

**Vermont Industrial School  
Journals, 1910-1915, 1917, 1936  
MSA 437**

**Introduction**

This collection consists of eight journals kept by an unknown employee of the Vermont Industrial School in Vergennes, Vermont, for the years 1910-1915, 1917, and 1936. The journals document the people and activities at the school. The collection was purchased by the Vermont Historical Society from Paula DeFeyter in March 2008 (Ms. acc. no. 2008.9). The collection also includes a handwritten, handbound book of approximately 75 pages entitled “Needlework Taught in Industrial Schools,” dating from the early 1900s. The provenance of the book is unknown; it was found in 2026 a box of de-accessioned museum materials that were not associated with other VHS collections. The collection is housed in one archival flip-top box and occupies .5 linear feet of shelf space.

**Institutional History**

The Vermont Industrial School was authorized by the state legislature in 1865 as the Vermont Reform School and soon put into operation in the town of Waterbury. The School was to aid in the reformation and correction of all offenders under eighteen years of age, changed to sixteen years in 1866. Prior to the establishment of this School, juveniles were treated the same as adults. The school was all but destroyed by fire in 1874, so the legislature appropriated \$49,000 for it to move to the old Champlain Arsenal grounds in Vergennes, where it remained until it closed in April 1979. In 1875, permission was given to send girls from ages ten to fifteen to the School. The Vermont Reform School had its name changed in 1900 to the Vermont Industrial School, then in 1937 to the Weeks School in honor of former Governor John E. Weeks.

The School was controlled by a three-member commission until 1906 when it came under the Board of Penal Institutions. In the years between 1906 and 1966, the School underwent some changes in control. In 1966 the Weeks School was administered by the Department of Institutions. When it closed in 1979, the School was under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections.

The institution played a role in the eugenics movement in Vermont. In 1925 Henry F. Perkins, professor of zoology at the University of Vermont, organized the Eugenic Survey of Vermont as an adjunct to his heredity course. Its mission was to conduct eugenics research, educate the public about the results of that research, and provide support for social legislation that would reduce the apparent growing population of Vermont’s “social problem group.” Professor Perkins reportedly brought his heredity class to Vermont Industrial School for “field work” in eugenics, and many of the Eugenic Survey’s genealogies of so called “degenerate” families originated with children at this institution.

Besides juvenile delinquents the school also served as a temporary shelter for children who were not delinquent, but were dependent or neglected children. In the 1960s the school offered a strong developmental and educational program in a campus atmosphere. At that time the population was about 160 with seventy to ninety additional children in foster homes under the eye of the institution.

In 1979 with the movement for deinstitutionalization and for centralization of human services functions, the federal government offered to take the Weeks School as a Job Corps site. Federal funds supported a transition to a community-based system of juvenile services, and the Departments of Corrections and Social and Rehabilitation Services used those funds to begin a network of group homes, open a secure detention unit at Waterbury State Hospital, and create a wilderness camp. The state transferred responsibility for children adjudicated delinquent to the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, which in turn contracted with community mental health centers, licensed group homes, schools, foster parents, and others for services formerly provided by state employees.

### **Scope and Content**

This collection consists of eight journals of activities at the Vermont Industrial School in Vergennes, Vermont, for the years 1910-1915, 1917, and 1936. The author or authors of the journals is unknown, although she may have been the school nurse since many entries record the health of residents and employees and the appearance of doctors to treat them.

Joseph N. Barss was superintendent of the Vermont Industrial School from 1907 until November of 1917. The seventh diary in the collection ends just after the arrival of "our new Superintendent Mr. Wilson" on November 4, 1917.

These are a few excerpts from the diaries:

January 1, 1911: Mr. McNeil is better, but the Dr. thought it was best to put him in the sick ward as he is suspicious of scarlet fever."

April 24, 1911: Agnes Hart and Ira Peters were both furloughed today to Mrs. and Mr. Fred Guyette of Shoreham.

July 24, 1911: Miss Morton went to Burlington in the morning and returned in the afternoon with Rose Pratt, who has been for the past two weeks at the Mary Fletcher Hospital. Mrs. Barss went to the station to meet them.

August 10, 1914: Wilfred Warner escaped tonight from the barn.

August 11, 1914: At 5:00 pm Larmay (?) escaped, swam the Creek and succeeded in eluding all pursuers.

February 24, 1917: Cleveland and Goodell ran away tonight. Returned about midnight by Mr. Lawrence.

An index to the names of children mentioned in the journals created by VHS volunteers is contained in Folder 0.1. A transcription of the 1936 journal is in Folder 0.2. This was created to give researchers an idea of the events and activities at the school. Additional excerpts from the journals, created by the dealer who sold these items to the Vermont Historical Society, are in Folder 0.

Also included in the collection is a handwritten, handbound book of approximately 75 pages entitled “Needlework Taught in Industrial Schools.” The provenance of the book is unknown; it was found in 2026 a box of de-accessioned museum materials that were not associated with other VHS collections. The book does not mention a specific connection to the Vermont Industrial School in Vergennes. However, it is possible that it did originate there and such a book would certainly have been used by teachers at the school to instruct girls in the useful craft of sewing. The book dates from the late 1880s or early 1900s. The book contains 24 lessons beginning with the basics of how to thread a needle, and then progressing to topics such as basting, types of stitches, hemming, patching, buttonholes, darning, patterns, embroidery, and constructing finished garments. Most lessons include sample bits of fabric with examples of the completed patterns and stitches. The book provides a unique window into the education of girls in industrial schools.

### **Related Collections**

The VHS library collection includes the biennial report from the Vermont Industrial School 1901-1902, 1903-1904, 1905-1906 and copies of the *Echo*, a monthly institutional newsletter for November and December 1911, Feb., March, April, May, June, August, and December 1912, January, April, and August 1913, and June 1920. All are in the “Pam. School Catalogs” drawers. Some list the names of residents of the Industrial School when the report was issued.

A pair of journals for the years 1908 and 1909, similar to the ones in this collection, were sold by an unnamed book dealer in 2008. (See Folder 0).

### **Inventory**

MSA 437:1	Journal, 1910
2	_____, 1911
3	_____, 1912
4	_____, 1913
5	_____, 1914
6	_____, 1915
7	_____, 1917

- 8 \_\_\_\_\_, 1936  
9 “Needlework Taught in Industrial Schools,” ca. late 1800s-early 1900s.

VHS Volunteers & Paul Carnahan  
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