



The St. Lawrence County **Chronicler**

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Orphans and Orphanages

What would happen if your parents couldn't take care of you any more? You might go live with relatives or you might have to depend on the county or state to take care of you.

Judy's Story

In 1954 when Judy Hutton was twelve years old she was sent with her sisters to

the United Helpers Society orphanage in Ogdensburg. She was terrified of the big building and its long, dark hallway. Two strangers took the sisters into an elevator (the first they'd ever seen) and left them in the third-floor Infirmary room for the weekend. "We were crying up a storm," Judy remembers. "We wanted to go home so bad."

Judy and her sisters lived in the orphan-



The United Helpers Orphans' Home on State Street in Ogdensburg. The "new" wing (on the right), built to house elderly women in 1910, was known as the "Old Ladies Department." [SLCHA Postcard Collection]



Ogdensburg City Hospital and Orphan Asylum was the Catholic orphanage run by the Grey Nuns. This institution cared for orphans, the sick, the poor and the aged. Notice that the children are wearing matching uniforms, with boys on the left and girls on the right. [Courtesy of David E. Martin]

age for three years. They went to school, did chores and got an allowance on Saturday mornings of ten cents. On Saturday afternoons they went skating or to the movies. Dinner on Saturday night was popcorn and an apple. One Sunday night it was white rice and maple syrup and an apple. One part of the United Helpers building was called the “Old Ladies Department”. Judy did errands for the old ladies and often set their table for dinner.

At first Judy wanted to go home and once she tried to run away. One night she and a friend took some food from the

kitchen and crept down the fire escape. They wanted to go back home to Gouverneur but they only made it as far as the cemetery near the orphanage. Judy remembers, “A car went by and we thought, hey, maybe we can get a ride!” Unfortunately, it was Mr. and Mrs. Jones, the supervisors at the orphanage.

The United Helpers Society where Judy lived first took in children in 1898. Judy remembers meeting kids at the movies who were from the Grey Nuns Catholic orphanage, also in Ogdensburg. It began in 1885.



The County Home or Poor Farm in Canton around 1890. [SLCHA Postcard Collection]

The Poor House

Before the orphanages, children in St. Lawrence County who had no place to live were sent to the County Home, also called the Poor Farm. This big, brick building sat above a bend in the Grasse River in Canton. The County Home housed poor and disabled adults as well as children. A New York State report written in the 1850's had this to say about poor farms: "...the children are poorly fed, poorly clothed and quite untaught."

Many people worried that children in the poor houses were not being treated well. In 1875 New York State passed a

law that said children could no longer be sent to the Poor House. If they did arrive, the manager of the poor house must find a home for them. That same year Mary and Emma St. Dennis, ages 10 and 7, came to the St. Lawrence County Home with their mother, a newborn baby sister and their brother, Francis, age 5. The Register of Paupers states that they stayed at the poor house for several months then were separated from their mother and brother and baby sister. They were "put out to a farmer" to work and live on a farm in the county.

A Close Call

Other children were sent further away. Jessie Bishop was five years old in 1918. She lived in the United Helpers orphanage because her mother had died and her father was away trying to find work. Her little sister was put in the baby ward. Jessie remembers that she was scheduled to take a train to New York City. She believes from there she would have been put on an Orphan Train.

Orphan Trains brought children out to the west and gave them to new families. Jessie was lucky. The day before she was to take the train her grown-up cousins stopped to visit the orphanage. After they went shopping they came back and took her home with them.

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Register of State Paupers

No.	NAME.	DATE OF ADMISSION.	SEX.	AGE.	BIRTH PLACE. (STATE OR COUNTRY.)
25	Elizabeth Bousman	June 29 ¹⁸⁷⁵	Female	18	
28	John Choring	October 18	Male	65	Ireland
29	Hannah Stevenson	" 23	Female	24	"
30	George Brown	Nov 27	Male	48	Conn
31	William Brown	" 29	"	28	N.Y.
32	Mary St-Dennis	Dec 30	Female	31	N.Y.
33	Mary St-Dennis	" "	"	10	Conn
34	Emma A. St-Dennis	" "	"	7	"
35	Francis J. St-Dennis	" "	Male	5	"
36	Kate Edith St-Dennis	Jan 27 ¹⁸⁷⁶	F.	1 day	N.Y.
37	Hannah Barnham	March 20	F.	50	Vermont
38	Amelia Gleason	May 10	F.	35	N.Y.
39	John Shaw	July 17	M.	64	England

Register of State Paupers in the State Alms House at Canton, N.Y. Can you find Mary and Emma St. D.

Orphan Trains

Other children from St. Lawrence County did go west on the Orphan Trains. A 1904 newspaper article from the *Decatur County Journal* in Leon, Iowa had this report:

A company of fourteen orphan children were brought to Leon last Friday under the auspices of the New York

Children's Aid Society for the purpose of placing them in suitable homes. ... The children are placed on trial for six months. They are to be well clothed and treated and must remain in the family until they are eighteen years of age. The society has a right to remove a child for reasonable cause and will again take charge of those found unsatisfactory. A

s in the

CAUSE OF PAUPERISM.	COUNTY COMMITTED FROM.	CITY, VILLAGE OR TOWN COMMITTED FROM.	NAME OF THE COMMITTING OFFICER.	NAME OF THE COMPLAINING OFFICER.
Insane	St. Lawrence	Madrid	George Robinson	S. D. Gage
"	"	Osweatchee	"	W. A. Bell
Pregnant	"	Wanton	"	S. J. Johnson
from a building	"	"	"	"
"	"	"	"	"
Pregnant	"	Norfolk	"	S. J. Arnold
Child of above	"	"	"	"
"	"	"	"	"
"	"	"	"	"
Id Key 33	"	"	"	"
sanity	Franklin	Malone	S. P. Willard	Nathan Hamlin
"	"	"	"	H. P. Adlson
"	"	"	"	"

Dennis and their family? [SLCHA County Home Collection]



Christmas at United Helpers Orphans Home around 1950. Notice the stacks of identical toys on the table behind the children. [Courtesy of United Helpers Management Corporation]

large crowd gathered at the opera house on Friday at 2 o'clock p.m. and the distribution of the children occurred as follows:

The article goes on to list all the children and who they were given to. Three of the children were from Ogdensburg. George Robert Killoran, age 10, and his sister Marian, age 13, were separated and

I hereby promise to pay to the SOCIETY OF UNITED HELPERS
for the board and care of my _____

the sum of _____ *per* _____ *If* _____ *weeks*
elapse without full payment being made I agree to remove said
child or to allow the officers of the Society to place _____ *in a*
good, permanent home; and in that case I agree to RELINQUISH
 ALL CLAIM *to said child.*

Promissory Note. Parents who were unable to care for their children at home might request a temporary placement of their children in the orphanage. Parents had to sign this form agreeing to pay for room and board until they were able to take their children back. If they stopped paying, United Helpers could put the children up for adoption. [Courtesy of United Helpers Management Corporation]



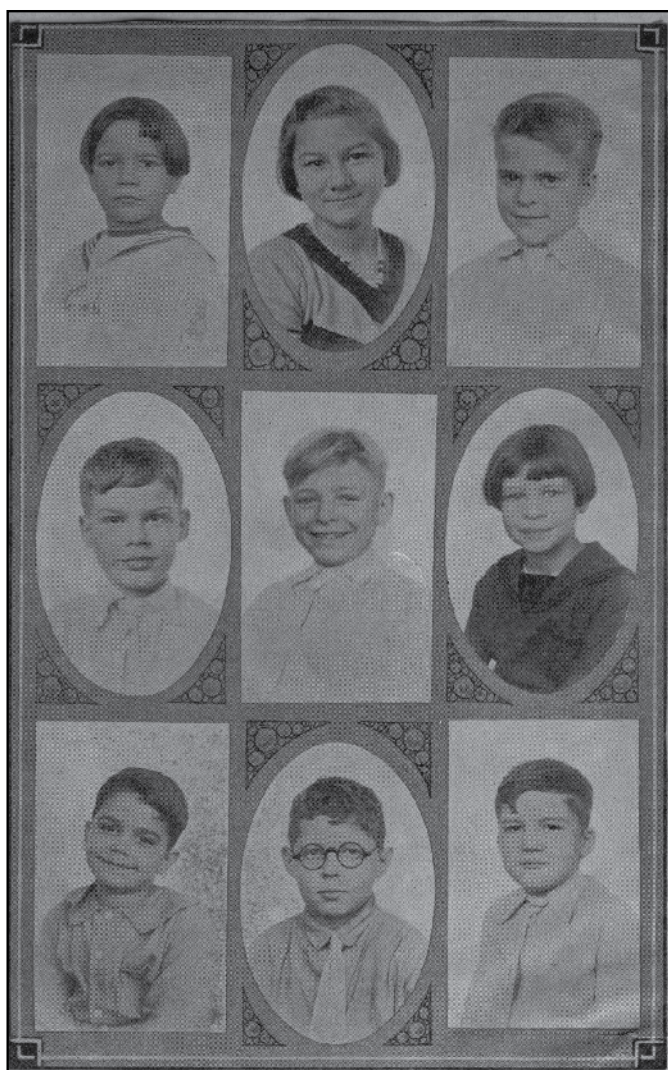
*"The Girls of 1937" – Girls at play in United Helpers Orphans' Home.
[Courtesy of United Helpers Management Corporation]*

given to different families. The article says: "Maggie Estella Remore, 12 years old, was born in Ogdensburg. Her parents are living but their whereabouts are unknown. The child was placed with MRS. LUCY RAY."

The newspaper article doesn't say how the children felt about traveling a long distance to begin life in families they had never met, but we can guess that, like Judy Hutton, the children were afraid. Some children ran away from their new homes



*"The Boys of 1937" – Boys work a jigsaw puzzle at United Helpers Orphans' Home
[Courtesy of United Helpers Management Corporation]*



Some United Helpers children on New Year's Day 1935: Elizabeth P., Ruth J., John L., Donald F., Steven M., Eleanor H., Herbert P., Gerald H., and Charles W. (from top left to bottom right) [Courtesy of United Helpers Management Corporation]

Robert Pharo-- boarded an orphan train in 1921. They were all sent to different states, with Robert going the farthest west to Wyoming.

The End of an Era

The last Orphan Trains headed west in 1929. After that New York State sent its dependent children to orphanages or foster homes if they could no longer stay with their parents. Judy Hutton and her sisters

were some of the last children to stay at the United Helpers orphanage. It closed in 1958.

Since the 1960's the federal government has helped out families who need money and assistance with AFDC, or Aid to Families and Dependent Children. This way more families can stay together. Sometimes though, parents can't take care of their children. These children may be adopted or put into foster care until their parents can care for them again. Some older children in St. Lawrence County live in Group Homes where they are cared for by House Parents.

Glossary

Alms – money or food given to poor people

Foster child – a child who receives care from someone who is not a relative

Infirmery – the nurse's office

Orphan – a child whose parents are dead

Half-orphan – a child who has one living parent

Orphanage – a building where orphans live

Pauper—a person who is extremely poor

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Writing/Research: Betsy Kepes

Design: Susie Wood