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White William*

THE EARLY DAYS OF THE MAGDALEN
SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA

NEGLEY K. TEETERS

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THE EARLY DAYS OF THE MAGDALEN SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA¹

NEGLEY K. TEETERS

ITS FOUNDING

ON MARCH 4, 1800, twenty-two citizens of Philadelphia met in the Friends Meeting House at the Corner of Fourth and Pine Streets to organize a society to give aid and succor to "that class of Unhappy Females who have Strayed from Virtue." Here is their preamble:

A number of Persons having in occasional conversation at different Times expressed their Sympathy and commiseration with that class of Females who have been unhappily seduced from the path of Innocence and Virtue and who at times feel desirous of a return thereto, met together when instances were adduced of some Females who, groaning under a humbling Sense of their deplorable Situation and anxiously longing for a deliverance therefrom but the numerous and complicated discouragements which surround them and no gleam of hope appearing, they sink further and further into Guilt and Wretchedness.

When we take a view of one of these unhappy Victims of seduction robbed in a fatal moment of her innocence and virtue, her character and reputation apparently forever lost, shun'd by her former acquaintances and discarded by her relatives and friends, lamenting her past conduct in the most bitter reproaches on her weakness, her present situation with the most poignant Sorrow and distress, looking forward with horror and amazement, she seeks below hope and sees nothing but shame and Infamy to await her, to extend a fostering hand

¹ The parent organization of the present White-Williams Foundation of Philadelphia. The old society was reorganized in 1913 with a change of policy by which it pioneered in the field of school counseling. Today the agency supplies grants-in-aid to needy school children in the public schools. It took its name from Bishop William White, first president, and George Williams, one of the managers of the earlier society. Sources are the volumes of the Society's minutes and the reports of the managers.

to those to cherish every budding of repentance, to have an Asylum provided for such to look towards where, sequestered from their miserable Associates they might by repentance and amendment of Life make an atonement to an offended Creator and become useful members of Society, are Objects we think not only desirable but highly worthy the pursuit of a christian Mind, the subject appearing of too much weight and Importance for so small a number to enter much upon, it was agreed to invite such other persons as also feel the weight of it to meet with us in order to give the subject further solid attention and endeavor to devise some plan for the relief of such Females as are in the way of ruin and wish to be rescued therefrom.

The group elected officers: Bishop William White, rector of Christ Church, president; Robert Wharton, mayor of Philadelphia, vice-president.

The first objects of the Society were to implement the purpose of its founding and to devise ways and means of raising funds. The officers assessed the members one dollar per annum; by the end of the first year the Society boasted over one hundred members. Raising money was a major problem with this infant society. They learned that "the old troop of horses posses[s] a fund of \$6,000 which could be used if a foundling hospital could be engrafted on it" but, as this was not envisaged by the organization, it could not press for such a magnificent sum.

Mayor Wharton presented a brilliant idea. He offered to contribute money received from "conviction of hucksters" and other "bench fees" received in his court. Some \$300 was added to the treasury in this manner. How this could

be done is obscure. The mayor later donated "marriage fees." Boxes for the solicitation of funds were placed in the various magistrates' offices and periodically these were collected and their meager contents added to the funds of the Society.

A financial windfall accrued to the Society in January, 1801. A residue of a fund collected earlier in Philadelphia for aiding the distress of victims of some calamity in Baltimore, Providence, and Norfolk (possibly a hurricane or a plague) was to be allocated to worthy charities of the city. When this fund, which amounted to \$2,050.46, was distributed, the Magdalen Society received \$1,050.46.

Castig about for ideas for implementation of their humanitarian objectives, the leaders developed correspondence with the Magdalen Society of London. George Harris of that organization sent the Philadelphia group some pamphlets, which included by-laws, plans for a building, routine of the asylum under its operation, and "Psalms and Hymns" used by the London Society.

Actually, the main objective of the Philadelphia Society, that of rendering compassion and relief to the "unhappy females who have lost their virtue," was realized very slowly. A few cases that came to the attention of the group turned out, upon investigation, to be either unworthy or unsuitable for care. In the minutes of February 9, 1802, appear these plaintive words:

Little opportunity has presented of promoting the great object of the association, that of "restoring to the paths of virtue those unhappy females who in unguarded hours have been Robbed of their innocence." They, however, are not less sanguine of the utility of the Institution and of the advantages which may eventually arise from it.

That opportunities must and will occur in

this large city to exercise benevolence and employ considerable funds in this way there can be no room to doubt and it is with pleasure the committee anticipate the further usefulness of the Society from its growing strength both in new members and additional funds.

An even more poignant note of despair and frustrated zeal appears in the annual report dated February 1, 1804, when, after four years, no candidate had been moved to take advantage of the Society's compassion. It reads:

The committee has to lament that not an object contemplated to be relieved by the Society has been presented—still your committee are not discouraged but entertain hopes that the period is not far distant when the spirit of all Grace shall influence the hearts of some of these unhappy females who, in an unguarded moment, have been induced by the temptations of Satan through the seductive artifices of wicked and abandoned men, to sacrifice their chastity and reputation at the shrine of sensual gratification in such a powerful manner, as to convince them of the necessity of reformation in heart and life and thus cause them to become Magdalens indeed—under such impressions and with these views (and these only) your committee look forward to the future prosperity of the Institution.

THE FIRST MAGDALENS

The first application from a "distressed female" was received December 22, 1804, when the president, Bishop White, informed the Standing Committee that an unfortunate woman desired "to become the recipient of the moral as well as the pecuniary privilege" of the Society. The committee reported on this case, known from that time forward as Magdalen No. 1, as follows:

January 14, 1805. The committee attended on the case to provide a temporary asylum for the candidate. . . . They have placed the person who on further conversation and examination [they] find a worthy object, in a religious family at boarding with a full use of a private room for herself . . . in order to [give] her full

relief from her former distress they were under the Necessity of paying the amount of the debt incurred by boarding herself and child . . . and that a further sum was necessary to procure a half cord of wood, hawling, sawing and piling and a Carriage hire and for carting furniture, \$41.60.

This young lady was referred to in the minutes of the Society as "Mrs. M[agdalen] O[ne]" but in the roster her name appeared as the initials "E— O—." The men who dealt with Magdalen No. 1 were enthusiastic about her progress up the ladder of rectitude. They reported that they had paid her a visit and found her "endeavoring to procure a decent maintenance by keeping a school for the Tuition of children, and by needlework." She lived in a "respectable neighborhood and her prospects are flattering." In order to encourage her they presented her with five dollars "for the purpose of procuring benches for her scholars and to defray current expenses in living."

Nothing in subsequent records indicates a policy against giving aid to mothers but it does appear that Magdalen No. 1 was the only one possessing a child. The committee attempted to reconcile their client with her relatives but she demurred. It is interesting to note that these pioneers in "social work" worked through her rather than through her relatives. Apparently they had enough insight to ask her consent first.

The record shows that she was visited "frequently" and was found "in a religious family with whom she regularly attended divine worship and has conducted herself in an Exemplary manner cheerfully engaging in such employment as your committee has dictated."

The application of Magdalen No. 2, "L— R—," was received by the Society on September 5, 1805:

The circumstances of a person apparently under a deep conviction of the impropriety of her former vicious course of life had been visited by the chairman . . . came under consideration. The committee inquired minutely into her character and determined the mode of procedure relative to her. [They spent \$10] and found her a suitable place in a sober and religious family.

The committee was happy to report later that Magdalen No. 2 had married a respectable and religious man and that "she and her husband are both members in full Unity with a religious society."

But worthy candidates were reluctant to come forward and take advantage of the Society's largess. One Jacob Lindley of New Garden did write to the Society in "behalf of an unfortunate female" but on due consideration the committee did not feel her "a proper object of further attention of the Society."

During the year the Standing Committee, in an effort at recruitment, visited the almshouse and the local Walnut Street Jail where they hoped to locate some worthy clients. But "on conversation and strict investigation" those they saw were unfit for help. However, they distributed some Bibles and tracts for the use of the females in these establishments.

But in 1806 they finally rescued a client from the almshouse and "placed her a few miles out of town in a respectable family." It was later reported that she appeared penitent and "desirous of living agreeable to the precepts of the Gospel." She was labeled Magdalen No. 3; her initials were "J— O—."

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ASYLUM

It was considered from the beginning that a home or an asylum was of major importance if the work to which the Society was dedicated was to flourish. The Standing Committee, from time to

time, ruefully complained that many females could be aided and possibly saved if only a suitable retreat were provided where they could find peace and protection from the temptations of the world.

In 1807, a lot, comprising nearly an acre, with a suitable brick building on it, was purchased for \$4,000. It lay at the corner of what was then Schuylkill Second and Race Streets. The land was described as "under very high cultivation and adorned with appropriate shade trees as well as several fruit trees of different kinds and in a known healthy situation."

After the tenants moved out, the Society advertised for a "suitable married man to take charge as Steward and his wife to act as Matron." David Love and wife were employed, "both of whom are believed to be orderly and religious persons." The Loves paid a rental for the use of the house and were paid for boarding the Magdalens "at a reasonable rate."

In the organization's annual report, dated February 9, 1808, the following quaint message was conveyed to the members by the Standing Committee:

A temporary asylum has been provided and fitted up for the reception and employment of that unhappy class of the community for whose benefit and reformation the Society was instituted; but it is lamentable to observe the insensibility that generally prevails among these deluded females, and their backwardness to accept the charitable assistance gratuitously offered to them, considerable pain having been taken and labour bestowed on a number in order to convince them of the benevolent views of the Society which in some instances has had the desired effect. . . . Four females . . . have been admitted into the asylum, three of whom now remain there, and appear to afford a comfortable prospect of their being hereafter restored with reputation to Society; the other poor depraved creature eloped [absconded] about three weeks after her admission. [The Magdalens] usually come into the Asylum bare of Cloathing and in some instances almost

naked, they are necessarily engaged some short time in making garments for themselves and afterwards are employed at spinning.

The Society felt more secure after it had established the asylum. It was no longer dependent upon private homes to accept clients who were unprepared to lead a potentially respectable life.

The first girl to be taken to the new home was Magdalen No. 4. She was "not quite twenty-one" and was taken from the "City Prison." About a year later she was sent to a place in the country armed with a letter "for her use when deprived of our verbal communications." As this letter established a precedent of giving discharged inmates certain advice it is herewith included:

Asylum: April 25, 1808

S— P—

You are now about to return to the World; reflect on what is past—Consider how hardly you have escaped from destruction, that the hand that hath now relieved you can never be extended to you again² and that misery is the unavoidable consequence of sin. Think how sharp the stings of a wounded conscience are; Think! O think! that though death alone can put an end to wretchedness here, it opens the door to a scene still more dreadful for the finally unrepentant.—But we trust what you have experienced in life has or will lead you to true repentance and faith in a dear Redeemer, so as to reconcile you to God and be assured that if you exert your utmost abilities to please him, he will protect and assist you.

Reflect on the great advantage and comfort of having him for your Friend who is able and ever willing to give effectual aid to those who strive to do his will, who will support them here, and regard them with endless happiness hereafter—Fail not morning and evening to address yourself to your Heavenly Father with a humble and grateful heart, thanking him for the blessings he has bestowed on you and that he hath not cut you off in the midst of your sins, and fervently implore the holy spirit to direct

² A girl was not given a second chance. If she failed to make good her rehabilitation she could not apply again.

and help you in those ways which are acceptable in his sight.

As often as you have leisure read the Scriptures, especially the New Testament. Attend divine service and omit no opportunity to improve your mind in spiritual things: Sincere sorrow for having offended the Almighty and an earnest desire for amendment are acceptable in his sight. Be chaste in your conversation and cherish not even for a moment, an improper thought. Be civil to all, but indulge not Talkitiveness; and be careful not to communicate your later situation to anyone; be diligent and industrious and as careful of the property you are entrusted with, as if it were your own.

If you wish to change your place, do not give offence that you may be discharged for good behavior is the surest way to obtain friends and reputation.—Be neat and cleanly in your dress and person; but attempt not finery or fashion. That you may follow this advice is most sincerely desired by

MEMBERS OF VISITING COMMITTEE

The early managers recognized the importance of keeping records on their clients. In March, 1807, they appointed a recorder whose duty was "to keep a private record of the real name, connections and condition of the several Magdalens who may be admitted . . . accompanied with such information relating to their conduct and behavior as may be considered to be useful and necessary; also to record such letters of the Magdalens and such as may be written to them as well as other correspondence relating to the Society as may be judged proper and useful." Here we see early censorship of letters. If such data were collected they are no longer extant. All that we have concerning these early clients are their names and a few data inscribed in the managers' records as the girls were admitted to the asylum.

ROUTINE AND PROGRAM IN THE ASYLUM IN ITS EARLY DAYS

The routine of the home was strict and arduous, even for those early days.

Every hour of the day, from early dawn until nine in the evening, was apportioned for work, study, eating, and spiritual nourishment. Typical of the admonitions of the managers, dated March 7, 1808, shortly after the home was opened, is:

Your committee have thought it proper to recommend to the Magdalens the necessity of rising at sunrise every morning, the propriety of neatness of apparel and of cleanliness of their apartments, as well as apportioning a portion of each day to reading the Scriptures with other religious books and Tracts, also attention to religious meditation and devotion.

The inmates were clothed in "a long gown for first days [Sundays] and short gowns for the remainder of the week, of grave coloured muslin, Nankeen Petticoats, white or coloured Cotton stockings, white muslin neck handkerchiefs, muslin cap of neat modest pattern and neat leather shoes—and for the winter season the addition of linsey short gown and petticoat and woolen stockings, the stockings to be the manufacture of the Asylum as far as can be accomplished with propriety."

On November 7, 1809, the managers drew up rules governing the staff as well as the inmates. Those applying to the Magdalens include the following:

They are not to leave the Asylum on any account without permission from the Visiting Committee.

They are not to communicate with the other Magdalens any of the circumstances connected with their lives prior to their admission.

They are to avoid all kinds of levity in their conversation and conduct.

They are not to use any kind of profane or obscene language.

They are not to altercate or dispute with, nor speak evil of any person.

They are not to hinder each other in their labour.

They are not to labour on the Sabbath or first day except in works of necessity or mercy.

They are to rise in the morning with the sun, and retire to bed at nine o'clock except in cases requiring it otherwise.

They are, immediately after rising and putting on their apparel, to wash themselves, and as soon after as convenient to assemble together, when the Steward, matron, or one of the Magdalens is to read in the hearing of the rest, a portion of the Scriptures, they continuing together, and behaving with solemnity until dismissed.

The reading of the Scriptures and so forth to be observed before retiring to bed.

They are to repair to their place, and at the time appointed when and where their food is prepared for them, waiting a proper season before and after they have eaten according to the regulations that may be adopted by the Steward.

They are to occupy their time on the Sabbath or first day in the reading of the Scriptures and other religious books in meditation and pious devotion.

Many of the rules formulated at this time dealt with safeguarding the privacy of the home. No outsider, even though a visiting friend of the steward or matron, was permitted to talk to the inmates, unless such person was there on business. And even in such a case, two other persons must be present. No one manager was permitted to talk with an inmate without a colleague or the matron being present. Even the physician, who at this time served gratuitously, was never left alone with any girl who might need his professional services.

In 1809, the Society erected a three-story brick building in order to afford more room for work. The building consisted of one large room on the first floor "calculated for manufacturing," eleven "lodging rooms" on the second, and, on the third, one "large well-ventilated room." Each room for sleeping purposes had a single window and was supplied with a single bed, a small closet, and a table. The following year a board fence, eight feet high, was built around the

entire lot (years later to be replaced by a brick wall) "to prevent the escape of discontented Magdalens and elude prying eyes." Long spikes were imbedded in the tops of the boards. As Anna Pratt many years later (1913) commented: "The fence seemed to prevent advancing civilization from penetrating the minds of the trustees." It was Anna Pratt who changed the function of the Society from that of caring for Magdalens to pioneering in the field of school counseling.

But despite the fence, an occasional Magdalen "eloped." Aside from moral suasion, there were no restraints used at the home. A girl could leave if she wished but, if she did, she could not return.

In 1813, the managers of the asylum made a report on the total number of Magdalens rendered assistance as well as a haven, as follows:

Whole number of Magdalens admitted	54
Of whom placed at service in respectable and religious families	27
Reconciled to their friends	5
Discharged at their own request	2
Dismissed for improper conduct	3
Removed to Alms House and not returned	5
Eloped, absconded	8
Remaining in the Asylum	4
	—
	54
From the best information to be obtained the Managers submit the following:	
Of those placed at service there are deceased	4
Living at reputable service and doing well	17
Married and living in good reputation	3
Unknown	3
	—
	27
Those reconciled to friends and doing well	5
Those discharged at their own request —unknown	2
Of those discharged for improper conduct	

Dead.....	1
Unknown.....	2
Of those removed to Alms House	
Unknown.....	4
Removed there for medical treatment.....	1
Of those eloped	
Deceased.....	1
Unknown but feared may have resorted to their former evil course.....	7
Those who remain in the Asylum and in a promising state.....	4
	—
	27
Total.....	54

The policy of the Society in placing out the girls who seemed to be prepared was to solicit the aid of "respectable" families or, in some instances, relatives. If a girl stayed twelve months and "conducts herself . . . as to obtain from her employer a Certificate of good conduct [she] shall be entitled to a Premium of Eight Dollars to be paid by the Visiting Committee."

On May 1, 1810, the first immigrant Magdalen was admitted to the asylum. She was Magdalen No. 26, thirty years old. Born in Amsterdam, she had arrived in this country in 1793. The record states that she had been married for ten years but had left her husband and had been living in prostitution.

In 1819, the Managers proposed that those Magdalens who were affected with syphilis should be treated in the infirmary of the home rather than to be sent, as was the custom up to that time, to the almshouse. The word "syphilis" was not used in the records until this year.

In 1822, the records state, an "impostor" had entered the house. As nothing more is stated, it is not known just what such an impostor was or why she should have wished to enter such an asylum. In 1822 also there is recorded an account of the first inmate to die in the home:

The Magdalen whose death is stated . . . we are happy in believing left the world in the faith of "him who Justifieth the ungodly"; her affliction was tedious and painful but was borne with patience and resignation and she looked with joyful anticipation to the hour of her Dissolution in a firm assurance that "to be absent from the Body was to be presented to the Lord"; all who saw her had reason to believe her end was peace. This one poor Soul, this Brand plucked from the burning is worth more than all the Labours of the Society. This Soul converted from the error of her ways and saved from death having a multitude of Sins Covered is a sight which angels beheld with delight and which but for your Asylum might never have happened.

The Society was a little tardy in asking for help from the women of the community. But in 1820 the Managers gave permission to a group to visit the Magdalens. No mention is made of their affiliation but they may have been members of the Society of Women Friends who, at the time, were active in visiting female prisoners in the city's jails.

More than ten years later (1833) a Board of Matrons, formed in the city, specifically volunteered to assist the managers in their work. The officers of this board agreed to become actively engaged under the conditions listed:

Although our number is small we consider our Board sufficiently organized to enter on duty under the following governing principles: First, let it become our constant care to cultivate harmony of spirit and unison of action in all our proceedings; Second, the prevailing object of the Board is to promote the design of the Magdalen Society in order that their noble charity shall become more extensively beneficial; Third, we propose to seek for, enquire after and hold ourselves in readiness to receive application from individuals who will be considered by the Managers of the Asylum as subjects claiming their attention; Fourth, when our applicants are thus introduced to notice, the Board of Matrons must not be expected to assume further control over their charge nor be considered responsible for their future conduct;

but to commit them to the general rules and salutary regulations of the family. To—the advice and counsel imparted by religious characters who may occasionally visit the House by permission. To—the protection of the Society—and lastly—to the preservation of a Higher Power.

In 1821 it was decided by the managers to dispense with Mr. and Mrs. Love. A Mrs. Hannah Smith, a widow and mistress of a fancy dry goods and trimming shop, was employed. She was a member of the Pine Street Presbyterian Church and “of a good reputation of piety.” She proved to be an excellent selection and possessed good administrative ability. In a short historical sketch of these early days, signed only by the initials “L.M.B.,” dated September 1, 1878, we find the reason why the Loves left their post. They were tobacco addicts.

Down to this period [1821] smoking of tobacco had been freely allowed the inmates, and the Steward and Matron being greatly addicted to the use of the Pipe, the Asylum building came near being destroyed by fire by their careless use of the same. This led to the following action by the Board as appears from the Minutes of February 13, 1821 which disposed of the smoking privilege and the Stewardship at the same time. . . . “Inasmuch as the family of the Steward and Matron, Mr. and Mrs. Love has become large the managers are induced to make a change in the domestic arrangements, and to employ a Matron who having no particular family of her own it is expected will be almost constantly with the Magdalens. . . .”³

Periodically some of the more restive Magdalens took “Scotch leave” from the home. It was always painful to report such incidents. On one occasion the girls merely found the keys to the house and

³ The writer of this article could find nothing in the minutes of the Society that mentions tobacco or the threat of a fire in the asylum. It is not known where “L. M. B.” got his information. It is possible that “L. M. B.” was Mr. L. Montgomery Bond, a member of the board in 1878.

to the outer gate and walked off. The record states: “Their departure, it is feared, was promoted, in part, by desire to indulge in strong drink whereof they could not partake while part of the family.” The managers were also alert to discontent among the inmates: “Some discontent and querulous disposition has been exhibited by the Magdalens but it is hoped some pretty sharp remonstrance by the committee have put an end to such unthoughtful conduct.”

An atmosphere of apprehension and discontent apparently developed in the home from time to time. In 1830 (October 22) insubordination on a large scale took place. In the record for November 2 we find:

More than common attention has been paid to the Magdalens in consequence of a want of peace among themselves and much insubordination to the matron and her assistant; every effort to produce a better state in the family proved ineffectual it became necessary to discharge those that remained. . . . The committee and the matron are led to the conclusion that in future all the rules must be more rigidly enforced.

The record further states: “This paper exhibits a picture of the asylum which is without a complete parallel in the proceedings of the house, but the managers are not without hope that the course pursued will ultimately prove beneficial.” But the following year there was more trouble:

Some allegations having been made that the Magdalens were not allowed sufficient space of time after being called up in the morning to permit them exercise of mental private devotion, that they were unduly restricted from walking in the garden and partaking of the fruit growing therein, and that the diet was not of a satisfactory quality.

Upon investigation the committee wrote:

Testimony furnished by one of the Magdalens the longest in the family informed your

committee that from 20 to 30 minutes were allowed them after being called previous to their being expected to join the family in the duties of the day, and that they always walked in the Garden when it was suitable and partook freely of the fruit. . . . The committee also learned that the diet was of excellent quality, both in bread and in meats and that the tea and coffee were the same as would be set on the matron's table.

In 1846, the Society erected a fine four-storied brick building on its property. This building still stands in Philadelphia. It was sold in 1923 to the Philadelphia Municipal Court and is now the property of the Franklin Institute.

By 1850, after fifty years of operation, it was recorded that 925 girls had been cared for by the Magdalen Society. The record states "Restored (as we have reason to believe) to the paths of virtue, 294."

The Society carried on for yet another half century and more, hewing close to its original objective, that of saving prostitutes from the tragedy of their profession. In the annual reports, bound in pamphlet form in later years, we see a picture of the asylum under which are the following words:

To the City the seducer lures his victim. *To the City* women come to hide their shame. *The City* is the great receiver of the fallen who cannot endure to remain in the smaller towns, known to everybody. Therefore *the whole Country is responsible for the lost in the City*; and every effort to reclaim them should be supported by all Christians. Daily, numbers die; daily, numbers supply their places; and must those who might be rescued, be left unsaved for the want of means to effect it?

The managers of the Society were so close to the temptations of the city that they believed it to be solely responsible for the degradation of women. The reports are full of indictments of city life. For example we find this in 1840:

The heart sickens at the amount of guilt of this description in this city, at its increase in amount and in publicity; at the boldness of vice and at the indifference of a vicious community in regard to the prevalence of licentiousness. Our city has become more and more degraded by the prevalence of this sin. . . . Our public squares, so beautiful and which seem to be made to be trod only by the pure—are places where they are assembled in large numbers at night; and our theatres admit them—as the theatre does everyone—unblushingly within its walls. It would be doubtful whether a theatre could be sustained if this were not one part of its arrangements, so closely connected are theatrical exhibitions and licentiousness. Mere lamentation is unavailing. The managers pursue their way with unabated and increased zeal; and they would call on a virtuous and christian community to aid them in rescuing the hundreds of the guilty and abandoned in this city from vice and destruction. Let it not be forgotten that each one of the victims of vice in this city has a soul which cannot die; a soul that may be redeemed and purified by the blood of the atonement, a soul that may yet by the Grace of God become a jewel in the Saviour's Crown.

In 1848, the Society believed it necessary to employ a person to visit the brothels and areas of prostitution to persuade girls to take advantage of the charitable services of the asylum. They realized the delicacy of the situation as may be seen from the following:

To seek out a Laborer who may be deemed suitably qualified to perform this delicate and important duty, one whose years and experience of the human heart and pious devotion of Soul will give assurance under the Divine blessing of success, but whose prudent and circumspect walk will thus be an availing shield against the temptations of our common nature or the designs of unprincipled women—Should such an one be found it cannot but add to the expense of the Society.

After considerable exploration they found one Oliver Brooks whose work was "to visit the abodes of the daughters of guilt with the view of inducing them to avail themselves of the benefits of our

Asylum." Brooks was paid \$100 for a three-month period. Fifty Magdalens were admitted to the asylum the following year. Whether this increase was due to the efforts of Oliver Brooks is not known. We do know, however, that he died within a few months of his employment and another worker was secured for this delicate task.

The records continue in a vein of mingled discouragement and optimism, year after year. The first half-century of the Society found it more determined than ever that the community had a re-

sponsibility to assist the weak and down-trodden female who had stumbled into the sordid realm of prostitution. It was discouraging to the managers because they saw how few actually wanted to be rescued from their blighted lives. But it was cause for rejoicing when even one woman was "snatched from the burning." Because of this occasional one the Society felt justified in continuing. And this they did for another sixty years before new concepts and new challenges changed the focus of the Society.

TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

Received February 13, 1956

[Partial] HISTORY [of Magdalen Society]

On February 8, 1800, the old record tells us a number of persons met in the Friends' School on Pine Street and organized themselves in a society whose purpose was to "aid in restoring to the paths of virtue, to be instrumental in recovering to honest rank in life, those unhappy females who, in an unguarded hour, have been robbed of their innocence and sunk into wretchedness and guilt, and being affected with remorse at the misery of their situation, are desirous of returning to a life of rectitude, if they clearly saw an opening thereto."

1804. Although there were 112 members at that time, the report of the standing committee says "that they have to lament that not an object contemplating to be relieved by the Society has been presented. Still your committee are not discouraged but entertain hopes that the period is not far distant when the spirit of all grace shall influence the hearts of those unhappy females... in such a powerful manner as to convince them of the necessity of reformation in heart and life and thus cause them to become Magdalen's indeed." It was not until December of that year that they found the first "Distressed female, and after due investigation of her situation and temper of mind found her to be, so far as your committee were capable of judging, a proper object of their attention, and as soon as possible made suitable provision for her in future... by placing her in a very respectable and religious family as a temporary asylum and are endeavoring to procure for her suitable employment in order to insure her mind to the habits of industry." Two years after her acceptance by the society, Magdalen No. 1, as they called her, opened a school to teach reading and needlework, and the committee appointed to supervise her were so pleased with her work that they "Presented her with \$5.00 for the purpose of procuring benches for her scholars." Magdalen No. 2, who was found about six months later, was also placed in "an orderly family" and was soon married to a religious man.

Three more years passed by and we find this entry:

1807. The Standing Committee of the Magdalen Society reports that since the last annual meeting of the Society, a temporary asylum has been provided and fitted up for the reception and employment of that unhappy class of the community for whose benefit and reformation the Society was instituted, but it is lamentable to observe the insensibility that generally prevails among those deluded females and their backwardness to accept the charitable assistance gratuitously offered to them. Considerable pains have been taken and labor bestowed on a number in order to convince them of the benevolent views of the Society which in some few instances have had the desired effect and in many of extending knowledge of our charity. Four females who were considered proper objects of our attention have been admitted into the asylum, three of whom now remain there and appear to afford a comfortable prospect of their being hereafter restored with reputation to society, - the other poor depraved creature (Magdalen No. 6) eloped about three weeks after her admission.

For the first few years they were not controlled by formal rules but lived more like a private family. Physicians looked after their health and visiting committees gave moral and religious instruction. Their costumes were prescribed for them in minute detail and their time was spent in spinning, weaving and housework. It was looked upon as a Retreat and a high board fence was built about the grounds for their protection. (to elude peeping eyes and to prevent the escape of discontented Magdalen's. Gradually it became more of an institution. A matron was employed to run it and an assistant matron to serve as "moral instructor." Indeed, at all times the girls must have been under pressure to "repent" openly and some of them have done so for at least two became themselves assistant matrons.

(more)

In spite of all its drawbacks the home continued to grow in size and numbers of inmates so that on their one-hundredth anniversary 2,726 Magdalens had been under their care. Membership dues which were originally \$1.00 were raised in 1815 to \$2.00 and various interesting but small legacies were received from time to time. Not all the Board, however, were satisfied with the results of their effort.

As early as 1849 the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, George Williams, one of the seventeen men who founded the Society, who was at this time 81 years old, in his annual report deploras the fact that nearly half of the inmates had been discharged for insubordination and hopes that "the time will come when some liberal provision will be made for girls who do not come within the class for which our houses of refuge are designed. They need proper attention to their physical development and judicious direction toward some appropriate employment for a livelihood - a benevolent heart will sympathize with such wants and a philanthropic ingenuity will perhaps devise a practical method of supplying them."

Thus was our present work foreshadowed, but Mr. Williams was too far ahead of his age to have this hope carried out in his lifetime. The founders of the Society had been the pioneers in their day and gradually through the century, society grew up to it and the State provided reform schools for the more difficult cases and probation for the more hopeful ones, so that the need for the Home gradually disappeared. Also the position of women in the community was changing greatly.

March 11 - after 4 meetings they adopted a constitution. The Right Rev. William White, D.D., first bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania was the first to sign the document and was later elected as first President of the Society.

(more)

THE MAGDALEN SOCIETY - 1814

Case Record:

Magdalen #28: 24 years of age, born in Philadelphia and shortly after was removed to Mt. Holly, lived there near 12 years, came to Phila. and remained 3 years, was seduced by a Spaniard, and removed with him to Savannah, in Georgia, continued there four years, when he died of the yellow fever. She then returned to Phila., was again led astray by a person of property continued with him some time, when he became so far sensible of the impropriety of his conduct that he separated from her, and gave her a sum of money for her support, and advised her to live in future, an orderly chaste life, since which she has not been in the bad habits, but a considerable part of the money she had received as a reward for her iniquity being expended, she became alarmed least in a short time she should be reduced to poverty and want or be tempted again to a life of Infamy rather than beg her bread: With these apprehensions she called upon one of our managers for advice.

Magdalen #26: having by the perseverance of her temper, and wicked disposition become so unruly as to disturb the peace of the family; the committee in consequence thereof repeatedly admonished her to a more circumspect behavior, but finding no likelihood of amendment they were obliged to discharge her.

Yearly Report of Committee

"The committee have the satisfaction to report that during the past year a number of deluded females have through divine favour been restored to the path of virtue and usefulness."

Asylum Library - "Donated and approved by the Managers"

1. "Grace Abounding"
2. "Serious Call to the Unconverted to a Devout Life", Baxter
3. "Saints' Everlasting Rest"
4. "Lessons For Young Persons In Humble Life"
5. "Heavenly Footman" - Bunyan
6. "No Cross - No Crown"
7. "Night Thoughts" - Young
8. "Thoughts On Death" - Dadd
9. "Power of Religion On the Mind"
10. "The Christians Defense Against the Fear of Death"
11. "Paradise Lost and Regained"
12. "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul"

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