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The Home for Aged Colored Women, 1861-1944

Esther MacCarthy

In 1822, a change of charter made Boston a municipality, and this change served to complicate and politicize the care of the poor. Since colonial times, the care of Boston's poor had been the responsibility of a popularly-elected Board of Overseers of the Poor. This Board gave sums of money directly to those needy persons who remained at home, and it established an almshouse as a shelter for those who were destitute. After 1822, there were power struggles between the City Council and the Overseers of the Poor, which resulted in a lack of progress in dealing with the needs of the poor. This power struggle was exacerbated by the increased number of poor immigrants moving into Boston. The Overseers of the Poor were accused of wasting tax money, and by 1862 funds for the poor were reduced. The almshouse was transformed into a House of Industry, which was expected to be self-supporting. Many citizens, including Mayor Frederic Lincoln, believed that many of the poor were a "swarm of beggars who in winter time took up their abode with us to live upon our alms" That attitude helps to explain why institutions intended for benevolent purposes were looked upon with dismay and distrust.¹

The idea of giving money to such public institutions as the almshouse or the House of Industry was outside the Brahmin tradition of service. The tradition of giving directly to the needy, under controlled circumstances, was more attractive to the privileged families of Boston. While Boston struggled with its public funds, private benevolence continued. In March of 1849, Andrew Bigelow and several associates grew concerned over the condition of aged women. They proposed the opening of a home intended for elderly poor women who were respectable, native-

1. John Koren, Boston, 1822 to 1922 (Boston, 1923), pp. 135-144; Thomas H. O'Connor, South Boston: My Home Town (Boston, 1988), pp. 29-31.

born Protestants. In 1850, they opened the Boston Home for Aged Women, which began with only one resident. By 1860, the number of residents had increased to such an extent that they outgrew the house at 36 Charles Street, near Beacon Hill. As a result, they were moved to a larger house on Revere Street. This institution, the Home for Aged Women as it was eventually called, was based on similar establishments which had been founded in New York City and Philadelphia. The Boston Home for Aged Women was intended to serve women who were "respectable, aged and indigent." Part of the inspiration for the establishment of this home was related to the fear of the foreign-born poor, most of whom were Irish immigrants, who were crowding into the cities at that time. Public funds could be used to establish and support poor-houses or houses of industry, but "respectable" American-born men and women were placed in homes which were supported by private donations.²

But what of "respectable, aged and indigent" Black women? Public almshouses would not admit them, and as a rule they were forced to find assistance in institutions for the insane. The remainder of this paper is about one exception to this rule. The Home for Aged Colored Women was founded by a group of Boston citizens who were concerned about the lack of help for elderly Black women. The Home was unique, as it was intended to provide assistance to a largely forgotten and neglected group of people, and because success of the venture depended on cooperation between African-Americans and whites. These groups worked together for the benefit of the elderly Black women who were not accepted by public or private institutions.

In the forty-first *Annual Report of the Directors of the Home for Aged Colored Women*, reporting on the year 1900, Anna P. Jackson, who served as clerk of the board of directors, presented a brief summary of the history of the Home. She decided that it was an appropriate time to recall that history, because the directors were about to move the house to a new location at 22 Hancock Street, after it had been at 27 Myrtle Street for twenty-seven years. Jackson's summary touched on

2. Association for the Relief of Indigent Females (Boston, 1850), p. 9; "Memorial to the City Government," in Association for the Relief of Aged and Indigent Women file, Box 8, in Home for Aged Women Records, Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, Mass.; Carole Haber, "The Old Folks at Home: the Development of Institutionalized Care for the Aged in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, CI (1977): 240-257.

many of the significant aspects of the history of the Home. Her presentation also illustrates the predominant outlook of the founders and subsequent directors of the home toward the project which they had launched in 1860. The following is a brief excerpt from her summary:

The project of a Home for aged colored women took definite shape at a meeting in the vestry of Rev. James Freeman Clarke's church in January 1860 at the instance of Rev. L. A. Grimes and Mrs. R. P. Clarke, who had found a number of aged women in a destitute condition. No private institution would receive colored women, and the white paupers in the almshouses would not associate with them, so they were obliged to share the quarters assigned to the insane or vicious, or to remain outside, dependent on the precarious charity of an occasional benefactor, or of friends nearly as poor as themselves. Our early records are full of pitiful stories, almost incredible to modern ears, of the wretched surroundings from which these women were taken, and their gratitude and joy at finding a comfortable refuge for their old age is most touching; the first woman who died in our care said, "This has been the happiest year of my life."³

This description of the founding of the Home for Aged Colored Women briefly covered the salient facts, but little was said about the time period in which the Home was established. January of 1860 was in the midst of a period of extreme tension throughout the United States. On October 16, 1859, John Brown and his band had seized the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. Brown was captured, charged with various crimes, and convicted; on December 2, 1859, he was hanged for conspiracy to commit murder and treason. In death, he became a symbol of the conflict between the North and South over the issues of slavery in the South and the expansion of slavery into the North. Throughout 1860, the battle would be waged through the political

3. Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Home for Aged Colored Women (1901), p. 3.

system, with Abraham Lincoln emerging as the winner of the presidential election, but immediately after his victory, the Southern states began to secede from the Union. Shortly thereafter, the Civil War began.

Massachusetts politicians and residents had been deeply involved in the struggle over the abolition of slavery in the decades preceding the Civil War. In 1859 and 1860, many Bostonians were intensely engaged in all phases of the struggle, from work in support of the abolition of slavery, to activities on behalf of fugitive slaves who had escaped from the Southern plantations. In the midst of all this turmoil, the Home for Aged Colored Women was opened.

In his autobiography, James Freeman Clarke provides more information about the beginning of the movement to establish the Home for Aged Colored Women, and he credited his mother for initiating the movement. It seems that Clarke's mother had "one or two old colored people as pensioners," and she

was led to think that there ought to be a home in Boston for old colored women. It was at the beginning of the Civil War, and many of us thought that the attempt to establish such a home would be more successful if postponed. But my mother was no temporizer. She made me bring up the subject at one of the Wednesday evening meetings of the Church of the Disciples; asked Mr. [Leonard A.] Grimes, the minister of the colored people's church, to be present and to state the facts within his knowledge to show the need of such an institution; interested Governor [John] Andrew, Dr. and Mrs. Samuel Cabot, and others; and by their help the institution was established, and the old colored women were installed in their comfortable home.⁴

It is clear from the recollection of James Freeman Clarke and from the records of the Home that it was Mrs. Rebecca Parker Clarke and Reverend Leonard A. Grimes who did the major portion of the work toward the actual founding. Rebecca

4. James Freeman Clarke, Autobiography, Diary and Correspondence (Boston, 1891), p. 6.

Parker was a member of a respectable family and a diligent member of her son's congregation. She lived a proper, although not extremely wealthy, life in the Beacon Hill section of Boston. Many of her friends were members of more prosperous and famous families in that same locale.

Leonard Grimes, who was Black, was born of free parents in Leesburg, Virginia, in 1815. Having become involved in Underground Railroad activities in Washington, D.C., he was arrested, tried, and found guilty of aiding slaves in their escape to Canada. That was a very dangerous thing for a free Black to do, for he could have been punished by being enslaved, rather than imprisoned. After his release from a prison in Richmond, Virginia, Grimes moved to Massachusetts, became a minister, and was chosen to be the pastor of the Twelfth Baptist Church in Boston, which became known as "the Church of the Fugitive Slaves in Boston." Reverend Grimes worked with many of the city's pastors in attempts to help fugitive slaves reach true freedom in Canada, where they would be free from the possibility of being recaptured and returned to slavery. In some sources, Reverend Grimes is referred to as "the most aggressive" of the Black activist ministers in ante-bellum Boston, because of his work on behalf of fugitive slaves.⁵

During December of 1859, Rebecca Clarke and a friend went with Reverend Grimes to the homes of more than fifteen women, to verify their belief that a Home for Aged Colored Women was really needed. Mrs. Clarke then convinced her son, Reverend James Freeman Clarke, to hold a meeting at his church, with John Albion Andrew, soon to be governor of Massachusetts, Mrs. Samuel Cabot, Miss Margaret Storer, and others who were not named in the sources. Reverend Grimes read to the assembled group a list of eighteen names of destitute women. He believed that those women were ready to consider moving into the proposed facility, while others were reluctant to leave their own quarters or their few possessions. Since a few of the members who were present had begun to doubt the need for such a Home, the Committee on Admissions had also asked Andrew Cushing, the Superintendent of City Missions and a board member of the Home for Aged Women on Charles Street, to attend and to state his opinion on the need for a home for aged Black women. Cushing

5. See, for example, James O. Horton and Lois A. Horton, Black Bostonians (New York, 1979), p. 47.

convinced the assembly, based on his fifteen years' experience in such work, that they should proceed with their plans. They so voted and immediately took up a collection. Anna Jackson described it in her annual report for 1900:

Hon. John A. Andrew, soon after elected governor of Massachusetts, prepared a paper asking for subscriptions from the public, and the response was sufficient to permit the hiring of a matron and of a cheap house (at 65 Southac Street) by the month, in which ten old women were received. Beside these limited accommodations, the house was not in a convenient location, and it was poorly warmed, so in 1863 another appeal was made for funds to place the Home on a more permanent basis. This met with a generous response, the former "Association" was incorporated on March 4, 1864, and in the following August the ten inmates were transferred to 27 Myrtle Street, which be then was the property of the corporation known as the Home for Aged Colored Women.⁶

A very clear structure was established at the first meeting in January of 1860.⁷ The members elected officers and established a Board of Managers. The first officers were Dr. LeBaron Russell, president; Nathaniel G. Chapin, treasurer; Anna Loring, secretary; and Dr. Calvin G. Page, physician. There were to be twenty-four Managers, with two assigned per month. There was also a committee on admissions. Over the years, this format would remain basically the same, with the gradual addition of a collector to assist the treasurer, an auditor, and various ad hoc committees.

Records indicate that to the founders, the Home was not simply one more charity. They were deeply committed to the success of the establishment, and they consistently gave time,

6. Annual Report, 1901, pp. 3-4.

7. The first meeting of the "subscribers" was held on January 18, 1860, according to the 1861 Annual Report, or on January 13, 1860, according to the Record of the Proceedings of the Board of Managers of the Home for Aged Colored Women, I (1860-1868), n.p. (henceforth cited as Board Meeting). The term "Manager" was gradually replaced by "Director."

attention, money, or goods to the Home. Between January 24 and February 7, 1860, several committees were established, to select a suitable house, to obtain furniture, to take charge of admissions, to select a suitable matron, and to establish by-laws for the Home.⁸

By April 10, the Committee on the Matron "had engaged Mrs. Thurston, a colored woman, as Matron," and had accepted Mrs. Ryder, an elderly Black woman, as the Home's first "inmate" (sic). A visiting schedule was set up from April 1, 1860, to February 1, 1861, with each visitor responsible for four weeks. The visiting schedule is an indication of the commitment of the founders and subsequent directors of the Home. It is quite clear from the Visitors' Log that the directors were anxious to become fully acquainted with the elderly inhabitants. With these regular "visitors," the Matron could never have felt that she was fully responsible for the burden of operating the Home. The visitors over the years were predominantly female, but a few men did take their turns.

At this point, it might be appropriate to reflect on why these directors, some of whom were from prominent Boston families, were so devoted to the Home for Aged Colored Women, and to its inhabitants. From what can be ascertained from the documents, one strong motivation of the original members was a genuine concern for women who had worked in their families for many years -- in one case an elderly inmate had served for four generations of the family. The directors were concerned that their loyal servants not be forced into public institutions.⁹

A second strong motivating factor was a religious one. The founding came out of a meeting at the Unitarian Church of the Disciples, Reverend James Freeman Clarke's congregation. Many of the directors of the Home can be connected directly to the Unitarian Church. They had been very involved in anti-slavery activities in Massachusetts. They had worked against the Fugitive Slave Law, either by helping fugitives to escape to Canada, or by protesting their forced return to the South. There is evidence, as mentioned earlier, that they worked with Reverend Leonard Grimes in such activities, thus a strong connection to the Baptist Church also existed at the beginning of the Home for

8. Ibid.

9. See article on the 95th birthday of Mrs. Nancy Washington in Board Meetings, IV: 131.

Aged Colored Women. But, unlike the founders of other Homes, those of the Home for Aged Colored Women never insisted that the residents be able to demonstrate that they had been pious, or that they followed specific religious practices.

The religious motivation of the directors was not only an expression that they were their brother's -- or sister's -- keepers, but a practical recognition of existing racial antipathies which had to be addressed. That realization formed a third motive for the founding of the Home. The following segment from the *Fourth Annual Report* for the year 1863 gives evidence of a blend of religion and anti-racism:

We are more and more satisfied that our institution is needed. Filled, as our poor houses are, with a foreign population, they must be anything but refuges to our people of color. Whilst we deplore the antipathies that embitter race against race, we must take them into account in our charities¹⁰

Such direct allusions to problems of race are rare in the sources and, more generally, are subtly stated. Another very explicit example may be seen in the report of the visitor of May, 1900, who may have been Anna D. Hallowell. She indicates that the move to 22 Hancock Street was a difficult event:

The alterations of the house, 22 Hancock Street, have been discouragingly postponed, by the intentional delays of Mr. Damrell, (the official through whom permits to build are issued.) Through the persistent effort of Mr. Powers, chairman of the building Com. the permit was finally received -- May 29 -- and operations were to begin at once. This delay of a month is a great disappointment -- particularly as it is owing entirely to prejudice against color.¹¹

10. See *Annual Report* (1864), p. 5.

11. See volume IV of *Quarterly Reports*, January 1887 to January 1919, including Reports of Special Committees. See the entry for May of 1900. By a comparison of handwriting, the author seems to have been Anna D. Hallowell.

Having looked at the establishment of the Home and what motivated such a foundation, it is timely to turn to the actual Home itself and to its inhabitants. In the first annual report on the year 1860, the first house was described:

A suitable house in Southac Street was hired at a moderate rent, and an excellent Matron engaged. The house was furnished plainly but comfortably, and at but little cost, owing to the kind contributions of many articles of furniture by friends. Applications for admission were received from the friends of several old and infirm colored women; and such as were considered to be proper inmates for the Home were admitted as soon as the house was prepared for their reception, in the month of April, 1860.¹²

This house on Southac Street and the two houses which would follow at 27 Myrtle and 22 Hancock were in the heart of the Black community on Beacon Hill. The moves to the different houses were made to upgrade living conditions, as well as to enlarge the total number of rooms for residents. The Directors hoped to house thirty residents, but the number never exceeded twenty. Families and friends of the women continued to make applications for rooms in the Home, but during the first few decades, families which had previously employed the women played a major role in securing housing for their former servants. It is also evident that during the term of Rachel Smith as Matron, she played a major role on admissions, having almost the final word on the admission of an applicant.

The residents had well-defined obligations, described in the Rules which they were obliged to follow. A printed version of the Rules, although a later version, seems to follow rather closely the earlier versions, of which there is no complete copy. The ten rules were as follows:

RULES FOR INMATES

1. Every inmate of the Home shall respect the Matron and comply with her directions.

12. See Annual Report, 1861, p. 5.

2. All inmates who are able to come downstairs are expected to be at morning prayers; also to make their own beds and put their rooms in order, and be ready to assist others who are unable to help themselves.
3. They are also expected to knit and sew, and to assist in housework.
4. They will not be allowed to sell any article, or to work out of the house.
5. They must not leave the house without permission of the Matron, and if out in the evening must return by half past nine o'clock.
6. If they wish to make a visit, leave of absence must be obtained from the Matron, and she must be informed of the place where they are going and of the length of their stay.
7. No one is allowed to solicit aid outside the Home.
8. No one is allowed to consult a doctor out of the house.
9. No lamps shall be brought to the house. Whatever furniture and clothes inmates are allowed to bring must be left to the Home on their death.
10. They shall come to the Home on probation for three months, and if they conform to the rules, shall be allowed to remain.

The Rules indicate some of the small problems which arose in the course of the first few decades of the Home's existence. They also provide a hint of the parsimonious manner in which the Home was maintained.¹³

The everyday life of the house was supervised by a matron who was assisted by a nurse and later by five servants. The first matron was a Mrs. Thurston, who served from the founding to 1870. Unfortunately, we can learn little of her life at the Home beyond the fact that she made the occupants very happy. At her death, the Director's Report tells us more.

13. This version of the Rules was on an undated looseleaf flyer, found in the files of Annual Reports.

We have to regret the death of our matron, Mrs. Thurston; one peculiarly fitted for her office; a woman of remarkable good sense; understanding how to control without seeming to rule; ruling none the less when seeming to humor; a good manager every way; cautious in speech and conduct; circumspect, and with a natural sense of the proper and the fitting; a tact, a refinement not common in any rank in life. Better than all this, she was a religious woman, by profession and in daily living; none will need to be told that dying, her soul was full of trust in the infinite love.¹⁴

That was quite an encomium for Mrs. Thurston. The report then mentions a Mrs. Stallard as her successor, and goes on to note that "the managers have had no reason whatever to regret their choice of her as matron." Yet, by January of 1872 she was replaced by Mrs. Rachel L. Smith, the third Matron, who would serve from 1872 to 1897.

Rachel L. Smith left a lasting mark on the Home. She seems to have been a great-hearted, enthusiastic, well-organized, loving, and strong woman. Through her tenure as Matron, she influenced the Directors and lovingly controlled the "inmates." She was very imaginative in carrying out her work. For example, in 1875 she asked if two parlors might be used for a Fair, and she guaranteed that "no mischief or inconvenience would ensue." Not only did no "inconvenience ensue," but the women at the Home enjoyed working on the Fair. Making their items for sale gave them a purpose, and the Fair brought visitors to the Home. Finally, the Fair earned money, \$327 in the first year, funds that were needed at a time when the Home was not heavily endowed. After the Fair, each "inmate" was given fifty cents, in gratitude for her work, and the Matron received ten dollars. The Fair was such a success that it became a major event of each year.¹⁵

Rachel Smith also reached out into the community to provide entertainment and events at the Home. The number of concerts, readings, and rides for the women increased greatly. In January of 1873, in fact, the members of the Board decided that

14. Annual Report, 1870, p. 6.

15. For an example of the way the Fair was presented and advertised, see the flyer in the appendix of the records of the Board Meeting, April 8, 1873.

they had to warn Mrs. Smith to care for her own health. "In self forgetting zeal," they wrote, she had been taking the ill into her own room, and she was informed that she was no longer to do so. Clearly, the Directors did not want to lose the services of Rachel Smith, so they decided that she was to take a vacation.¹⁶ Five years later, in 1878, that vacation became a regular event. The Matron was to have a six week vacation with pay, but she was to come to the Home once a week or if there was an emergency, and she had to pay for her own carfare and for her substitute. In 1892, the Matron's pay was "raised" to \$7.00.¹⁷

Fortunately, Rachel Smith was followed as Matron by Mary E. Townsend, who, while seemingly not as creative as her predecessor, had the good sense to maintain contacts with the churches and communities which Rachel Smith had initiated. The visitors and readers continued, as did the entertainment and the Fair, and Reports indicate that all was well under the aegis of Mary Townsend. When she died in November of 1914, her obituary praised her for her virtues. The author of the obituary also mentioned two changes which came during the eighteen years of Mary Townsend's tenure. Those changes were an increase in the number of women on outside aid, and a more subtle change which came with newly-emerging standards connected with such Homes. The Report stated that

When our family was first gathered from the highways and by-ways of want and neglect, loving care, shelter, warmth and food were the prime necessities, and the first generations lived and died thankfully under these conditions which were so much happier than they had ever dreamed of for their old age. Modern social science now demands more breathing space, sanitary regulation, scrupulous cleanliness, attention to diet, with knowledge and training in these branches on the part of employees. To fit together the ancient and modern order with as little disturbance as possible to those in her care, was the difficult task which came more and more insistently to Miss Townsend;

16. *Ibid.*, January, 1873

17. *Ibid.*, April 12, 1892.

but she set about it with courage and good nature and has paved the way for her successors.¹⁸

There is no statement in the records as to how Miss Townsend upgraded herself and the staff, but apparently she somehow managed to bridge the gap between the old and the new standards. Mrs. Mary E. Armistead, who followed Townsend as Matron, proved to be satisfactory at first. But, in the 1920s, a number of references make it clear that she was not the loving Matron which her predecessors had been. In 1930, the Assistant Matron, Mrs. Alice D. Scott, took over the duties with the residents and left to Mrs. Armistead the administrative work of the Home. Mrs. Scott continued to serve as matron until the Home was closed in 1944.

With reference to the "outside aid" cited above, it is clear that from the earliest years the Home was never large enough to provide for all who wanted to enter. The Committee on Admissions had hard choices to make. Over the years, several questions would arise which determined the priorities. Would they take invalids? Yes. Poor white women? No. Feeble-minded? Yes. Disruptive inmates? Not if disturbing to others in the house. Poor women from Salem? No, as wealthy towns should provide their own homes. Priority was to be given to Black women who resided in Boston. Would they take men? No. Would they dismiss an "inmate" who disobeyed either the rules or the Matron? Yes, and they did so. Nevertheless, there were still women who might have qualified, but who were not admitted. In 1869, a solution was found in the form of outside aid. Some women were barely able to care for themselves, or they could stay with relatives, if they had just a few dollars a month in aid. Slowly, the number of women on outside aid grew over the years. By 1901, the reporter, Anna P. Jackson, very correctly predicted that outside aid would continue to grow while the number of inmates would remain steady or decline.¹⁹ Indeed, over the next few decades that was precisely what would happen. By the time the decision was made to close the Home, it was made in the belief that outside aid could help a greater number of women. In

18. Annual Report, 1915.

19. Ibid., 1901, p. 5. See also the Report for the following year, in which the point was again raised that outside aid was growing as a part of the services rendered by the Home.

the early reports, next to nothing was said of the lives of the women on outside aid, and more detail was given on the residents of the Home. Conversely, the recipients of outside aid were described in somewhat greater detail in the later years of the Home.

The "inmates" were the most interesting people connected with the Home. The early Managers were personally knowledgeable about each woman in the Home, and they kept detailed notes on each resident. Unfortunately, as the years passed and the relationships changed, the notes of the Visitors and Admissions Committees were, at times, very perfunctory, even when some of the women in the Home seem to have had extremely interesting personal histories. What we know about the women often came at the end of their lives, in a brief obituary. Following are a few representative excerpts from the more extensive obituaries.

The first is from the description of Charlotte Cogle, who died on May 13, 1878, which was written at the time of her acceptance into the home.

Recommended by Mrs. Burrill of South Boston and admitted September 25, 1860. She was born a slave in Georgia is now seventy three years of age and has lived at Mrs. Burrill's in South Boston during about twenty years. At the beginning of that time her master, Major Jacob Woods a planter, sent his grand-daughter, then a child of seven years old to be educated at Mrs. Burrill's school and 'Ma'am Charlotte' was also sent to take care of her. A few years after this, Major Woods died after having freed his slaves, amounting in all to one hundred and fifty, and sent them to Liberia, including Mrs. Cogle's only child a daughter from whom she had never since heard. When at the age of twenty one years her young mistress, her "dear chile" returned to Georgia and married there, the money which until that time had been regularly paid for Mrs. Cogle's support, in accordance with the provisions of Major Woods' will, ceased to arrive, and the choice only was given her of being left here destitute or of returning to Georgia where, it was promised her, she shall be made comfortable with the slaves of

her young mistress's husband. Having promised her old master that she would never return to the South, and not liking the prospect of becoming the slave of a man whom she did not know, and who had unjustly deprived her of her means of support, she chose to remain with Mrs. Burrill who kindly offered her a home at her house. There she lived for some years longer, until the increasing infirmities of age made her feel that she could be of little service; and only a burden upon Mrs. Burrill's kindness, and she therefore decided to enter the Home.²⁰

The next entry is from the *Annual Report* for 1866. It illustrates how well the Directors knew the women and their personal foibles. The reporter refers to the death of Ma'am Phillips, who was probably over 100 years of age. She was generally silent, but occasionally very expressive, especially on the subject of slavery. "Her long patience under disease was relieved by not a few touches of obstinacy. We shall miss her, too, for she has always been the central figure, sometimes visible through a cloud of tobacco smoke: of the room upstairs, which had a fire." Added to the account was the note that "It must not be imagined that smoking is common at the Home. Ma'am Phillips, on account of her great age and early coming, was indulged in many fancies which the directors would not now gratify."²¹

In 1907, the following entry was made in the *Annual Report*, telling of some of the women on outside aid:

One of our oldest beneficiaries was a slave on a sugar plantation in Louisiana, and has trouble in her head from the hard work done there, digging ditches, cutting down trees, plowing, etc. [During

20. "Descriptions and Admissions to the Home for Aged Colored Women," case of Charlotte Cougle, File 4, unnumbered, but on 12th page.

21. *Annual Report*, 1867, pp. 6-7. An interesting aspect of this entry is a set of votes relating to smoking in the Home. In June of 1879, the Directors voted that "tobacco, being a luxury enjoyed by some of the inmates, be included in the expenses." In April of 1880, they voted that "In view of the danger of fire, the previous vote was amended to read that "no inmates shall be allowed to smoke tobacco or any substance." Perhaps the last word indicates a certain inventiveness on the part of the residents.

the Civil War], She and her husband ran away and joined a New Hampshire regiment of volunteers, and she nursed the sick soldiers until the colonel brought her to the North. She receives three dollars a month from us, some help from her church, and earns her board in a family by looking after the children while her mother works out.

Another woman of seventy-eight helps out her four dollars a month by nursing sick children, receiving food or a little money in return. She has a sweet and helpful disposition and does many kindnesses

Another has lost her right arm and has no relations to care for her, but is able to earn a little by cleaning. We give her four dollars a month, and a bundle of clothes from time to time.²²

This item, from the Directors' Meeting of December, 1921, was occasioned by the death of Rebecca Barbadoes:

She belonged to one of the oldest Massachusetts families. Her grandfather was a resident of Lexington and an ancestor fought in the Revolutionary Army. Her father was a citizen of Boston and was identified with the anti-slavery movement. For many years she was a stewardess on the Boston and Bangor boat. For some years she received outside aid from the Home and later came to live there in January 1916.²³

The Home closed in 1944. The first hint that this action was being considered in any serious fashion appeared in a report of a Special Committee on the Future of the Home, in November of 1920. The report indicates an interest in giving up the Home entirely, and moving in the direction of providing only outside aid. But the Committee concluded that it would require too much time to make such a drastic change, and that the Directors had an obligation to the women in the Home. The fact is, however, that

22. Annual Report, 1908, pp. 6-7.

23. Director's Report, December, 1921.

during the 1920s, the number of inmates was always below capacity.

During the 1930s, the number of women in the Home was about twenty, but with the Great Depression many more women were receiving outside aid as well as special emergency relief. In the records of the 1930s, there was never a hint that the Home would soon be closed. But in the 1940s, the number of women in the Home was so low that the Directors took in temporary lodgers to fill the rooms, women who were on their way to relatives or to another institution. Unfortunately, as so often happens to a group in a period of change, the records are sparse during the 1940s, so there is not much documentation of this change. The *Annual Report* of 1943 noted that there were only six inmates and seven boarders. It mentioned that old age pensions and other forms of outside aid had reduced the need for such a Home, but it did not indicate that the next *Annual Report* would tell of the end.²⁴ The only reference to the closing of the house in the regular reports was in the minutes of the regular quarterly meeting of May 16, 1944. At that meeting, the Directors voted to pension the Matron, Mrs. Alice Scott, at her full salary, and to empower the Executive Committee to sell the house.²⁵

The *84th Annual Report*, of 1944, states: "On July 20th of last summer, 1944, the house of 22 Hancock Street, which had been the Home for Aged Colored Women for forty-four years, was sold for a boardinghouse to Miss Helen Hebb and the quiet, gentle old-world atmosphere we had all loved and known so well from that day became a memory." The last boarder and five inmates were placed at private homes, at St. Monica's Home, or at Resthaven in Boston.²⁶ The reason given for the closing of the Home was stated briefly in the "Report of the Committee to Study and Advise Concerning the Program for Future Conduct of Home for Aged Colored Women," which was presented to the Directors in May of 1944. The authors of the report, Esther Hawkins

24. *Annual Report*, 1944, p. 5.

25. Minutes of May 16, 1944, Directors Meetings, as recorded by Ethel B. Smith, Clerk. From 1944, most of the records are stored with the Grimes-King Foundation. The *Annual Reports* for 1944 and 1945 are at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

26. *Annual Report*, 1945, p. 3.

Wilson, Ada Hinton, and Hannah G. Ayer, opened their report with the following statement:

After careful study of the needs of Aged Colored Women in Boston, and interviews with various persons who are trying to deal with these needs, this Committee believes that the Home for Aged Colored Women is no longer serving the community in the best way possible.

Throughout its eight decades, the Home for Aged Colored Women had served its inhabitants uniquely and well. During the eighty-three years of the Home's existence, its Directors had always tried to make the building truly a "home." Perhaps because the Home was small, but also in great part because of the enlightened policies established by the Directors, its residents never suffered from the cynicism or the disparagement of the elderly that appear in the records of other homes for the elderly. The women were not referred to as "children," nor were they treated as having the "disease" of being elderly. They never had to pay their own way by working in or for the Home, or by paying a large admission fee. They were given freedom to be as creative and independent as possible within the limits of a communal setting.²⁷

While the Directors were saddened by the closing of the Home, the declining population served to justify that decision. Moreover, through thrift and the prudent investment of the small contributions of the early decades, the Directors had built up a substantial fund. They thought that by broadening the scope of their activities, they might better serve the community. For the next five decades, the Directors of the Home -- which was later renamed the Grimes-King Foundation -- struggled to find effective ways to maintain their services to the elderly. They tried rehabilitating an old building to provide an opportunity for independent living for elders, linking with other groups which would carry out the rehabilitation, while they provided part of the funding, and working with social service agencies to provide activities to brighten the lives of the elderly.

27. See Esther MacCarthy, Serving the Community: The Story of The Grimes-King Foundation and Its Predecessor, the Home for Aged Colored Women, 1861-1992 (Boston, 1992).

Descendants of the original Directors were on the Board into the 1950s, thus exemplifying the on-going commitment to solving the problems of homelessness, age, race, and gender -- problems which still exist. The Directors were racially integrated, as were the members of the first Board, and, like them, they continued to seek the best ways of serving the community.