

Researching Residents of Connecticut County Temporary Homes

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The mystery was revealed on a small yellowed clipping from an undated newspaper lost among her mother's loose photographs. Here was a clue she wasn't looking for. Rose and her brother at ages six and seven were placed in a children's home after their mother died. Could this be *Grandma* Rose? Was it the shame of being committed to an "orphanage" that kept this story hidden for so long? Might there be records to confirm and explain the story?

Connecticut County Temporary Home records are among the unknown resources for genealogists. In 1883 Connecticut put an end to indenture and almshouse placement of children when it created a system of County Temporary Homes to provide care and protection for dependent, neglected, abandoned, and cruelly treated children until their placement could be secured in a "well-selected family home" (CT HB No. 359, 1883). However, there were never enough certified families and children often lingered in the Homes. In 1911 the "total number of children admitted to county homes since their organization was estimated at 24,600, of whom it is thought that about thirty percent have been placed in families" (Folks, p. 106).

Temporary Home Program

Children adversely affected by parents' poverty, desertion, death, illness, character defects, or incarceration were typically committed to County Temporary Homes. Such action, often initiated by the State Board of Charities, Humane Society, or a town official, took place through a court order severing parental rights. County Home children were then under the guardianship of a County Board of Management. As a result, records were generated by town, county, and State governments — and newspapers.

Children's Records

Although not all records of children created by the Homes have been preserved, those that do exist can be invaluable. These may include basic facts about children — name, age or birth date, parents, and out-placements. Sometimes, they are supplemented with priceless news clippings, photos, medical issues, names of relatives, and perhaps even anecdotes of runaways, military records, or marriage. Some

children arrived individually whereas others came with siblings. Each story is unique to the individual child.

Two good places to start exploring Temporary Home placements are the Connecticut State Library and an historical society or library in the child's home town or county home location. Be aware that a "foster" family's surname may have been used for children placed out.

Connecticut State Library and Archives

The Connecticut State Library in Hartford has an assortment of handwritten ledgers and papers, each of which is unique and may contain information unavailable elsewhere. Examples include:

- A 1922 letter inserted into a record book from Florence Crittenton League, New York City explains the birth name of Margaret Deltora was changed at the New London County Temporary Home to Mabel Mahoney. She was placed with a series of families until joining Barnum & Bailey's Circus as a horseback rider. Shortly after marrying John Gannon in Worcester, MA she arrived at the Crittenton Home at age 19.
- In 1919 Mildred Delaney was given in adoption by the New London County Board of Management to Mr. & Mrs. Thompson of Joliet, Illinois; and subsequently inherited \$100,000!
- 1914 Department of Education records show Derrel Adams was placed with the Dimock family by the New Haven County Home and attends grade 6 regularly with Miss Hayden at Rocky Hill Center School.

Local Repositories

Local libraries and historical societies can be a source of unexpected finds. For example, Beardsley & Memorial Library in Winsted has very good county home resources which are supplemented by the nearby Winchester Historical Society's wonderful collection of memorabilia, including photos in and around The Gilbert Home. This Home was a private institution that also served as the Litchfield County Temporary Home. A fortunate researcher will find their family mentioned in *The Real Diaries of Real Boys*, a collection of stories written at summer camp by Gilbert Home residents in the Boys' Brigade.

Examples from Tolland County Home archived at Vernon Historical Society include photographs, news clips, and interviews.

- A personal interview with Marcia Banning describes some of her first experiences as a resident in a County Home beginning with a ride in an automobile (to the County Home), central heat, indoor plumbing, and witnessing the Hindenburg fly over the Home.
- An excerpt of a joyous picnic outing in July 1906 is recorded in the Tolland County "Visitors' Minutes" by Mrs. Tillinghast. "It was an all day affair and everyone went ...Imagine the jolly crowd all climbing into the ample wagons, then the long merry ride which of itself is a joy to any child. And when they reached their destination, then how they scrambled up those cherry trees, which soon seemed to bear two kinds of fruit, boys and cherries."

County and Local Government

Although Connecticut and Rhode Island are the only two states without some version of county government today, this was not always true. Connecticut county government endured from 1666 until it was abolished in 1960. County Temporary Homes were the county's largest program when they closed in 1955. Even though many county government records are lost, surviving records can be revealing. For example, invoices submitted to the county for reimbursement sometimes show expenses for specific children.

As county homes were closing, the State required superintendents to turn over children's bankbooks. Litchfield County Home Superintendent VanWhy, like others, fought to protect the children's money, knowing all the children's savings over \$300 would be confiscated. A court summons and correspondence describe his battle and threat of imprisonment ultimately forcing him to surrender the bank books of seven named children to the State.

Court records, especially probate, contain commitment documents explaining why parents lost and sometimes regained custody of their children. Until about 1924, commitments were often posted in the "court notes" section of newspapers along with other County Home news.

- In 1889 The Connecticut Humane Society petitioned Eastford Probate Court on behalf of Amasa Lambert, age 8, claiming his parents were drunkards and paupers and their child deserted, neglected, cruelly treated, and dependent. Two days later, without his parents present, he was committed to the custody, care, and control of the County Board of

Management of The Temporary Home for Neglected and Dependent Children in Putnam until age 16.

- In 1898 Emma Harvey fought the Windham Selectmen's attempt to commit her 11 and 14-year-old children to the County Home and won their release.

US Census

The US census provides names of County Home children and staff in residence at ten-year intervals, 1900-1940. This unusual example from the 1920 US census at The Gilbert Home, which also served as Litchfield County Temporary Home, makes an unusual distinction between "boarders" placed voluntarily and "inmates" placed via a legal process.

OTHER DIVISION OF COUNTY *Winchester town*
 NAME OF INSTITUTION *The William L. Gilbert Home*

| NAME of each person whose place of abode on January 1, 1920, was in this family. Enter surname first, then the given name and middle initial, if any. Include every person living on January 1, 1920. Omit children born since January 1, 1920. | RELATION. Relationship of this person to the head of the family. | SEX M F | AGE As at last birth-day. | COLOR OF HAIR B Blk Brn G Gr O R W | COLOR OF EYES B Blk Brn G Gr O R W | MARRIAGE M Married S Single W Widow D Divorced | EDUCATION U Ungraded G Grade H High school C College P Professional O Other | OCCUPATION A Agriculture M Manufacturing S Service O Other | OCCUPATION A Agriculture M Manufacturing S Service O Other |
|--|---|---------------|------------------------------|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Moncelli, Daniel</i> | <i>Inmates</i> | | <i>15</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Moncelli, Julia</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>11</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Moncelli, Lena</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>12</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Murray, Vincent</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>12</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Murphy, Doratha</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>7</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Murphy, Frederick</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>8</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Parrella, Barnum</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>15</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Parsons, Arthur</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>15</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Rice, Julia</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>8</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Rice, Mary</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>6</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Ross, Charles</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>11</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Smith, Burton L</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>6</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Stone, Lawrence</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>9</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Stone, Raymond</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>11</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Stone, Theodore</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>13</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Stone, Winthrop</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>5</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Stadway, Ralph</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>12</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Swell, Evelyn</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>6</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Thorp, Alward</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>13</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Thorp, Mary</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>15</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>White, John G</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>10</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Warner, Alberta</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>15</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Wilson, Marshall F</i> | <i>X</i> | | <i>9</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Wilson, Pamela H</i> | <i>Inmates</i> | | <i>11</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Allaine, David G</i> | <i>Boarder</i> | | <i>7</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Allaine, Marion M</i> | <i>Boarder</i> | | <i>4</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Bajarin, Charles</i> | <i>Boarder</i> | | <i>13</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Bajarin, Edward</i> | <i>Boarder</i> | | <i>9</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Bajarin, Eugene</i> | <i>Boarder</i> | | <i>14</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |
| <i>Bajarin, Marion</i> | <i>Boarder</i> | | <i>11</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>W</i> | <i>S</i> | | | |

These are all Charity Cases

U.S. census, 1920, Winchester, Connecticut; ED 232, sheet 17B, NARA; CT State Library.

The census would also record a placed-out child living with their foster family.

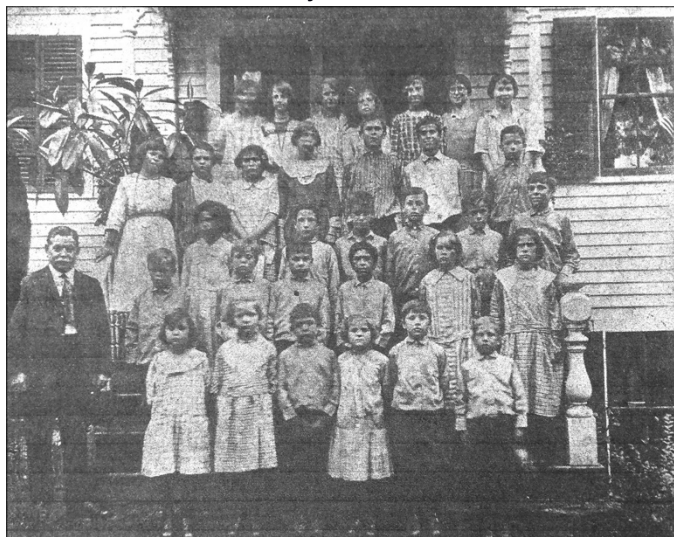
Cemeteries

It was a gravestone in the County Home section of Springdale Cemetery in Warehouse Point, that led to

the story of a boy who left the Hartford County Home with his father, was then abandoned in Albany, New York, and returned on his own to the County Home where he died of illness, not abuse at the Home as the family speculated.

Newspapers

Whereas governmental records provide mostly facts, newspapers contain stories, sometimes filling in gaps for which there are no official records. Check area historical societies and libraries for small local papers that may otherwise be difficult to find. A page-by-page search, especially of Town News ("gossip column") may reveal stories. Papers also covered county home graduations with children's names and events like this Loyal Order of Moose outing with Superintendent Hicks and Tolland County Home children in 1924.



Superintendent Hicks and children from Litchfield County Temporary Home at Vernon Center, *Rockville Journal*, August 24, 1924, courtesy of Vernon Historical Society.

Do not overlook more current articles:

- In 1929 Raymond Cahoon, Grade 8, was awarded first prize at the speaking contest held Friday at the Vernon Center County Home and represented the Home School at the county contest.
- Like a 1989 reunion Evelyn Bonhotel-Stocker, Robert Chatfield, and others described their experiences growing up at Gilbert Home/Litchfield County Temporary Home in an article that ran in a local newspaper.
- In a 2001 interview, Joan Clark recalled her times at Middlesex County Home in the 1930s and later in the 1940s after it had been converted to a reception cottage. ("For 70 Years, Building Housed Orphans," *Hartford Courant*, March 20, 2001, Greater Middletown, p. N1.)

- Newspaper reports about the State Board of Charities sometimes contain lists of children placed-out from county homes across the state by Children's Aid Society and similar agencies.

Online Search

For more successful online searches, query for more than just an ancestor's name. Search terms like County Home, the names of superintendents and staff, courts, or county agents may lead not only to stories about individuals, but also operation of the homes themselves.

- August 2, 1924 the circus was in town! Children far and wide looked forward to attending; and the Home children were invited guests. Unfortunately, measles had infected the Home that August and the children were quarantined. However, through the generosity of the circus employees and the ingenuity and kindness of the American Legion, the children saw the circus, right in their own backyard! It required special arrangements to round up cars to transport the performers. Then the clowns, ventriloquist, acrobats and more, put on a special performance for the children. The Legion added the finishing touch; every child had popcorn, candy, and peanuts! It was a day never to be forgotten by any of the children or adults in attendance.
- Frederick Burgess, age 53, was killed in a highway accident. The newspaper account of the tragedy mentions he once lived at Gilbert (Litchfield County) Home.

Institutions and Geography

Children were not placed only in the local County Home. Sometimes they were placed in other counties or transferred to more appropriate institutions, in and occasionally out of State.

- Robert O'Neil, born in Newark, NJ was sent to Saint Francis Orphan Asylum after his mother died; transferred to Hartford County Home in 1898, transferred again to Gilbert (Litchfield County) Home in Winsted, and then back to Hartford. Paralyzed and barely able to move he was released as ineligible for the County Home program and placed again at St. Francis.
- In 1926 Antilo Montani, born in Niagara Falls, NY, was admitted to Hartford County Home after his father, a former strong man on the stage, was injured and could no longer find work. In 1927 Antilo's brother Carlo lost the ends of three fingers in a bread slicer at the Home. The next year the two boys and their sister, Malfada (Violet), were discharged to the Department

of State for deportation to Italy with their father at 1:00 pm the next day.

Research Guides and Indexes

Connecticut County Temporary Home history is not readily available and the records, often scattered, hand written, and unindexed can be intimidating. In an effort to facilitate this research the Klemmers are developing research guides which to date cover Windham, Tolland, Hartford, and Litchfield County Temporary Homes. These guides provide an index to children's names gathered from County Home records at the State Library Archive and local repositories; records found in newspapers and other documents (but certainly not all); historical information on the Home; research tips; and reference material. The Klemmer's books can be found at the State Library History & Genealogy reference section and select local historical societies and libraries.

There is no single resource that will answer every question and no guarantee you will find details for the person you seek. The County Temporary Home system evolved over its 72 years, so research methods must be flexible. Even when a specific child cannot be found, insight into the institution should be available. Hopefully, your quest for stories and understanding of children who deserve to be remembered will be engaging, and any stigma associated with being a County Home Child can be viewed in context.

For Further Research

Following are a few items to help research Connecticut County Temporary Homes and the children they served.

CONNECTICUT STATE LIBRARY, HARTFORD

Connecticut Newspaper Project, *Newspapers in Connecticut institutions: updated through June 1997*, Connecticut State Library. Call number: QUARTO 016.07 C752n, 1997 is an incredible key to newspapers online in repositories you might never suspect.

Connecticut State Board of Charities annual reports list and describe other institutions for children including religious, reform, and medical, issued biennially 1883-1955.

Connecticut State Library Archive Finding Aids such as RG 061: County Government.

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Archive.org](https://archive.org) also known as the Internet Archive is a non-profit library of millions of free books, movies, software, music, websites, and more.

[FultonHistory.com](https://fultonhistory.com) for a wide variety of newspapers, free and in the public domain. It is surprising how many County Home stories got legs and traveled far and wide.

[HathiTrust.org](https://www.hathiitrust.org) an enormous digital library.

RESEARCH GUIDES

Klemmer, Cheryl and Klemmer Chris, *Index to the Litchfield County Temporary Home and the William L. Gilbert Home (1883- 1955) Residents and Resources*, November 2016, at CT State Library, Beardsley & Memorial Library, Winchester Historical Society, and Litchfield Historical Society.

---. *Index to the Hartford County Temporary Home for Children, 1883-1993: from records archived at the Connecticut State Library and the U.S. Census (1900-1940)*, April 2016, at CT State Library.

---. *Index to Windham County Temporary Home Residents and Resources, January 2017*, at CT State Library, Killingly Historical Society, and Aspinock Historical Society of Putnam

---. *Tolland County Temporary Home: History, Residents, and Resources*, July 2017, at CT State Library, Vernon Historical Society, and Vernon Town Clerk's Office.

---. *New London County Temporary Home: History, Residents, and Resources (1884-1955)*, February 2020, at CT State Library and Otis Library, Norwich.

STUDIES

Dana, Ruth Catlin, "Public Foster care for Dependent and Neglected Children in Connecticut," University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, 1946.

Dexter, Elizabeth H and Marcus, Grace F, "The Problem of The County Home Child: a study made under the auspices of the Connecticut State Board of Charities," 1921, Archive.org.

Folks, Homer, "The Care of Destitute, Neglected, and Delinquent Children," MacMillan Company, 1911, Archive.org.

Love, Rev. Wm. DeLoss, "County Temporary Homes for Children in Conn., a History of the Program" ca. 1913, Pitts Theological Library, Emory University, Ask@Pitts.Emory.LibAnswers.com.