
GENESEE COUNTY HOME / POORHOUSE (A brief History)

By Susan L. Conklin, County Historian



An act to provide for the establishment of county poorhouses was passed in Albany in 1824. On December 4, 1826 the Genesee County Board of Supervisors met in Bethany for the purpose of establishing a County Poorhouse. A brick building, originally a stagecoach tavern, located near the corner of the Bethany Center Road and Raymond Road was the site selected, as it represented the geographical center of the county. (Wyoming County wasn't established until 1841.) The following official announcement, dated December 9, 1826, appeared in an issue of the *Batavia Times* newspaper:

"Notice is hereby given that the Genesee County Poorhouse will be ready for the reception of paupers on the first day of January 1827 ... The Overseers of the Poor of the several towns of the County of Genesee are requested, in all cases of removal of paupers to the county poorhouse, to send with them their clothing, beds, bedding and such other articles belonging to the paupers as may be necessary and useful to them."

The following were eligible for assistance: habitual drunkards, lunatics (one who by disease, grief or accident lost the use of reason or from old age, sickness or weakness was so weak of mind as to be incapable of governing or managing their affairs), paupers (a person with no means of income), state paupers (one who is blind, lame, old or disabled with no income source) or a vagrant.

Causes of pauperism are listed and in 1867 the Superintendent of the Poor reported that of the 1,018 poor, 706 had become paupers by intemperance (excessive drinking of alcoholic liquor). Another document noted that a man had died leaving behind a widow and fatherless children and with no means of support the mother and children become residents of the County Home.

In 1828 the County constructed a stone building attached to the Poorhouse for the confinement of lunatics and a repository for paupers committed for misconduct. The insane were also housed at the County Home until 1887 when the Board of Supervisors agreed to send "persons suffering with acute insanity to the Buffalo State Asylum and cases of violent, chronic insanity to Willard.

A list of those who died while living in the County Home was recently compiled by the History Department staff. Information was found in the Registration Books, the list of coffins purchased, mortuary listings and reports from the Superintendents of the

Poor to the County Board of Supervisors. Information on the cemetery located at the County Home is almost nonexistent. The 1886 Proceedings stated "*The burying ground we have improved by building a fence in front and grading and leveling the ground as much as could be done without injury to the graves.*" An actual cemetery register or plot map has yet to be discovered. The County did bury those who had no family to care for the dead and the receipts provide us only with clues.

Occasionally an obituary will include information regarding an individual who once resided and died at the County Home. Phebe White has the distinction of being an inmate for 58 years, having entered the County Home at the age of 9 in 1828, shortly after it opened. She was listed as idiotic and at the age of 49 became blind. Phebe was one of the first recipients of the care and protection provided by the County Home. The Superintendent of the Poor estimated her total care cost the county \$7,000. The 1871 Proceedings listed 146 persons had been provided for at a cost to keep each at \$1.08 per week per resident. The County Home included a working farm and woods which provided food and fuel, therefore the actual cost to care these individuals was low.

A memorial site was created in the Genesee County Park and on June 6, 2004 the Genesee County Historians dedicated a historical marker honoring those who died while living in the County Home from 1827 until 1974 when the facility was closed and relocated to Batavia. In addition to the bronze plaque marker there are five headstones which were returned last fall to the County by Lori Carlson, the current property owner of the former County Poorhouse. These stones date from 1887 to 1888 and the History Department staff was able to find the receipts for the stones which indicated the County purchased them for \$5.00 each. The reason they were never used is unknown. The cemetery for the County Poorhouse has faded away as the stones crumpled, the grass grew and the forest replanted. No one was around to care for those who had so long ago been forgotten. These people, though they were poor, ill and sometime abandoned, do deserve to be remembered.

GENESEE COUNTY HOME RECORDS
HOUSED IN THE
HISTORY DEPARTMENT'S
COUNTY'S ARCHIVES

Inventoried: 2005

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RECORDS PERTAINING TO THE GENESEE COUNTY HOME

Records Management Retention Schedule Number: 21.[634] = Register or equivalent Summary Record Listing Residents of County Poor House or Alms House

Records Date: 1820-1975

Volumes: 6 Cubic Feet and 17 Books

Condition of Records: Good Condition

Location: Archives (see listing)

Includes: Correspondence, receipts, inventories, account ledgers, immigrants, lists, copies of legislative proceedings, financial records, reports, copies of orders and purchases made for the various paupers. File folder headings listing is included.

Historical Value: Documents the level and type of care provided to paupers residing at the County Home. Documents the early development of the facility, growth of the County Farm, and changes brought about through social reform.

Cubic Foot Storage:

DATES	COLLECTION	LOCATION	CONTENTS
1852-1901	Doc. Box 3A	2.A.1	Correspondence
1847-1973	Doc. Box 3B	2.A.2	Lists
1828 – 1975	Doc. Box 3C	2.A.3	Medical
1820 – 1903	Doc. Box 3D	2.A.4	Financial Records
1820 – 1927	Doc. Box 3E	2.A.5	Financial Records
1820 – 1900	Doc. Box 3F	2.A.6	Financial Records
1820-1900	Doc. Box 3G	2.B.4	Financial Records