



Women . . . were the first Burlington residents to see poverty as a social issue that demanded a response beyond the resources of the poorhouse.

Middle-Class Women and Civic Improvement in Burlington 1865-1890

By MARSHALL TRUE

Just before Christmas in 1866, a young girl was brought to the Home for Destitute Children in Burlington. Dressed in rags, she had only a remnant of an old quilt to protect her against the cold. Orphaned by the death of her parents in Quebec, she had been sent to live with an uncle who had recently migrated to Vermont. According to Julia Spear, the recording secretary for the Home, the child had been seriously abused. She was “hardly more than a skeleton, the poor little limbs covered with bruises.” Less than a year later this little girl had been placed in a home where she could be “tenderly loved and very happy.”¹

This tale, recounted in the Home’s annual report in the sentimental prose style of the period, was clearly designed to appeal to the spirit of altruism that the Home’s sponsors assumed motivated its public benefactors. The Home sought to give “wretched beggars” an opportunity for “respectability and usefulness in life.” It did so “by removing children from contact with the vices of their elders . . . and by giving them the rudiments of an education.”² The women of the Home also hoped to serve not only the children but also the “community in which they are saved from pauperism and crime.”³ Interestingly this larger ambition to serve the community was often obscured in the documents and reports of the Home for Destitute Children and may well have masked the important contributions that middle-class women interested in charitable work made to the civic culture of Burlington in the decades following the Civil War. I use civic culture here to refer both to the ways residents of Burlington envisioned their city and to the means they used collectively to realize those visions.

The Home for Destitute Children was one Burlington agency founded by middle-class women to combat poverty in the city in the latter decades

of the nineteenth century. Another was the Burlington Relief Association, founded in 1861 and by 1869 called the Ladies Aid Society. This Ladies Aid Society became the Howard Relief Society in 1882 and was incorporated under that name by the state in 1884. (To avoid confusion I have attempted, except when quoting a source directly, to use the name common at the time.)⁴ Through these institutions, two generations of middle-class women established a link between organized efforts to help the poor and organized efforts to build a better Burlington. This linkage between charity and civic improvement had important consequences for the city, for the poor, and finally, for these middle-class women themselves.

Middle-class women had, of course, long been involved in charitable work in the community. As individuals, as church members, and as the wives and daughters of prominent citizens, Burlington women had conducted charity schools, participated in church benefits for the poor, and distributed their private largess to those less fortunate than themselves. They had also joined the temperance and antislavery movements partly, at least, in an effort to improve the world in which they lived. What was new in the charitable work of the women discussed here was the scale and organized nature of their activities.

On April 22, 1861, a large group of Burlington women gathered in the dining hall of the American Hotel to support Vermont men engaged in the struggle for the Union. In the "present crisis" of the country they felt "called upon to help." Mrs. George Wyllys Benedict was elected chair of the association and Mrs. Philo Doolittle became secretary. The women organized committees and divided their labor to provide shirts, haversacks, underwear, towels, sewing kits, and Bibles for the young Vermonters going off to fight.⁵ These women organized sewing bees, provided food and drink for soldiers' picnics, and established a network to collect fees; one young married woman, Ellen Boardman, dutifully recorded her donations ranging from five to eighty cents in her household account book.⁶

This relief association also served as a seedbed for future organized women's activities in the community. Ellen Lyman, daughter of prominent Burlington coal merchant Elias Lyman, frequently wrote in her diary about going to the courthouse to "sew for soldiers" during the war. Lyman also noted the "soldiers pic-nics."⁷ After the war and her marriage to Charles E. Allen, "Nelly" Allen served for five years as the recording secretary of the Home for Destitute Children.⁸ Ella Moody, a frequent companion of Ellen Lyman during the war and later a teacher at a select school for girls, became one of the first local managers for the Home.⁹ Both Katherine Hagar and Ellen Platt, two of the founders of the Ladies Aid Society, were active in the Burlington Relief Association of the Civil War period.¹⁰

The founding of the Home for Destitute Children in 1865, for example, was an immediate outgrowth of the organized efforts of women in Burlington to aid the Union cause during the Civil War. Established initially for the orphaned daughters of Civil War veterans by a number of women who had worked together in the Burlington Relief Association during the war, the Home quickly expanded its horizons to include boys as well as girls and abused children as well as orphans.¹¹ Just months before the Home for Destitute Children opened Roman Catholic Bishop Louis de Goesbriand had written in his diary: [the Catholic Church] “is the only one that does anything for the poor.” De Goesbriand had been instrumental in founding the Providence Orphan Asylum in 1854. The bishop’s views and the substantial attention given to the fact that the founders of the Home represented every Protestant denomination in the city suggest that it was begun, at least in part, in response to Catholic initiatives.¹²

These Protestant middle-class founders had similar backgrounds. All but one were married women. All were active churchwomen and all had connections to well established Burlington families. The only unmarried founder was Lucia T. Wheeler, who was the daughter of the late president of the University of Vermont, John Wheeler. A “confirmed invalid and sufferer,” who lived for the “Christian example” she could provide others, Lucia Wheeler resided with her mother and was active in Burlington philanthropic circles. Most accounts portray Lucia Wheeler as the founder of the Home, thus honoring the assumption that the Home was her idea and the importance of her bequest of \$10,000 to it upon her death in 1871.¹³ Yet to focus on Wheeler and her Christian altruism misrepresents the impact of the other founders and perhaps their motivations as well. Susan M. Edmunds, the daughter of prominent Burlington attorney, Wyllys Lyman, was married to George F. Edmunds, who began his long career in the United States Senate in 1866. Mary Haight Phelps was the wife of Edward J. Phelps, son of a former Vermont senator and a leading Burlington lawyer. Phelps was also the city’s most prominent Democrat and after serving a term as president of the American Bar Association, was appointed the United States ambassador to England by President Grover Cleveland. Katherine Pease Benedict, like Wheeler, was the daughter of a University of Vermont president and was married to George G. Benedict, the publisher and (after 1866) owner of the *Burlington Daily Free Press*. Julia Loomis was married to Henry Loomis, a member of one of Burlington’s oldest and most prominent families and an important banker. Laura Hickok was the wife of a retired New York City physician; Dr. Hickok had volunteered his time to supervise the re-

furbishing of the poorhouse on Shelburne Road in 1859. Harriet Shedd was married to James V. Shedd, a prosperous tinware merchant and local politician.¹⁴

As organizers of the Home, these women took on the initial responsibility for its operation. In their ambition to fit children “for positions of respectability and usefulness in life,” they discovered “the vices of their elders” and recognized that those vices were rooted not only in sloth and intemperance, but in poverty as well.¹⁵ This link between vice and poverty also dawned on others in the community. Dr. Samuel W. Thayer wrote a hard-hitting report on poverty in the city’s tenements in 1866.¹⁶ Significantly, organized middle-class women were among the first to respond to the problem of poverty in the city. During the war, members of the Burlington Relief Association prepared food baskets for war widows and orphans and after the war women continued to help the needy as members of the Ladies Aid Society.

The members of this aid society, like the organizers of the Home for Destitute Children, were all Protestant. The majority were married to men of stature in the community, and, of course, they were all middle class. Moreover, many of them knew the organizers of the Home and shared their ambitions to save the deserving poor from the ravages of poverty.

Louisa Howard, Helen Phelps, Almira Mead, Emily Clapp, Harriet Willard, Martha Towle, Ellen Platt, and Katherine Hagar were among the organizers of the Ladies Aid Society. Louisa Howard, an active figure in Burlington philanthropic circles, was the society’s most prominent member. Howard had donated generously to the Home for Destitute Children, even providing tombstone markers for children who died. She regularly gave to the Poor Fund at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, and endowed scholarship money for students at the University of Vermont. Her gifts to the relief society, totaling more than \$40,000, enabled it to become a permanent institution in Burlington.¹⁷ Ironically it was Louisa Howard’s younger brother, John Purple Howard, who acquired vast wealth in the New York hotel and real estate business and was a prominent Burlington benefactor, from whom the Howard Relief Society took its name in 1882.¹⁸

The other women associated with the early stages of the relief society, while less prominent than Louisa Howard, were members of leading Burlington families. Phelps, Mead, Clapp, Willard, and Towle were married to local businessmen. Hiram Phelps operated a marble and granite business, and C. N. Mead was a tobacco dealer. R. M. Clapp was one of the founders of the Burlington Shade Roller Company, while George Willard ran a grocery store. George Towle had a partnership in a dry

goods business. Ellen Platt was the widow of L. B. Platt, a banker and businessman, and Katherine Hagar was the unmarried daughter of George Hagar, a hardware store owner.¹⁹

Middle-class women in Burlington, as others nationally, entered into charitable work for a constellation of reasons. As Alice Kessler-Harris has pointed out, a national demographic revolution, which produced smaller families, combined with substantial changes in household technology to free married women to seek voluntary work outside the home.²⁰ Charitable work, often seen as an extension of woman's work as nurturers and moral exemplars, drew thousands of American women into groups like the Home for Destitute Children and the Howard Relief Society.²¹ Moreover, Protestants in cities across the United States turned to charitable work as a response to the unsettling problems of industrialization, whether out of altruism or out of their desire to reassert social control.²² These forces operated in Burlington, Vermont, as they did in the rest of the nation.

Yet in two distinct but related areas, Burlington's charity movement ran contrary to national trends. First, organized charity in Burlington was born with the creation of the city in 1865 and consequently became part of a larger municipal campaign to build a better Burlington. Secondly, Burlington women, unlike many of their counterparts elsewhere, established and maintained control over their charitable organizations. John T. Cumbler has studied charitable organizations in Fall River and Lynn, Massachusetts, two small industrial cities much like Burlington. In Fall River, Cumbler finds women made up over 90 percent of the membership and occupied no leadership positions. In Lynn women gradually moved into leadership roles and, in so doing, changed the agenda for organized charity by making it more sensitive to the needs of working women. Their drive to attain leadership positions, however, cost the women of Lynn both energy and time. While charity reformers in Lynn and elsewhere had to compete for public attention and limited resources with other reform groups,²³ the women of Burlington, thanks to the timing of municipal reform and their own efforts, occupied a central position from the beginning. They used this position to alter public policy toward the poor and establish a fragile bridge over some of the issues of class and ethnicity that divided women.

In 1865 Burlington was in the middle of a period of rapid change. The coming of the railroad in 1850 had diminished the importance of lakeborne wholesale commerce to Burlington and forced a reorientation of the town's economy. In 1856 Lawrence Barnes opened a planing mill for processing lumber on the Burlington docks, and this lumber business, along with ancillary wood manufacturing enterprises, had keyed what

residents hailed as a marvelous renewal of economic prospects. Matthew Buckham, a University of Vermont professor, wrote in 1867 about “the almost wonderful revival of enterprise here within five years past.”²⁴ Sion Howard wrote glowingly to his brother Daniel about real estate prospects in Burlington, concluding “so you see there are changes and chances for more in Burlington.”²⁵ Prospects of a “prosperous and happy” career, in the words of Burlington’s first mayor, Albert L. Catlin, had fueled the 1865 decision to incorporate the city of Burlington. As Catlin noted in his address that year: “By a wise administration, the city can be improved from year to year and made all that is desirable for its residents.”²⁶

Among the improvements envisioned by Mayor Catlin were an improved sewer system, a new sanitary water supply, new streets and curbs, and the establishment of a city marketplace for wood and hay. The mayor also promised citizens that his administration would keep “special vigilance over idlers and loungers who are . . . in our midst.”²⁷ Burlington’s growth had attracted new migrants, not only from the surrounding countryside but also from French Canada and Ireland. As these new arrivals came to the city seeking work in the lumberyards or on the docks, they crowded into tenement houses in each of the city’s three wards. The city’s health officer, Dr. Thayer, described several crowded tenements in the North End “where horses, cows, hogs, hens and children are mixed up, so that it is difficult to determine which is the hog pen and which is the nursery.” These tenements, “filthy haunts of dissipation and poverty,” demanded public attention, Thayer believed, and in his report he recommended that the Overseer of the Poor also act as a city inspector and do what was necessary to clean them up.²⁸

Thayer’s recommendation — had it been carried out — would have severely strained the resources of the Overseer of the Poor. Samuel P. Huntington, a bookseller and Methodist Sunday School director, who with Dr. Hickok, had been most responsible for establishing the town’s new poorhouse in 1859, reported in 1863 that ninety-nine persons had been admitted during the year to a poorhouse designed to accommodate seventy-five. In 1864 Huntington noted that the seventy-six persons helped that year included an “undue proportion of children.” Huntington also reported higher expenditures than usual because he provided aid both to the families of deceased soldiers and to draftees who had not been paid. Huntington, who was trying to deal with an apparently unending problem with limited resources, was sometimes vexed by his charges and what he saw as “the constant coming and going of strangers, the most loathsome to be imagined, with diseased bodies and not infrequently covered with vermin.”²⁹ Nor did the war’s end ameliorate the problems of poverty for Huntington’s successors, Noble B. Flanagan and Ambrose

A. Drew. As Drew laconically reported to the citizens of Burlington in 1869: "Total enjoying benefits of Poor House, 86."³⁰

Flanagan and Drew were also interesting choices for their office. Flanagan, born in Hinesburg in 1815, had been sheriff of Chittenden County since 1857 and had worked during the war as a Deputy Collector for the U.S. Internal Revenue Department. While he served as Overseer of the Poor, he was also a collector of taxes, policeman, and chief engineer of the fire department. Flanagan later served as city collector and policeman, and in 1871 he became chief of police, succeeding Luman A. Drew, Ambrose's brother. The Drew brothers ran a meat market located at the city marketplace, next door to the City Hall.³¹ That the city should select two men closely identified with the emerging municipal police authority as overseers revealed the voters' traditional disposition to identify that office as one dealing with "vagrants, common beggars, and idle and disorderly persons."³²

As a lake port Burlington traditionally had its population of transient poor. Residents of the city tended to assume, therefore, that problems of poverty were largely temporary. They saw Burlington as the "gate through which emigrating paupers" passed "in their annual peregrinations."³³ This attitude may clearly be seen in the work of Rowland E. Robinson, a popular local colorist who described French Canadian migrants as "professional beggars" and regarded them as "an abominable crew of vagabonds."³⁴

As overcrowded tenements intimated, and census data confirmed, increasing numbers of Burlington's "emigrating paupers" were choosing to stay. In 1860, Burlington had identifiable Irish and French Canadian populations of 1,098 and 1,067 respectively. Through the 1860s foreign emigrants, particularly from Canada, continued to flock into Burlington. The city's population grew dynamically from 7,716 in 1860 to 14,387 in 1870, and the census of 1870 revealed that 6,618 (42.9%) were foreign-born. Moreover, the growing number of French Canadians, fleeing economic hardship in Quebec, found themselves in low-paying unskilled jobs; in 1870 three out of every four workingmen faced those disheartening conditions. Additionally, because the cost of living in Burlington was on the rise throughout this period, unskilled laborers — particularly those with families — found even a subsistence living difficult to attain.³⁵

Gradually, concerned women in Burlington realized that they would have to deal with what they saw as "the legacy of poverty" in the community.³⁶ From the late 1860s well into the 1880s, women struggled with the issues of poverty, crime, and education in their city and over time they achieved a general consensus on how the community should respond to the poor. They worked with local officials, chiefly the mayor and

Overseer of the Poor, and their efforts both widened and altered the city's institutional responses to the needy. Both institutions, the Home for Destitute Children and the Howard Relief Society, increasingly occupied central and influential positions in the city.

Women, for example, were the first Burlington residents to see poverty as a social issue that demanded a response beyond the resources of the poorhouse. One of the earliest responses came from the organizers of the Home for Destitute Children. By 1866, the numbers of children in need persuaded Harriet Shedd, the manager for that year, Laura Hickok, the vice president of the Home, and Sarah C. Cole, recently elected corresponding secretary, that they needed to put their institution on a permanent footing. The following year, they announced a statewide fund-raising effort. Cole specifically criticized the poorhouse because it made no attempt to "elevate" its charges; she argued that the older notion that each community should take care of its own poor was "wholly at fault applied to children."³⁷

From the outset one of the objectives of the women of the Home for Destitute Children and the Ladies Aid Society had been to provide the children of the poor with the benefits of an education; the Home operated its own primary school for four and a half hours each day and in 1865 taught the girls "sewing and knitting besides the usual English Branches."³⁸ The Ladies Aid Society designed a number of programs to keep children in school. In its program of distributing clothing, for example, children needing shoes, warm coats, or rubbers were required to have notes from their teachers attesting to regular attendance. The Society also operated a school on Saturdays where boys and girls were given instruction in useful crafts, etiquette, and deportment. Both organizations took great pride in educating children: "We often question the wisdom of aiding the dissolute, the lazy, the 'shiftless' . . . but we are confident that we cannot make a mistake if through our watchful care the poor children of the city . . . are kept regularly at school."³⁹ Matthew Buckham, at the head of a local school committee seeking to reform the school system, supported the women's efforts. He expressed his concern for "hordes of ragged children on the streets." Buckham estimated that two-thirds of these youths were "non-Americans" and warned his fellow citizens not to forget "the duty of educating these children." "Here," he said, were "in great numbers the children of the ignorant, the unthrifty, the uncleanly."⁴⁰

Difficult economic circumstances troubled Burlington through the decade of the 1870s. The city's ethnic composition continued to change, and men and women, concerned with those Buckham called "the unthrifty, the uncleanly," had to face the poverty of many of the city's new ar-

rivals. Abner B. Lowry, a bookkeeper by trade, became Overseer of the Poor for the last nine months of 1871 and served in that position through 1878. Interestingly, Lowry, unlike his immediate predecessors, had no law enforcement background. He was also the first overseer to work regularly with the women of the Ladies Aid Society and to acknowledge their efforts in his reports.

Lowry's detailed reports provide impressive evidence of poverty in the city. In 1871 Lowry reported that he had aided 113 paupers at a cost to the city of just under \$4,000. Of those helped, 74 had come to the city from either Canada or Ireland (53 and 21 respectively); in 1877 Lowry shared similar statistics with the public and reported that of 221 aided, 130 hailed from Canada while 56 came from Ireland.⁴¹ Lowry, described by Mayor Jo D. Hatch as a "prudent and painstaking overseer," had little sympathy for the poor. He found them "the most insolent and exacting people among us. They demand aid of the overseer with the audacity of a highwayman and dictate with the authority of the Lord of the Manor no matter how drunken, idle and undeserving they may be."⁴² Lowry concluded his report in 1876 by recommending that the city revise its laws to put the able-bodied poor to work.

This recommendation echoed a reform that had already been introduced into Burlington by the women of the Ladies Aid Society. In 1873 Ellen Platt operated an employment office, located on Church Street near Lowry's office, to assist women in finding jobs for which they were paid in food, clothing or, infrequently, money. This operation became what the women of the society called an "intelligence office," in effect, a domestic job locating service. By paying a fifty cent registration fee, Burlington residents seeking domestic help, for laundry and cleaning, were provided with the names of women willing to do such work. Platt commented, "A great effort was made to induce women to pay in work of some kind for the help they received."⁴³ The women of the society, using information gleaned from visiting Burlington's poor neighborhoods and interviewing the women for whom they had found work, concluded that healthy men and women should work for the aid they received. As Lowry's successor as Overseer of the Poor, Henry Greene, reported in 1879, the Ladies Aid Society had devoted its attention to the "healthy able-bodied pauper" and had "endeavored to secure work and positions for such persons and ha[d] planned some work for them to do" to enable them "to realize the value of work." Greene heartily embraced the conclusion of the Ladies Aid Society that "indiscriminate giving is no aid to the poor as a whole."⁴⁴

Mayor Hatch also embraced the idea of finding "a limited amount of work" for the able-bodied to provide relief and not "encourage pauperism." By 1880 the city had adopted measures to permit the 'street commissioners

to provide employment to the poor by furnishing stone to be broken for use on the streets,” and Mayor Hatch specifically credited the Ladies Aid Society for establishing the principle of “proper discrimination between those who ask for assistance from necessity and those who are indolent and undeserving.” Mayor Hatch also praised the Society “for its unselfish and devoted attention to the wants of those who, for various reasons, are not properly classified as city paupers but who by such assistance are saved from being aided directly by the city.”⁴⁵

Members of the Ladies Aid Society established a program of visiting the homes of those who sought assistance. They believed that these investigations afforded “the only possible means of controlling pauperism and unmasking imposture.” They sought direct knowledge of the living conditions of the poor because they wanted to make relief conditional upon progress and good conduct. By knowing how the poor lived, they sought to “raise the needy above the need for relief, prevent begging . . . [and] to encourage thrift, self-dependence, industry and sanitation.”⁴⁶ Overseers of the Poor and other public officials imitated the efforts made by middle-class women “for the amelioration of the conditions of the poor.”⁴⁷ Those same officials adopted policies originally pioneered by the Ladies Aid Society. Henry Greene reported in 1881 that the society was cooperating with him in a plan for “furnishing employment to the needy who are able to work,”⁴⁸ and in 1892 Mayor Seneca Haselton told the public that all calls for city assistance were “patiently and thoroughly investigated.”⁴⁹

Just as the Ladies Aid Society developed into an influential agency for dealing with the needy of Burlington, the Home for Destitute Children, through the efforts of the women who worked for it, became a powerful force shaping state policy toward dependent children. In its first decade of operation, the Home admitted 276 destitute children and placed 200 of them “into good families.”⁵⁰ To do this, its organizers and managers had established a permanent fund for the Home and annually solicited donations from all over the state. The Home recruited managers in every county of the state, who worked closely with the women of Burlington both in screening potential adoptive families and in selecting needy children for admission to the Home. The Home’s managers developed guidelines for adopting families that required prospective parents to describe their economic circumstances, the distance from their home to school and church; they also recommended a three-month trial period for each adoption, and required that every child report back to them within six weeks after placement.⁵¹ By 1890 the Home had an established reputation as a “child saving institution” and it had cared for, educated in its primary school, and changed the lives of eight hundred children from Burlington

and all over the state.⁵² The actions of these women removed children from the poorhouse in Burlington, as Overseer Greene and others noted. But more importantly these women and their associates in the society had articulated the community's responsibility to provide "care and nurture for those creatures thrust upon the charity of an unthinking world."⁵³

The sympathy that Julia Spear expressed for the plight of the young waif from Quebec hinted at a connection that these middle-class women made across class lines with the wives and daughters of the poor. This tenuous connection suggests that the organized charitable efforts of middle-class women had consequences that they had not anticipated and did not claim. Although the evidence is largely anecdotal, I would argue that the women of the Home and the Howard were women helping other women. The tales of saving young E. from the life of prostitution followed by her mother and sister or providing work for Mrs. B., deserted by her intemperate husband, which provide much of the substance of the annual reports of these organizations, hint at sisterly connections across class and ethnic lines and presage the social feminism most traditionally associated with the settlement houses of the Progressive Movement in the last decade of the century.⁵⁴ This is not to suggest that women associated with charitable reforms necessarily embraced the reform agenda of Jane Addams or Lillian Wald; the evidence of Katherine Pease Benedict's diary for 1870 in which she recorded countless hours "begging for the Home" and also confessed that she had "heard woman suffrage discussed *ad nauseam*" contradicts that conclusion.⁵⁵ But women who worked actively in the community with other women found their perceptions of a woman's sphere changed. Katherine Hagar, for example, one of the most active members of the Howard Relief Society, was superficially a typical nineteenth-century spinster. She had been trapped at home by the need to care for a demanding invalid mother so that her father and brothers could carry on the family business. Her mother's death released the well-educated, talented Hagar, and she became the first president of the Howard Relief Society. Her work with the Howard was important to her and she did it well. Reading widely in the literature of charitable reform (her sister Sarah was the librarian at the Fletcher Free Library from 1885 until shortly before her death in 1905), Hagar insisted that all applications for financial aid be investigated carefully, that homes of the needy be visited regularly, and that aid be tied to gainful employment or school attendance. These administrative innovations had important implications not only for the Howard Relief Society but also for the city as a whole and brought Hagar's concern for poor women to the attention of city officials.⁵⁶ Moreover, Hagar was widely regarded as the "life and soul" of the Howard Relief Society and was hailed by Sarah

Torrey, who became president of the Home for Destitute Children in 1893, as “the friend of the poor.”⁵⁷

Like Hagar, other women found scope for their considerable talents and energies in charitable work. Laura Hickok, for example, devoted eighteen years to managing the Home for Destitute Children. Blessed with a shrewd administrative mind, Hickok was largely responsible for setting up the county manager system that transformed the Home from a strictly local operation to a statewide social service agency. She also supervised the expansion of the Home’s quarters and combatted bouts with measles and frozen pipes, which troubled the Home’s day-to-day administration. Although poor health forced Hickok to relinquish her executive responsibilities in 1883, she continued to be active at the Home until her death in 1893. Her obituary praised her “generous policy to the poor” and commented “There were few days . . . when her little carriage was not seen on its way to the home.” Hickok’s dedication was matched by that of her friend and colleague, Harriet Shedd. While Hickok managed the programs, Shedd provided the financial resources to support them. Shedd was the Home’s chief fund-raiser, and between 1865 and her death in 1882 she achieved the financial backing that made the Home a fixed part of the Burlington community. She organized parish committees to ensure regular collections from local Protestant congregations; she wrote annual request letters to potential benefactors all over the state. Shedd also organized Busy Bee clubs to teach local schoolgirls how to raise funds in the city, and was instrumental in making the arrangements that led to John P. Howard’s gift of the revenues from the Howard Opera House to the Home. In her last year as treasurer of the Home, Shedd managed a budget of over \$17,000, while that of Henry Greene, as Overseer of the Poor, was less than \$5,000.⁵⁸ Hagar, Hickok, Shedd, and many of the other women associated with them, found in charitable work an opportunity to develop and use administrative, political, and fiscal abilities in a world that otherwise denied these opportunities to women. Surely active women visibly doing useful work in the community left this legacy as a lesson for their daughters.

Forcefully in act and argument, middle-class women shaped the building of what city boosters proudly called “Beautiful Burlington.”⁵⁹ They placed their concern with the needy squarely on the city’s reform agenda. They worked effectively to shape policies and develop strategies to help the indigent adjust to rapid economic and demographic change in the city. They made the organizations they had founded an integral part of Burlington’s civic culture with definite responsibilities for the unfortunate. Finally the organized charitable work of the women of Burlington helped a rapidly changing city to redefine itself. In simple terms, their humane

concern for the unfortunate and their willingness to contribute so many hours of unpaid labor to that cause enhanced the civic pride of middle-class residents and enabled them to believe that Burlington was a city that retained older small-town virtues.

NOTES

¹ *The Annual Report of the Home for Destitute Children* (Burlington, 1869), pp. 3-4, describes the plight of the orphan girl. These reports were published by the Home annually throughout the period under discussion here; subsequent citations will refer to the *Home Annual Report* and provide the year of publication.

² *Home Annual Report*, 1868, p. 6.

³ *Home Annual Report*, 1865, p. 3.

⁴ Many sources list the development of charitable institutions in Burlington and illustrate the problem of nomenclature. See, for example, Charles E. Allen, *About Burlington Vermont* (Burlington, 1905), pp. 20-21, 58, 94; or Joseph Auld, *Picturesque Burlington: A Handbook of Burlington, Vermont and Lake Champlain*, 2nd ed. (Burlington, 1894, p. 42, 63ff. The best source for this information, however, is Charles Allen's "Note Book of Burlington History, A Chronological Sequence 1851-1904." Charles Allen Papers, Wilbur Collection, Bailey / Howe Library, University of Vermont.

⁵ "Burlington Relief Association," Wilbur Collection, Bailey / Howe Library, University of Vermont. This brief MS summarizes the activities of two meetings on April 22 and June 21, 1861. It contains a list of materials produced for the soldiers and, most importantly for this study, a list of 153 names of women who joined the association. Partial evidence from other sources suggests that the Relief Association continued beyond the meetings noted in this MS.

⁶ Ellen F. Catlin Boardman, "Personal Household Account Book, Burlington, Vt., 1852-1881," Wilbur Collection, Bailey / Howe Library, University of Vermont.

⁷ Ellen Cordelia Lyman diary, October 8, 1862. She wrote "went down to C[our]t House early in morning to sew for soldiers Came home to dinner & went back again & staid until tea Was very tired." Lyman was nineteen years old as she began her diary in January of 1862. Lyman's diaries for 1862, 1864, 1865, and 1866 are at Wilbur Collection, Bailey / Howe Library, University of Vermont.

⁸ From 1873 to 1877; *Home Annual Reports*.

⁹ *Home Annual Report*, 1868, and see Lyman diaries, August 1, and November 24, 1862, and March 22, 1864.

¹⁰ "Burlington Relief Association," April 22, 1861.

¹¹ The Home opened its doors on November 1, 1865, for seven destitute girls. I do not know when boys were first admitted. Charles E. Allen in a "Historical Address" included in the *Home Annual Report*, 1876, reported that 50 of the 276 children admitted to the Home in the decade, 1865-1875, were boys. The earliest documented male resident of the home was ten-year-old Samuel Redwood, a handicapped youth with a speech impediment, who lived the rest of his life at the Home and died there in 1888. *Home Annual Report*, 1889. None of the Annual Reports, not even the first in 1865, refers exclusively to girls or to orphans. The earliest report of children taken from their parents is in *Home Annual Report*, 1871.

¹² Bishop de Goesbriand Diary, typescript, entry for April 5, 1866. Wilbur Collection, Bailey / Howe Library, University of Vermont. While obviously the women who founded the Home could not have been motivated by an entry in the bishop's diary, I cite it as evidence of his opinion and suggest that he may have expressed similar ideas in public. His diary pages are not numbered. For the self-conscious Protestantism of the founding of the Home, see *Home Annual Report*, 1865, and particularly Allen, "Historical Address," *Home Annual Report*, 1875.

¹³ See for example, Allen, *About Burlington*, p. 58, or Charles S. Forbes, "20th Century Burlington," *The Vermonter* 5 (1900): 206. The quote is from Wheeler's obituary, *Burlington Free Press*, November 22, 1871.

¹⁴ The list of the founders is in *Home Annual Report*, 1875. Biographical data about these women is culled from a variety of sources, primarily the *Burlington City Directory*, published annually beginning in 1866, which chiefly enabled me to track their husbands. Messrs. Edmunds, Phelps, Benedict, and Loomis were prominent enough to be briefly mentioned in William S. Rann, *History of Chittenden County*, (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason and Co., 1886). For information on the role of Dr. Hickok and the poorhouse, see *Burlington Town Report*, (Burlington, Vt., 1860), p. 66.

¹⁵ *Home Annual Report*, 1868.

¹⁶ Burlington incorporated itself as a city in 1865 and Thayer's inspection was part of a new municipal effort to improve the city. Thayer's immediate concern was the threat of cholera and the need, as he

put it "to place our city in a good sanitary condition," but the evidence of poverty that Thayer discovered in the three wards of the city could not be ignored. "Report of the Health Officer," *Annual Report of the City of Burlington 1865* (Burlington, 1866), pp. 79ff.

¹⁷ The terms of Miss Howard's will are from the *Burlington Free Press*, March 27, 1886. Biographical details are from her obituary in the *Free Press* for March 24, 1886, and from Levi and Sybil Smith, "The Howards of Burlington: A Nineteenth Century Family," Fletcher Free Library, Burlington.

¹⁸ Marshall True, "From Relief Society to Mental Health Center: The Changing Role of the Howard in Burlington, Vermont," *Occasional Paper Number Five* (Burlington, Vt.: Center for Research on Vermont, 1981), p. 11. For Howard's largess toward Burlington, also see Smith and Smith, "The Howards of Burlington," and George B. Bryan, "The Howard Opera House in Burlington," *Vermont History* 45, (Fall, 1977), pp. 197ff.

¹⁹ I have not discovered any listing of the "founders" of the Ladies Aid Society. Most sources, including Allen, *About Burlington*, and Auld, *Picturesque Burlington*, mention only Louisa Howard. This list of names has been generated from a file of undated *Free Press* articles dealing with the early history of relief in Burlington, "Howard Scrapbook," located at the Howard Mental Health Services offices, and the *Report of the Howard Relief Society for 1885*, (Burlington, 1886). The list is intended to be representative, not complete. Husbands' occupations have been derived from the *Burlington City Directory*.

²⁰ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 114.

²¹ In 1892, the National Conference of Charities consisted of fifty-five groups with memberships totaling 453 men and 3,534 women. Amos Warner, *American Charities* (New York, 1894), p. 374.

²² Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Protestants Against Poverty: Boston's Charities 1870-1900* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1971). Also see Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930* (New York: Atheneum, 1975) and David J. Pivar, *Purity Crusade, Sexual Morality and Social Control 1868-1900* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973).

²³ John T. Cumber, "The Politics of Charity: Gender and Class in Late 19th Century Charity Policy," *Journal of Social History* 13 (Fall, 1980), pp. 99-111. For the divisions and strains within charity movements, see Brenda K. Shelton, *Reformers in Search of Yesterday: Buffalo in the 1890s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976), or Kenneth L. Kusmer, "The Functions of Organized Charity in the Progressive Era: Chicago as a Case Study," *Journal of American History* 60 (December, 1973), pp. 657-678.

²⁴ Matthew H. Buckham, "Burlington as a Place to Live In," in Abby Maria Hemenway, ed., *The Vermont Historical Gazetteer, A Magazine Embracing a History of Each Town: Civil, Ecclesiastical, Biographical and Military*, 5 vols. (Burlington, Vt.: by the Author, 1867-1891), I, p. 719.

²⁵ Sion Howard to Daniel D. Howard, March 22, 1863, Burlington, Vermont, Julia Howard Spear Papers, Wilbur Collection, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont.

²⁶ "Mayor A. L. Catlin's Address," *Burlington Annual Report 1865*, p. 73.

²⁷ "Mayor A. L. Catlin's Address," *Burlington Annual Report 1865*, pp. 74-77.

²⁸ "Health Officer's Report," *Burlington Annual Report 1865*, pp. 83-84, 99.

²⁹ Huntington served the town of Burlington as Overseer of the Poor from 1859 to 1864 and my comments are based on his reports published in *Burlington Annual Reports, 1860, 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864*. Huntington's quoted remarks about the poor are from his 1861 report, p. 8. Huntington later became postmaster for Burlington and served the city as an alderman. Biographical details from *Burlington City Directory, 1865 through 1883*.

³⁰ "Report of the Overseer of the Poor," *Burlington Annual Report 1869*, p. 85.

³¹ Biographical details about Flanagan and the Drew brothers is drawn from *Burlington City Directory, 1865 ff*. Flanagan served two years as the city's first salaried chief of police and he was succeeded by Luman Drew. Also see the obituaries of Flanagan and Luman Drew, *Burlington Free Press*, December 18, 1882, and February 22, 1905, respectively.

³² The language is from *General Statutes of the State of Vermont*, revised 1797, p. 269, sec. 12. Overseers in the nineteenth century were granted wide authority in dealing with the indigent including deciding who should be remanded to the poorhouse. For the laws under which overseers were operating in the last decades of the nineteenth century, see *General Statutes of the State of Vermont*, revised 1839, chapter 17. Overseers of the Poor and poorhouses continued to operate in some Vermont communities until 1968.

³³ Russell F. Taft, "Documents and Sketches Relating to the Early History of Burlington, Vermont," Hemenway, *Historical Gazetteer*, I, p. 508.

³⁴ Rowland E. Robinson, *Vermont: A Study in Independence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), pp. 328-330.

³⁵ This account of demographic change in Burlington is largely based on Mary Elizabeth Beattie, *Emigrés and Industrialization: French Canadians in Burlington and Colchester, Vermont 1850-1870*, (University of Vermont, M.A. thesis, 1985), especially Chapter IV, but also see T. D. Seymour Bassett, *Urban Penetration of Rural Vermont 1840-1860*, (Harvard University, Ph.D. diss.), pp. 579-631, and

Joseph Amrhein, *The Economic History of a Northern New England City* (New York University School of Business, Ph.D. diss., 1958).

³⁶The phrase is from *Home Annual Report*, 1879 but the conviction that the poor had to be helped was frequently expressed in the *Annual Reports* of both the Home and the Howard. In 1877, Kate Morton, corresponding secretary for the Home asked rhetorically: "Can we—ought we, dare we—assume the responsibility of refusing to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and teach the ignorant who come to our very doors?" *Home Annual Report*, 1877.

³⁷*Home Annual Report*, 1868. This report listed an operating budget of just under \$5000, which compared to the Overseer of the Poor's expenditures of just over \$4000. *Burlington Annual Report, 1867-1868* indicated a growing commitment on the part of middle-class women to making charity work. Cole, who had moved to Burlington and married merchant Morton Cole in 1850, had essentially replaced Mary Phelps on the informal executive committee for the Home. Like Phelps she was an Episcopalian who had been active in temperance and religious work as well as philanthropy. Cole held a variety of positions with the Home until her death in 1891; see *Burlington Daily Free Press*, August 18, 1891.

³⁸*Home Annual Report*, 1865. The Home continued to operate its school on the premises into the twentieth century.

³⁹*Report of the Work of the Howard Relief Society from June 1, 1891 to June 1, 1892*, (Burlington, 1892), p. 10. Clothing distribution and the Saturday school are described in undated *Burlington Free Press* articles, Howard Scrapbook.

⁴⁰"Report of the Superintendent of Common Schools," *Burlington Annual Report 1867*, pp. 16-19.

⁴¹"Overseer of the Poor's Report," *Burlington Annual Report 1871*, pp. 102-117; and also see "Overseer of the Poor's Report," *Burlington Annual Report 1877*, pp. 49-56.

⁴²Mayor Hatch's description is from "The Address of the Mayor," *Burlington Annual Report 1876*, pp. 10-18; Lowry's remarks about the poor are from "Overseer of the Poor's Report," *Burlington Annual Report 1876*, pp. 98-99.

⁴³The description of this office is from undated *Burlington Free Press* articles, Howard Scrapbook; also see True, "From Relief Society to Mental Health Center," pp. 8-9.

⁴⁴"Report of the Overseer of the Poor," *Burlington Annual Report 1879*, pp. 49-56. Greene, like Lowry, had a background in bookkeeping and had served the city in a number of minor posts, including jail commissioner and tax assessor, prior to becoming Overseer of the Poor in 1878. Greene continued as overseer through 1886; he also volunteered his services as an auditor for the Home for Destitute Children. *Burlington City Directory*, 1865-1890. I have not been able to locate Greene's obituary.

⁴⁵"Mayor's Address," *Burlington Annual Report 1879*, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁶Undated articles, *Burlington Free Press*, Howard Scrapbook.

⁴⁷This is a quote from Mayor George H. Morse in 1884, *Burlington Annual Report 1884*, p. 20, but the efforts of the Ladies Aid Society which became the Howard Relief Society in 1882 and received a state charter in 1884 were mentioned in virtually every "Mayor's Address" and many of the Overseer of the Poor reports from 1871 on. The public record clearly points to a central role for this organization in dealing with poverty in Burlington.

⁴⁸"Overseer of the Poor Report," *Burlington Annual Report 1881*, p. 117. In this same report Greene favorably mentioned a report published by the Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor in Brooklyn in *Harper's Weekly*, recommended to him by members of the Ladies Aid Society, p. 120.

⁴⁹"Mayor's Address," *Burlington Annual Report 1892*, p. 21.

⁵⁰Allen, "Historical Address," *Home Annual Report, 1875*.

⁵¹This information is derived from the Home's *Annual Reports*. For the Permanent Fund and Subscriber List, see *Home Annual Report*, 1868 and subsequent reports. For the list of County Managers and Adoption Guidelines, see *Home Annual Report*, 1870.

⁵²The phrase is quoted from *Home Annual Report*, 1893. The data about eight hundred children is from *Home Annual Report*, 1891.

⁵³Greene's judgement was expressed in the "Overseer of the Poor Report," *Burlington Annual Report 1884*, p. 129. The quote, probably written by Sarah C. Cole, is from *Home Annual Report*, 1882.

⁵⁴For young E., see *Home Annual Report*, 1877, pp. 89. E. "has lived an honest and industrious life, is respectably married and has one child" and writes back to the Home "I mean to bring her up just as the ladies of the Home would approve." For Mrs. B., see *The Friend and Helper*, vol. 1. no. 4 (April, 1900), p. 5. *The Friend and Helper* was a short-lived journal published by the Howard Relief Society and other charitable agencies at the turn of the century. Its editor was Walter Crockett, well-known historian of Vermont and Lake Champlain. Susan Porter Benson argues similar connections in her exploratory "Business Heads and Sympathizing Hearts: The Women of the Providence Employment Society, 1837-1850," *Journal of Social History*, XII (Winter, 1978), pp. 302-312. On the settlement houses, see Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

⁵⁵Katherine Pease Benedict, diary, 1870. Wilbur Collection, Bailey / Howe Library, University of Vermont. Benedict's diary lists more than a dozen occasions when she visited or went "begging" for the

Home. Mrs. Benedict was less a "feminist" than her husband, who as a trustee of the University of Vermont actively supported the admission of women. Mary E. Woodruff, *In Search of Usefulness: the University of Vermont's First Women Graduates* (M.A. thesis, University of Vermont, 1985).

⁵⁶ This account of Hagar's career is based on *Howard Annual Reports 1885-1891* when Hagar was president. All the innovations were in place by 1885. Glimpses of Hagar's personal life are available in Hagar Family Papers, Wilbur Collection, Bailey / Howe Library, University of Vermont. The bulk of this collection consists of letters that Sarah Hagar wrote to her sister, Katherine. Also see Theodora Peck Diary, which records going with "K. Hagar to meeting about servants," July 3, 1882. Peck Papers, Wilbur Collection, Bailey / Howe Library, University of Vermont.

⁵⁷ Sarah P. Torrey, "Women's Work in the First Church," *The 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the First Church of Burlington, Vermont*, (Published by the Church, Burlington, 1905), pp. 61-65.

⁵⁸ For information on Hickok and Shedd, I have used *Home Annual Reports, 1865-1893*, *Burlington City Directory 1865-1895*, and their obituaries, *Burlington Free Press*, May 8, 1894, and October 24, 1882, respectively. Also see, "Overseer of the Poor's Report," *Burlington Annual Report, 1882*, p. 108.

⁵⁹ See, for example, George G. Benedict, *Beautiful Burlington* (Burlington, Vt.: Free Press Publishing Association, 1895). Benedict, a well-known historian of Vermont's Civil War, was also publisher of the *Burlington Free Press* and the husband of Katherine Pease Benedict, one of the founders of the Home for Destitute Children.