

Orphan Society of Philadelphia records

01

**Finding aid prepared by Celia Caust-Ellenbogen and Sarah
Leu through the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden
Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories.**

Last updated on March 22, 2016.

Elwyn Historical Archives and Museum

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Summary Information

Repository	Elwyn Historical Archives and Museum
Creator	Orphan Society of Philadelphia (Pa.)
Title	Orphan Society of Philadelphia records
Call number	01
Date [bulk]	1930-1965
Date [inclusive]	1815-1965
Extent	4.5 linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	<p>The Orphan Society of Philadelphia, founded in 1814, was the first non-sectarian orphanage in Pennsylvania. In 1965, due to low enrollment and financial and staffing issues, the Orphan Society merged with the Elwyn School, now known as Elwyn, in Delaware County, Pa. The Orphan Society of Philadelphia records, 1815-1965 (bulk 1930-1965), consist of administrative and financial records, legal documents, historical files, orphan records, and other materials. Of special interest is an Orphan Asylum register listing orphan admissions (name, birth date, admission date) and dates of discharge or death from 1815 to 1896.</p>

Biography/History

"The Orphan Society of Philadelphia [Pennsylvania], a privately supported institution, was founded in 1814. In March 1815, the Society began operations and soon was caring for twenty-five orphans in a rented house on Market Street, west of Broad Street. Most of the original orphans were children who were moved from the [city's] Almshouse upon a recommendation by the Guardians of the Poor. The orphanage operated continuously from 1815 until 1965 when it merged with the Elwyn School [now known as Elwyn] in Elwyn, PA [Middletown Township, Delaware County]. The institution, while nonsectarian, was Christian-based in philosophy and teaching. For at least the first one hundred years, admission was restricted to "destitute fatherless children of married parents." Boys were not admitted over the age of seven and were housed until the age of sixteen; girls were not admitted over the age of nine and were housed until the age of eighteen. During the 150 years of its operation, the Society resided in four successive homes in three locations and served approximately eighty to one-hundred orphans most years. However, by the 1950s, applications had decreased significantly; there were only twenty-three orphans under the Society's care when it merged with the Elwyn School on February 14, 1965."

Bibliography:

Kearney, Susan. "Background Note." In the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's *Orphan Society of Philadelphia Records, 1814-1965* finding aid. September 2003. Accessed December 4, 2014. http://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/migrated/orphansocietyfindingaid.pdf.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of administrative and financial records, legal documents, historical files, orphan records, and other materials. The administrative records include constitution and by-laws (1815, 1845), charter amendments, printed annual reports (1834-1963), monthly reports (1936-1939), and Board of Managers' meeting minutes (1956-1963). The financial records (circa 1938-1963) include payroll records, petty cash receipts, financial reports, estate files, and a financial journal (1938-1962). The historical files include newspaper clippings and anniversary pamphlets. The orphan records include financial accounts organized by child with dates admitted (circa 1940-1960) and an Orphan Asylum register transcribed in 1844 that lists orphan admissions (name, birth date, admission date) and dates of discharge or death from 1815 to 1896. A guest book (1934-1951) is also present in the collection.

There are also about two dozen framed photographs, plaques, documents, and artworks in the collection. The photographs are of directors, managers, benefactors, and other individuals associated with the Orphan Society. Of special interest is an 1815 document, "Rules for the Governing of the Asylum."

Administrative Information

Elwyn Historical Archives and Museum

Finding aid prepared by Celia Caust-Ellenbogen and Sarah Leu through the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories.

Sponsor

This preliminary finding aid was created as part of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories. The HCI-PSAR project was made possible by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Access Restrictions

Contact Elwyn Historical Archives and Museum for information about accessing this collection.

Immediate Source of Acquisition Note

The Orphan Society of Philadelphia's records were transferred to Elwyn as part of the 1965 merger of the organizations.

Processing Information Note

Summary descriptive information on this collection was compiled in 2014-2016 as part of a project conducted by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania to make better known and more accessible the largely hidden collections of small, primarily volunteer run repositories in the Philadelphia area. The Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories (HCI-PSAR) was funded by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

This is a preliminary finding aid. No physical processing, rehousing, reorganizing, or folder listing was accomplished during the HCI-PSAR project.

In some cases, more detailed inventories or finding aids may be available on-site at the repository where this collection is held; please contact Elwyn Historical Archives and Museum directly for more information.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials Note

Historical Society of Pennsylvania: Orphan Society of Philadelphia records, 1814-1865, coll. 1913.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Elwyn Institute
- Orphan Society of Philadelphia (Pa.)

Geographic Name(s)

- Delaware County (Pa.)
- Middletown (Delaware County, Pa. : Township)
- Philadelphia (Pa.)
- Wallingford (Pa.)

Subject(s)

- Orphanages
- Orphans