

THE OVERSEERS OF THE PUBLIC WELFARE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

Records, 1838 - 1964 (with gaps)

Charities Collection - CC 011

3 boxes	Processed March 1996 by Nora J. Bloom
15 linear inches	Supervising Archivist: Joan Gearin
Accession number: 1996.009	

ACQUISITION: In 1911 the Boston Children's Aid Society gave its entire library to the Simmons College School of Social Work Library. This library included the annual reports of many local and international welfare and charitable organizations. With the passage of time this collection took on historical significance and in 1991 it was transferred to the Simmons College Archives.

As part of donations in 1988 and 1989, Donald Moreland, a local social worker and collector of social work history, gave the Simmons College Archives a large number of annual reports, pamphlets and other materials related to various welfare and charitable organizations. Because neither of these donations is a discrete collection, the materials transferred in 1991 from the School of Social Work Library and related materials donated by Donald Moreland were combined to form the Charities Collection. The Simmons College Archives Charities Collection consists of numerous small collections. Accession numbers for the individual collections are assigned during processing.

ACCESS: Unrestricted.

COPYRIGHT: Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be discussed with the College Archivist.

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY:

The Overseers of the Poor of the City of Boston (OPB) was established in 1691, incorporated in 1772, and reorganized in 1864, at which time they became directly accountable to the city. In the annual report of 1871 to the City Council, it was stated that four board members would be elected by the City Council each year to the unpaid twelve person board, to serve for a term of three years. In addition to the expenditure of public funds appropriated by the City Council for charitable purposes, the Overseers administered private charitable trust funds in accordance with their provisions.

As of 1880, the objective of the agency was to "Grant partial relief, in small supplies of food fuel, medicines, or rarely money, at their own homes, to those who in their opinion

require it, provided such persons have a settlement in Boston; also [to] relieve the expenses of towns in which such persons have settlements, until the town takes charge of the case." ⁱ Under the direction of the OPB, a Temporary Home (1862) gave temporary shelter and food to needy women and children in return for housework, and the Wayfarers' Lodge (1879) gave the same assistance to able-bodied male paupers in return for sawing wood. Another goal of the agency was to prevent the demoralization of the poor through indiscriminate almsgiving by centralizing the efforts of private charitable organizations and by conducting home visits of potential recipients. Each family applying for aid was visited by an agent of the board who would make a report of past and present history, character, capacity to work, ability of relatives to support, etc., and register their names on the books of the board. ⁱⁱ

In 1914, in accordance with the Massachusetts Acts of 1913, the OPB established a program for Mothers' Aid, a predecessor to Aid to Dependent Children. In 1921, the OPB was renamed the Overseers of the Public Welfare in the City of Boston (OPWB). The agency's continuing objective, "to relieve and aid all poor and indigent persons residing in Boston," had the new proviso "that they are not being aided in institutions." ⁱⁱⁱ(3) During the Great Depression, from 1930 to 1933, the agency began to receive some federal government funding, began a temporary Unemployment Emergency Relief Fund, and established a program for Old Age Assistance. In addition, the organization had expanded into several branch offices and had begun to issue licenses for collecting funds on public streets.

In the annual report of 1944, the agency which the OPWB board members administered was reclassified as the Department of Public Welfare for the City of Boston. By the year 1964, the organization was known simply as the Boston Welfare Department. The Board of Overseers, whose members were now appointed by the mayor, directed the distribution of funds under five assistance programs: Old Age Assistance, Medical Assistance for the Aged, Aid to Dependent Children, Disability Assistance and General Relief, operated the Temporary Home for Women and Children and provided lodging and meals for homeless men. The financing for these programs included funding from city, state and federal appropriations and totaled over fifty-three million dollars. In addition, the board was still responsible for the distribution of nineteen private charitable trust funds left to their care over the years.

In 1967, the Boston Welfare Department was abolished when the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare took over the responsibilities of all city and town public welfare boards within the Commonwealth. ^{iv}

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE:

The records of the Overseers of the Public Welfare of the City of Boston (1838-1964), formerly the Overseers of the Poor of the City of Boston, constitute 12.5 linear inches. The largest part of the collection is annual reports of the Overseers of the Poor of the City of Boston (OPB) from 1870-1915 (with gaps) and of its later incarnation, the Overseers

of the Public Welfare of the City of Boston (OPWB) from 1924-1964 (with gaps). This collection also includes other publications by the Overseers of the Poor in the City of Boston and an 1837 report on pauper statistics in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

SERIES LISTING:

I.	Annual Reports
II.	OPB Publications
III.	Other Publications

SERIES DESCRIPTION:

SERIES I.: Annual Reports

The annual reports, 1870-1915 (with gaps) and 1924-1964 (with gaps), contain lists of current and previous members, annual highlights, annual expenditures, receipts and payments, data on trust funds, statistics on public assistance and information on contemporary legal actions concerning public assistance.

SERIES II: OPB Publications

This series consist of five documents:

Deeds of Trust of David Sears to the Overseers of the Poor of the City of Boston, Trustees and Actuaries of the Fifty Associates Charity, and the Searstan Charter-House documents David Sears' endowments to these charities which were directed by the OPB. Though this publication is undated, the latest date in the text is 1856. A letter from David Sears, dated 1865, is tipped in at the front of this book.

Act of 1864, Ordinances, Rules and Regulations, as to the Overseers of the Poor, Charity Building and Temporary Home (1869) is a reprint from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Acts of 1864, containing the act under which the OPB was reorganized, and documents related to property managed by the OPB.

Report of the David Sears Charity, A Fund held in Trust by the Overseers of the Poor of the City of Boston with Accompanying Documents (1875) describes OPB's use of the David Sears endowment.

The Report on "Outdoor Relief," by a Committee of the Overseers of the Poor of the City of Boston (1888) discusses problems associated with non-institutional public assistance in Brooklyn, New York.

Rules for the Visitors of the Overseers of the Poor of Boston (1897) is a handbook created for OPB employees who were called “visitors”, who conducted home visits to collect information on and make evaluations of aid recipients.

SERIES III.: Other Publications

This series contains one report published by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts entitled Abstract of the Returns of the Overseers of the Poor in Massachusetts for 1837 (1838). This was the first report on pauper statistics in Massachusetts compiled by the Overseers of the Poor in Massachusetts cities and towns.

CONTAINER LIST:

BOX	FOLDER	CONTENTS
		<u>Series I.</u> <u>Annual Reports</u>
1	1	Bound Volume, 1870-1883 Bound Volume, 1884-1897
	2	Bound Volume, 1898-1909 Bound Volume, 1910-1924
	3	1871
	4	1877-1878
	5	1878-1879
	6	1893-1894
	7	1894-1895
	2	1
2		1897-1898
3		1898-1899
4		1899-1900
5		1900-1901, 1905-1906, 1906-1907
6		1907-1908 (2 copies), 1909- 1910
7		1910-1911, 1913-1914, 1914-1915
8		1924-1925, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1929
9		1930, 1931-1932-1933, 1934 (2 copies), 1935
10		1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940 (2 copies), 1941
11		1942, 1943, 1944 (2 copies)
3	1	1945, 1947, 1948, 1949
	2	1950, 1951 (2 copies), 1952 (2 copies), 1953

	3	1961, 1962, 1963, 1964
		Series II. OPB Publications
	4	Deeds of Trust of David Sears to the Overseers of the Poor of the City of Boston, Trustees and Actuaries of the Fifty Associates Charity, and the Searstan Charter House (1856?)
	5	Manual for the Use of the Overseers of the Poor in the City of Boston (1866)
	6	Act of 1864. Ordinances, Rules and Regulations, as to the Overseers of the Poor, Charity Building and Temporary Home (1869)
	7	Report on the David Sears Charity, A Fund held in Trust by the Overseers of the Poor of the City of Boston with Accompanying Documents (1875)
	8	Report on "Outdoor Relief," by a Committee of the Overseers of the Poor of the City of Boston (1888) (3 copies)
	9	Rules for the Visitors of the Overseers of the Poor of the City of Boston (1897)
		Series III. Other Publications
	10	Abstract of the Returns of the Overseers of the Poor in Massachusetts for 1837 (1838)

ⁱ. Directory of Charitable and Beneficent Organizations of Boston, 1880 (Boston: A. Williams, 1880) pp. 20-22.

ⁱⁱ. Directory of Charitable and Beneficent Organizations of Boston, 1914 (Boston: The Old Corner

Bookstore, Inc., 1880) pp. 24-27.

iii. Directory of Social Agencies of Boston and Metropolitan Area, 1940 (Compiled and Published by the Boston Council of Social Agencies) pp. 53-56.

iv. Agency history record, Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Massachusetts.