

Elwyn records

02

**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.**

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Elwyn Historical Archives and Museum

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Summary Information

Repository	Elwyn Historical Archives and Museum
Creator	Elwyn Institute
Title	Elwyn records
Call number	02
Date [inclusive]	1852-2006
Extent	125 linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Elwyn is one of the oldest service organizations in the United States for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Tracing its roots to a Philadelphia school for "mental defectives" founded in 1852, and officially incorporated in 1853 as The Pennsylvania Training School for Feeble-Minded Children, Elwyn has remained at the vanguard in the understanding, care, and treatment of intellectual disability for over 150 years. One of its most influential staff members, Superintendent Dr. Isaac Kerlin, was instrumental in organizing the field's national professional organization, today known as the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The Elwyn records, 1852-2006, consist of materials from Elwyn's administrative bodies and staff members including past superintendents and presidents, student records, materials published by Elwyn including publicity materials, photographs, and various audio and audiovisual materials. The collection is organized into six series: I. Administrative and financial records, II. Staff papers, III. Student records, IV. Publications and press materials, V. Photographs, and VI. Audiovisual materials.</p>

Biography/History

Elwyn is one of the oldest service organizations in the United States for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Tracing its roots to a Philadelphia school for "mental defectives" founded in 1852, Elwyn has remained at the vanguard in the understanding, care, and treatment of intellectual disability for over 150 years. By the early 2000s, Elwyn had programs in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and California serving over 12,000 people.

"In 1852, James B. Richards, a teacher, came to Philadelphia and opened a private school for "mental defectives" on School Lane in Germantown. He enlisted the sympathies of Dr. Alfred L. Elwyn, a physician, and together they were able to arouse interest in the endeavor in Philadelphia. Their efforts led, in [1853], to the incorporation of The Pennsylvania Training School for Feeble-minded Children, later renamed the Elwyn School. An appropriation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania of ten thousand dollars and provisions for ten students were obtained. The school and its 17 students were moved to Woodland Avenue in 1855. Edouard Seguin, then a political refugee from France, was appointed educational director the following year.

"Before the end of the decade, dissention and financial difficulties threatened to close the new school. [Richards left Elwyn and started a school for people with intellectual disability in Harlem, NY.] Dr. Joseph Parrish was appointed Superintendent [at Elwyn] and was able to bring about financial stability. An additional appropriation of \$20,000 by the legislature for buildings provided opportunity for expansion and the search for a permanent location began. Dorothea Dix, who had paved the way for humanitarian treatment of both [people with mental illness and people with intellectual disability] in Massachusetts, assisted in choosing a new site, fifteen miles south of Philadelphia at Media [Delaware County]. Miss Dix was instrumental in securing state appropriations for the new campus. In 1857, the cornerstone of the main building was laid, and the new school was dedicated to the shelter, instruction, and improvement of [children with intellectual disability]...

"The school grew in size despite the financial difficulties that again developed during the Civil War. By 1864, the property, grounds, and buildings held by the institution were valued at \$140,000. The student population had increased to 144, many from other states. Eighty of these children were supported by the state. During this year, Dr. Parrish retired and was succeeded by Dr. Isaac Kerlin, who served until 1893...

"During Kerlin's administration, there was further expansion of the institution with the help of additional state appropriations. Kerlin was widely recognized for his scientific interest in and study of [intellectual disability]. The Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions for Idiotic and Feeble-minded Persons was founded and held its first meeting at Elwyn in 1876. Dr. Kerlin, along with Seguin... [and others] were the original members of this group, which later changed its name to the American Association on Mental Deficiency [and is now known as the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities]. In 1871, Elwyn endorsed the idea of a custodial department. A special act of the Legislature authorized the institution, now called the Pennsylvania Training School, to provide asylum for "idiotic and imbecilic" persons without regard to age. Later, buildings were added for epileptic and

paralytic girls. The school, which became an institution after the Civil War, now described its custodial department as the Asylum Village of Elwyn.

"...[Kerlin]...urged recognition of the "moral imbecile" and the necessity for his life-long guardianship and detention for the protection of society. Kerlin believed firmly in the growth of institutions and the dependence of the "defective classes" upon the strong arm of a paternal government. His acceptance of a correlation between idiocy, pauperism, and crime led him to assume that the reduction in the number of jails, criminal courts, almshouses, and "grog-shops" awaited only the growth of 'villages of the simple.'

"Leadership at Elwyn was continued by Dr. Martin W. Barr from 1893 to 1930. Dr. Barr is known for his anthropometric research laboratory and for authoring the first American textbook on mental deficiency. He emphasized manual training for students and introduced classes in printing, weaving, and basketry. A 34-acre farm was purchased and farming became an important "training area." By 1902, Elwyn's grounds encompassed 137 acres; a staff of 165 employees served a population of 1,041 students, three-fourths of whom were in training programs and one-fourth of whom were in custodial care.

"Dr. E. Arthur Whitney succeeded Dr. Barr in 1930, and served in that position until 1960. Dr. Whitney continued the tradition of Kerlin and Barr as a recognized leader in the field of [intellectual] deficiency. He was a staunch proponent of eugenics and argued repeatedly for the control of feeble-mindedness through selective sterilization.

"Dr. Gerald R. Clark, appointed Superintendent in 1960, was responsible for radical changes in the institution. During the years of his administration, Elwyn made rapid strides away from the closed custodial model and became a more open school and habilitation center for [children and adults with multiple handicaps]. The emphasis shifted from segregation and shelter toward community-oriented training, with the goal of helping [individuals with intellectual disability] find a useful role in society. The name Elwyn Training School, which had been used for several decades, was changed to Elwyn School and then to Elwyn Institute to avoid confusion with state and correctional facilities.

"Educational programs were expanded with the opening of a new educational center. Rather than serving only the highest level students in educational programs, services were increased so that all levels of [individuals with intellectual disability] were enrolled in full-day educational programs. The old classifications of moron, imbecile, and idiot were replaced by classifications of mild, moderate, and severe mental retardation. Vocational training courses for this population were developed and licensure as a private trade school for [people with disabilities] was obtained from the State Department of Public Instruction. A close working relationship was established with the Pennsylvania Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) and a vocational counselor from the Bureau was located at Elwyn on a full-time basis. BVR provided necessary training funds to supplement vocational training programs. A sheltered workshop program on the campus was initiated...

"Almost 100 percent of the [students in residence] at Elwyn were enrolled in some form of education or vocational rehabilitation program. In addition to the [population in residence], programs were expanded to accommodate [students living in the community]. [Students with hearing impairments, visual impairments, and multiple handicaps] were also accepted. A volunteer program was initiated to stimulate and direct the interest of service clubs, church groups, and individuals. An active community preparation program was pursued for the first time at Elwyn to provide students with appropriate experience and training for independent community living.

"Changes were made at all levels of the financial and administrative functioning of the institution to provide more efficient, business-like procedures and to improve services directly affecting the care, training and safety of students.

"Psychologist, Marvin Kivitz, PhD., became president in 1979. Programs were expanded into other community settings with the establishment of a network of community-based habilitation centers, transitional and community living arrangements. Elwyn then served over 6,000 [people with disabilities] in four states.

"In 1981, Elwyn took on the management of the historic Training School at Vineland, New Jersey. Elwyn's work with disabled people soon gained international attention."

Over the last years of the 20th century and early years of the 21st, particularly under the leadership of Dr. Sandra Cornelius (president of Elwyn since 1991), Elwyn has shifted its focus to encouraging independent, community-integrated lifestyles for children and adults with intellectual disability. Among other programs, Elwyn operates community-based medical, psychiatric and dental clinics; has established major residential initiatives in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and California; partners with the Federal government to train workers in various industries; and provides outreach to local school districts as consultant to enable children with special needs to be supported in their home school district. In 2014, Elwyn is best characterized as a Human Services System that supports over 13,000 people with disabilities.

Bibliography:

Quoted text from: Elwyn Historical Archives and Museum. "Origins." Pamphlet, Elwyn, circa 1991.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of materials from Elwyn's administrative bodies and staff members including past superintendents and presidents, student records, publicity and other materials published by Elwyn, photographs, and various audio and audiovisual materials. The collection is organized into six series: I. Administrative and financial records, II. Staff papers, III. Student records, IV. Publications and press materials, V. Photographs, and VI. Audiovisual materials. Some partial inventories are available on site.

Series I. Administrative and financial records includes Board documents, sub-committee records, financial and supply-related materials, and various other materials relating to the administration of Elwyn. There are annual reports (1854-2002, incomplete), Board minutes, Superintendent reports, and general correspondence (1860-1988). Committee records include Admission and Discharge Committee minutes, 1935-circa 1950; Committee on the Household minutes, 1853-1898; Committee on Instruction minutes; other committee records. Financial and supply-related materials include ledgers, checks (1881-1900), a cash book (1853), grant proposals, bulk medication orders for the facility, shoe repair books, bill of fare (daily menu) volumes (circa 1900-1931), and medical supply catalogs. There are also some records pertaining to sub-organizations within Elwyn, including Parent-Staff Association materials, a catalog

(1900) of institutional library materials and check-out records, and documents related to Middletown Boy Scout Troop Number 2. In addition, there are blueprints and technical drawings related to the buildings and grounds, historical materials including an unpublished history of Elwyn, school and hospital manuals, strategic planning materials (1980s), visitor registers, and other additional documents and unsorted materials.

Series II. Staff papers consists of articles by Elwyn staff, materials about staff awards and honors, curriculum materials, National Multimedia Center for Adult Basic Education abstracts, and papers from specific Elwyn staff members. Best represented staff members are: Elwyn Superintendents E. Arthur Whitney, Martin W. Barr, and Isaac Kerlin; a few Stewards of Elwyn; and Mary Telfer, a biochemist at Elwyn who studied the link between genetics and intellectual disability. The E. Arthur Whitney papers include materials relating to the American Association on Mental Deficiency (now known as the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities), general correspondence (1939-1960), and materials from the International Congress on Mental Deficiency (circa 1959). The Martin W. Barr papers (1894-1918), which is the largest part of this series, include letter books and general correspondence, admissions and discharge materials, receipts, and other unsorted materials. The Isaac Kerlin papers (1860s-1890s) include correspondence relating to the school, its construction and maintenance bills, and Kerlin's personal letters. The Stewards of Elwyn papers (1894-1911) include correspondence and receipts, many relating to food and hospital supply orders, from William Pratt, F. M. Scheibley, Grace Barnes, and Nathan Dewees, all of whom served as Stewards of Elwyn between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Mary Telfer research materials (1960s-1970s) include articles written by Telfer relating to research on genetics and intellectual disabilities.

Series III. Student records includes materials such as medical records, physical exam books, school progress records, chromosome studies, and daily medicine dispensary records. Most materials in this series date from the 1870s to the 1940s, but the chromosome studies are from the 1960s and 1970s. The medical records include various logs for individuals, some of which note the date of admission, activities, or notable occurrences in the life of the individual; birth and death certificates; and other medical records. The chromosome studies include genetic files, some of which have family histories and physical descriptions of the individuals. The largest portion of this series is a set of sixty-nine volumes detailing the "idiocy description" and etiology of over 6,000 individuals at Elwyn, circa 1879-1920. For each individual, two pages have been filled out describing the person's biographical details, physical description, and diagnosis along with his or her family history in hopes of establishing a familial pattern that could help determine the etiology (cause) of the person's condition.

Series IV. Publications and press materials consists of Elwyn newsletters, yearbooks (1976-1989, 1991), pamphlets, advertisements, press releases, materials relating to the Showcase of Stars ice skating fundraiser (1980s) for Elwyn, and other materials published by Elwyn. This series also includes articles written about Elwyn, newspaper clippings and clippings scrapbooks (1870s-1970s), and pamphlets and reports from various associations and organizations (not Elwyn).

Series V. Photographs (circa 1860-2006) consists of photographs, film negatives, slides, contact sheets, photo albums, and a few stereographs. A variety of subjects relating to Elwyn and its functions are depicted. Photographs from the turn of the 21st century are probably the largest section in the series, depicting Elwyn Day, dances, flower shows, fundraisers, and other events. There is also a very large quantity of portraits of students, dating from the late 19th century, that are labeled with a number and sometimes name and/or condition. There are several images of Elwyn's buildings and grounds including

construction work and interior shots of the facilities and classrooms, as well as images of board members and benefactors, students, doctors, and student activities. Some photographs and slides are medical in nature, such as images of brains and an album of occupational therapy treatments, both dating from the turn of the 20th century. There is at least one X-ray film. Also present in the collection is a separate photograph file organized by subject with photographs, albums, and negatives.

Series VI. Audiovisual materials consists of audio and video reel-to-reels, U-matics, 35mm color films, Ediphone wax cylinders, and published audio digest reels about internal medicine. Topics covered include Elwyn's summer programs, lectures and recordings of staff including several of former artist and Elwyn administrator Earl A. T. Wilkie (1930-2009), a 1980 Elwyn symposium, and other topics. Also available are audiocassettes of oral histories and published audio digest audio reels on internal medicine. Several of the recordings are masters.

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.

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

Center for the History of Medicine, Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine (Boston, Massachusetts): Isaac Newton Kerlin papers, 1838-1970 (bulk 1838-1891), B MS c44.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Elwyn Institute

Geographic Name(s)

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

Personal Name(s)

- Barr, Martin W., 1860-1938
- Elwyn, Alfred Langdon, 1804-1884
- Kerlin, Isaac Newton, 1834-1893
- Telfer, Mary A., 1923-2007
- Whitney, E. Arthur, 1895-1966

Subject(s)

- Developmental disabilities
- Intellectual disabilities
- Medical social work
- Mental health services--Administration
- Mental illness--Etiology
- Mental illness--Genetic aspects
- Mental retardation
- Mental retardation facilities
- People with disabilities
- People with disabilities--Research
- People with intellectual disabilities
- People with mental disabilities