skilled and unskilled trades, but also stressed the need for higher wages in the agricultural sectors of the workforce and for reasonable prices for necessities, such as food and shelter. The shift from feudalism to capitalism, where lords no longer controlled production, also

² Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 25.

³ William P. Quigley, "Five Hundred Years of English Poor Laws, 1349-1834: Regulating the Working and Nonworking Poor," *Akron Law Review* 30, no. 1 (Fall, 1996), 83.

resulted in shifting social attitudes toward the poor. Clearly defined in the 1349 Statute of Labourers was the fear that “the rise of this class of free labourers presented for the first time its modern shape the problem of the pauper—the man who cannot or will not maintain himself by his work.”⁴ The nonworking poor, unless disabled or over the age of 60, were required to work on their own accord, and if they refused or took to begging in the streets, they would be forced to work involuntarily. The statute regulated the working poor by making work compulsory, imprisoning anyone who left their job prior to the end of their contract, and strictly controlled wages.⁵

The social categories of “worthy” or “unworthy poor” did not come into widespread use until the seventeenth century, congruent with the emergence of laws concerning the distribution of relief. While the English Poor Law of 1597, amended in 1601, was not the first act of legislation created in England and Wales for the provision of furnishing relief to the poor, it was the first act at the national level to stipulate that publicly financed relief was mandatory, and was the catalyst for all subsequent legislative reforms.⁶ It brought attention to the importance of place, both where an individual resided (law of settlement) and where administration of relief should occur. As a result, the government established two different institutional systems of indoor relief in the early- to mid-seventeenth century. Indoor relief refers to an individual receiving aid while living in an institutional facility such as a workhouse or a poorhouse. Its counterpart—outdoor relief—refers to the distribution of assistance by overseers of the poor or township trustees, whereby the recipient maintains residence in their own home,

⁴ Ibid., 84.

⁵ Ibid., 85.

⁶ Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 9.

or lives with family, friends, or neighbors.⁷ The rise of the workhouse, “a device for harnessing idle labour and reforming character,”⁸ was most prominent in urban centers, where there was greater financial support for the construction of these facilities, and more use for menial labor, such as breaking rocks and crushing bones to pave roadways, which had more practical applications in the city than in agricultural settings. The poorhouse system, along with a greater advocacy for outdoor relief, was the preferred system in rural communities. The poorhouse as it was used in England and Wales was reserved for the poor who were genuinely unable to work, such as the elderly and the disabled, whereas the able-bodied poor continued living on the scheme of outdoor relief, where they could be “farmed out” to work to cultivate the fields. The 1601 law was also responsible for solidifying the idea that parishes should not distribute relief freely, but that an individual must work in order to receive assistance. By making work mandatory for all welfare recipients regardless of age, gender, or ability, the parishes hoped to deter the lazy and idle citizens of the working poor from seeking aid from the government. In theory, this would reduce the total amount of money spent on the poor throughout the year.⁹

Outdoor relief was the preferred system of assistance in England by the mid-eighteenth century in urban centers as well as rural communities. It was cheaper for parishes to administer this mode of assistance than to operate a workhouse, though the workhouse continued to be a vital tool in maintaining social control over the poor even in

⁷ David Wagner, *The Poorhouse: America's Forgotten Institution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 7-8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹ Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 11; Michael E. Rose, *The English Poor Law, 1780-1930* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), 17.

a largely outdoor system. The Gilbert's Act of 1723 gave parishes the right to refuse relief to any able-bodied poor who refused to labor on public works projects. This act also gave local governments the power to send the working poor to the nearest workhouse, where they would be forced to work to earn their room and board. The horror stories surrounding the workhouse were enough of a threat to most that made localized outdoor relief so successful.¹⁰

Localization of outdoor relief did have a downside when it came to determining eligibility for assistance, and led to great debates over an individual's legal place of residence. No single parish wanted to pay relief to more paupers than was required of them. The fewer poor families or single persons that the parish was legally responsible for, the lower poor rate the parish officials would have to charge its citizens. The poor rate was a separate tax generated on the amount of real property that an individual owned. Parish officials took possession of most, if not all, of the person's real and/or personal property to augment their care beyond of the poor rates. Parliament ratified the Act of Settlement in 1662 to define a person's proper place of residency, so that the parishes would spend less time and taxpayer money arguing over which local government would take the burden of providing aid to a certain person or family.¹¹ The number of days, months, or years an individual had to reside in a certain parish before gaining legal settlement changed several times, largely dependent on social and economic environments. Under the 1662 act, a person retained their former place of residence until forty days had passed since moving into their new home, or if they resided on a piece of

¹⁰ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 24-25; Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 35.

¹¹ Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 10.

property worth less than £10 in a single year. A woman's legal place of settlement was dependent on that of her husband, and a child's on that of their father.¹²

Overseers of the poor were to remove all persons receiving public assistance to their place of settlement. The law went so far as to include the removal of all persons likely to become county charges, meaning any individual or family living at or below the poverty line who did not possess legal residence in that parish, to reduce the number of poor within the parish. Local officials had the right to remove these people even if they did not seek aid, simply because their low economic status posed a potential threat to the financial stability of the government. It was not until parliament passed an act in 1795, over 130 years later, that it became unlawful for overseers to remove an individual or family until they had actually petitioned for relief. Additionally, this law stipulated that if an individual were too sick or otherwise infirm to move without risking their life, overseers could not remove them to their legal place of settlement until they were well enough to make the journey. The parish of legal settlement was required to reimburse the parish providing care to the individual during their time of illness.¹³ By the end of the eighteenth century, England began to strengthen its regulatory practices over relief administrators as well as over the poor. In earlier years, parish officials appointed overseers of the poor. They would conduct their selected duties alongside their regular means of employment, without gaining anything in return for the time and money they put into caring for the poor. This led to a system of lackadaisical enforcement of the poor law. Many magistrates, such as Patrick Colquhoun, advocated for a greater centralization of poor relief administration, where paid assistants of the overseers with no ties to the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Rose, *The English Poor Law*, 19.

parish under their supervision would be better able to determine the worthiness of the poor, and make clearer distinctions between a person living in indigence, and a person living in poverty.¹⁴

Understanding the differences between poverty and indigence were integral, according to Colquhoun, in maintaining proper social order, which in turn benefited the advancement of civilization. In his 1806 publication, *A Treatise on Indigence*, Colquhoun provided the following definitions which reformers adopted for the creation of future legislation in England and the United States: “*Poverty* is that state and condition in society where the individual has no surplus labour in store, and consequently, no property but what is derived from the constant exercise of industry in the various occupations of life;” indigence “is that condition in society which implies *want, misery, and distress*. It is the state of any one who is destitute of the means of subsistence, and is unable to labour to procure it to the extent nature requires.”¹⁵ In other words, an individual who was able to and did work but had little or no prospect to earn extra income to provide anything but the basest necessities was simply poor; an individual who was unable to work as a consequence of mental and/or physical handicaps and therefore had no source of income was indigent. Both the indigent and the poor were valued components of the social order, but only those who lived in poverty possessed the faculty to move the nation toward a more sophisticated model of civilization, when “the advancement of the individual man has reached a limit forbidding the hope of further progress.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., 46.

¹⁵ P. Colquhoun, *A Treatise on Indigence* (London: J. Hatchard, 1806), 7-8.

¹⁶ Isaac Taylor, *Ultimate Civilization and Other Essays* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1860), 1.

Colquhoun outlined four conditions of ability to which a person could belong. The first two, the “utter inability” and “inadequate ability” to provide material goods or otherwise survive without assistance from others made an individual indigent. The third, a person with “adequate ability” lived in poverty, but retained an otherwise respectable existence. The fourth and final condition, where an individual possessed “extra ability,” a state that Colquhoun considered the standard circumstance among humanity, was the most laudable and was the “source of wealth.” Those with extra ability were not necessarily the wealthiest of society, but were responsible for innovations and refinement of culture through their surplus ability, and it was those living in poverty that provided the manpower needed to move the engine of progress forward.¹⁷ Without poverty, there would be no incentive to work; without a sufficient labor force, there would be no source of material or financial gain; without prosperity, there could be no social refinement or innovation; and without improvement, civilization would become stagnant and cease to evolve.

Britain’s thirteen American colonies, stretching along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean from New Hampshire in the north to Georgia in the south, developed for many reasons. Many British expatriates came to escape religious persecution, while others immigrated to benefit from the growing economic advantages of transatlantic mercantilism and the exploitation of North America’s abundant natural resources. Some arrived with the prospect of obtaining large tracts of land to make a better living for themselves than they had abroad. The British government distributed most of the land in the American colonies through “headrights” to accelerate the population growth of

¹⁷ Colquhoun, *A Treatise on Indigence*, 8.

colonial settlements. These land grants, typically averaging between 50 and 100 acres per person, were given to nearly every male immigrant, as long as they paid their own expenses to get to the New World.¹⁸ Others, such as the severely impoverished, the orphaned, and the criminals that placed a burden on the Crown's treasury, were transferred to the British Colonies as indentured servants to alleviate the cost of their maintenance and as an alternative to the exceedingly overcrowded workhouses and prisons. An individual could sign a contract of indenture at their own discretion, though more often than not, particularly in the cases of those charged with criminal activity, removal to the colonies as an indentured servant was involuntary.¹⁹ Orphaned children (historically those without a father, even if the mother survived) or the children of impoverished parents were often sent to the colonies as apprentices. While the colonies were accountable to the Crown as vital economic assets, they existed more as an extension of the British government when it came to legal matters and administration. Not only did the laws that allowed transportation of paupers to the colonies remove these individuals from the custody of the workhouse superintendents and overseers of the poor, alleviating the strain of inadequate funding through the poor rates, but also served to eradicate Britain's financial obligation toward these parish charges entirely.

The only reference within the English poor law concerning the British colonies is the statutes that allowed for the removal of paupers and criminals to the colonies as

¹⁸ John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 222; Richard Middleton, *Colonial America: A History, 1585-1776* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 60.

¹⁹ Colquhoun, *A Treatise on Indigence*, 108, n. 210.

indentured servants. Once indentured,²⁰ the guardian or master was responsible for providing the proper care and necessities, including the cost of their conveyance. The masters received an additional fifty acres of land for each dependent, making this type of arrangement beneficial to all. The indentured were guaranteed transport and employment, while the masters were guaranteed additional land rights.²¹ Upon arrival to the colonies, indentured servants were only entitled to room and board, and anything beyond that was at the discretion of their master.²² The result of the statutes on transport was that once an individual's time of indenture terminated, typically ranging anywhere between seven to fourteen years, often they were nearly as destitute as before their conveyance to the New World, despite rights to "freedom dues." Indentured male servants received a single complete set of clothing from stockings to overcoat, an average of fifty acres of land, a small collection of tools, and grain at the end of their contract.²³ They did not earn wages while indentured, nor did they have many personal possessions prior to their journey across the ocean. Freedom dues helped to compensate for this, but without money in hand or other commodities to sell to pay the surveyors or to purchase the proper farm equipment to cultivate their land, the formerly indentured were stranded in unfamiliar territory with few options to support themselves or their families.

Many continued to live as general laborers, utilizing the skills they brought with them from abroad. Some worked as tenant farmers or remained employed as domestic servants until the time that they could provide the land surveyors their dues and become

²⁰ Unless otherwise specified, this term is used to identify the poor who were indentured as an alternative to indoor or outdoor relief, not other classes of self-indentured servants such as artisans who sought to immigrate to the American colonies but lacked the means.

²¹ Middleton, *Colonial America*, 69.

²² Quigley, "Five Hundred Years," 85.

²³ Middleton, *Colonial America*, 112.

freeholders in their own right. The nature of the colonial economic system, predicated on maximum export, meant that unskilled labor was in great demand and wages high, so most indentured servants acquired their land within a few years.²⁴ Nonetheless, poverty continued to plague nearly a quarter of the population, primarily in the cities, where transients and non-agricultural laborers gathered in search of work. Poverty in the American colonies resulted, in part, from the use of a free market system, where the supply and demand of exported goods was in constant fluctuation. In addition, the high taxes on imported and exported goods, and quitrent on headrights that the British government imposed on its colonies further aggravated the economic divide between wealthy landowners and everyone else. Many employers continued to pay their workers in kind or in back wages at the end of their term, whether a month or several years. This unstable system, in addition to an increase in population of non-indentured English citizens reliant on steady economic exchange to maintain their existence, meant that many individuals and families subsisted at or below the line of poverty.²⁵

To combat the growing number of working poor, the colonists utilized many of the principles of poor relief established in England to regulate the movement of, and the means and amount of support given to, the poor. Most counties, cities, and rural communities had little to no contact with the colonial capital, let alone England, even though they remained subjects of the Crown. Many of these communities developed a system of local government that was a mixture of “the Bible, common law, and individual whim”²⁶ to maintain and safeguard their social ideals from external influences,

²⁴ Ibid., 112.

²⁵ Smith, “Poverty and Economic Marginality,” 116.

²⁶ Middleton, *Colonial America*, 96.

such as the increased number of vagrants, men who were strangers and who posed a potential threat to local customs. Most towns held annual elections for offices such as land surveyors, tax assessors, law enforcers, and overseers or guardians of the poor, to ensure that. Like the English system, a man's eligibility to hold office was highly dependent upon property ownership, length of residency, and social standing. The colonists, particularly those in the New England settlements, closely followed the statutes of the English Poor Law to stave off economic deterioration caused by the high taxes and monopolistic nature of the types of goods they were allowed to produce to send abroad to England. They made minor alterations according to what was the best for the preservation of their town. The statute most heavily relied on throughout the colonies for regulating poor relief was the law of settlement, especially within rural communities.

By the 1730s, the colonial economy took a drastic downturn, in part because of the turmoil caused by the several European powers that fought for exclusive control of the American continent, and thereby for the control of its abundant natural resources. The American colonies never fully recovered. The large death toll of able-bodied, working-class men resulted in a sizeable population of widows and orphaned children without a means of support. As a result, many communities created public and private almshouses to assist the destitute, as well as workhouses to counteract the growth of unemployed laborers.²⁷ The English Poor Law and its approach toward social institutions remained in use long after the American colonies gained their independence.

Independence brought the end of indentured servitude, only to replace it with a system of

²⁷ Smith, "Poverty and Economic Marginality," 89.

free labor that threatened the status quo of the paternalistic society.²⁸ Poverty was a common, natural state, but a state that needed to be strictly monitored and controlled as the United States began its expansion westward.

The young nation had a handful of large cities, but primarily consisted of numerous small farming communities loosely scattered throughout the country. America adopted a system of highly localized poor relief that would last well into the twentieth century in most states. Prior to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the United States declared all the lands north of the Ohio River, south of the Great Lakes, and east of the Mississippi River reserved for Native Americans. Congress prohibited [Euro-Americans?] from settling within the Northwest Territory until an official survey of all the land was made and territorial claims negotiated with the Native Americans.²⁹ The Ordinance of 1787 was a tool for the American government to maintain control and order in the wilderness of the Northwest Territory. The governor appointed to oversee this frontier, with the assistance of three judges, “were to adopt and publish in the district such laws, criminal and civil, of the original states as were necessary and suited to the territory;”³⁰ this included legislation regulating the poor. Many of the settlers to the Northwest Territory came in an attempt to begin a new life, to remove themselves from the impoverishment they faced and the harsh scrutiny of their peers. “The ideal of the West was its emphasis upon the worth and possibilities of the common man, its belief in the right of every man to rise to the full measure of his own nature, under conditions of

²⁸ Ibid., 108.

²⁹ Aileen E. Kennedy, *The Ohio Poor Law and Its Administration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), 6.

³⁰ Ibid., 7.

social mobility.”³¹ When pioneers settled Marietta, Ohio in 1788, this town became the first Euro-American settlement within the Northwest Territory, and blazed the trail for future communities. Even though these settlers arrived with the notion of making their own way, they could not escape entirely the burgeoning economic structure of the original states in the union. By 1790, despite the few isolated settlements within the vast wilderness, Governor Arthur St. Clair enacted the first legislation within the Northwest Territory that required the appointment of an overseer of the poor.³²

Early settlers found an abundance of land ripe for the taking, but a lack of material possessions or the ability to take large farming implements into the Ohio wilderness created difficulties for many settlers to rise above a hand-to-mouth existence. The 1790 act reveals that poverty continued to be a problem in the frontier as much as it had been within the rest of the Union. Governor St. Clair overextended his duties in creating this act, as the Ordinance of 1787 only gave him the power to adapt and alter the preexisting laws outlined in the Articles of Confederation as necessary to the unique circumstances of the Northwest Territory, not to create new legislation. The 1790 act was not far removed from pre-existing legislation requiring overseers of the poor and other managerial officials, but the main difference was its extreme localization beyond the level of the township. Earlier New England legislation required township officials to report directly to the county. The 1790 act removed this requirement, acknowledging that the settlements within the Northwest Territory were widely scattered and

³¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *Rise of the New West, 1819-1829* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1906), 68-69.

³² Kennedy, *The Ohio Poor Law*, 216; Northwest Territory, *Laws Passed in the Territory of the United States North-west of the River Ohio, from the Commencement of the Government to the 31st of December, 1791*, (Philadelphia: Francis Childs and John Swaine, 1792), 47.

demographically diverse that it was impractical to install a more centralized government to regulate the population. These small, close-knit communities were often formed from a small handful of families from the same region with the same religious background. The kinship ties and shared experiences produced highly independent and individualistic social attitudes that “preferred to limit the power of the larger administrative group, and entrust more and more to the local unit.”³³ This also resulted in a paternalistic approach to the protection of the poor living within the Northwest Territory, where poor relief was a matter of public responsibility rather than private charity.

Five years later in 1795, the Northwest Territory adopted “A Law for the Relief of the Poor,”³⁴ inaugurating a system of social welfare that would act as the foundation for such legislation when Ohio earned its statehood in 1803. Taken from legislation created in Pennsylvania, the 1795 law further outlined the duties of overseers of the poor in supporting those individuals and families in need of relief. Tax assessors established a poor rate of two cents on the dollar for the total value of real and personal property. From these funds, the overseers of the poor were instructed by justices of the peace to distribute necessary relief according to need. Overseers provided the able-bodied poor who were “proper objects of relief” with contracts with persons who were willing to provide them with board and lodging, as well as a means of employment.³⁵ Justices of the peace held public auctions to guarantee that the poor, the able-bodies as well as those unable to work due to age, infirmity, or disability, received relief that was appropriate to

³³ Robert E. Chaddock, *Ohio before 1850: A Study of the Early Influence of Pennsylvania and Southern Populations in Ohio* (New York: Columbia University, 1908), 77.

³⁴ Northwest Territory, *Laws of the Territory of the United States North-west of the Ohio*, (Cincinnati: W. Maxwell, 1796), 127

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

their needs. The lowest bidders, persons who were willing to take the poor into their homes for a minimal cost, were compensated through the poor rates, but if they failed to fully provide for the poor or mistreated them, overseers of the poor could refuse to pay up to half of the entitled bonds.³⁶

The law of settlement played as significant a role in the Northwest Territory as it did in the preceding decades of poor relief legislation in the American colonies and in England. The frontier, with limited tracts of cleared land that was suitable only for small farms consisting of a few acres, existed by the meanest subsistence. There were few opportunities for commercial enterprise outside of the Ohio River port cities such as Marietta and Cincinnati. The majority of inhabitants living in the Northwest Territory survived by individual and community efforts to conquer the wilderness and carefully regulate its resources.³⁷ The hand-to-mouth existence left little enough funding for communities to assist their own poor, let alone to care for wanderers who had contributed nothing to its survival. All persons were required to hold a certificate that verified their place of legal settlement in the event that they required aid from the township. To gain settlement within the Northwest Territory, a man had to maintain residency within one township for an entire year, where they paid \$25 or more per year for rent, or held a public office. A woman's place of settlement was the same as her husband's, but in the event of his death, depending on local statutes, she could claim residency in the place she lived prior to her marriage. Children claimed their father's residency, even if the mother was still alive after the father's death.³⁸

³⁶ Kennedy, *The Ohio Poor Law*, 19.

³⁷ Chaddock, *Ohio before 1850*, 47.

³⁸ Kennedy, *The Ohio Poor Law*, 16.

When a stranger arrived to a community with the notion to settle permanently there, they had to provide some means of security to the township, usually in the way of money or by showing that they had property of some value that could serve as a substitute for cash to support them if they became indigent prior to gaining residency. The security, in addition to certificates of legal settlement, made it possible for people to have greater freedom to settle in a place of their choice, and protected the poorer townships of the Northwest Territory from the financial burden of caring for outsiders who became indigent. Township officials developed a formalized system of “warning out” newcomers that they built into the settlement laws, evidence of the severe anxiety the population had over the threat poverty posed to the social order. Townships saw exclusion of strangers as a natural right in their self-preservation. If a stranger failed to produce security, they had three months to remove themselves elsewhere. If they remained in the township after they were warned out, the community had no legal obligation to support them if they became indigent.³⁹

When Ohio gained its statehood in 1803, the system of local government shifted away from townships to the county. This created a more centralized government that supervised township trustees along a singular method of administration while it maintained the rights of the smaller organizational units to protect its citizens from the “aristocratic tendencies” of the previous era.⁴⁰ Early Ohioans strongly believed that the new state continued to provide boundless opportunities for all inhabitants regardless of the social and economic class they held in the older states. In Ohio, all citizens had to work together for the greater good of all and to slowly chip away at the wilderness. The

³⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁰ Chaddock, *Ohio before 1850*, 77.

elite had far less influence, especially in the interior of the state away from the Ohio River and Lake Erie, where a “naturally developed manhood suffrage” meant that all men had some skill or wisdom to contribute to the strength and unity of his community.⁴¹ Many of the Ohio poor laws remained heavily steeped in the standards outlined in the English poor laws well into the 1930s, particularly in relationship to laws of settlement, familial responsibility (whether parent to child, or child to parent), local administration of poor relief, and local taxation on real property to support the poor fund.

The preservation of the family unit, especially during times of their financial difficulty, was imperative to the perpetuation of a society founded on the ideas of sobriety, morality, and personal industry. Many transportation arteries, such as river systems, canals, and public highways, were expanded soon after Ohio joined the Union, not only to facilitate movement of people between the states, but also to improve the exchange of goods from and to Ohio communities. This invariably heightened the influence of commercialism within the state as access to luxury goods increased drastically. Ohio struggled to maintain its community-oriented identity, predominantly based on strong Protestant work ethics and the family unit as an essential model of social regulation, as the prospect of refined living dangled within reach. The act of 1805, created “for the relief of the poor,” reveals much about the transition away from the communal, familial order of society toward a pattern of individual pursuits. American culture believed poverty led to the degradation of family life, a condition that had severe religious and social consequences. The 1805 act did not hold the family responsible in the care of their destitute kin, as in previous decades under the Northwest Territory laws,

⁴¹ Ibid., 68.

but shifted the responsibility almost entirely to the local government.⁴² This may have been acknowledgment that often the relatives of the poor were as equally impoverished and therefore unable to provide necessary assistance, but it can also be viewed in the light of a passionate effort to maintain a strong community support system.

The state upheld the opinion that parents had a social obligation to protect, maintain, and educate their children until they reached the legal age of emancipation. Ohio set this age at twenty-one years, although a female could earn her emancipation at the age of eighteen by marriage. Until that time, a father had “no more right to allow his children to become public charges,” than to deny his children the necessary care and amenities that would prepare them for a life as upright citizens of the United States of America.⁴³ Society held mothers less responsible over the economic status of their children, as it was the father’s duty as the breadwinner to ensure that the family did not fall into poverty. Overseers of the poor preferred to distribute outdoor relief to destitute families as a single unit rather than remove the children and place them in apprenticeships or under guardianship of a wealthier community member. This was especially true in the case of a widowed mother and her orphaned children, although in some cases the overseers thought that the best alternative was to divide the family in the children’s best interest, such as when the family consistently petitioned for partial or temporary relief month after month. Partial relief was dependent upon the amount of relief given to an individual or family, supplementary to inadequate resources, while temporary was dependent upon the length of time that relief was provided.⁴⁴ In a society

⁴² Kennedy, *The Ohio Poor Law*, 23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

that was increasingly anxious over the influence of commercialism on the morality of the public, separating children from their parents was not a light matter. On the one hand, the family unit was the fundamental component of a healthy society; removing children would lead to a breakdown of that society. On the other hand, leaving children in a dysfunctional home would make them ill prepared for adulthood, and could also lead to the collapse of the social order. The concept of family as a micro-hierarchy, and how local officials interpreted this model played a significant role in why social reform movements usually implemented a greater community-oriented infrastructure in rural Ohio than the rehabilitation of a single individual.

The prevailing notion that poverty was the will of God, a direct carry-over from many of the early-Protestant, Calvinistic religious sects brought to America from the Old World, put the blame of destitution almost entirely on the shoulders of the poor; this opinion lasted well into the early-twentieth century. Many Americans acknowledged that under certain circumstances, such as brief stints of unemployment, the poor were not fully culpable for their plight, but this did not remove them from the supposed moral delinquency that led to their idle status in the first place.⁴⁵ In a country as overflowing with opportunity and resources as the United States, where hard work, self-discipline, and righteous living, were the foundations of society, poverty's persistent presence only strengthened the conviction that pauperism was some form of divine justice resulting from an individual's faulty character. Because many religious leaders and reformers saw the poor (who were the majority within the rural frontier) to be as much a part of society as merchants, doctors, and lawyers, it was the responsibility of the community to oversee

⁴⁵ Matthew A. Crenson, *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 31.

their welfare, since they had as much a right to exist as their wealthier neighbors.⁴⁶

Without the poor, the social order would turn into chaos.

The rapid growth of urban centers in Ohio during the second decade of its statehood only increased the population's anxiety over the shift toward a more materialistic society. The shift away from earlier religious ideologies of compassion and using excess wealth for the greater good of humanity toward a more scientific approach that excess wealth was the natural result of social evolution further complicated matters of poor relief. Following the War of 1812, the United States fell into one of its first major economic crises. The Panic of 1819, a depression that spanned from 1816 to 1819 throughout most of the country caused by the inability of state banks to "redeem notes in specie," forced citizens of the United States to reconsider its views on poverty. Prior to the Panic of 1819, "the prevailing conviction was that people who failed to be self-supporting in a country as bountiful as America must carry some fault within themselves."⁴⁷ But even the wealthiest—manufacturers who had placed high investments in the banks—felt the impact of the collapsed economy, and could not blame idleness entirely on the moral delinquency of those without work.⁴⁸

In addition, the movement toward industrialization in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century created a period of much uncertainty as for the first time Americans began en masse to move away from their self-sustaining agricultural roots and entered into a realm of dependency upon a system that placed an arbitrary value on their individual worth within the greater society. With industrialization came the innovative

⁴⁶ Kennedy, *The Ohio Poor Law*, 11. See also Brundage, *The English Poor Laws*, 68 for the historical role of the poor within European society.

⁴⁷ Crenson, *Building the Invisible Orphanage*, 45.

⁴⁸ Chaddock, *Ohio before 1850*, 73-74; Crenson, *Building the Invisible Orphanage*, 37.

advances in production technology and the introduction of wage labor, a revolutionary concept within a society structured on a barter system, providing labor or goods in exchange for the like. Industrialization not only transformed the economic system within the United States, but it also significantly influenced the social and philosophical mindset of the entire American culture, rural alongside urban.

Chapter Two: Rise of the Institution

Agricultural communities have rarely been among the wealthiest of society, and yet the assumption that poverty is less prevalent there than in urban centers, or does not exist at all, continues into the present day. This assumption likely stems from the fact rural regions tend to have a more even distribution of wealth among all citizens than in metropolitan areas, where there is more diversity in occupations, and consequently results in a greater economic hierarchy among social classes. The egalitarian nature of agricultural societies deemphasizes the manifestation of poverty within these communities by creating less of an economic margin between the wealthiest and poorest citizens. Historically, rural communities across the United States have taken a more hands-on approach to social welfare programs than cities, more along the lines of catering to the needs of the individual rather than attempting to control the masses. Less distinction among economic status leads to a greater appreciation of the individual's value to society. It also heightens the awareness among all social strata of the community of the stark reality that poverty is a real, potential threat to everyone. All it takes is an overabundance of goods or a drought affects the entire local economy, not just the farmers. Rural populations interpreted the poor law so that it best suited their community. What worked in one county would not necessary work in the adjacent county. The extreme localization of poor relief in rural Ohio attests to the concerns of self and community preservation, not only during times of great economic depressions, but also during times of industrialization and urban expansion that were seen as a menace to society's core values.

Knox County is a predominantly rural area located in central Ohio. Scholars estimate that farming has been the leading industry in Knox County for approximately 3,000 years, when the Adena culture introduced farming to the region in ca. 1,000 B.C. Created from Fairfield County on March 1, 1808, Knox County was appropriately named for General Henry Knox of Revolutionary War fame, who later became the first Secretary of War under President George Washington. The federal government had designated much of central Ohio as part of the United States Military Lands, acreages of property specifically reserved for veterans of the Continental Army as compensation for their service and patriotism. Funds in the federal treasury proved to be inadequate to provide the promised pensions to all Revolutionary War soldiers, which left federally owned lands as the only other alternative to cash money payment. Land suited many soldiers better than or as well as currency, as many were poor farmers unable to afford the same amount of land prior to the war.

Agriculture was the principle occupation for most early settlers to Ohio outside of major port cities along the Ohio River and Lake Erie. The land, once cleared of its dense woodland, proved to be highly fertile and conducive to the growth of corn, cereal grains, fruit trees, root and vine vegetables, and the rearing of livestock. Despite the prospect of immense agricultural wealth, many families retained a pioneer-style existence for decades. It was difficult to clear large acres of thick woodland and prepare fields for plowing, as well as to transport goods to market and still make a profit. They lived on small, simple subsistence farms more along the lines of a glorified garden, and relied on wild game rather than livestock for most of their meat. It took several years to condition new fields, untouched by concentrated human modification for millennia, to produce a

surplus beyond what was needed for a single family's survival. The threat of attack by animals or American Indians was a stark reality of everyday life, further complicating matters of bringing society out of a state of self-preservation.¹ Additionally, Thomas Jefferson's Embargo Act of 1807, which prohibited the exportation of American goods to foreign ports—specifically Britain and France, who, prior to this ban, relied heavily on American goods to support their troops during the Napoleonic Wars—wreaked havoc on the American economy. The embargo deeply affected Ohio's interior communities as much as the state's port cities. The little that the interior produced for export could not be shipped east to the New England states, south to New Orleans, or north to Canada. It was difficult to transport goods of any sort in a state such as Ohio that relied almost solely on its waterways for travel, as the few inter- and intra-county roads were little more than primitive dirt paths weaving their way in, out, and over slowly decaying tree stumps. This created little incentive for settlers in isolated communities, such as Mount Vernon and Fredericktown, to produce much beyond what was necessary for their own survival, as even transport of goods to locations elsewhere in the state was impractical and unrewarding.²

Without hard currency readily available to many rural communities even after Jefferson lifted the embargo in 1809, many Ohio towns continued living in a subsistence economy, where the production of goods did not exceed the needs of the community, and were exchanged among citizens by means of barter for comparable goods or services.

Knox County was more easily accessible to settlers than many other communities within

¹ N. N. Hill, Jr., *History of Knox County, Ohio: Its Past and Present* (Mount Vernon, OH: A. A. Graham & Co, 1881), 152.

² Lorle Porter, *Politics & Peril: Mount Vernon, Ohio in the Nineteenth Century* (Zanesville, OH: New Concord Press, 2005), 19-20.

the Ohio frontier were, and yet it did not rise above subsistence level until the mid-1820s when the population increased (from 8,362 in 1820 to 17,085 by 1830) and became more diverse in its economic pursuits. The Kokosing River (known as Owl Creek to the American Indians) serves as a primary tributary, along with the Mohican River, to the Walhonding River. The Walhonding in turn converges with the Tuscarawas River to form the Muskingum and terminates at Marietta, where it joins the Ohio River. The Kokosing River is not accessible by the large riverine boats and barges that travel the larger tributaries of the Ohio, but shallow draft vessels such as canoes and flat-bottom watercraft allowed many of the earliest settlers (fur trappers, surveyors, land speculators) to arrive at Knox County with more supplies than they would have been able to carry with them over land. In Knox County, roads were practically nonexistent, and the few that did exist were little more than muddy trails winding through the thick foliage, many barely wide enough for the passage of a single cart. Without legal tender, roads remained unimproved. Without roads, fewer settlers ventured into the heart of Ohio, and with fewer settlers to clear the land for larger agricultural production, most communities maintained a hand-to-mouth existence.³

While Knox County's population increased, it was unable to rise above a subsistence economy, as many of the newcomers were themselves poor farmers looking for cheap land, with little or no monetary wealth to contribute to the rapidly growing Ohio interior. Knox County alone saw a growth in population from 2,149 in 1810 to 8,326 in 1820, an increase of 287.4%—nearly twice the growth seen throughout the entire state—due in large part because of the War of 1812. The soldiers had enlarged

³ Ibid., 16.

many of the main roads through Knox County as they made their way north to facilitate the transport of troops and equipment to the battlefields. This was the first introduction many soldiers had to the Ohio interior, and after the war, a large number of these men chose to return to the lush forests and fertile fields of central Ohio. The widened roads made it possible to transport more goods to market, but with the financial difficulties throughout the United States that resulted from the Panic of 1819, very little real money was available to the inhabitants living in the still comparatively remote settlements of Knox County. “The productions of the country were almost valueless in exchange for money” to purchase goods in the larger towns further south, “and it was with difficulty that they could be bartered for goods at the stores.”⁴ Some of the wealthier merchants of the county had invested in the local Owl Creek Bank, but similar to financial institutions everywhere, issued paper currency in good faith that its patrons had material wealth of equivalent worth. The value of these notes depreciated quickly as the panic spread throughout the country. Farmers were unable to obtain loans, merchants were unable to sell their goods, and the government struggled to support its citizens as the economy collapsed.

There is very little documentation of social welfare practices in Knox County’s early history, although it is apparent that such matters were never far from mind. The very first county election took place on April 4, 1808 with an attendance of one hundred fifty-six voters.⁵ Included on the ballot for local government officials were three positions for overseers of the poor as mandated by Ohio law, bestowed on Moses Craig,

⁴ A. Banning Norton, *A History of Knox County, Ohio, from 1779 to 1862 Inclusive* (Columbus, OH: Richard Nevins, 1862), 232.

⁵ Porter, *Politics & Peril*, 21.

James Walker, and Alexander Walker, who were all among the first settlers of the county and all too familiar with the hardships that corresponded with living in central Ohio.⁶ Taking care of those less fortunate was already set in motion even while the fledgling society had barely organized and gained its own economically stable ground as an individual political entity. It is not surprising that the impoverished received such attention early in Knox County's history, like other rural communities throughout Ohio, considering that the majority of the population constantly sought to remain beyond the reach of poverty's looming shadow. While it was state law that each county have a board of overseers of the poor, the system that Knox County implemented for the distribution of poor relief more closely followed the customs of its predecessors than official state protocol. Pioneers understood the volatility of their unique circumstances, and that their fate was almost wholly dependent on the whims of nature, man, and the good will of God.⁷ "North, west and east of these embryo settlements all was wilderness for many miles."⁸ Frontiersmen faced the challenges that nature presented—harsh winters, wild animals, poor first harvests—stoic fortitude, and were aware that every man, woman, and child had an integral role in conquering the wilderness. The only certainty at the newly opened Ohio frontier was family, friends, and neighbors. Having a strong united population was of utmost importance to the survival of the community. A home was more than a place to shelter a single family, but also served as shelter "for every stranger who passed that way, 'without money and without price.'"⁹ This attitude of neighborly

⁶ Norton, *A History of Knox County*, 39.

⁷ Richard Middleton, *Colonial America: A History, 1585-1776* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 96.

⁸ Norton, *A History of Knox County*, 13.

⁹ Hill, *History of Knox County*, 209.

compassion carried over into Knox County's use of poor relief, on and off the official record, despite the fact that the Ohio Poor Act of 1805 shifted responsibility to local government.¹⁰ The county's citizens acknowledged the necessity of overseers of the poor, but continued to impart relief according to community and individual sentiment and tradition.

Local government created a formally sanctioned means of caring for the less fortunate of society soon after the State of Ohio officially incorporated Knox County as an independent administrative district. State legislative acts clearly described the process by which individuals were to petition for relief, to what extent such aid would be furnished, and through whom the allotted assistance would be distributed. Under state legislation, each county was responsible for appointing three individuals, commonly named "Overseers of the Poor," to manage the care of the impoverished within the county. While the duties of these overseers varied from one county to the next—and one township to the next—their responsibilities were more or less the same: to provide complete or partial assistance to those who petitioned for relief, and who the county commissioners deemed worthy in their need. The commissioners often charged the overseers with the additional task of actively seeking out those individuals and families that did not make petition for aid, but that were clearly in need of additional support, or who were likely candidates to become county charges. This included individuals with physical disabilities or severe injuries that prohibited them from gaining employment, the elderly who were without children and were no longer able to work due to the infirmities of old age, widows and their orphaned children, and outsiders who were unable to

¹⁰ Aileen E. Kennedy, *The Ohio Poor Law and Its Administration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), 23.

provide proper security. Because of the sparsely populated nature of many early Ohio counties, overseers of the poor often delegated this task to township trustees, who acted as representatives for the rural poor, and who in turn relied on the citizens to report those living in poverty. Although citizen involvement in reporting a “complaint” about likely county charges as part of their civil duty did not become part of the Ohio poor law until 1865, it was common practice from the very beginning, and an integral part of the preservation of a community’s moral integrity.¹¹ Knox County followed these regulations for the most part, although county officials made many exceptions, especially when living relatives were present. Many living in poverty, or who possessed a mental or physical handicap, likely went unrecorded because of family or friends sheltering them without asking the county for assistance in their support.

The Euro-American settlers of Knox County primarily came from Pennsylvania, Virginia, New Jersey, Maryland, and the New England region. Although the Kokosing River provided relatively easy passage to Knox County for the earliest “first white settlers,” the majority came overland through the Allegheny Mountains. Most were poor farmers or unskilled laborers who “sought to better their condition by making permanent homes in the wilderness west of the Ohio river.”¹² Many of these individuals and families were veterans of the Continental Army who had actively served in the Revolutionary War and took up residence on United States Military Lands, but many others came to escape the harshness of the rapidly industrializing Atlantic seaboard and the economic divide among social classes caused by the trend toward urbanization. In the heart of Ohio, most everybody that remained after the first few years were among

¹¹ Ibid., 86.

¹² Hill, *History of Knox County*, 208.

their social, economic, and ethnic equals. By 1830, Knox County's population had increased by 105.2%, whereas population grown throughout the entire state of Ohio only increased by 61.3%. The unequal distribution of wealth became more apparent as more manufactories rose along the Kokosing River, primarily near Mount Vernon. The Mt. Vernon Iron Works, founded in 1833, was the oldest and most successful of the small industrial plants, and catered to the predominant agricultural community by casting ploughs, troughs, kettles, grinders, and other farming equipment. Knox County farmers no longer had to travel to Zanesville to purchase well-manufactured tools.¹³ Companies like the Mt. Vernon Iron Works invited many non-agricultural residents to Knox County, which contributed to the population boom in the early half of the nineteenth century. However, this also shifted the relationships within communities from close kith and kin to include people with little or no affiliation with the founding families beyond common heritage, and led to a reconfiguration of community identity.

Knox County citizens were predominantly of Irish, Scotch-Irish, German, and English descent, and Protestant. Catholics (mostly Roman Catholic with Irish roots) formed a tiny fraction of the county's population, and had minimal impact in the overall social attitude toward county poor relief.¹⁴ Christianity in Knox County took on several denominational guises. Regardless, the citizens in most communities—even the county seat of Mount Vernon with the most heterogeneous population—paid little heed to fundamental differences in doctrine prior to the 1820s. It was at this time that many groups began to construct permanent houses of worship specific to their religious preference. The number of inhabitants was so small at this time that most religious

¹³ David Neal Keller, *Cooper Industries, 1833-1983* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1983), 2-3.

¹⁴ Hill, *History of Knox County*, 415-416; Porter, *Politics & Peril*, 26.

groups held nonsectarian services where everyone in the community gathered for general worship as one body. The exceptions were the Catholics, as both they and the Protestants could not reconcile the prejudices each group brought with them to the frontier.¹⁵

Catholics were among the first settlers to Knox County, primarily in Mount Vernon and Danville (located in the northeast part of the county), but their population was so small that they contributed little to the overall social organization of the county. The local government was heavily steeped Protestantism, and consequently influenced how local citizens interpreted state legislation, especially acts pertaining to relief of the poor.

Methodists and Presbyterians formed the largest congregations of Knox County, though large concentrations of Baptists and Episcopalians were also present around this time. A sizable Quaker community was concentrated in the northwest corner of the county near Fredericktown, “who by their quiet yet industrious ways have contributed very much to the prosperity and peacefulness of our people.”¹⁶

Religion continued to play vital a role in shaping the social atmosphere of the early-nineteenth century as it had during the colonial period, and was a plush cushion that Americans fell back on when the natural order seemed to fall into disrepair. Despite the religious differences between Protestants and Catholics, all agreed that it was their role as Christians to “relieve the poor, visit the sick and imprisoned, and instruct the ignorant in the ways of the Lord.”¹⁷ Religion helped to bring communities closer together even when their approaches to worship differed, but these differences were essential in creating a more democratic system of local government. The separation of church and

¹⁵ Hill, *History of Knox County*, 405, 415.

¹⁶ Norton, *A History of Knox County*, 15.

¹⁷ Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 155.

state worked well in part because religion had such a strong role in the everyday lives of the people. It functioned along the lines of a civil institution that served to regulate the manners and morals of society, and allowed the legislature to perform more efficiently by lessening the “political strife” caused by competing interpretations of the law.¹⁸ “The church existed to enunciate the moral law, the state to enforce it. Those who deviated from the accepted path could expect to be punished”¹⁹ either by the damnation of their eternal souls or corporal punishment through the legal system. As long as citizens followed the law, the government cared little for how this transpired or why it worked.

Catholics and Protestants took great pains to take care of the needy within their own traditions, fearing that interference by the opposite religious sects would corrupt the souls of those they helped, especially when it came to caring for orphaned children without either parent.²⁰ This rang as true for Knox County as it did in more densely populated parts of the state, but the high concentration of Protestants meant that even formal methods of poor relief distribution tended to be evangelistic in nature rather than charitable, creating a “disciplinary society”²¹ that stressed the regulation of moral behavior and the salvation of souls.²² The emphasis that Protestants placed on the differences between the worthy and the unworthy poor, unlike their Catholic neighbors who were inclined to be more open and liberal with their almsgiving, tended to deter the genuinely needy from seeking aid. A fundamental difference between the Catholic and Protestant approach to poor relief was that the former saw charity as an extension of the

¹⁸ Ibid., 35.

¹⁹ Middleton, *Colonial America*, 87.

²⁰ Matthew A. Crenson, *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 41. For definition of “orphan,” see chapter 1.

²¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 193.

²² Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform*, 77.

church for the good of all mankind, while the latter viewed it as a social obligation that would end in personal salvation and community improvement.²³



Figure 2. Illustration reflecting Protestant ideals of proper work ethic and public charity as a means toward personal salvation. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

Tight-knit rural communities such as those in Knox County faced a philosophical quandary when it came to differentiating between the worthy and unworthy poor. Those who were unable to work because of age, infirmity, or mental illness were worthy of “Christian charity and ordinary human compassion [which] made their care a clear duty,”

²³ Crenson, *Building the Invisible Orphanage*, 32; Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform*, 151.

whereas those who were able to work but did not, “should fend for themselves.”²⁴ While agriculture requires precise knowledge of crops and livestock, even the best farmer could fall on hard times through no fault of his own. His crops failed or his livestock died because of drought or disease, not because he was languid in his vocation. Was he more worthy of assistance than the man who lived in town who lost his job at the gristmill because the demand for flour dropped? The millworker had no more control over his fate than the farmer did, and yet society often looked upon his unemployment as idleness. The reason for his unemployment did not matter as much as his “deviant” jobless state, whereas the farmer—often upheld as a pious, exemplary model of proper work ethic—was someone to pity. The majority Knox County citizens were poor, living on the precipice of impoverishment, and recognized themselves in many of the indigent who sought aid. They did not have much to offer their deprived neighbors, but made an effort to provide them with what little comfort that they could, whether the needy were widows, orphans, farmers, or tradesmen.

A percentage of the property taxes collected from landowners served to finance the public funds necessary to provide care to the indigent population, as part of the community’s civic duty to help those worthy in need. There were no clear guidelines articulating how an overseer should determine who was eligible to receive relief, and more often than not assistance was given to the poor based on an adulteration of the “Bible, common law, and individual whim.”²⁵ An outdoor system, where overseers of the poor distributed relief to the needy like a door-to-door salesman, was often the only

²⁴ Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 18.

²⁵ Middleton, *Colonial America*, 96.



Figure 3. Based on the Biblical parable of the poor widow who offers her last two coins to the poor, and the wealthy donate great sums of money to buy their way into heaven. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

means of assistance available to the rural poor, as most agricultural communities did not have enough capital in the treasury needed to erect a poorhouse. When possible, indigents (those who were unable to work because of mental and/or physical handicaps and therefore had no source of income) were maintained within their own meager homes, or in the homes of family or friends, and were provided with food, clothing, and other material support on a need-by-need basis. The worthy poor (those who were able to and did work but had little or no extra income to provide anything but the basest necessities), received similar treatment. The unworthy poor—able to work but did not—were often imprisoned or otherwise indentured to earn public relief funds. State law prohibited overseers of the poor from distributing cash to the needy, as county auditors could only

authorize receipts for items that were billable.²⁶ This law was congruent with the widespread Protestant conviction that an excess of wealth was inherently evil unless the individual used it to do good. Money was useful to purchase necessary items for the truly needy, but putting money directly into the hands of the poor, many Protestants believed, would only increase the “causes of human suffering” that contributed to the further degradation of society, such as alcoholism, gambling, and other moral vices.²⁷

When a pauper’s need for assistance became a long-term issue (i.e. petitioned for or received relief over several consecutive months), and prior to the establishment of the county poor farm, these individuals were sold at public auction to the lowest bidder. On May 7, 1832, it was

Ordered by the Commissioners that Public Notice be given in a public Newspaper that the said John Haywood will be offered At public sale at the Court House in the Town of M^t Vernon on the first Monday of June next at one oclock P.M. on said day to be Kept for the Term of one year at the Lowest bidder. Ordered by the Commissioners That the said John Haywood be Left in the hands of the Jailer until First Monday of June Next.²⁸

Haywood, “An Idiot or Insane person,” was sold to Smith Headly for \$137.00 for a term of one year. The following year he was sold to Lewis Layman for \$74.00, and in 1834 that price was set at \$97.00 to be paid to Ruben Luce.²⁹ The bidders received monthly compensation that would result in the full amount agreed upon at the time of auction for

²⁶ Kennedy, *The Ohio Poor Law*, 104.

²⁷ For Protestant views on personal wealth see Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform*, 155; on providing monetary relief to the poor, 148.

²⁸ Knox County Commissioners, “Commissioners Journal B, 1831-1832,” Office of the Commissioners, Knox County, Ohio, recorded May 7, 1832, 21-22.

²⁹ Knox County Commissioners, “Commissioners Journal B,” recorded June 5, 1832, 25; recorded June 3, 1833, 48; and recorded June 3, 1834, 80.

taking these indigents into their homes. Those paupers deemed legally insane after close examination—often only by county commissioners with no medical training—who received no bids at public auction were housed within the city or county jail and treated as the basest criminals until a proper guardian was found. Guardians provided their charges with basic human necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter, and assisted the individual in procuring gainful employment if they were of sound enough mind and body to perform any sort of task. As much attention as legislative acts took to ensure that guardians did not abuse their charges, physically, mentally, or in undue labor, the Knox County did not reimburse guardians for medical expenses.³⁰ There is no account in the existing county records as to why overseers and trustees refused to reimburse guardians for medical treatment. The most likely explanation it is that there was a County Physician received a salary by making monthly rounds throughout the county, as was the practice in later years after the establishment of the county poorhouse. If this were the case, “trustees had no authority to pay anyone else for medical services,” as this would have gone against the contract between the county and the physician, who, like guardians, offered his services at the lowest bid.³¹

As Knox County’s population grew, so, too, did the number of paupers and poor farmers seeking aid. County officials realized that the cost of traveling throughout the countryside to distribute aid and to monitor the poor was far higher than the actual amount of aid provided. The Knox County Commissioners had discussed the possibility

³⁰ Knox County Commissioners. “Commissioners Journals.” Office of the Commissioners, Knox County, Ohio. 1808-1931. All guardianship entries specifically state that medical expenses are not covered under terms of agreement. It is not known if refusal to pay for medical treatment was unique to Knox County, or if the practice existed elsewhere in Ohio and the United States, as well.

³¹ Kennedy, *The Ohio Poor Law*, 28.

of establishing a poorhouse beginning in the late 1830s, very likely in response to the Panic of 1837 and the unexecuted construction of the Walhonding Canal extension, scheduled to terminate in Mount Vernon. An act of legislature on March 10, 1838 ratified the plans of the Mount Vernon Lateral Canal Company to construct the Walhonding Canal extension along the Kokosing River, which would have expedited the shipment of goods to eastern markets.³² Only a few years earlier, however, in the years 1835 and 1836, a charter was created for the construction of the northern portion of the Sandusky, Mansfield & Newark Railroad, which later became a part of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Thousands of men and their families flocked to the county with the prospect of finding work on both the Walhonding Canal extension and the Sandusky, Mansfield & Newark Railroad. Knox County was left with the weighty decision of which mode of transportation to adopt: the tried and true canal system that they already had the contract to build, or the still relatively new technology of steam-powered rail that had no clear date of construction. Knox County ultimately chose to wait for the railroad, but had to wait a little over a decade before work commenced in laying the line south from Richland County to Newark, a line that did not open until 1851.³³

The great influx of immigrants that resulted from the expectation of finding steady work on either the canal or the railroads created a severe strain on the social order of the county; most were not even remotely affiliated with the established families. Manufacturing industries were in embryonic states, and offered a limited supply of employment opportunities to these newcomers. Some that chose to stay in Knox County

³² *Acts of a Local Nature, Passed at the First Session of the Thirty-Sixth General Assembly of the State of Ohio, Begun and Held in the City of Columbus, December 4, 1837* (Columbus, OH: Samuel Medary, 1838), 221-222.

³³ Hill, *History of Knox County*, 225-226.

were able to hire themselves out as farmhands, especially during the harvest, but this was only temporary work. The overall communal sentiment, especially during the Panic of 1837, was fear that these outsiders would take away precious financial resources from the hands and mouths of family and friends who deserved it most—well-loved community members who had contributed to the social stability of the area since its infancy. In wake of the shifting socio-economic pattern, County Commissioners on April 18, 1838, formally considered for the first time “the propriety of Building a poor House,” and decided that in “the first week in June . . . they [would] receive proposals and view Lands for the purpose of Building” a poorhouse farm.³⁴ For a rural community such as Knox County, with small towns, villages, and hamlets loosely scattered within its borders, a poorhouse appeared to all concerned a more efficient and cost-effective solution than the traditional distribution of outdoor relief. If the overseers of the poor could no longer afford to go to the poor, bring the poor to the overseers. It would only cost the county the one-time fare of transporting the indigent to the poorhouse, rather than spending time and money month after month in visiting the poor throughout the county. A poorhouse would be a place where “the *infirm* could be more readily healed—the *idiot* more humanely provided for—the *lunatic* more securely kept, and the *youth* better prepared for society.”³⁵ Knox County prepared to reconstruct society by means of “Social Christianity,” where they would attempt to reform the moral character of the poor rather than try to regulate their behavior through law alone.³⁶

³⁴ Knox County Commissioners, “Commissioners Journal B,” recorded April 18, 1838, 228.

³⁵ Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 23. Quoted from “Report of the Secretary of State [of New York] in 1824 on the Relief and Settlement of the Poor,” commonly known as the Yates Report. This report was the first of its kind to survey statewide poor relief practices, based on a formal questionnaire. Similar surveys were used in other states following the success of the Yates Report.

³⁶ Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform*, 148, 161, 168.

In September 1842, the County Commissioners purchased 132 acres of land from William E. Davidson for the purpose of establishing a poorhouse on the property. The property, known as “Bricker Farm,” was located four and a half miles southwest of the county seat of Mount Vernon in the tiny hamlet of Bangs (then known as Bangs Station).³⁷ The Knox County Poor Farm served as a central location to corral the poor, and economized the process of providing aid. Early in the forays of the poorhouse movement during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, many communities throughout the United States converted preexisting buildings into poorhouses as a cheaper approach in the relocation of county paupers. It did not matter to community leaders or their citizens that the majority of these buildings were ill suited to the task of housing and caring for large numbers of people; it was shelter that provided some of the inmates with better living conditions than they had previously possessed. The beauty of Bricker Farm was that it came prefabricated with farmhouse, barns, sawmill, sheds and other outbuildings, and copious amounts of land already cleared specifically for agricultural use, for crops and livestock. The commissioners converted the preexisting farmhouse on the property into living quarters for the poor, with a wing added for the propriety of separation of the sexes, though they gave little consideration to the separation of children from adults, or the mentally ill from the elderly.³⁸ Institutional buildings designed specifically for social reform, whether poorhouse, insane asylum, or public schools, did not become common practice until the mid-nineteenth century. Many

³⁷ Knox County Recorder, “William Davidson & Wife Deed to The Commissioners of Knox County,” in *Conveyance Volume Y*, Office of the Recorder, Knox County, Ohio, recorded August 8, 1842; Knox County Commissioners, “Commissioners Journal C, 1838-1845,” Office of the Commissioners, Knox County, Ohio, recorded June 13, 1842.

³⁸ Knox County Commissioners, “Commissioners Journal C, 1838-1845,” Office of the Commissioners, Knox County, Ohio, recorded August 5, 1842, 179-182.

rural communities did not construct these structures until much later, as they often lacked the funds to construct buildings of sufficient size to hold the inmate population. This may be why some communities adopted a cottage system, where several smaller buildings served to house the inmates, and resembled a tiny village more than an actual institution.³⁹ One commonality among all poorhouses, rural as well as urban, was that they were established in part to reform the corrupt moral character of the poor by providing them with many opportunities to perform productive labor.

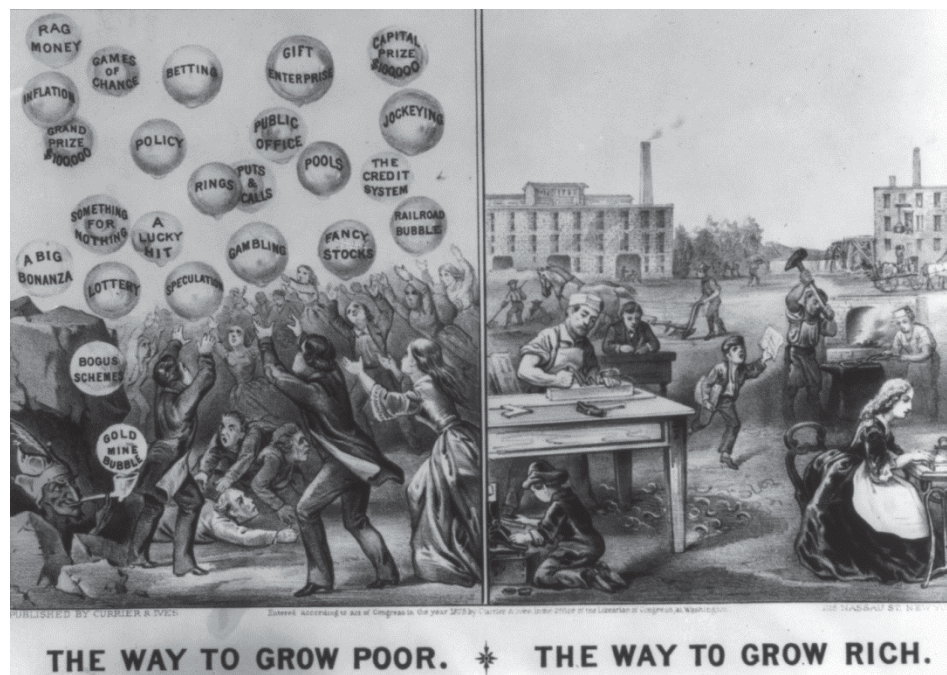


Figure 4. Americans viewed poverty as a moral delinquency, and believed that the poverty could be cured by instilling a sense of proper work ethic among the poor and working classes. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

The Knox County Commissioners intended that the farm would make the poorhouse a self-sustaining enterprise that would minimize the impact of providing relief

³⁹ David Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 265; Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 130.

on the County's purse, and establish a proper work ethic in its poorer citizens.⁴⁰ The poorhouse directors strongly encouraged the able-bodied poor were to work on the farm, in the sawmill, perform domestic chores, and general indoor and outdoor maintenance of buildings and grounds. Knox County had high hopes that the establishment of the Knox County Poor Farm would eradicate outdoor relief altogether, and the commissioners gave township trustees formal notice "to bring all the poor that are a township charge, to the Knox county Poor House, on the 10th of January, situated five miles from Mt. Vernon, on the Columbus road. All pay will cease at that time for the keeping of said paupers."⁴¹ This plan was doomed from the very beginning. As the earliest census records enumerating the poorhouse inmates attests, nearly every adult housed on premises suffered from some form of debility that would have likely prevented or limited them from working. Of the nine female inmates, three were children under the age of four, one suffered from rickets while another from seizures, one had cataracts, one was "simple," and one insane. Of the seven male inmates, two were "idiots," one suffered from rheumatism, one was deaf, and one insane. In all, that left a 53-year-old man, a 60-year-old woman, and an 80-year-old man to work on the farm and conduct most of the indoor chores.⁴²

The poorhouse was supposed to be self-sustaining, run by the inmates under direction of the superintendents, and when this failed to occur, the poorhouse directors forced to used hired hands to assist in the daily farming operations. From plowing,

⁴⁰ Knox County Commissioners, "Commissioners Journals"; Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 41; Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform*, 163.

⁴¹ "Notice," in *The Democratic Banner* (Mount Vernon, OH), January 10, 1843, 3.

⁴² U.S. Bureau of the Census. *1850 Ohio Federal Population Census Schedules, Knox County*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1964.

cultivating, and harvesting the fields to taking care of the livestock, from food processing and canning to doing the laundry, most of the work was done by others not listed as inmates of the poorhouse. The first available poorhouse expense report provides evidence that the system of a self-sustaining institution was doomed to failure almost from the outset. By 1848, Knox County was using a dual system of indoor and outdoor relief to care for the poor. Nineteen inmates were reported as living in the poorhouse at the time of the report, and several “outdoor paupers” were receiving care from community members.⁴³ Why township trustees chose not to remove some paupers to the poorhouse while others were is unclear, but it appears that it may have been due to who they considered temporary versus permanent paupers (discussed in chapter one), and which individuals were more likely to find employment outside of the poorhouse. It is also likely that the tight-knit, religiously minded citizens of the county found it difficult to remain separated from the direct care of their family, friends, and neighbors. “A meeting was held . . . composed of nearly all the denominations in town, for the benefit of those families who may be in needy circumstances.”⁴⁴

Knox County continued to use both indoor and outdoor relief into the twentieth century. In 1874, an “idiot” boy burned to death (age not revealed) when he crawled to the stove in the room that he and his mother shared and his clothes caught fire. This horrific incident brought to the public’s attention the wretched condition in which its poor were living, and of the very real possibility that if the boy had been discovered later that

⁴³ “Report of outdoor expenses for benefit of Poor of Knox county,” *The Democratic Banner* (Mount Vernon, OH), October 24, 1848, 4. As the report does not list names for the outdoor paupers, only the names of those receiving payment for providing assistance, it is difficult to determine the exact number. Outdoor paupers often received care from multiple benefactors.

⁴⁴ “Relief for the Poor,” *The Democratic Banner* (Mount Vernon, OH), January 11, 1848, 2.

the entire building would have smoldered to the ground. The citizens of Knox County came together and petitioned for the construction of a new poorhouse.

Let the New Infirmary Building be erected as speedily as possible. Let it be strongly and securely built; not costly, but comfortable; large enough to accommodate the growing population of the county; and above all things let it be fireproof, and be heated either by hot air or steam.”⁴⁵

They also began to rethink the role of the institution, utilizing its floor plan, architectural style, and landscaping to further promote the rehabilitation of the poor and extend community ideals.

⁴⁵ “Interesting Meeting at the County Infirmary,” *The Democratic Banner* (Mount Vernon, OH), May 1, 1874, 3.

Chapter Three: A Convenient Style of Architecture

The institutional reform movement in the United States reached its peak in the 1870s and 1880s. The Civil War had facilitated the movement toward large-scale industrialization in many of America's large cities, and spread outward toward less urbanized centers. Once industrialization was fully set in motion, many Americans felt that the pauper problem would greatly diminish, if not vanish entirely. However, even while the standard of living began to rise, the wages that the working-class received did not. This created more frequent stints of temporary unemployment as working-class individuals searched for a better-paying job in order to support themselves and their families. Industrialization affected agricultural communities such as Knox County as much as it did urban centers. Mechanization of farming implements, e.g. threshing machines and self-propelled tractors, reduced the amount of time and effort needed to cultivate a field, which consequently reduced the number jobs available to hired hands.¹ Industrialization actually created a cycle of dependence on public welfare instead of providing the highly sought after opportunities of upward financial and social mobility that it promised. The insane asylum received the highest level of attention, in part because of strong social activism by the likes of Dorothea Dix and women-organized benevolent organizations such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.). Poorhouses (labeled "infirmaries" in Ohio according to 1851 legislation) received similar attention. Poorhouses were reform of these institutions was based largely on the model used to restructure the insane asylum.

¹ Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 5.

Everything from poorhouses to mental hospitals, public schools to orphanages, and prisons to group homes for the disabled, transitioned into places designed to rehabilitate the unfortunate classes of society rather than facilities devised to correct delinquent moral character. The mid-nineteenth century was a period of religious renewal, and a refocusing of the United States toward social welfare with a more maternal approach, meaning a greater emphasis placed on nurturing and caring for inmates of social institutions rather than relying on legal codes alone to dictate how a facility should be administrated. An individual living in poverty, like mental illness, alcoholism, drug abuse, and other addictions, had the potential to be cured of their “ailment.” Americans became aware that, in order to change the impact that institutions had in the cure of its inmates, it was necessary to reconfigure the physical spaces of these institutions along with the relationships among administrators, inmates, and the larger community.

In the mid-nineteenth century, one man—Dr. Thomas Story Kirkbride—had an idea that would forever change institutional housing in the United States, including the Knox County Infirmary. His ideas also influenced the way in which administrators of these facilities cared for those in need. The first Kirkbrides, hailing from the northern part of County Cumberland, England, arrived in the United States as members of William Penn’s mass Quaker relocation movement to North America in 1682.² Like many other Quakers, the Kirkbrides settled along the fertile banks of the Delaware River in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania near present-day Trenton, New Jersey. Thomas was

² Nancy Tomes, *A Generous Confidence: Thomas Story Kirkbride and the Art of Asylum-Keeping, 1840-1893* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 46.

born on July 31, 1809 on the family farmstead.³ As he grew and began to have more responsibility helping his father on the farm, he took a keen interest in the treatment of the livestock, particularly the sheep, which he quickly “became so familiar with them as to recognize them by their physiognomy.”⁴ It was during this time that Kirkbride developed an interest in medical treatment beyond that of livestock, and set his mind to the professional study of medicine, with a specialization in surgery.

Kirkbride’s influence within the medical profession began prior to his admittance into the Medical Department at the University of Pennsylvania in 1828. He began his studies at the age of nineteen, reading books on the subject of medicine, disease, and psychology under the exemplary tutelage of Dr. Nicholas Bellville, a prominent physician who resided in Trenton. Kirkbride had only praise for his mentor, who he had the privilege of being his last private pupil. When he graduated from the university in 1832, Kirkbride strove to follow Bellville’s example. All of Dr. Kirkbride’s colleagues agreed that he was destined for great things, and that his benevolent dealing with difficult patients was unparalleled. Because of his kind and generous demeanor, it was not surprising that he was at the top of the list of candidates under consideration for superintendent of the new Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane in Philadelphia, even at the comparatively inexperienced age of thirty-two. Kirkbride secured the position of superintendent not only because patients, their families, and other doctors found him likable, but also in part because he had already proved himself as a budding expert in the

³ John Curwen, Charles H. Nichols, and John H. Callender, *Memoir of Thomas S. Kirkbride* (Warren, PA: E. Cowan & Co, 1885), 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

field of mental disorders, which he had studied while serving as the resident physician at the asylum for the insane at Frankford, a neighborhood of Philadelphia.⁵

Kirkbride dedicated his mind, body, and soul to taking care of those left with little or no normative mental capacity, living by the mantra, “My work is my pleasure.”⁶ He took genuine concern in the welfare of his patients, and was thoroughly appalled by the state of mental healthcare available in the United States. He would personally spend at least a few minutes every day with each individual, believing that one-on-one interaction between doctor and patient was the most beneficial for all parties. Of chief concern was the way in which hospitals were constructed with no rhyme or reason, rarely giving consideration to the special needs of the insane, and how the most “excitable” patients were often imprisoned within a jail cell when no other alternative was available. “It is pretty generally conceded, that a more convenient style of architecture, and better arrangements, are desirable in most establishments for the care of the insane.”⁷ Kirkbride desired to create a facility specifically designed to accommodate the unique needs of the mentally ill, to offer them a place of comfort, compassion, and to return to them the dignity of a human being that society had managed to strip away from their persons.

Recalling his days as a child along the banks of the Delaware River, roaming around on endless acres of picturesque farmland with chores and other physical and mental activities to occupy his time, Kirkbride devised a plan for hospitals for the insane, a plan that many other social institutions adopted over time, including poorhouses. His proposal was a combination of general healthcare practices, a hierarchy of medical

⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁷ Thomas S. Kirkbride, *On the Construction, Organization, and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1854), 3.

professionals and patients, ideal geographical settings for these institutions, and suitable occupations for patients of a stimulating variety. Perhaps most significantly, Kirkbride, after careful study and consideration, introduced an architectural design for an institution that contributed not only to the basic care of patients, but also to their potential cure. Kirkbride's design was to be pleasing to patients, visitors, caretakers, and efficient for the implementation of effective healthcare for all levels of mental disorders, from docile short-term patients to those with violent tendencies and long-term care. Known as the Kirkbride Plan (often specifically referring to the floor plan, but including the general principles of operation, care, and setting), benevolence was the key ingredient throughout the sympathetically composed doctrine. "There is no reason why an individual who has the misfortune to become insane, should, on that account, be deprived of any comfort or even luxury . . ." ⁸ This was a novel idea presented at a time where social institutions were more concerned with alleviating communities of the deviant classes, not considering the inmates as part and parcel of an evolving society.

Kirkbride outlined in exhaustive detail the proper arrangements of rooms, wards, outbuildings, gardens, roadways and walkways—everything down to the tiniest details such as water pipes and dust vents. He created his design to take full advantage of local terrain and natural resources, which made it an attractive design across the country, from the Atlantic Coast to the Rocky Mountains. Kirkbride strongly believed that architects, while well-intentioned and capable of executing beautiful architectural styles, were unable to comprehend fully the significance of interior spaces within social institutions like mental hospitals or poorhouses because they did not have the intimate knowledge as

⁸ Ibid., 5.

to how these institutions functioned or what purpose they served. Internal arrangements of rooms, corridors, wards, and wings were far more important to Kirkbride than exterior dressing, though he did concede that style should be in good taste, as this would provide an atmosphere conducive to a more pleasant patient experience, and which could even play a factor in the ultimate cure of certain individuals.⁹ It is somewhat surprising that a gentleman architect and landscaper, with no formal training in architecture or horticulture, was able to design building and grounds to harmonize with one another so perfectly. Kirkbride's design proved so beneficial that it would be replicated throughout the United States from its first implementation in 1856 well into the latter half of the nineteenth century. The basics of his design are still visible in institutional buildings—hospitals, retirement campuses, schools—that are erected today, though they would not formally be considered as adhering to the Kirkbride Plan. Remnants of Kirkbride's design in these institutions include a hierarchy of space, wide hallways, and plenty of natural light.

The three main principles utilized in the ideal institution were centered on fresh air, natural light, and expansive grounds. The selection of a suitable building site took precedence over all else, for only then could plans be properly designed for the most convenient and appropriate construction. Kirkbride preferred somewhat secluded locations, always in the countryside near ample objects of “interesting character,” meaning a landscape of rolling hills, bodies of water (whether rivers, ponds, or lakes), and fertile soil to support a small farming operation.¹⁰ This would provide patients the

⁹ Curwen, Nichols, and Callender, *Memoirs of Thomas S. Kirkbride*, 21.

¹⁰ Thomas S. Kirkbride, *On the Construction, Organization, and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane, 2nd Edition* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1880), 37.

opportunity to partake in “ample walks for exercise, pleasant drives and cheerful views and surroundings, [and] might direct from morbid fancies to more healthful ideas.”¹¹ This type of setting and the personal freedom to enjoy the natural beauties it provided, Kirkbride believed, would greatly reduce melancholy that could lead to unruly and destructive behavior, which would allow caretakers to distribute their attention to all patients on a more even scale, not just those with under severe distress. Also essential in site location was the proximity to main transportation arteries, such as railroads or county and state highways that would provide free and easy access to medical facilities, as well as in transporting patients quickly and safely to the asylum. Although located in the countryside, Kirkbride’s ideal institution was not to be removed from society, but to serve as a refuge from the chaos inherent in urban settings that had the potential to upset certain classes of patients. The well-being and potential rehabilitation came first and foremost in Kirkbride’s plan, whether in the administration of care or in the physical design of the institution.

What he does not specifically express, but which is equally significant within his argument for a rural setting, is that a large site also affords the necessary space required for future building expansion, which would not always be possible in an urban setting. The Kirkbride Plan was not conducive to the restrictive composition of city blocks. His plan was one of linear construction, meaning all the hallways ran parallel to each other, which he believed was ideal for providing patients with ample sunshine, fresh air, and unobstructed views of the expansive grounds from anywhere within the building. The linear plan made possible a more complete division of patients by gender, further divided

¹¹ Curwen, Nichols, and Callender, *Memoirs of Thomas S. Kirkbride*, 17.

by class of mental disorder, and allowed superintendents to provide a higher level of moral treatment to their charges. Many people, from doctors to clergymen to the average citizen, believed that some cases of insanity were caused by moral degradation as much as psychological impairment.¹² The tripartite plan consisted of a central administration hall (often defined by a tower to emphasize the authoritative role of this space) that housed offices, kitchen, laundry, apartments for administrators and their families, other communal spaces suitable for the general public to visit, and often dining halls. Separate wings for male and female patients flanked the administration hall, each of which consisted of a series of wards with progressively increased levels of care corresponding with distance from the center. The most violent or “excitable” patients were located farthest away from the center of the building, so as not to interfere with the daily operations of running the institution, or upset visitors unaccustomed to intense frenetic state of mind and behavior.¹³ Separate wards were to be staggered forward or backward from those adjacent to it so that the hallways did not directly connect to the others, but essentially ran parallel to each other, further separating the classes of mental disorders and minimizing the likelihood of undesirable mingling between these patients.



Figure 5. Kirkbride's basic linear floor plan, illustrating parallel hallways extending from a central administrative block, staggered to prevent intermingling of patients from different wards. (Courtesy of Kirkbride, *On the Construction* (1880), 155.)

¹² Tomes, *A Generous Confidence*, 120.

¹³ Kirkbride, *On the Construction* (1854), 12-13.

The Kirkbride Plan advocated for buildings to be aligned to the cardinal points, as best as the prevailing landscape would allow, to permit maximum exposure to natural sunlight, and to create conducive patterns for cool breezes to circulate freely throughout the facility. Ideally, rooms should be located on one side of the building only, so that natural light would penetrate each patient's room consistently throughout the day, but Kirkbride realized that this was not always feasible in smaller communities, as it by nature created a more costly construction cost because of the amount of land it would require. In the event that the rooms were located on either side of a central corridor, it was essential that each would be outfitted with large windows to admit both sunlight and fresh air, with appropriate safety precautions such as bars to prevent a fall. A solution to the "problematic" arrangement of a central corridor, each ward was to have at least one parlor, or similar room for socialization, located in the center of that ward so that all patients were able to enjoy the full benefits of light, air, and beauty during any part of the day.¹⁴ Social rooms also provided an opportunity for inmates to have a more normal domestic-like experience, by giving them an alternative indoor space other than a bedroom and dining hall.

Kirkbride's revolutionary notions on institutional architecture and design were fashioned specifically "for the relief of those deprived of the use of their reason,"¹⁵ but in the end served a far greater purpose in the scheme of social reform. The mid- to late-nineteenth century was a period of progressive social reform throughout the country. The increase in the erection of various social institutions such as insane asylums, schools for

¹⁴ Kirkbride, *On the Construction* (1880), 136-141.

¹⁵ Curwen, Nichols, and Callender, *Memoir of Thomas S. Kirkbride*, 14.

the deaf and blind, public schools, veterans' hospitals and group homes, and poorhouses came at a time when Americans needed to prove to themselves that social morality was not lost in the wake of the Civil War. All of these institutions needed to be able to regulate large numbers of individuals efficiently, while providing necessary moral and social rehabilitation predicated on the idea of utilizing natural environments as a means of reinvigorating the mind, body, and soul. Social rehabilitation within poorhouses, in particular, concerned many Americans, as these institutions had traditionally been places of complex social stratification, as the poor that they housed included the insane, disabled, elderly, children, and general poor. Such a wide variety of social classes under a single administrative body increased the likelihood of corruption among all of these groups the more interaction they had with each other. The Kirkbride Plan was well suited for the poorhouse and other forms of social institutions in carrying out the "moral treatment" and general care of these patients, paupers, and children, and was modified easily to suit the particular needs of individual communities.

Knox County had an idea of what they wanted their new infirmary building to look like and how they wanted to reconfigure its daily operations. The county commissioners had a fairly simple decision to make when they received bids for architectural plans. William Tinsley was a familiar name to the commissioners, and his skill as a conscientious architect was well known to them. Tinsley's work was first introduced to Knox County in 1857 when he earned the commission to build Ascension Hall from Bishop Philander Chase, president and founder of Kenyon College (in Gambier), where the hall erected. While in Gambier, Tinsley designed the Kokosing

House in 1864 as a residence for Bishop Thurston Bedell, who was a professor at Kenyon College, and a few other homes located in Mount Vernon, including the Potwin House.

William Tinsley was born on February 7, 1804 in Clonmel, County Tipperary, Ireland, and descended from a long line of architects. His father Thomas, his grandfather Sylvester, and his great-grandfather Thomas, and even his maternal grandfather Joseph Brough/Brough, a stonemason by trade, were all builders. His older brothers, John and Thomas, Jr., followed their father into the building profession, and were also instrumental in introducing and encouraging William to join the family business.¹⁶ It was while he worked for his father, and later for his brothers, that William found his passion in drawing and designing buildings more than their actual construction, and he soon made a name for himself as a professional architect. He received commissions throughout Ireland and England, where he constructed many churches and summer cottages for wealthy patrons. Tinsley's early aesthetic ranged from Italian Villa Renaissance to Tudor and English Gothic, all three of which he continued to revert to after he immigrated to the United States in 1851.¹⁷ Tinsley settled in Cincinnati, Ohio with his wife and eleven children, and set up an architectural firm with his eldest son, Thomas. He edited his designs to fit the Midwestern aesthetic, but maintained elements and features in his buildings that he felt were crucial to the built environment. He was told that his "notions of style and structure were ahead of the notions and tastes of" the American Midwest,¹⁸ and it took him over two decades to gain the liberty to express fully his ideas of architecture, design, and function.

¹⁶ Douglas John Forbes, *Victorian Architect: The Life and Work of William Tinsley* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1953), 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

Tinsley's foray into the world of institutional architecture other than for college campuses commenced soon after his sojourn in central Ohio. In the mid-1860s, the city of Cincinnati made plans to construct a new hospital there, a project that Tinsley hoped would become his. As with many large public structures, architects were required to submit architectural sketches along with a written description of the proposed building to the board of directors for review. Tinsley took a trip home to Ireland in 1865, and while in Europe took a side trip to Paris, France. While this was primarily a pleasure excursion, Tinsley was keen to examine Lariboisière Hospital had been constructed in 1853 to fight an epidemic of cholera. Tinsley was particularly taken with the architecture and floor plan of this hospital, "on the general arrangement of which I knew the [Cincinnati] hospital should be constructed, i.e., the Pavilion or separate buildings on one square area."¹⁹

While Tinsley did not receive the commission for the Cincinnati Hospital, a second opportunity emerged when the State Board of Education held a competition for the design of the Ohio Institute for the Education of the Blind, in Columbus. Tinsley returned to his earlier aesthetic of academic architecture for his proposal rather than implementing the ideas that he brought back from Paris, though he did take special care to design the interior spaces to best suit the needs of the blind. Although the purpose of the Ohio Institution was primarily academic, it functioned more along the lines of a formal institution somewhere between general hospital and school. Tinsley chose to use a modified version of the Kirkbride Plan for his design, although it is uncertain how familiar Tinsley was with Kirkbride's work. The Ohio Institution for Education of the

¹⁹ Ibid., 105.

Blind, completed and ready for occupancy by May 21, 1874, was Tinsley's "largest and most ambitious project."²⁰

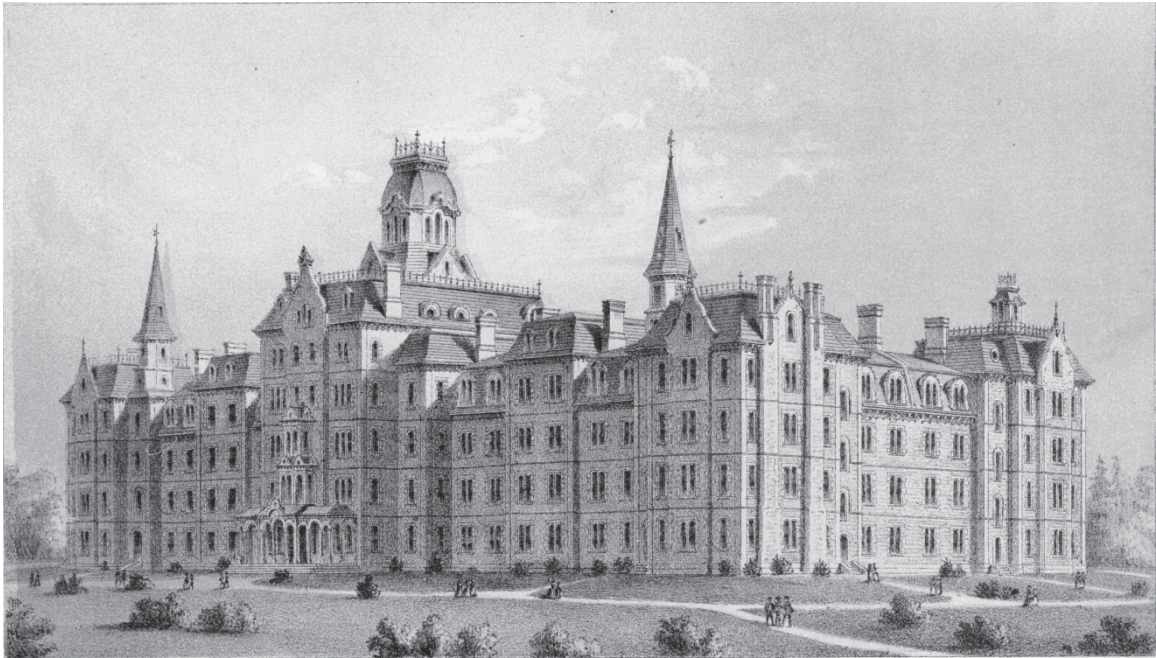


Figure 6. Ohio Institution for the Education of the Blind shows clear similarities to Tinsley's work at the Knox County Infirmary, constructed the following year. (Courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society.)

William Tinsley was seventy-one years old when construction of the Knox County Infirmary began in 1875 under the father and son partnership, "W. & T. R. Tinsley." The county commissioners selected the Tinsleys design even though they were not the lowest bidders to respond to the request for plans.²¹ It was likely a combination of Tinsley's successful implementation of institutional architecture at the Ohio Institution for Education of the Blind in Columbus and his local reputation for employing unique architectural designs that ultimately convinced the commissioners to use Tinsley's plans. Based on Tinsley's private journals and various family records, the Knox County

²⁰ Ibid., 119.

²¹ Knox County Commissioners, "Commissioners Journal F, 1866-1875," Office of the Commissioners, Knox County, Ohio, recorded May 14, 1874, 522.

Infirmary is the last building that William Tinsley designed on his own, without the assistance of and prior to relinquishing the entire architectural firm to his son in the latter half of 1874.²² The building retains many of Tinsley's early architectural aesthetics, and the style and floor plan resemble that of the Ohio Institution, though on a far smaller scale. It is not known whether Tinsley had read any of Dr. Thomas S. Kirkbride's books or articles on the subject of institutional housing, but it seems likely that Tinsley would have been at least casually familiar with Kirkbride's work, especially since Tinsley had a growing interest in institutional architecture outside of the academic world. Kirkbride and Tinsley were contemporaries, one a gentleman architect and the other a professional, but it would not be surprising if Tinsley had obtained Kirkbride's publications prior to submitting designs for institutional buildings like the Knox County Infirmery and the Ohio Institution for the Education of the Blind.

Like Kirkbride, Tinsley preferred a tripartite floor plan when he designed his buildings, which often followed a linear plan, when it came to academic structures such as residential halls and buildings designed for educational instruction. For Tinsley, the tripartite design was more a matter of what he perceived aesthetically pleasing and a matter of economics, rather than relying on functionality alone. Tinsley's institutional designs, similar to Kirkbride, had two wings that flanked a central unit, which often extended above the wings a half-story or more, sometimes further defined by a square tower or rounded turret, depending on what was appropriate to the designated architectural style. Tinsley was a strong advocate for this type of layout because he understood that, especially in the largely agricultural Midwest, funds to construct a

²² Forbes, *Victorian Architect*, 127.

building in its entirety were not always possible to obtain in full at the time of initial construction. A single building that is constructed as three separate units that could either stand alone or be pieced together as a whole was more attractive to potential patrons with restrictive budgets than other designs might have been. Even when money was not an issue, however, Tinsley preferred the visual impact provided by building in “units” because it presented a sense of movement within the architecture, not the flat factory-like buildings that other architects were constructed at this time.²³

Tinsley also advocated the notion that architectural style should be consistent throughout the building, not only along the most visible, street-facing façade, but also on all exterior sides and throughout the interior. He took special interest in personally designing the interior spaces to maintain a singular architectural theme “simply and truly carried out” for all aspects of the entire structure. “The interior is intended to harmonize in style with the exterior, simple in character, of durable materials,” so that an individual would not be overwhelmed by contradicting, jarring, and invasive architectural dialogue.²⁴ This idea plays well with Kirkbride’s idea of creating spaces that were peaceful and calming to the inmates. For example, a Tudor Gothic building should remain Tudor Gothic on the interior to create a smooth, seamless transition from the exterior to the interior. This, in theory, would lessen the emotional disharmony certain classes of inmates might experience when entering an institution.

In designing the Knox County Infirmary, Tinsley favored the faintly Tudor Gothic style he used in many of his collegiate buildings, combining it with distinct Italianate and

²³ Ibid., 77.

²⁴ Ibid., 76-77.

Second Empire-inspired elements that give it a unique compositional style.²⁵ Unlike many of his collegiate buildings, or even the Ohio Institution, this building appears to be cramped, narrow, daunting, and uninviting. This begs the question, did Tinsley succumb to the stigma attached to the poor of society and created this building in the hopes of deterring potential paupers from seeking public assistance, or, perhaps, it was simply that he was unable to fully execute his aesthetics within the parameters presented by the Board of County Commissioners. There were 139 rooms in total, including a small chapel located on the third floor where church services were held every Sunday.²⁶



Figure 7. Knox County Infirmary c. 1880, displaying tripartite design, ample ventilation, large windows, and pleasing architectural style. (Courtesy of the Knox County Historical Society Museum.)

²⁵ Mark Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in Their Cultural and Technological Context* (London: University Press of New England, 1999); Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

²⁶ “Grand Opening of Knox County’s New Infirmary,” *The Democratic Banner* (Mount Vernon, OH), June 29, 1877, 3.

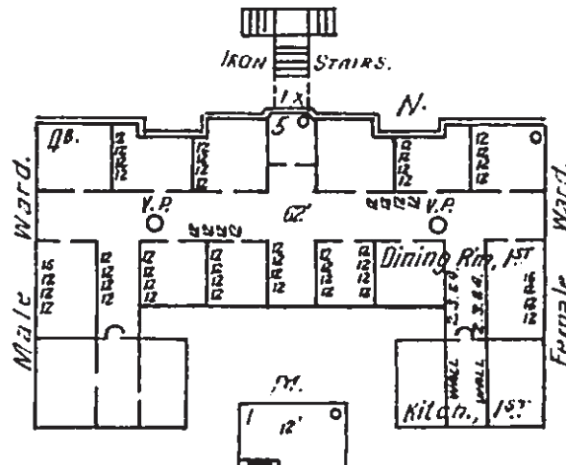


Figure 8. Knox County Infirmary’s use of the Kirkbride Plan and Tinsley’s design aesthetic made would have allowed future expansion without altering architectural style. The secondary building is the boiler house. (Courtesy of the Knox County Historical Society.)

Tinsley’s use of a modified Kirkbride Plan, which coincidentally played into his own architectural ideals, is evident throughout the Infirmary building, its orientation, and its location on the property. First, it was erected in close proximity to State Route 3, one of the largest and most highly traveled state roads in Ohio, and the Cleveland, Akron & Columbus Railroad, which had a small passenger station in Bangs. This follows Kirkbride’s instruction that although secluded, an institution like a poorhouse should be located along main transportation arteries. Second, the Infirmary is located within the extremely picturesque countryside of southwestern Knox County and along Dry Creek, a major tributary to the scenic Kokosing River. The farm, gardens, courtyard, and grounds provided the “objects of interest” advocated by Kirkbride in the restoration and reinvigoration of the mind. Third, it is oriented along the cardinal points, with the long axis running east to west, allowing for the northerly winds to enter large portions of the building and for the southerly direction of the sun to enter the building throughout all parts of the day. Fourth, there is a central block where the main offices and hospital ward

were located, flanked by the female ward to the east and the male ward to the west. Fifth, the more “excitable” patients were relegated to the third floors in the rear wings that run perpendicular to the main portion of the building, as the Infirmary did not have the length required to fully separate the mentally ill from the other residents. Additionally, a small jail cell was installed in the southwest corner of the ground floor. Sixth, a small apartment was located on the second floor to house the Infirmary Superintendent and his family. It is interesting to note that the kitchen and dining hall were not located in the central portion of the building as suggested in the Kirkbride Plans, but rather on the eastern wing with the female wards. This was done at the request of the county commissioners, likely because the kitchen is traditionally women’s domain, though an explanation was not provided.²⁷

The Knox County Infirmary was more than a building and grounds erected in the mode of an ideal institution or the physical manifestation of social reform theories. It was a reflection of Knox County and its struggle to maintain their agricultural identity while the rest of the world was on the fast track toward industrialization. Between the 1860s and the 1870s, Knox County experienced a “Gas and Glass” boom, which continued into the mid-twentieth century. Discoveries of large quantities of natural gas within Knox County led many companies to establish natural gas processing plants, most in or near Mount Vernon. Companies chose this region because Mount Vernon because was the county seat and the largest municipality within the county that could support large-scale manufacturing. The Mount Vernon Gas Works, one of the earliest companies, was established in 1857, and was the largest supplier of natural gas products

²⁷ Knox County Commissioners, “Commissioners Journal G, 1874-1881,” Office of the Commissioners, Knox County, Ohio, recorded June 21, 1875, 70.

for heating and lighting throughout Knox County, including the infirmary. Large numbers of immigrants from Indiana and Oklahoma, many of Belgian descent, came to Knox County as a result of the “Gas and Glass Boom” hoping to make their own way, much like the earlier immigrants had during the canal and railroad debates in the preceding decades. The influx of immigrants, however, also led to the rise of vagrancy, which threatened the social and economic infrastructure of the county, where there were minimal opportunities in the few manufactories to absorb the large quantity of unskilled laborers.

Rural communities throughout Ohio, not just Knox County, felt similar pressures from industrialization. Social reform movements were created from a mixture of religious revivalism, professionalized charity, and greater state regulation of local institutions such as poorhouses. Society began to recognize that economic issues, unemployment, and other factors contributed to poverty, and that the social structure of the United States “was responsible for some poor men’s sins.”²⁸ While industrialization and urbanization was evidence of America’s social evolution, it was also part of the perceived social degradation that many reformers feared. It increased the commercialistic mindset of the middle and upper classes, which trickled down to the poorer working classes as the natural path toward an advanced society. Ohio, among numerous other states, enacted a series of statewide improvement plans that challenged the traditional agrarian values of places such as Knox County. State legislature put these plans in place to create a more cohesive cultural identity among its citizens. “New standards of value . . . were defined and embodied in material possessions that emanated

²⁸ Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 167.

from and reflected urban culture.”²⁹ Consumerism devalued the role that agricultural communities played in the support of the greater society by taking their goods, whether crops (grains, fiber) or animal byproducts (meat, wool, leather, dairy), and selling them at low prices, meaning that farmers received minimal payment for their products.

This left agricultural communities with even less economic stimulus, and they had to face a difficult decision. They could adapt the statewide improvement plans for their own benefit, or crumble under the pressure to conform to urban ideals and forfeit a large portion of their code of morality. Communities throughout Knox County were unsettled by society’s movement away from “the Protestant work ethic . . . toward the god of consumption.”³⁰ Rural towns could not compete with the burgeoning urban commercialism, and many individuals migrated toward the cities in order to survive. This also meant that many of the older citizens of the county, most poor farmers when they were in their prime, were left without children to take care of them. The Knox County Infirmary was the only place that they could go, except for the save few that had been able to save enough personal assets during their lifetime to afford to live in a private boarding house. In addition, the State Board of Public Charities, created in 1867 and reorganized in 1875, began to be a stronger presence in poorhouse regulation as part of the statewide improvement plans.³¹ This concerned many agricultural centers that unless they actively participated in the maintenance of the county infirmary and its inmates, the

²⁹ Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 155.

³⁰ Richard Middleton, *Colonial America: A History, 1585-1776* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 244.

³¹ Deborah Marinski, “State Policies and the Public Response to Institutionalization: Caring for the Insane in Late-Nineteenth-Century Ohio,” *Ohio History* 114 (2007): 118.

institution would become stagnant, impersonal, and completely removed from local traditions of family and community.³²

In reality, the State Board had very dull teeth and comparatively little impact on local poorhouse improvements. The state established the board to inspect the county poorhouses and to provide counsel to the superintendents as to how to bring the buildings and care up to state code, but did not have the legal power to enforce directly their recommendations.³³ Genuine concern for community preservation was what led to high levels of social interaction between the general population of Knox County and those living in the poorhouse, and contributed to the longevity of the institution until its termination in September, 1977—135 years to the month from its establishment in 1842. The Knox County Infirmary provided its inmates with as normal a domestic atmosphere as is possible within an institutional setting. Family and friends visited the poor several times throughout the year on formal holidays, such as the Fourth of July, Flowers Day, and Christmas, in addition to regular visits from church groups and benevolent societies. The superintendents invited the entire county to come celebrate these events with the inmates. Hundreds of people attended these events, and brought with them homemade treats and little presents for each inmate. There were any number of indoor and outdoor games and other amusements throughout the day. The celebrations were like any regular community gathering, the only difference was that it was at the infirmary rather than a community park. Organizations such as the W.C.T.U. would read essays on the dangers of immoral conduct, the importance of being temperate, and the rewards of leading a

³² Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 102.

³³ Aileen E. Kennedy, *The Ohio Poor Law and Its Administration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), 1.

spiritually pious life.³⁴ Therefore, despite a fare more sympathetic attitude toward the indigent and disabled, endeavors to reform the traditionally “unworthy” inmates of the infirmary were still present, although these efforts took on a much more passive approach toward the end of the nineteenth century.

³⁴ *The Democratic Banner*, Mount Vernon, OH.

Conclusion: Preservation of Community Identity

Today, there are approximately 1,270 farms within the county's borders, each averaging 156 acres. Agriculture continues to account for nearly eighty-six percent of the county's land use, with roughly fifty-nine percent of the population engaged in some form of agricultural science. The United States Department of Agriculture has designated fifty-seven percent of all agricultural land within the county as "prime farmland," defined as "land that is best suited to grow food, feed, forage, fiber and oilseed crops."¹ Knox County was and continues to be a farmer's paradise. It was in large part the county's strong agricultural traditions that guided the administration of public relief, and to some extent maintains a level of influence in shaping local attitudes toward social welfare. The Knox County Infirmary remains as one of the largest late-nineteenth century infirmaries in the state of Ohio, and is one of the few examples of a the Kirkbride Plan as implemented and modified for use in rural county poorhouses.

The fear of social deterioration in the United States in the early- to mid-nineteenth century led to a series of social reform movements and the rise of institutionalization of certain classes of citizens (indigent in poorhouses, insane in asylums, criminals in prisons, children in schools), which in turn initiated a reexamination of the designs of these institutions. Commonalities in many of these buildings include the linearity of their floor plans, often with a central space reserved for administrative purposes, and almost all

¹ For land use statistics, see Knox County Regional Planning Commission, *Knox County Comprehensive Plan 2012 Update* (Mount Vernon, OH: privately published, 2012), 3.2-3.3; United States Department of Agriculture, *2007 Census of Agriculture: Ohio, State and County Data* (Washington, D.C.: National Agricultural Statistics Service, issued February 2009) (updated December 2009). Data from the 2012 Census of Agriculture is not yet available. For local agriculture and definitions, see Ohio State University Extension Office, "Farming in Knox County," last modified January 14, 2008, <http://www.kirklyn.com/hgg/farming.htm>. Knox County agriculture primarily includes crops, feedlots, and orchards.

are of masonry construction. All were used to instill a sense of order and hierarchy, which many Americans felt were under threat within the increasingly industrialized and urbanized society. Tall ceilings, large windows, masonry, single hallways, few ells if any, all served to promote and facilitate the rehabilitation and education of citizens deviating from the parameters defining the “social norm.”

Legislation that was enacted to regulate the poor closely followed periods of great social and economic upheaval. The first major stride toward strictly organized administration of material or financial relief to the poor occurred in England with the 1349 Statute of Labourers. This statute was created to counteract the devastating economic impact of the Bubonic Plague, which forced England to rapidly transition away from feudalism to capitalism with the increase of peasants earning wages for their labor instead of room and board from their lords. The 1349 Statute mandated that work was compulsory for all the able bodied of the working class, or else they faced imprisonment in the workhouse. Only those who were truly unable to work because of age, physical or mental disability would receive minimal assistance. Many of the middle and upper classes citizens began to fear poverty as a threat to their own comfortable ways of living by the end of sixteenth century with the rise of the working class. The idea of “worthy” and “unworthy” poor made its first official appearance in legislature in 1597, which was the when provisions for furnishing publicly financed relief to the poor was standardized across the entire United Kingdom. When Parliament revised this statute in 1601, they clearly defined laws of settlement to determine which parish was responsible for providing relief for individuals and families in need. This created a system of localized poor relief that would influence legislation well into the twentieth century in England and

the United States, and also shaped the general attitude of society at large toward people living in poverty.

An individual's legal permanent place of residence was crucial in determining how much aid an overseer of the poor would provide, as well as how that relief would be administered. Two systems were developed to accommodate the distribution of public funds to assist in the maintenance of the poor, each with unique advantages and disadvantages. Outdoor relief was the earlier of the two systems. Paupers who received relief under this method of distribution had the luxury of remaining in their own residences, or living with family, friends, or neighbors if they were without a home. Indoor relief referred to institutions such as poorhouses or workhouses where overseers of the poor would remove paupers in order to receive room and board. The primary stipulation for the indoor system was that all able-bodied inmates had to work, sometimes on the poorhouse farm, domestic chores, or various forms of production. Institutionalization of poor relief brought all the indigent of a municipality, city or county, to a single location, which facilitated a more strictly regulated system of relief administration. Outdoor relief was the more popular mode of relief distribution, and had the most advocates for its use, even though it was more likely to be abused by the poor and guardians alike. While the outdoor system was slightly more labor intensive in ensuring paupers received adequate aid and attention, the indoor system was more expensive to maintain.

Religion dictated the qualifications a poor person had to meet in order to receive aid in early forays into poor relief. In the United States, especially in Ohio and other highly agricultural areas, Protestantism was the most widespread and fervent when it

came to determining an individual's worthiness to receive assistance. It was every Christian's duty to care for the poor of society, for it was charitable kindness that would lead to a moral society, but more importantly, lead the provider's soul to salvation. Religion served to regulate the manners and morals of society. Liberal distribution of aid to those living in poverty without first determining the worthiness of their need, many Protestant reformers believed, would lead to the degradation of society and create a class of citizens with no morals, work ethic, or respect for community.

The rise of institutionalization in Knox County followed similar trends throughout the state of Ohio. The county commissioners purchased the Bricker Farm in 1842 in reaction to local and state development programs, such as the construction of the Cleveland, Sandusky & Newark Railroad and the proposed Walhonding Canal. These and similar projects brought many immigrants into the area, most with little or no connection to the existing families in the county. The larger the population became, the more intense it became for overseers of the poor to distribute relief in a place like Knox County, where most families lived on remote farms. Knox County chose to relocate the poor to the county farm to alleviate the burden of traveling to and from the county seat to monitor the indigent in the countryside. It was an act of county resourcefulness when the commissioners purchased Bricker Farm in 1842 for the purpose of converting into the county poorhouse, not a devaluation of the county's indigent population. The gas and glass boom of the 1860s and 1870s, while it increased the population of potential county charges, also increased the county's financial resources that they could put toward constructing a new poorhouse in 1874.

The Knox County Infirmary—its main building and outbuildings, the landscaping, the large acres of rolling farmland—offered a means for the citizens of this rural county to reflect on its past and the direction that it was heading at the dawning of a new century. The infirmary was the physical manifestation of local traditions within the sphere of regional and national institutional social reform, and in many ways stood as a monument to the strong sense of community that Knox County citizens maintained throughout its history. The Kirkbride Plan, from physical features to administration, materialized many of the core social values already present within Knox County. “Good institutions existed in a close, symbiotic relation with their communities,”² and the Kirkbride Plan used in institutions like poorhouses and insane asylums, performed as a tiny community all on its own. Beautiful scenery, objects of interest from fields to streams to gardens, natural light, fresh air—all were available at the Knox County Infirmary. The design created by architect William Tinsley only added to the splendor provided by the natural world. Tinsley provided the inmates of the infirmary with a beautiful place live, inside and out, a place where they could escape the reality (to some extent) that they were dependent on county for their survival. The building was far grander than the majority of the county’s population could even dream of living in, and yet they spent the money to construct a palatial edifice to provide even the poorest members of society with some small comfort, luxury, love. They may have been removed from the community in space, but not from thought.

The Knox County Infirmary “is an institution of which the citizens of the county may be justly proud, and stands to-day as a monument . . . to the cultivated, benevolent

² Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 102.

spirit of the people.”³ This statement speaks as much to the predominant community ideals of social order as it does to the larger social reform movements occurring elsewhere within the United States. The mid- to late-nineteenth century was a period of progressive social reform, which saw an increase in the construction of various social institutions for the rehabilitation of inmates to proper work ethics and moral standing. The pride that Knox County felt in its poorhouse was a mixture of genuine compassion for the indigent population and the need for self-commendation. From the farm to domestic work, from blacksmith shops to food processing, from religious services to tuberculosis hospitals, the poorhouse was essentially a miniature model of all the surrounding communities, a type of fringe society within itself. The Knox County Infirmary was, in a sense, a way to begin anew; a means to divert attention away from the prevailing faults within the greater community and focus its efforts on recreating the social order and harmony that began to fade with the persistent chiming of progress.

³ N. N. Hill, Jr., *History of Knox County, Ohio: Its Past and Present* (Mount Vernon, OH: A. A. Graham & Co., 1881), 252.



Figure 9. Inmates of the Knox County Infirmary. Photo taken soon after the completion of the new four-story, “fireproof” brick building c. 1877. (Courtesy of the Knox County Historical Society.)

Dedicated to the individuals who once roamed the halls of the Knox County Infirmary. The directors, the superintendents, the matrons, the staff, but above all, the forgotten inmates. The Knox County Infirmary was a true Palace for the Poor, where communities came together to provide their destitute mothers, fathers, children, friends, and neighbors a sacred space that they could call home.

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