SPRINGFIELD'S UNION RELIEF ASSOCIATION, 1877-1886

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In his Springfield *Handbook*, Moses King noted that until 1877, Springfield had not been distinguished in its benevolent work. By 1882, the year his book was published, Springfield's benevolent societies had become noteworthy. Though he provides a long list of benevolent societies active in 1882, the Union Relief Association (U.R.A) clearly stands out from the others, not because of its programs, but because of the growth of the association and the effectiveness of its work in treating the poor and providing relief. The types of societies present in Springfield were varied. Some, like the U.R.A., provided responsible relief in conjunction with city or state authorities. The Hale fund, which provided money to the pastors of the First Congregational, First Baptist, and Trinity Methodist churches, also included the clerk of Superior Court as one of its administrators. Others, like the Springfield Home For Friendless Women and Children, were entirely state-run, while still others, like the Taylor Benevolent Fund, were completely under private control.[1]

Many of these societies catered entirely to members of a specific group. For example, Springfield had a number of mutual aid societies which aided only those who were members and who had, in many cases, paid money which resembled insurance, in order to become members. The aim of these societies was clear. In the event of accident, sickness, or death, the society would pay the family a certain amount to make up for the loss of support. Hence, the Wason Company's mutual relief association was open only to those employees who had worked a sufficient number of days. Another group, the Orient Lodge, Knights of Honor, provided aid to its members, who paid five dollars each year. The Orient Lodge had only 140 members in 1883, seven years after its establishment. Another society, the Roman-Catholic Mutual Insurance Company of the Diocese of Springfield, which had members from all the towns west of

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1. King's Handbook, (Springfield, 1884), pp. 211-214.

Framingham, had only 260 members in 1883. It also was established in 1877, the year of a nation-wide railroad strike, which worsened the depression that had affected the area since 1873.[2]

Membership in an organization like these guaranteed aid in times of need, but the majority of the people in Springfield either could not afford yearly dues or did not work for a large company that provided for its employees. For the poor of Springfield, the options were few. There was municipal aid, provided by the Overseers of the Poor; the city also ran an almshouse for paupers, but there was a stigma attached to it. Another option was door to door begging, but pride prevented much of this, at least by those who were considered to be "decent" members of society. The churches also provided aid but only for their congregations, and in many cases their aid was minimal. Families that were normally self-sufficient and had fallen on hard times, usually did not seek aid from these sources. They preferred to struggle rather than be considered paupers who were aided by the state or who resided in the local almshouse.

The almshouse was a place to put the poor who could not be helped with donations. A committee report to the U.R.A. provided a shocking description of the almshouse in 1877. It came to the conclusion that of those housed at the institution, seventy percent were intemperate and the presence of these disreputable people heavily influenced all the other inmates. It was a common belief that the intemperate were not deserving of help since their poverty was a product of their "vice." Because of the presence of intemperates at the almshouse, the committee of the U.R.A. declared that the Overseers of the Poor were negligent in their distribution of aid. In addition to the condition of the inmates at the almshouse, the report also described extreme overcrowding. The building housed eighty-three inmates in only thirty rooms, with three rooms being occupied by one person apiece. The report provided an example of eleven boys, students at the truant school which was also housed at the almshouse, living in one room which measured thirty by fourteen-and-one-half feet.[3]

In general, the committee concluded that the almshouse, which was funded by the state through the Overseers of the Poor, was overcrowded, undersupervised, poorly planned, under-financed, and ill-suited for its purpose. "The plan of the building," according to the

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2. Ibid., pp. 214-217.

3. Union Relief Association, Annual Report (Springfield, 1887), pp. 18-19.

report, "is a masterpiece of inconvenience and want of forethought." It cited, as another example, a common day room of ten feet by fourteen-and-one-half feet used by thirty-two children. Finally the committee made suggestions towards improving the almshouse, as it determined that of fifty-one men and women in residence there, only seven were able-bodied and almost all of the fifty-one belonged in a hospital. The committee recommended that the legislature act to remove children from the poor environment of the almshouse, separate the sexes into the two wings of the building, place the disabled and infirm in a hospital, move the truant school to the country, and reduce the problem of intemperance by reducing the number of liquor licenses issued in Springfield. One suggestion was for the Overseers of the Poor to provide better funding for the almshouse and the city hospital. The U.R.A. committee believed that the money would be available, if not for "indiscriminate giving" by the Overseers of the Poor, indiscriminate giving that enabled the intemperate poor to live at the almshouse.[4]

Clearly, this committee, like many other members of the Springfield community, came to the conclusion that the poor were not being ministered to in a way that could help them rise above their poverty. The Overseers of the Poor, the committee complained, was not only busy providing support for the residents of Springfield, but were forced to support residents of other cities who had come to Springfield looking for work or relief. By aiding these people, others suffered, including the needy members of the Springfield community.[5] The children of these transients attended Springfield schools, burdening the taxpayers even more. Likewise, the parents of these children, who did find work, put members of the Springfield community on the state aid lists, as in 1877 employment was difficult to find. The lack of organization between cities was the direct cause of this situation. It was even believed that some people were collecting aid in two cities, while only having residence in one.[6]

One of the most outspoken representatives of the U.R.A. was Reverend Washington Gladden, who later would become famous as an advocate of the Social Gospel. In editorials, reports to the U.R.A., and in speeches, Gladden did not place all the blame on the Overseers of the Poor. Rather, he concluded that with the influx of

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4. Ibid., pp. 15-20.

5. Springfield Republican, February 14, 1877.

6. Annual Report (1877), pp. 9-10.

immigration and the weakening of the "Native vine" by the growth of a "degenerate plant" called "professional mendicancy," the overseers were ill-equipped to properly screen applicants and to determine who was worthy of aid and who should be refused on the grounds of intemperance, vice, or lack of desire to rise above their poverty.[7]

Gladden provided his reasons why the Overseers of the Poor were unable to adequately handle the job. He cited the inability of the city to provide relief for needy families because they had not yet settled in the city, while intemperate residents were given money, furthering their vice. Officially, non-residents were considered "State Paupers," which meant they needed to go to the state almshouse at Tewksbury to receive aid. Unfortunately for many the trip was too expensive or they preferred to stay in Springfield. Another reason for the inability of the Overseers of the Poor to properly serve Springfield lay in the size of the problem. Gladden's figures indicate that over 30,000 dollars was spent in 1876 on poor relief in Springfield; in one month alone, over one thousand requests were received. He correctly concluded that "No man could give all these cases the necessary attention and investigation." He continued: "With the best purposes and the most diligent efforts of the city authorities it must be that a very large proportion of this money is obtained by the unworthy and vicious poor."[8]

Finally plans began to materialize for solving the problems of poor relief in Springfield. It was the conclusion of the U.R.A. that a volunteer program should be established, consisting of people who could spend the time necessary to screen applicants, and one that was not limited by state determinations of residency or social status. Initially, there was a great deal of debate on precisely how the organization should function. On January 30, 1877, at South Church chapel a meeting was held to discuss these questions. This meeting, supported by Mayor Ansel Phelps, produced a number of ideas.[9] One concern was the role that the church would play in the new organization. It was felt that neither the church nor the city should be completely free from the responsibility of providing for the poor, since Christian charity was a hallmark of the church and a responsibility of elected officials. Another suggestion was that a work program be set up to provide jobs for the poor. The employment

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7. Daily Republican, February 14, 1877.

8. Ibid., February 14, 20, 1877.

9. Annual Report (1877), pp. 12-13; Daily Republican, February 14, 1877.

situation in Springfield was dismal and the suggestion was addressing a relevant issue. Another idea was the creation of a district system that could provide proper visitation and could reach out to the group that needed the most help. It was the common opinion of the group attending the meeting, including the city almoner, that the "Middle poor" received the least support. This group of non-church affiliated people, who were too proud to be associated with paupers, received no aid and did not have the means to escape their poverty. These people, with the proper help, could rise up from poverty and once again become upright members of society, self-sufficient and successful.[10]

Perhaps the most promising suggestions were related to an examination of systems already in use elsewhere in the country and the world. There was a discussion of "Judicious, intelligent charity" which had been tried for the three previous winters in the twenty-second ward in Philadelphia. The Germantown Relief Society consisted of a paid superintendent, seven male directors and a large corps of "lady visitors," in a ward of 25,000 people. The conclusion was that through careful investigation, the unworthy had been removed from the system while the worthy poor had been helped. Finally, with the agreement that the city was doing much towards the relief of the poor, even though it was not enough to correct the problem, the meeting adjourned until a later date.[11]

It is important to point out the support the community gave to the expressed need for a change in the system of public poor relief. Samuel Bowles, the editor of the *Springfield Daily Republican*, provided information on other charitable organizations in and around the city. An article printed one week before the January 30 meeting included the observation of a member of the New York board of charities, on the causes of pauperism. In this article, a term was introduced which became a catch phrase for the articles written by men like Washington Gladden, as they discussed the poverty problem in the city. On the subject of "Hereditary Pauperism," the article declared that "there is a large number of families" throughout New York State "which are kept together by private and public charity, the sole end of whose existence seems to be the rearing of children like themselves." The article continued by providing a few reasons for the presence of "pauperism": indiscriminate "out-door relief," neglect of

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10. Springfield Daily Union, January 30 and 31, 1877; Daily Republican, January 31, 1877.

11. Daily Union, January 30, 1877; Daily Republican, January 31, 1877.

disease, the absence of timely assistance in obtaining employment, and the idleness of life at New York's poor houses.[12]

Bowles' articles served to educate the public, as well as promote his own ideas. Just two days after the organizational meeting, Bowles argued that women should be encouraged to join the various charitable organizations. Using common sense, he argued that because of the low cost of female volunteers, along with their fresh perspective, women were ideal for benevolent work. His article went on to mention the practice of using women as volunteer workers in the charitable organizations of Tewksbury and Monson. Bowles believed that women provided a connecting link between personal charity and the amount of interest generated in support of public and private organizations. Bowles' influence as editor can be measured by the success of the Ladies' Flower Mission, which depended on his paper to solicit donations of flowers and fruit for redistribution to the poor. The Ladies' Flower Mission existed for at least nine years, and in 1886 was reaching more of the unfortunate in the city than ever before.[13] Bowles' involvement went beyond his newspaper connection to include his acceptance of the post of chief fundraiser, and he succeeded in raising a large sum of money for the U.R.A.[14]

In his handbook of Springfield, Moses King gave much of the credit for the organization of the U.R.A. to Bowles, and nearly attributed the entire rise in Springfield's benevolent societies to Bowles' "Timely discussions" in his newspaper and to his work in various societies.[15] Bowles' untimely death occured soon after he helped organize the Union Relief Association, but support for the U.R.A. continued for many years, certainly indicating that many other individuals were deeply involved in the organization.[16]

The February 13 meeting, at which a constitution was presented and adopted, received great extensive coveragee in the local press. During this meeting, a board of managers was appointed and a debate followed on the nature of the society. It was during this debate that the society took on a crusade-like attitude which was later

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12. Daily Union, January 24, 1877.

13. Idem.; Annual Report, (1877), p. 21.

14. Stephen G. Weisner, Embattled Editor (Lanham, Maryland, 1986), p. 132.

15. King's Handbook, p. 211.

16. Weisner, Embattled Editor, pp. 132-133.

found to be impractical. Lofty aims like "upholding the principles of helping the poor to help themselves, of witholding alms that may do harm, of giving such advice and assistance as may be of permanent benefit to the recipients," were found to be impractical and in this case overworded.[17] The assumption that Springfield was overrun with professional paupers, mendicants, and intemperates was wrong, and helped produce the lofty goals, but also helped foster the image of the "inadequate" Overseers of the Poor."[18]

Washington Gladden's report on "establishing the society," read at the February 13 meeting, helped dispel some of the over-romanticized ideas about what was about to be undertaken. His proposal included a description of the poor relief system in use at Eberfeld, Prussia, and his discussion of that system led to the adoption of a similar program for Springfield. This system, he explained, utilized a number of "visitors" who were assigned districts within the city, and who visited applicants for aid in order to determine whether they were "worthy" enough to receive it. In Eberfeld, the money for poor relief was raised by taxation, but was distributed by 252 unpaid "visitors." Over this large body of volunteers were eighteen "overseers," or superintendents. A district was assigned to each visitor, but no visitor was allowed to have more than four families under his or her care, allowing close association with the families in need. The recommendation for aid, therefore, came from someone closely associated with the recipient, thereby reducing the amount of money given to "unworthy" people.

In 1852, the year prior to the system's application, four thousand out of 50,364 living in Eberfeld received some sort of aid. By 1857, the population had increased to 52,590, but the number of people aided dropped to 1,528, and the cost of aid had dropped from 35,000 dollars in 1852, to about 13,000 in 1857. An English official appointed to examine the system said that "The result of administration upon these principles is that there is no able-bodied pauperism in Eberfeld, and very little of any kind." The success of the Eberfeld system seemed obvious, after only five years of operation.[19]

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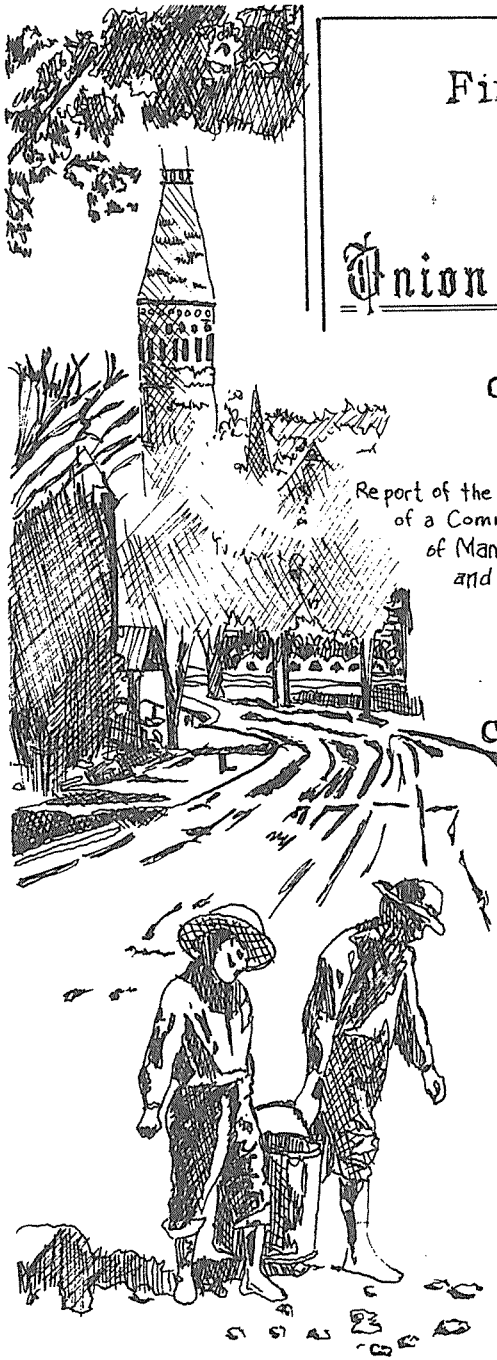
17. Union Relief Association constitution, article 4.

18. Annual Report (1877), p. 5.

19. Daily Republican, February 14, 1877; Daily Union, February 13, 1877.



First Annual Report

OF THE

Union Relief Association

OF SPRINGFIELD, MASS,

COMPRISING

Report of the Secretary and Treasurer together with the Report of a Committee of three Ladies appointed by the Board of Managers to visit the City Alms-House, Hospital and Lock-up, a Report from the Secretary of the Flower Mission and Report on Organization

AND

Constitution and By-Laws

OF THE

ASSOCIATION

1877

In order to rally support for the Eberfeld approach, Gladden also mentioned a report of the New York State Charities Aid Association. According to the report, the Eberfeld program was combined with another program designed to find work for the applicants, rather than supply money. "Supplying work," read the report, "instead of alms, loans instead of doles, will often prevent, in a crisis, the industrious poor from becoming paupers." In his concluding remarks, Gladden explained why he thought the church should not be undertaking the responsibility for a city's poor relief. His reasons were simple: the religious organizations could not run a city-wide poor relief program because of the difficulty in dividing territory among the various churches. He also felt that with so many churches involved, some would do better work than others. Finally, the "professional pauper" would move from parish to parish, gathering funds as he went.[20]

After the speeches had been made and the constitution finally approved, the U.R.A. came into existence. Though ineffective on February 13, the U.R.A. was an institution ready to relieve the poor of Springfield. The object of the society was straightforward:

> Its objective shall be the discouragement of mendicancy, and indiscriminate almsgiving, the judicious relief of those who are destitute and helpless, and the assistance of those who need employment. The association will seek, in cooperation with the authorities of the city, to care for the sick and infirm poor, and to aid industrious and worthy persons who may need temporary assistance. But it will not undertake to support able-bodied persons whose poverty is the result of their own vice or indolence or improvidence.[21]

In order to finance these endeavors, money was raised by subscriptions to the society. Members were asked to give one dollar to the society and to take a pledge: "I hereby pledge myself to abstain from indiscriminate giving of food, money, or clothing at my door or on the street."[22] The issue of out-door relief, including the practice

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20. Daily Republican, February 14, 1877; Daily Union, February 13, 1877.

21. Union Relief Association constitution, article one.

22. Ibid., article two.

of giving to beggars, produced many different opinions. Washington Gladden was outspoken as he recommended the abolition of official out-door relief by the city. He insisted that the greater the sum of out-door relief and the greater the availability of alms, the greater the attraction of the wandering poor to the area. For small towns he believed that out-door relief could be effective, but for a city like Springfield, he exclaimed, it would not work.[23]

A letter to the editor of the *Springfield Daily Republican* differed with Gladden's conclusion. The letter said that out-door relief did not do "more harm than good." Rather, out-door relief was an effective way to handle the ebb and flow of relieving the poor. Winters consistently swelled the ranks of the poor in any city, while summer served to reduce the number. France, the letter-writer maintained, used a system of official out-door relief quite successfully. The letter concluded with the statement that if the almshouses of the state were not so overcrowded, the system of official out-door relief might work, for "no country has ever got along" without out-door relief, "and none ever will."[24]

In a response, Gladden reminded the author of the letter, and the public, that many children, "Hereditary Paupers," grew up with the habit of dependence. Gladden concluded that out-door relief would not change this situation even if it did meet temporary needs of the people. He then challenged the writer's advocacy of out-door relief as beneficial to society. Gladden insisted that if there were no official out-door relief, there would have been an efficient volunteer program in place for Springfield long before 1877. Because the state took on the responsibility for aiding the poor, it relieved the churches and the private organizations of the need to dispense aid. Since the Overseers of the Poor had turned to "indiscriminate giving," the pool of applicants had grown from just the worthy poor to now include unworthy poor: the "mendicants," "hereditary paupers," and "intemperates." Gladden, a great orator, included an amusing anecdote to reiterate his point on official programs designed to do the work that honest citizens should have done:

> if any of us should ever hear the word of condemnation, 'I was hungry and ye gave me no meat,' I do not think it will be considered a sufficient answer

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23. Daily Republican, February 14, 1877.

24. Ibid., February 19, 1877.

> to say, 'nay, lord, but we elected a city government, and the city government appointed overseers of the poor, and the overseers of the poor chose an almoner, and it was his business to give thee meat. We paid our taxes.'[25]

While this newspaper discussion was going on, a number of other events helped move the U.R.A. forward. On February 19, a meeting of the managers occurred and the members of the executive committee were elected. At this meeting the managers established a total of 32 districts, so that the Eberfeld system could be put into effect. Finally, an office fo the U.R.A. was established at city hall. Its convenient location, next to the Overseers of the Poor, indicates the aim of the U.R.A. to work alongside the Overseers of The Poor. It was not the intention of the U.R.A. to replace the Overseers of the Poor. Rather, the hope was to work with the overseers and provide the help needed to put the Eberfeld system into action. By using the overseers' records, it was possible for the U.R.A. to move forward towards its goal of relief for the "worthy poor" by singling out those who actually needed help from those who sought to further "their vice."[26]

With all the pieces in place, the plan began. The first fiscal year of the U.R.A. started on March 7, 1877 and continued until September 26, 1877. With a working budget of $922.35, the U.R.A. spent a total of $829.06 its first year, with $583.63 being spent directly on relief. One of the most interesting entries was $156.10 for transporting families out of the state. The rest of the money was spent on food, fuel, clothing, and shoes, which were then distributed to the applicants who were deemed to be "worthy."[27]

During the first year, eighty-eight heads of family applied for aid from the U.R.A. Of these, thirty-three were refused on the ground they did not warrant aid from the U.R.A.; some were candidates for the almshouse, some were intemperate, and some had already received aid from the city. In all, from March to September of 1877, the U.R.A. provided aid to 246 people. The nature of this aid, as indicated earlier, was not monetary. The majority of the aid consisted of food, fuel, and clothing. In some rare cases, as in the

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25. Ibid., February 19 and 20, 1877.

26. Annual Report (1877), p. 4; Daily Republican, February 20, 1877.

27. Annual Report (1877), treasurer's report.

example of a local craftsman, something other than the essentials might be provided. The craftsman was given the raw materials needed for his trade, and from the sale of his products, he was able to move his family to a better location and become self-supporting. The U.R.A. also helped move one family to Kansas, to reunite a family whose father was already working there.[28]

By including in their annual report, submitted at the close of the first year, descriptions of conditions at the Springfield almshouse, city hospital, and "lock-up," the U.R.A. made the transition from a "selective aid" society to one that welcomed all the poor people of Springfield to apply for aid. The association, however, would continue to make certain that only the worthy would receive aid. The reports also show the desire of the U.R.A. to address problems that could not be solved with indiscriminate giving. This commitment indicated that the organization would go beyond its original goal in the hope of solving other problems in Springfield. The first example of this commitment came with the founding of the Ladies' Flower Mission. This non-profit organization had no budget and depended entirely on donations of flowers and fruit for their work. Organized in 1877, it served to distribute bouquets of flowers and boxes of fruit to the sick and infirm. In its first season, the Ladies' Flower Mission distributed 792 bouquets and 121 packages of fruit. Modelled after the Boston Flower Commission, the distributing season lasted from May 26 to September 26. Calls for donations were made in churches across Springfield, complementing newspaper articles which also called for donations. The figures showing the number of bouquets distributed reveals the success of the solicitation.[29]

The second year for the U.R.A. commenced September 27, 1877 and ended September 25, 1878. During its first full year, the expenses increased, while the amount of aid rendered decreased. Remembering the large drop in aid at Eberfeld, the plan seems to have worked. Examining the figures reveals a greater number of applications being denied aid than the previous year's thirty denials. Yet this year, more applicants received aid, despite the drop in aid spent. Of 154 applications, 82 received aid. These figures translate into 323 people receiving aid, up from 246 the previous year. Of the 82 families receiving aid, only 18 had applied for aid the previous year. The U.R.A., during the first year, one that was seven months

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28. Ibid., pp. 5-7.

29. Ibid.; Ladies' Flower Mission report.

long, spent $583.63 on aid, while during the second year the U.R.A. spent only $575.61, and the second year was a full twelve months long.[30]

In addition to the money spent for the direct relief of the poor, during the second year the U.R.A. gave five hundred dollars to the treasurer of the Children's Home. The success of the U.R.A. was apparent. The secretary's report noted that the reduction of out-door relief, due in part to the oath taken by subscribers to the association, had succeeded in reducing the number of tramps and beggars on the streets of Springfield. It is difficult to determine whether this was actually due to the U.R.A., or an improvement in the employment picture, or to verify that the "unworthy poor" had left the city. Yet, to the supporters of the U.R.A., it was no coincidence; they believed they had succeeded in stopping "mendecancy."[31]

The projection that poverty could be reduced in Springfield via the Eberfeld system certainly seemed to be a reality. In 1879, fifty-five families, a total of 172 people, received aid amounting to $430.93, with only eleven families repeating applications from the previous year. It is possible that the needs of the people were not as great in 1879, a year with consistently mild weather unlike the previous two years in which the weather had been much more severe; with better weather came fewer applications for aid.[32]

The third report of the Ladies' Flower Mission showed a remarkable increase in support, as 938 bouquets were delivered, along with 167 packages of fruit.[33] Though this rise in support is worthy of mention, it was the development (through the U.R.A.) of the Hampden County Children's Aid Society, during 1879, that was most noteworthy. On December 12, 1878, at a meeting at the First Congregational Church of Springfield, the subject of homes for dependent children was discussed. In each town of Hampden County, a committee of three people was established, to search out good homes where poor, dependent children could be placed. This organization, working in conjunction with the Overseers of the Poor and the State Board of Charities, began the long process of securing proper homes for needy children. The initial step for setting up this organization

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30. Treasurer's report, in Annual Report (1878), p. 7.

31. Ibid., p. 8.

32. Treasurer's report, in Annual Report (1879).

33. Ladies' Flower Mission report, in Annual Report (1879).

was to follow the example of legislation previously passed in New York State, keeping dependent children out of the almshouses. On March 12, 1879, the Massachusetts state legislature passed the bill and the Overseers of the Poor quickly complied by removing seventeen children from the almshouse and placing them in good homes. Once the legislation was in place, the only problem was the limited number of families willing to take in needy children. This would limit the success of the society from 1879 to 1886.[34]

The next yearly report by the U.R.A. showed a slight decrease in the amount of aid distributed from the previous year. In fact, the amount of aid expended over the next six years would not fluctuate dramatically except for the years 1883 and 1885, when especially harsh winters hit the area. Other than these periods of relatively high expenditure, the amount spent leveled off at approximately four hundred dollars per year.[35] After only four years, the effects of the U.R.A. were plainly visible. Judging from the dropping level of spending by both the U.R.A. and the Overseers of the Poor, the problems of poor relief in Springfield were dramatically decreasing. Out-door relief by the Overseers of the Poor cost $5,175 in 1873. By 1876 this figure had risen to $26,599. While much of this increase must be attributed to the increase in aid necessitated by the depressed economy, a great amount of the money was not distributed properly. Proof of this is found in the figures submitted by the Overseers of the Poor after the U.R.A. had finished its first season of poor relief. By September of 1877, the expenditures of the Overseers of the Poor had dropped to $12,362. The next year the trend continued, as the cost dropped to $7,974. Beginning in 1879 and continuing through 1886, the cost leveled off at approximately $4,000 per year for poor relief. The U.R.A. had made its presence felt. The Secretary of the association went so far as to declare that "The principles upon which the charity of the city had previously been administered are now acknowledged on all hands to have been faulty; but [before the association was established] they had not been thought faulty nor were they peculiar to Springfield." It would appear that proper observation, visitation, and supervision of funds drastically reduced the cost of poor relief.[36]

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34. Report of the Progress of the Hampden County Children's Aid Association, in Annual Report (1879).

35. Annual Report (1886), p. 7.

36. Ibid., (1880), pp. 12-14.

Unfortunately for the U.R.A., with the progress it had made towards lowering the cost of poor relief and even eradicating the need for poor relief, the operating funds had dwindled to the point where 1880 might have been the last year. Though the winter of 1880-1881 was severe, the money needed was not available until a committee raised six hundred dollars through a special fund drive. The future of the U.R.A. was in question.[37] Following this awkward financial situation, several proposals to combine the two organizations, the U.R.A. and the Overseers of the Poor, were not taken seriously until January of 1882. At that point, the proposal to merge was acted upon and the organizations which had worked next door to each other at City Hall became partners. In essence, the union did little more than provide the U.R.A. with necessary financial support; since the association had been so successful and its existence was threatened, the merger was desperately needed. From that time, the U.R.A. was in charge of all the city's poor relief, while the Overseers of the Poor continued to support the almshouse and the city hospital. The merger seemed inevitable, since the work of the U.R.A. had served to reduce the budget of the Overseers of the Poor, even without being directly affiliated with them.[38]

The facts concerning the next six years show the effectivenesss of the U.R.A. as a benevolent society. Its volunteers continued to visit applicants desiring aid, and it continued to help fight poverty. The amount of aid varied depending on the economic climate. But the U.R.A. had become more than just another benevolent society. It had become the focus of a movement in Springfield towards helping others to help themselves. The work of the Ladies' Flower Mission, a unit of the U.R.A., showed the association's concern for the sick and infirm, and the continuing donations demonstrated the fact that local citizens shared the concern. The improvement in caring for dependent children through the children's aid association was a major advance, and the members of the association believed that they were helping to eliminate "hereditary poverty." By the fourth complete year of the U.R.A., legislation had been enacted to make it illegal to place children under the age of four in an almshouse without a competent mother.[39]

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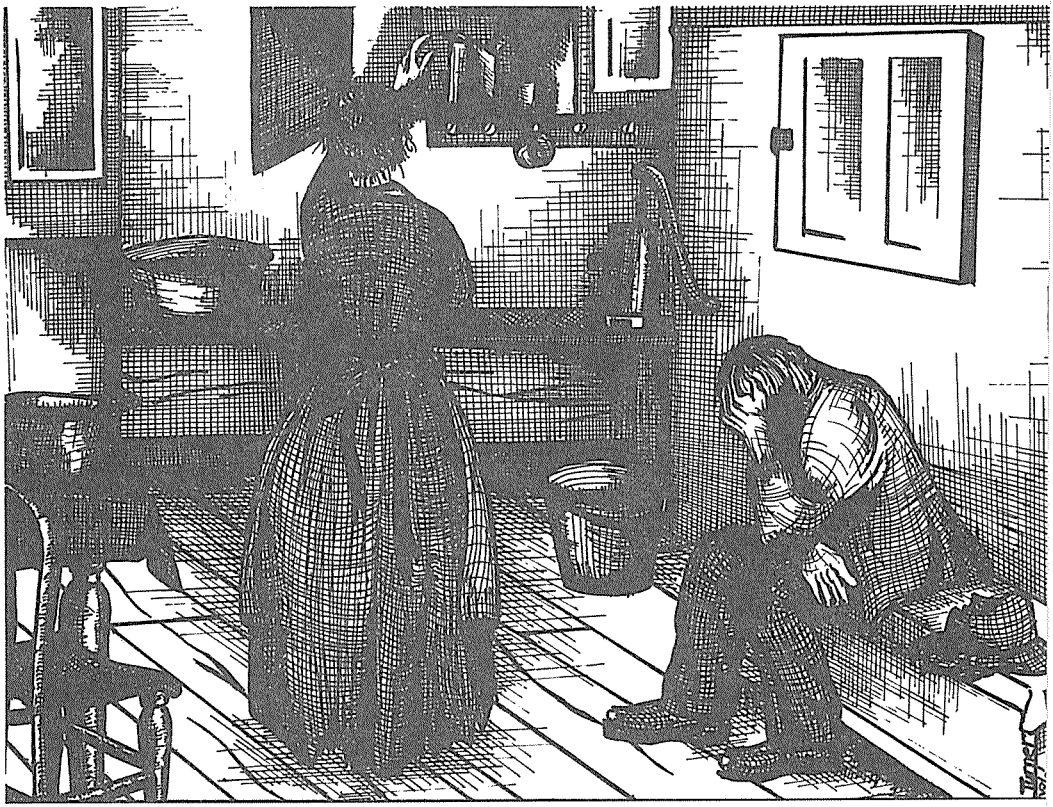
37. Ibid., (1881), p. 7.

38. Ibid., (1882), p. 17.

39. Ibid., (1880), p. 17.



This legislation, and the genuine concern for the children of Springfield, was an attempt by the U.R.A. to rectify the poverty problem by instituting programs that attacked the root of the problem. In order to counter "pauper growing," another term for "hereditary mendicancy," the U.R.A. moved to place children in proper environments. The object of the Hampden County Children's Aid Association was "the finding of homes for pauper and indigent children, in respectable families, where their moral and physical welfare would be promoted, and they be reared to habits of virtue, industry, and self reliance."[40] A final tabulation for the Hampden County Children's Aid Association, including 1886, showed that in eight years, over one hundred children had been placed in "proper homes." Despite the incorporation of the Hampden County Children's Aid Association in 1880, as a separate benevolent society, it continued to work with the U.R.A. and the Overseers of the Poor.[41]

The solving of problems in Springfield by the U.R.A. continued beyond the relief of the poor and the establishment of the previously mentioned organizations. On June 6, 1883, a committee was appointed to examine the options open to the U.R.A. for solving the problem faced by widows whose husbands worked elsewhere, or who had an intemperate spouse, were burdened with the responsibility of caring for children, and supporting the household. In order to get these families off the pauper lists, a solution was needed.[42] On June 18, 1883, a house at 256 Water Street opened to care for children of working mothers. The system provided for each child one meal per day, toys to play with, and supervision, all for a small fee. In the first six months, 485 entries were recorded in a daily log at the Springfield Day Nursery, equal to 485 days work available to families previously without the opportunity to earn enough to stop receiving aid from the city. A matron, who received money from the fees gathered daily was directed to "take these little ones, whose plastic minds are sensitive to each lightest impression of outward surroundings, out of the squandor and wretchedness which makes up all they know of home life, and surround them with some measure of kindness and comfort; to teach them to appreciate the desirableness of

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40. Ibid., (1886), p. 24.

41. Ibid., (1880), p. 30.

42. Daily Republican, March 10, 1963.

personal cleanliness; to amuse and instruct them; to make them feel the influence of kind words and pleasant looks."[43]

The day nursery continued to grow at such a rate that in 1886 it began to expand its services to meet more of the needs of poor women. The close relationship between the mothers and the matron provided a great deal of information upon which the U.R.A. could act. At first, employers advertised some openings designed to attract mothers who used the day nursery, but later the nursery became a benevolent employment agency which actively sought out positions for women. The drawback to this system was found to be the lack of job training among the women who used the services. To help this situation, the Day Nursery moved into larger quarters. This move, into a new house at 78 Bliss Street, was made possible by James Kirkham, who donated $5,360 to purchase the building.[44]

The entire group of agencies, day nursery, employment agency, and a new training center that helped mothers learn the laundering trade, was renamed the Industrial House Charities. On May 6, 1886, the new building opened and the agency continued to foster "a spirit of independence and self reliance in place of that supineness and shiftlessness which, in connection with ignorance and dissipation, led almost inevitably to pauperism and distress." The larger space allowed the training facility to actually expand into a laundry service which helped provide money for the entire organization while providing on-the-job training to a number of women. Some of the mothers even worked in the laundry to partly pay for their children to stay in the Nursery.[45]

Also established in 1886 was the Provident Dispensery, which provided medical relief to the poorer members of society. Because of the dispensary's connection with the U.R.A., the "worthy poor" received care that they might not have been able to locate elsewhere. Revenue from the estate of Elizabeth A. Burt generated a working fund. The dispensary was run by a board of physicians, including a consulting surgeon, two general practitioners, and one eye and ear specialist; together they treated over fifty patients during the

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43. Annual Report (1883), pp. 20-22.

44. Ibid., (1886), p. 9.

45. Ibid., p. 10.

first year. Payments ranged from ten to twenty-five cents per treatment.[46]

The progress of the U.R.A. in just ten years from a small organization trying to recreate a foreign system of poor relief to a large association that spawned smaller agencies indicates several things. Primarily, it shows the way the gilded age city responded to the need for poor relief, and how the leaders of society viewed those who were less fortunate. It is difficult to determine whether the earlier system "failed" because of the way it was administered by the Overseers of the Poor, but it is clear that had not the members of the U.R.A. complained about the problem of "mendicancy," many important agencies would not have come into existence until a later date. The success of the U.R.A. may not represent an advance over the earlier out-door relief system, but it demonstrated that private philanthropy could work with state and municipal organizations, and through judicious and prudent supervision it could develop means of responding to the social needs of the gilded age city.

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46. Ibid., pp. 8 and 20.