SURVIVING THE GREAT DEPRESSION
Orphanages and Orphans in Cleveland

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At the 1930 White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, Homer Folks, a long-time critic of orphanages, reported that 220,000 needy children remained in "their own homes," thanks to state mothers' pensions; these allowed women to care for their children at home rather than place them in orphanages. At long last, Folks hoped, professional social workers were able to implement the "fundamental principles of social work" articulated at the 1909 White House Conference on Dependent Children: most significantly, "home life is the highest and finest product of civilization. . . . Except in unusual circumstances, the home should not be broken up for reasons of poverty."[1] But the nation had already descended into the Great Depression, an "unusual circumstance" that devastated families and moved thousands of children into foster homes and orphanages. Cleveland orphanages, on the brink of redefining their mission and clientele, postponed change and maintained their historic role as significant caretakers of the children of the urban poor.

This local study confirms the crucial role that orphanages played at the national level during the Depression. In December 1933, 102,000 dependent and neglected children in the United States were in foster homes, and a record number were in orphanages—more than 140,000. According to Marshall B. Jones, "orphanages threw every resource they had into the breach. . . . Had it not been for the [orphanages], there might have been twice as many homeless children on the streets as there were."[2] In 1933, Lawrence C. Cole, executive director of the Cleveland Children's Bureau, the city's largest private child placement agency, described a child-care system under siege but steadfast in its mission: "The third year of the depression, with its continued strain upon the resources, not only of the families themselves but of the social agencies, has continued to bring many difficulties for the children's field." The number of dependent children continued to climb. Although most were placed in foster homes, orphanages remained crowded with children who had nowhere else to go: "Children cannot be discharged as formerly to their own homes or relatives as families under present conditions are unable to reestablish themselves, or

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relatives to open their own homes as before." Despite great economic pressures, "every possible effort has been made by the [child-care] institutions to increase facilities to meet needs." Cole concluded hopefully, " May we have faith and go forward to serve Cleveland's little ones in need as never before."[3]

The Depression decade in Cleveland presents a unique opportunity to assess the twentieth-century urban orphanage. Orphanages in Cleveland, as elsewhere, experienced crises of both financial means and institutional goals during the l930s. The institutions' greatest concern was how to care for more children with less money, but emerging professional guidelines also raised puzzling questions about which children needed care. These crises generated reports, studies, and position papers that provide a richly detailed, unusually candid picture of how desperate families and financially straitened child-care institutions survived economic catastrophe.

ORPHANS AND ORPHANAGES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The first shelter for dependent children in Cleveland was its public poorhouse. This imposing brick structure, the Cleveland Infirmary, was built in 1854 even as the commercial village experienced an economic boom. This facility housed old and young, ill and insane, skill-less and luckless, and those made destitute by seasonal unemployment or other economic misfortune, transiency, and mental or physical disability. In 1856, 62 children (10 of them younger than one year of age) were among the 159 people admitted to the institution.[4]

In 1866, reflecting the growing sentiment that dependent children and adults should not be sheltered together, the state of Ohio authorized counties to build "children's homes" for "all persons resident of the county, under sixteen years of age, who, by reason of orphanage, or neglect or inability of parents to provide for them are suitable persons for such provisions." Children were to remain in these public facilities only until they were indentured or adopted.[5] By the end of the century, thirty-nine of Ohio's eighty-eight counties had such homes.[6]

Cuyahoga County, where Cleveland is located, had no county children's home, probably because by 1866 there were already five well-established child-care institutions that provided food, shelter, clothing, and education for the children of Cleveland's poor. According to Timothy A. Hacsi, "From before the Civil War to the Great Depression, more of America's dependent children—children whose families, including extended families, were for a time unable to care for them—were helped in orphan asylums than by any other means."[7]

Two Cleveland institutions were Protestant. The Protestant Orphan Asylum, founded in 1852 in the wake of a deadly cholera epidemic, initially

received funds from the city for sheltering children from the infirmary. Its trustees were prominent Protestant philanthropists, and the orphanage's first sites were near their stately East Side homes. The Cleveland Children's Aid Society emerged from an industrial school for destitute and neglected children founded in 1854 by a Methodist minister.

Three orphanages were Catholic, reflecting the greater immiseration of the city's Catholic population. The Cleveland Catholic diocese had moved quickly to build orphanages that would rescue Catholic children from poverty and the proselytizing of Protestant poor relief agencies. Cleveland's first orphanage, St. Mary's Female Orphan Asylum, opened on Christmas Eve, 1851, administered by the Ladies of the Sacred Heart; in l863, the nuns opened St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum for younger girls. In l894, the two institutions merged as St. Joseph's. The Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine opened St. Vincent's Asylum in 1853.

The Civil War, a series of economic downturns, rapid urban migrations, and subsequent family dislocation encouraged the establishment of several more orphanages. In 1869, Cleveland's German Jewish community founded the Jewish Orphan Asylum for the children of Civil War veterans from the Midwest. The Jones Home opened in 1887 on the West Side farm of its chief benefactor, Carlos Jones. A Catholic laywoman, Mary Ellen Donovan, founded the Holy Family Home in 1895, and the Disciples of Christ Church founded the Cleveland Christian Home in l904.[8]

The orphans were made dependent on private charity occasionally by the death of both parents but far more often by the death, illness, or desertion of a child-caring or bread-winning parent, usually leaving behind a mother unable to support herself and her children.[9] In 1855, St. Vincent's admitted an Irish boy whose father was killed working on the railroad and whose mother bound him to the asylum until his eighteenth birthday.[10] The Protestant Orphan Asylum's annual reports described in pathetic detail the orphans' families:

> The mother, deserted by her husband, has to support her own aged parents by field labor; . . . the mother who has lost her husband after a long illness; everything sold to pay expenses; no resources but the labor of her hands; four children under seven years of age; or the mother dead; the father willing to support his children from his wages, but has no-one to care for them; or more sad than death, the mother has deserted her husband and children.[11]

During the terrible depression of 1893, St. Joseph's received a child whose father was dead and whose mother was in the city poorhouse.[12] The orphans of the Children's Aid Society came "from homes where poverty and distress hold sway, where sickness and death, lack of employment or dissipation, have robbed childhood of its natural protection."[13]

For parents, placement of their children in an orphanage was "often the final, desperate step in a series of attempts to deal with poverty."[14] Even though

they were expected to pay small sums toward their children's board, parents hoped to get their children back and preferred orphanages to foster families who might win their offsprings' love and loyalty. The Jones Home, for example, received scores of requests for temporary placement from parents pleading the desertion, insanity, imprisonment, or death of a spouse. In summer 1898, these women asked that their children be admitted: Mrs. Murphy, a widow with children, ages seven and eight; Mrs. Gorman, whose husband had deserted her, and their six-year-old son; Mrs. McKenzie, whose husband was "not willing" to support the family; and Mrs. McKinney, "not living with her husband."[15]

The children stayed varying lengths of time—from a few days to several years, depending on the institutions' policies and the parents' circumstances. Its intention, maintained the Protestant Orphan Asylum in 1901, was to help families "over the hard places of life [until they could] again take their children and maintain their homes."[16] According to Hacsi, no survival strategy "was more useful to a family in dire straits than the orphan asylum."[17]

By the end of the century, the oldest orphanages had become large congregate facilities in declining neighborhoods. St. Vincent's sheltered 300 boys; its playing fields bordered railroad tracks overlooking the industrial valley on the near West Side. About 250 girls lived at St. Joseph's site, once considered "country," now surrounded by small stores, working-class homes, and three cemeteries.[18] A dozen blocks west of St. Joseph's, the Jewish Orphan Asylum sheltered 500 children.[19] The Protestant Orphan Asylum housed about 100.[20]

This growth in size was a national trend. Across the country, the number of orphanages had risen from 624 in 1880 to 1,067 in 1910. Although the median number of children sheltered in 1910 was 60, 109 orphanages cared for more than 200 children each, and 24 institutions cared for 400 or more.[21]

The public and private welfare administrators who formed the vanguard of the social work profession viewed with dismay these large institutions, most of them—as in Cleveland—sectarian and some committed to lengthy stays for their inmates. All dependent children should be placed in private homes, argued one speaker at the 1898 National Conference on Charities and Corrections: "The home develops reliance, the institution, dependence. . . . Children [in institutions] are often taught too much about heaven and too little about earth." In 1902, Folks, long-time secretary of the State Charities Aid Association of New York, criticized not only the orphanages but also the parents who placed children there to be raised, often at public expense. These criticisms prompted the 1909 White House Conference resolution on the necessity of maintaining "home life."[22] In the wake of this conference, thirty-nine states (including Ohio in 1913) enacted mothers' pension laws to make the institutionalization of poor children unnecessary.

Yet, mothers' pensions were meager, and families continued to turn to orphanages in hard times. The growing number of Cleveland orphanages

reflected these economic realities and the city's growing ethnic diversity: St. John's Orphanage (Episcopalian, 1909), the Hungarian Evangelical Home (Lutheran, 1913), the Holy Ghost Roman Catholic Orphanage (1919), Holy Ghost Greek Catholic Orphanage (1918), the Orthodox Jewish Asylum (1919), and St. Basil's Orphanage (Ukranian Catholic, 1920). These small institutions sheltered about a dozen children each.[23]

Professional social workers continued to urge that dependent children who could not remain with their biological families be placed in foster homes. But children were admitted to Cleveland orphanages, not by social workers but by volunteer boards of men and women or by nuns, who had considerable latitude and were moved more by piety and pity than by professional criteria. In 1918, orphans with parents crowded Cleveland orphanages, partly because of the deadly flu epidemic but mostly because of the institutions' historic policy of admitting the children of destitute, disrupted families. Ninety-one percent of the 2,065 children in Cleveland child-care institutions from 1915 to 1919 had at least one parent; 66 percent returned to their families. A study by Henry W. Thurston of the New York School of Social Work criticized the institutions' haphazard record keeping, their "inadequate investigation of family situations, their unhealthy, crowded, unsanitary conditions; insufficient board payments by parents and relatives," and the children's lengthy stays.[24]

REDEFINING ORPHANS AND ORPHANAGES

As a result of the study, a private agency, the Cleveland Children's Bureau, was established in 1921, staffed with trained caseworkers to screen applications to the orphanages (except for Jewish institutions, served by a Jewish agency). The bureau intended to implement the newest principles of child welfare:

> The family is the primary unit of society and of the state and its solidarity should be protected. . . . The home should be broken only as a last resort after other measures fail and for causes other than economic. . . . The foster family home . . . is the nearest approach to the normal home for children.[25]

The Cleveland bureau won high praise from the United States Children's Bureau, the leader and trendsetter in child welfare. The Cleveland agency, according to the federal bureau, had reduced the "congestion" in orphanages by shortening children's stays and implementing new standards for placement: "dependency alone should not be the basis for institutional care." The very small ethnic orphanages closed. St. John's moved out of the city, and of the newest orphanages, only the Orthodox Jewish Asylum survived the l920s.[26]

The numbers of Cleveland children in institutions did decline slightly from 1,556 in 1924 to 1,491 in 1926, and the numbers in foster homes rose from 717 to 910 during the same period.[27]

In the context of slowing enrollments and continuing criticisms that they were too large and too impersonal, three orphanages moved out of the city and replaced their congregate facilities with cottages intended to simulate family settings for their smaller populations. In 1925, St. Vincent's merged with another orphanage, moved south to Parma, and became Parmadale. Its new campus boasted a dozen Tudor-style cottages, each housing twenty boys, all clustered around a large administration building. The Protestant Orphan Asylum moved several miles east to rural Orange Township on ninety-five wooded acres. Its stucco-clad cottages and chapel suggested an English village, and its new name, Beech Brook, the idyllic setting. The Jewish Orphan Asylum moved to the new suburb of University Heights. Its campus was enclosed by two suburban boulevards, Belvoir and Fairmount, after which the institution was renamed Bellefaire. Its handsome brick cottages, gymnasium, and chapel were designed to fit into this upper-middle-class neighborhood.

The orphanages' new locations distanced them from their historic clientele, the urban working class. The orphanages were no longer intended for poor children, who should be in their own or foster homes.

Similarly, the institutions' new form suggested a new function—the provision of individual attention to badly behaved, difficult, or troubled children. This interest in children's mental health had been expressed earlier when a child guidance center was established at the Children's Aid Society. According to the new professional guidelines, orphanages were now to provide temporary care for children to prepare them for "normal homes" and to "train" them in "proper habits and . . . character."[28] Lawrence C. Cole of the Children's Bureau described such a child: an eight-year-old boy who, after his mother's death, became "incorrigible, playing truant, stealing, etc. . . . After study, the child was placed in an institution, where he . . . has improved greatly and will be able after some months' stay to return home."[29] Although Parmadale still called itself an "orphan village," it now had responsibilities beyond providing food and shelter: "Parmadale is well equipped to give the children intensive spiritual, mental, and physical training . . . it can do more for a child in one year than many of our old institutions could do in two or three years."[30] Dr. O. B Markey, a psychiatrist on the staff at Bellefaire, advised the Children's Bureau that the controlled environment of an institution was crucial in any "mental hygiene program" for children.[31] By the end of the decade, Cleveland orphanages, like child-care institutions elsewhere, "had decided that to survive they needed to concentrate on children with behavioral and psychological disorders," a policy facilitated by the social work's growing emphasis on therapeutic strategies.[32]

ORPHANAGES AND ORPHANS OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION

But by l928, Cole had already begun to worry that institutions had too stringently restricted their intake; more children needed shelter than institutions could provide because of the "industrial situation of the last two years"—the city's already-sagging heavy industry economy. Ominously, orphanages were already almost full, and Parmadale had a long waiting list.[33] In 1929, Cleveland already had a slightly higher child dependency rate (three per thousand population) than comparable urban areas. There were 1,285 dependent children in foster homes, and the 1,573 children filled its orphanages and other child-care institutions.[34]

Cleveland had been flush for much of the 1920s; its industries, particularly automobile manufacture, boomed. Civic pride and prosperity were expressed in the completion of grand public buildings downtown, designed in the Beaux-Arts style and sited around a spacious mall overlooking Lake Erie. In 1927, the downtown's centerpiece was completed—the Cleveland Union Terminal, a railroad terminus with a vast underground shopping concourse. Its owners, Oris Paxton Van Sweringen and Mantis James Van Sweringen, had also built the rapid transit lines that connected the terminal to their new suburban community, Shaker Heights. The terminal was dedicated in June 1930. Within months, almost a third of Cleveland's workforce was out of a job, and the Van Sweringens faced bankruptcy.[35] The Great Depression had begun in earnest.

Families unraveled. As Cole explained,

> Their family resources exhausted, many families of the middle class and even the upper brackets, formerly perfectly competent to meet their own difficulties, have had to ask for service. With the father out of work, the family savings are soon spent, followed by inevitable makeshifts to keep the family together. Sometimes the mother finds work and the children are left day after day without adequate care.[36]

The numbers of Cleveland's dependent children escalated.[37]

A new public child-placement agency, the Cuyahoga County Child Welfare Bureau (CCCWB), was established to help meet this child-care emergency. The orphanages and private child-placing agencies like the Children's Bureau continued to take responsibility for children needing short-term care or children whose parents could pay some board. The CCCWB assumed financial responsibility for children needing long-term care. The agency's staff of professional social workers preferred foster homes to institutions even though the public agency was not obligated to pay the board of county wards in orphanages that received Community Fund monies. In 1931, 1,813 dependent children lived in subsidized foster homes.[38] But even with subsidies, there were not enough foster families. In fifty-six other counties, public children's homes

housed 8,000 children by 1933, but Cuyahoga County still had no children's home.[39] CCCWB social workers were forced to place children in the new Detention Home with delinquent children; sometimes dependent children waited weeks or months for permanent placement.[40]

Anxious parents and reluctant social workers turned to the orphanages for help. For the caseworkers at the Children's Bureau and the CCCWB who screened applications for orphanages, decisions about placement were complicated by the new social work guidelines: troubled children—not poor children—should be institutionalized. Caseworkers' discussions indicate how difficult it was to differentiate a child made dependent by parental poverty from a child made troubled by parental neglect, divorce, desertion, abandonment, and/or poverty. For example, a thirty-year-old divorcee, living in a rooming house, earning $12 a week as a cook, and working late hours, wanted placement for her nine-year-old son, "reported as smoking cigarettes and indulging in questionable conversation"; her ex-husband contributed no child support. Although the caseworker acknowledged that this was an "economic" problem, she decided for placement in the Jones Home. Another case involved children placed at St. Joseph's. The mother had deserted, and the father "asked for placement until he could get a job and get his bills paid." The father, described as "mildly psychotic," got his request.[41]

Parents had apparently learned to stress not their destitution but their own or their children's emotional and behavioral difficulties. Social workers had learned the new psychiatric vocabulary: "Another [case] was a mother working in a beauty parlor, her 8-year-old child being cared for by a friend. The mother has had a nervous breakdown. Her conflict over giving the child up makes her more nervous than before." She earned $12 a week; her ex-husband contributed $5. Is there "some way to get at the motive of the request for placement more thoroughly?" puzzled one caseworker.[42]

As child-care workers conceded, some of the children were troubled because they were in the orphanage, not in the orphanage because they were troubled. Beech Brook's director, C. A. Lindsey, described the trauma of children suddenly torn from parents, siblings, home, and neighborhood. "We like to think," he said,

> that children enjoy the fresh country air, the green fields, and the beauties of nature but such is not always the truth. This city-bred boy so missed his old familiar haunts that he was miserable. "Gee," he wailed, "If I could just smell that old street again." So he was taken in and his joy at seeing the neighborhood . . . was really pathetic.

Children were sometimes simply dropped at the orphanage without being told what was happening or why. One boy's

> father had told him he was going for a ride, which ended at [Beech Brook]. . . . Several others, who first had been taken to the Detention Home, said

that the police later had taken them to [Beech Brook] without telling them their destination.[43]

Although the debate over defining orphans continued, social workers and orphanage admissions committees again allowed compassion to triumph over professionalism, and the orphanages filled with the children of the Depression poor. The children remained in the orphanages 50 percent longer in 1931 than they had only a year earlier; they could not return home. Their parents were in desperate straits. In 1933, of 513 families whose 800 children had been placed in orphanages by the Children's Bureau, 300 were entirely out of work; only 97 families received relief. The 18 employed parents of girls at St. Joseph's earned on the average $8.66 a week; 17 Parmadale parents earned between $1 and $5 a week. At the Jones Home, only 10 of 29 families had work; 4 earned $3 a week or less; 3 worked for room and board. Only 95 of the 513 families were married couples; the rest were listed as separated, divorced, widowed, or deserted spouses.[44]

Despite its new psychiatric orientation, the Children's Aid Society received increasing numbers of children from relief agencies such as CCCWB. In 1928, 58 percent of children admitted were "dependent"; in 1931, 82 percent. The society had hoped to reduce its resident population to thirty-five, "but emergency demands . . . have been so great that this has not been possible."[45] In 1933, Michael Sharlitt, superintendent of Bellefaire, distinguished between its earlier inmates who were "biological" or "sociological orphans" and its current inmates who were "psychological orphans," but this distinction seems to have been irrelevant. In 1935, the families of twenty-two of the twenty-eight children admitted to Bellefaire were on relief.[46]

The admissions book of St. Joseph's records the familiar combination of family and economic collapse that orphaned children both before and during the Depression. Here appear divorced parents, drinking parents, fathers in prison, mothers and fathers in hospitals, all trying to survive the Depression with the help of this institution—for instance, the father who tried to care for his children while his wife was hospitalized but who "could not get work under those conditions." (The rather large number of fathers applying successfully to St. Joseph's can be explained by gendered assumptions about men being breadwinners, not caretakers of children, especially not daughters.) And here is a case that illustrates the devastating impact of the Depression on family life: "[child's name] with no particular disciplinary problems; father drinks, is out of work, quarreling in the home. . . . [Mother] in a nervous condition, on account of conditions at home." The child returned to her mother on Christmas Eve, 1931, because "conditions at home improved."[47]

These children of struggling parents entered institutions that had to feed, shelter, and clothe children with less money than ever before. Their parents, unemployed, working part-time, or bearing other crushing financial obligations, paid less and less board. Board payments were always a small part of

orphanage budgets, but as other sources of income dried up, their loss became more significant. In 1927, Parmadale received $14,742 in board monies; in 1933, $3,322. At the Jones Home, two mothers worked off their children's board.[48]

Absolutely crucial to the orphanages, except Beech Brook and Bellefaire, were Community Fund monies distributed by the Cleveland Welfare Federation. (Beech Brook had a large endowment; Bellefaire received subsidies from the Jewish Community Fund.) But Clevelanders' traditional generosity failed them as the Depression worsened. In 1932, the Community Fund raised a record $5,650,000, but donations dropped to about $3,000,000 a year for the rest of the decade.[49] In March 1933, $835,000 of Community Fund monies were impounded during the Roosevelt bank holiday.[50]

The Welfare Federation allocated fewer funds to child-care agencies and more to family relief agencies.[51] The federation told the orphanages to tighten their belts, urging in 1931 a 10-percent cut in employees' wages. In 1932, the federation cut its subsidies to the orphanages by 30 percent.[52] "All possible savings and cuttings of budgets . . . to the bone should be made," the federation warned, and "The alternative of cutting service through decreasing capacity or closing one or more institutions should not at this time be considered." More specifically, the federation suggested that the Jones Home might cut the wages of its washerwoman and scrubwoman to $2.50 a day plus car fare; Parmadale might reconsider the costs of its new chapel; St. Joseph's, the wages of its gardener; the Children's Aid Society, the salary of its nurse. The federation conducted an exhaustive survey of food costs in child-care institutions and in 1935 apologized that it could not allocate enough monies to meet the children's recommended nutritional needs, hoping that donations of food would tide the children over.[53] Federation subsidies did rise slightly from 1933 on, however, and doubtless kept the institutions alive.[54]

No Cleveland orphanage shut its doors during this decade, but some survived better than others. Beech Brook seems to have been relatively unscathed. Like the federation, the orphanage had funds impounded during the bank holiday. Exceptionally well endowed, however, the institution could sell stock to pay its bills. As the report of the volunteer Board of Managers cheerfully remarked in l934, "Another year of Depression has come and been survived. . . . What's more, we are still 'going strong' with more children than ever [about one hundred] and less funds than for many years." This board, which oversaw the daily operation of the orphanage, boasted of its "ingenuity . . . in making each penny count." The women spent $1 a month on each child's clothing and 7.6 cents a day per child on food.[55] Turkey was only 14 cents a pound at Thanksgiving, and "in spite of 'the times,' " wealthy board members made generous Christmas gifts to the children. The orphanage continued to offer a wide range of activities: Campfire Girls, Cub Scouts, piano lessons, band practice at the public school, dancing, dramatics, crafts, and, in good weather, sports and gardening on the Beech Brook campus.[56]

The recollections of Beech Brook during this period by a small group of former inmates were generally positive. Although both their placement in and their departure from the orphanage were difficult, they had enjoyed the cottages and country setting, especially in comparison to the old Protestant Orphan Asylum. They liked the food ("we had everything we wanted and the best") and the noninstitutional clothing that did not set them apart in their public school. The young men approved of Beech Brook's compulsory religious services and daily chores. They remembered most fondly the warm relationships with the adult staff and the many opportunities for recreation.[57]

Despite its move to suburban cottages and a decline in enrollment, Bellefaire remained a large institution, sheltering almost three hundred children on the eve of the Depression. Parents' board payments and endowment income dropped as expenditures rose. The institution had incurred large debts for the suburban facility and had difficulty collecting the pledges to pay them off.[58]

Although its economic situation recovered somewhat by 1939, Bellefaire's declining population prompted a study that described the lives of poor children in affluent surroundings. The study praised Bellefaire's new physical plant: its attractively furnished cottages, in which there was "freedom from outmoded institutional restrictions"; the gymnasium; and the swimming pool. The children did chores, although housemaids did the heavy cleaning. As at Beech Brook, the children had lots of organized activities, including sports, dramatics, and band. Although physical punishment was forbidden, discipline varied, depending on the cottage staff, and the report conceded that the children sometimes received "rough treatment." The report noted that, as "too commonly found in feeding children in institutions," Bellefaire's expenditures on its children's food was "meager," especially when the adult staff seemed to eat well; children typically ate at lunch two sandwiches ("egg salad," "apple butter") and a cupcake and fruit, while the staff might have "chicken noodle soup, chicken fricassee with dumplings, fresh string beans, bread, canned peaches, tea." And Bellefaire's suburban location sometimes brought cruel reminders of the children's poverty. "When at the old plant in the heart of the city, the children [attended public school] with boys and girls from families which were poor and in many cases unable to provide clothing and nourishment of as good quality" as the children in the orphanage. Now, however, Bellefaire children "found themselves in a privileged suburban neighborhood, where many of their schoolmates have advantages which they could not hope to have." Bellefaire children were bussed to several public schools to which they brought their lunches—all identical. These, like the leather beanies worn by the boys, differentiated them from the other children. There were undoubtedly incidents of anti-Semitism.[59]

Enrollment at the Children's Aid Society was in decline in 1929 but increased and held steady through the mid-1930s. As numbers of children rose, the endowment income plunged. "Even more drastic cuts have been necessary," explained the institution's budget committee: "The emergency was

met by closing the Receiving Home [a temporary holding facility]; the janitor was discharged; dental service was reduced; all but emergency repairs were eliminated. . . . Staff salaries, in addition to the usual cuts, were further reduced."[60] Because of the child guidance services it offered, the society was the only orphanage to receive county monies. CCCWB payments for its wards kept the institution afloat.

In January 1934, the supervisor of the Jones Home hoped that 1933 had been "the last of the Black Years of the Great Depression!" The home's small staff was in disarray; two members were discharged; others left of their own accord. The supervisor reported "weeks without wages, tradespeople reminding us of our debts." Its Women's Board funds were impounded during the bank holiday. The home briefly became entirely dependent on federation monies. The children's music and dance had been discontinued "for lack of funds."[61] By 1939, however, the home's endowments had rallied, providing about half the institution's income, and there was money for some remodeling (but not for a caseworker). The children's lives, according to the supervisor, were "as normal as is possible." As at the other orphanages, children attended public schools where they participated in extracurricular activities and on Sunday went to a neighborhood Protestant Sunday School and church services. There were clubs, activities, and entertainment. Parents visited on Saturday afternoon. Children were allowed to spend Easter and Thanksgiving with their families or friends and could invite them to the home's Christmas celebration.[62]

The Catholic orphanages—with the largest clientele and the smallest endowments—probably fared less well. The merger and new cottage system had incurred substantial debt at Parmadale. From 1931 to 1933, its federation allocation dropped from $80,000 to $57,882. Catholic Charities, which paid for children from outside Cleveland, dropped its subsidy from $60,000 to $48,600 in those years, and it continued to fall. The institution cut per capita expenditures from $1.15 per child in 1930 to $0.92 per child in l933; the children's meals cost 12 cents each in 1930 and 7 cents each in 1933.[63] Although its advisory board scrutinized the institution's expenses—the costs of replacing the boys' clothing and bedding, for instance—Parmadale had $26,000 in unpaid bills in September 1933.[64]

Called on the carpet, the sister in charge of Parmadale described an institution cutting all possible corners.

> The boys have meat four times a week and only the cheapest meat is purchased. . . . Butter is eaten once a day [at] the evening meal. . . . We average six slices of bread per day per boy—about one hundred twenty-five loaves per day. There are no sugar bowls on the tables; cocoa, tea, and cereal are sweetened in the kitchen. We buy seven hundred gallons of milk per week which allows a glass of milk per boy per meal. . . . Fifty under-nourished children receive milk and cod liver oil twice a day. . . . A little over one-third of our budget is for food. In our laundry . . . we have one Sister, one laundry man, and five girls. We operate five days a week. . . . The girls formerly received $40 a month and one

> meal—they now receive $40 a month. The laundry man received $160 per month—he now receives $100 per month and one meal per day. . . . Three hundred sixty boys change their stockings twice a week; their waists on an average of twice a week. . . . Once a week each boy receives a bath towel, hand towel and wash cloth. On an average we give out seventy to eighty suits per year. . . . We buy suits wholesale—this year we were able to purchase them in all sizes . . . at $4 per suit. . . . Haircuts cost ten cents per boy per month.[65]

St. Joseph's was probably the grimmest. Its endowment produced only $300 a year. Board payments declined, as did support from Catholic Charities and the federation. The orphanage ended 1931 with $12.23 on hand; 1932, with $10.43. When the federation and Catholic Charities bailed out the institution, its superintendent exclaimed, "Divine Providence steered our over-freighted barque safely over the first half of 1935."[66]

St. Joseph's perilous financial situation probably inspired a 1935 study of the institution that provides this sad picture. The four-story red-brick buildings, surrounded by a fence, had remained on Woodland Avenue, now an African American neighborhood. St. Joseph's was the only large congregate facility left in Cleveland, with a capacity for 220 but housing between 170 to 140 girls, ages five to fifteen in the early l930s. Life was regimented; a girl was assigned to a division with whom she ate, slept, worked, and had recreation. The girls "marched" or were "conducted to" their daily activities. For recreation, "they roller skate in the gym; a few have bicycles and ride about the grounds and others walk, play or stand about" for an hour. They then went to "their assigned employments in the laundry, kitchen, sewing room, cleaning or dusting through the house." The girls did a substantial amount of the institution's housekeeping, probably to save money. Even the oldest were in bed by 9 p.m. The girls slept in dormitories in the school building, the smallest children in its basement. All girls dined and bathed in the basement, as well. The only attractive room was the front parlor of the main building where the girls seldom visited. Unlike the other orphanages, St. Joseph's maintained its own school of eight grades. About a third of the girls with "dull normal" intelligence constituted a "special class" who were taught "cooking, serving, and sewing plus reading, spelling, and arithmetic." The teaching, supervision, and casework were done by the nuns, many of whom had "grown old in the work."[67]

In 1938, only 104 children, 30 fewer than the year before, were enrolled at St. Joseph's.[68] The orphanage moved in 1943 to the site of a former hospital on Lake Shore Boulevard, and four years later, its 97 girls entered Parmadale.

CONCLUSIONS

As the Depression decade ended, Cleveland's child welfare system was on the verge of vast change. The New Deal had shifted responsibility for dependence, including dependent children, from the private to the public sector. The

1935 Social Security Act provided unemployment and old age insurance for some American workers and Aid to Dependent Children to suitable mothers, which, like the mothers' pensions, was intended to keep families intact and children in their own homes. The CCCWB had quickly emerged as the single largest caretaker of dependent children in Cleveland. Professionally and financially committed to foster home care, the agency in 1941 placed only 32 of its 3,460 wards in orphanages.[69] The dislocations and disruption of families caused by World War II briefly filled Cleveland orphanages again with homeless, familyless children. But at war's end, the institutions' populations quickly declined. New Deal social insurance programs and postwar prosperity took hold, enabling families to care for their own. When families could not support their children, they became the responsibility of the CCCWB, which in 1950 became the Division of Child Welfare of the Cuyahoga County Welfare Department.

In the mid-l950s, Beech Brook, Bellefaire, the Children's Aid Society, the Jones Home, and Parmadale began again their pursuit of a new clientele and a new mission, resuming their transformation into therapeutic facilities. In the early 1960s, the institutions became dependent on public funds, which were available only for sheltering emotionally disturbed children, and the old orphanages began to refer to themselves not as child-care institutions but as "residential treatment centers." Their sectarian ties diminished; they relaxed religious and racial restrictions for admission.[70] In the l970s, criticisms by social work and medical professionals of residential treatment of children encouraged the institutions to develop off-site medical, psychological, and social services for children and their families. Only a very few children—the most seriously disturbed, sometimes predelinquent or delinquent—remained in institutions that had once sheltered hundreds.[71]

Orphanages had lost "their long place at the center of child welfare"[72] but not their tenacious hold on public memory. By the end of the 1980s, social workers talked of "no parent" families, of biological and kinship ties destroyed by drugs, relentless poverty, rising illegitimacy, and child abuse. The numbers of children in foster homes rose from 280,000 in l986 to 430,000 in l994. Policy makers once more suggested that orphanages shelter dependent children. In the wake of an endorsement of orphanages by the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, *Newsweek* asked, "The Orphanage—Is It Time to Bring It Back?" Critics answered no, and, as had Homer Folks decades earlier, attacked orphanages as cruel to children and destructive of families and familial responsibility.[73]

What might policy makers learn from this case study of orphanages during an earlier child-care emergency? On one hand, today's advocates of orphanages have forgotten the pain of children separated from beloved parents and familiar surroundings and have underestimated the anguish of ill, impoverished, or deserted parents compelled to give up their children. Advocates have not realistically calculated the costs of providing shelter for dependent

children today. The volunteers and nuns of the old orphanages have been replaced by social work and medical professionals; the cost-efficient congregate facilities have been replaced by cottages or group homes. Recent efforts to "reform" welfare suggest that the public would be reluctant to pay for such care and shelter for the children of the poor even if turkey still cost 14 cents a pound and haircuts still cost a dime.

On the other hand, current critics of orphanages do not remember that dependent children and child-care workers often had—and have—few choices. Life in Cleveland orphanages, especially during the dark hours of the l930s, was certainly not better than the "home life" celebrated by the l909 White House Conference and later social workers and family preservationists. Yet, an orphanage should not be compared to an ideal family with two parents and a comfortable income but to the real alternatives for dependent children then and now—a life with a disrupted, indigent family or on the street.[74] And critics should remember the crucial child welfare role that the orphanages played throughout the 1930s. Cleveland orphanages, even with belts tightened, salaries slashed, rations reduced, and repairs postponed, provided shelter, food, clothing, medical care, and education for thousands of children with many needs at great cost to themselves.

The Great Depression was perhaps the orphanages' finest hour of service to Cleveland and its needy families. It may not be their last, for orphanages may have another opportunity "to serve Cleveland's little ones in need as never before."

NOTES

1. *White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, 1930* (New York, 1931), 320, 322. I wish to thank John Carroll University for a George G. Grauel Faculty Fellowship that provided a semester off to write this article.

2. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Children under Institutional Care and in Foster Homes, 1933* (Washington, DC, 1935), 4; Marshall B. Jones, "Crisis of the American Orphanage, 1931-1940," *Social Service Review* 63 (December 1989): 627. Other local studies of orphanages that describe the Depression include Howard Goldstein, *The Home on Gorham Street and the Voices of Its Children* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1996); and Kenneth Cmiel, *A Home of Another Kind: One Chicago Orphanage and the Tangle of Child Welfare* (Chicago, 1995).

3. *Annual Report of the Executive Secretary of the Cleveland Children's Bureau, May 4, 1933*, 1-4, Children's Services MSS 4020, container 4, folder 56, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio (WRHS).

4. City of Cleveland, *Annual Report, 1856* (Cleveland, 1856), 44.

5. Quoted in Grace Abbott, *The Child and the State, Vol. 11. The Dependent and the Delinquent Child. The Child of Unmarried Parents* (Chicago, 1947), 45.

6. LeRoy Ashby, *Endangered Children: Dependency, Neglect, and Abuse in American History* (New York, 1997), 73.

7. Timothy A. Hacsi, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), l.

8. The records of the Holy Family Home at the Cleveland Catholic Diocese Archives are too fragmentary to be useful; the records of the Cleveland Christian Home are not available.

9. In 1870, most children in orphanages were half orphans: Rachel Marks, “Institutions for Dependent and Neglected Children: Histories, Nineteenth-Century Statistics, and Recurrent Goals,” in Donnell M. Pappenfort, Dee Morgan Kilpatrick, and Robert W. Roberts, eds., *Social Policy and the Institution* (Chicago, l973), 32. Orphans with parents are noted also in Cmiel, *A Home of Another Kind*; Reena Sigman Friedman, *These Are Our Children: Jewish Orphanages in the United States, 1880-1925* (Hanover, 1994); Nurith Zmora, *Orphanages Reconsidered: Child Care Institutions in Progressive Era Baltimore* (Philadelphia, l994); Goldstein, *The Home on Gorham Street*; Hacsi, *A Second Home*.

10. St. Vincent’s Admissions Books, Cleveland Catholic Diocese Archives (CCDA), Cleveland, Ohio.

11. Protestant Orphan Asylum, Annual Report 1872, 10-1, Beech Brook MSS 4544, container 2, folder 14, WRHS.

12. St. Joseph’s Registry Books, CCDA.

13. 1899 Annual Report, Children’s Aid Society MSS 3923, container 1, folder 14, WRHS.

14. Hacsi, *Second Home*, 143.

15. Record Book of Applicants, 1895-l903 and Admissions Book, Jones Home MSS 4049, container l, folder l, WRHS.

16. Protestant Orphan Asylum, Annual Report, 1901, Beech Brook MSS 4544, container 3, folder 16, WRHS; Hacsi, *Second Home*, 3, 4, 129-33.

17. Hacsi, *Second Home*, 214.

18. Michael J. Hynes, *History of the Diocese of Cleveland: Origin and Growth* (Cleveland, 1953), 222.

19. Jewish Orphan Asylum Annual Report, 1898, Bellefaire MSS 3665, container 14, folder 4, WRHS.

20. Protestant Orphan Asylum Annual Report, 1902, Beech Brook MSS 4544, container 3, folder 16, WRHS.

21. Marks, “Institutions for Dependent and Delinquent Children,” 39.

22. *Proceedings of the National Conference on Charities and Corrections, 1898* (Chicago, 1899), 371; Homer Folks, *The Care of Destitute, Neglected, and Delinquent Children* (London, 1902; 1978 reprint), 121; Hacsi, *Second Home*, 159-62.

23. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Children under Institutional Care, 1923* (Washington, DC, 1927), 107.

24. U.S. Children’s Bureau, *The Children’s Bureau of Cleveland and Its Relation to Other Child-Welfare Agencies* (Washington, DC, 1927), 11.

25. Suggested Program on Child Welfare, Children’s Services MSS 4020, container 4, folder 50, WRHS. The bureau proudly reported instances of what would be described today as “welfare” fraud.

> A so-called widow with three children was referred for study from an institution. It was planned the children would be kept temporarily during the summer, to return to the woman in the fall, giving her an opportunity to catch up financially.

The bureau discovered that the mother had remarried, the stepfather was financially responsible for the children, and the family was already known to eighteen other social agencies. Deciding that the mother was “morally delinquent,” the bureau had her sentenced to the women’s reformatory, and “all of the children permanently removed. . . . This constructive plan was only possible through adequate investigation and planning”: *First Annual Report of the Children’s Bureau, April 1, 1922*, Children’s Services MSS 4020, container 4, folder 50, WRHS.

26. U.S. Children’s Bureau, *The Children’s Bureau of Cleveland*, 35.

27. Report from C. C. Carstens, To the Honorable Board of County Commissioners of Cuyahoga County, Exhibit G, Federation for Community Planning (FCP) MSS 3788, container 2, folder 23, WRHS.

28. “Suggested Program on Child Welfare,” Children’s Services MSS 4020, container 4, folder 50, WRHS.

29. *First Annual Report of the Children’s Bureau, April 1, 1922*, Children’s Services MSS 4020, container 4, folder 50, WRHS.

30. Diocesan Letters, Communications, and Pastorals, Volume IV, September 10, 1925, and brochure, “A Lasting Memorial,” Schrembs (11) Institutions: Parmadale: General, CCDA.

31. Minutes, Children’s Bureau General Board, December 12, 1929, Children’s Services MSS 4020, container 4, folder 54, WRHS.

32. Ashby, *Endangered Children*, l05.

33. “Present Problems of the Children’s Agencies in Cleveland, November 2, l928,” Children’s Services MSS 4020, container 4, folder 53, WRHS.

34. Report from C. C. Carstens, FCP MSS 3788, container 2, folder 23, WRHS. The exact number of children in orphanages is difficult to calculate since sometimes, as in this report, the term *orphanage* includes several facilities for ill, disabled, and predelinquent children, which probably housed about two hundred children. Moreover, sometimes, as here, only Cleveland children are counted, and the two regional orphanages—Bellefaire and Parmadale—housed many children from out of the city.

35. Carol Poh Miller and Robert Wheeler, *A Concise History of Cleveland* (Bloomington, 1990), 129-30; Cuyahoga County's New Relief Needs, June l to December 31, FCP MSS 3788, container 2, folder 27, WRHS.

36. *Annual Report of the Executive Secretary of the Cleveland Children's Bureau, May 4, 1933*, Children's Services MSS 4020, container 4, folder 56, WRHS.

37. Raymond Clapp and Ruth G. King, "Cleveland's Dependent Children, l931," FCP MSS 3788, container 32, folder 785, WRHS.

38. Ibid.

39. Ashby, *Endangered Children*, l09.

40. Cuyahoga County Child Welfare Board (CCCWB), Minutes, Supervisors' Meeting, October 18, 1934 and Minutes, Supervisors' Meeting, October 31, 1935, Child Welfare Collection, WRHS.

41. Minutes, Joint Policy Committee [of the Children's Bureau and CCCWB], February 17, 1937, Children's Services MSS 4020, container 5, folder 66, WRHS.

42. Ibid. See also Martha Heineman Field, "Social Casework Practice during the 'Psychiatric Deluge,' " *Social Service Review* 54 (December 1980): 482-507.

43. Report of the Case Committee, May 8, 1934, Beech Brook MSS 4544, container l, folder 7, WRHS; Walter Albert Olsen, "I Lived in an Institution: A Study of the Reactions of Twelve Men" (Master's thesis, Western Reserve University, School of Applied Social Science, 1941), 10.

44. Analysis of Financial Status, April 1933, Children's Services MSS 4020, container 4, folder 56, WRHS.

45. Table Showing the Distribution of Cases Studied, Children's Aid Society MSS 3923, container l, folder 26; Minutes, Budget Committee, July 28, 1932, Children's Aid Society MSS 3923, container 2, folder 33, WRHS.

46. Bellefaire Annual Reports, 1933-34, Bellefaire MSS 3665, container 16, folder 1, WRHS; 1935 Summary of Jewish Child Care, Jewish Community Federation, MSS 4563, container 9, folder 144, WRHS.

47. St. Joseph's Admissions Book, 1929-1942, CCDA.

48. Parmadale Financial Report, 1925-1934, Schrembs Papers (11) Institutions: Parmadale: General, CCDA; Minutes, Board of Managers, January 13, 1933, Jones Home MSS 4049, container l, folder 8, WRHS.

49. Amounts Raised by Community Fund Chest, Jewish Community Federation MSS 4563, container 2, folder 21, WRHS.

50. Minutes, Board of Trustees of the Children's Bureau, March 7, 1933, Children's Services MSS 4020, container 4, folder 55, WRHS.

51. Amounts Raised by Community Fund Chest, Jewish Community Federation MS 4563.

52. Minutes, Board of Trustees of the Cleveland Children's Bureau, October 6, 1931, and Committee on Budgets of Children's Institutions, August 20, 1932, Children's Services MSS 4020, container 4, folder 55, WRHS.

53. Committee on Budgets of Children's Institutions, August 20, 1932, Children's Services MSS 4020, container 4, folder 55, WRHS; Budgets, Children's Council, December 17, 1935, FCP MSS 3788, microfilm reel 27, WRHS.

54. Budgets, Children's Council, Ibid.

55. Minutes, Meeting of the Trustees, October 25, 1934, and Board of Managers Report, l933-34, Beech Brook MSS 4544, container 1, folder 4, WRHS.

56. Board of Managers Report, l934-l935, Beech Brook MSS 4544, container l, folder 7, WRHS.

57. Olsen, "I Lived in an Institution," 2-25.

58. 1930 Annual Report, Bellefaire MSS 3665, container 16, folder l, WRHS.

59. *Bellefaire, the Jewish Orphan Asylum* (New York, 1939), 43, 57, 16-57, 50, 52. Bellefaire Superintendent Michael Sharlitt in *As I Remember: The Home in My Heart* (Cleveland, 1959), 257-9, wrote (probably correctly) that the intent of the report was to accelerate the development of Bellefaire into a "out-and-out clinical center and laboratory for problem and disturbed children" of which he did not approve, and he criticized the report (incorrectly) for overlooking the positive aspects of the institution.

60. Minutes, Budget Committee, July 28, 1932, and Budgets, Children's Aid Society, MSS 3923, container 2, folder 33 and folder 34, WRHS.

61. Jones Home, Annual Report, January 12, 1934, Children's Services MSS 4049, container l, folder 8, WRHS.

62. Statement of Objectives, April 15, 1939, Children's Services MSS 4049, container l, folder 8, WRHS.

63. Parmadale Financial Report, 1925-1934, Schrembs Papers (11) Institutions: Parmadale: General, CCDA.

64. Minutes, Advisory Board of Parmadale, September 8, 1933, Box 21, Parmadale Reports, CCDA.

65. Minutes, Advisory Board of Parmadale, December 5, 1934, Box 21, Parmadale Reports, CCDA.

66. Letter, Mary M. Cox to Rev. Michael L. Moriarty, January 18, 1936, Federation of Catholic Community Services/Catholic Charities Corporation (FCCS/CCC), St. Joseph's Box 26, l933-1945, CCDA.

67. Report of the Study of St. Joseph's Orphanage, FCCS/CCC, St. Joseph's, 1933-1945, Box 26, CCDA.

68. Minutes, Budget Committee, Children's Council, November 21, 1938, FCP MSS 3788, microfilm reel 27, WRHS.

69. Report of the Committee on the Child Care Field, December 1, 1941, FCP MSS 3788, container 49, folder 1180, WRHS.

70. These changes are described in Marian J. Morton, "Cleveland's Child Welfare System and the 'American Dilemma,' 1941-1964," *Social Service Review* 72 (March 1998): 112-36.

71. Marshall B. Jones, "Decline of the American Orphanage, 1941-1980," *Social Service Review* 67 (September 1993): 459-80; Paul Lerman, *Deinstitutionalization and the Welfare State* (New Brunswick, 1984), 119-21.

72. Hacsi, *Second Home*, 4.

73. Ashby, *Endangered Children*, 176-83; Cmiel, *A Home of Another Kind*, 187-91; Hacsi, *Second Home*, 219-22. New advocates of orphanages include Mary-Lou Weisman, "When Parents Are Not in the Best Interests of the Child," *The Atlantic Monthly* (July 1994), 43-63. Richard McKenzie writes warmly of his own life in an orphanage in *The Home: A Memoir of Growing Up in an Orphanage* (New York, 1996).

74. Goldstein, *The Home on Gorham Street*, 203-5.