



City of Manchester Archives
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Collection Summary

Repository: Manchester City Archives. Office of the City Clerk. City of Manchester, NH.

Creator: Welfare Department (Overseers of the Poor/Commissioner of Charities). City of Manchester, NH.

Title: Overseers of the Poor Collection

Collection Number: 0415.001

Accession Number: 1998.130; 2000.10; 2000.5; 2000.6; 2000.7; 2001.13; 2004.2

Dates: 1846-1919 (non-inclusive)

Volume: 12 volumes, 2 folders, 1 oversized item

Languages: Collection materials are in English.

Related Collections: [Commissioner of Charities, 1919-1945 \(0415.002\)](#)

Access: Access to collection is open to the public. Please contact the archives for an appointment to view materials. Cite the collection number and record series when making an appointment. Physical restrictions may apply to some records in extreme states of fragility.

Digital Note: Materials are not accessible online at this time.

Conservation Notes: Volumes 2 – 4 of the meeting minutes were restored and microfilmed using funds from the New Hampshire State License Plate (Moose Plate) grant.

Finding Aid Prepared by: Sally Fellows, 2011; Mike Intranuovo, 2015.

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Historical Note

The Welfare Department works to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged residents of Manchester, by providing emergency assistance to individuals and families who lack adequate resources. The office was originally known as the Overseers of the Poor from as early as 1846 until approximately 1918, then the Commissioner of Charities from 1919 until 1961, and the Commissioner of Welfare starting in 1962. Although an official office may not have always existed in Manchester's earlier years, an overseer of the poor can be found in the city's annual reports as early as 1846, when it was assigned to a single selectman; in 1848, a group of government officials comprised the Overseers of the Poor.

The Overseers of the Poor was comprised of an elected board. The board represented each ward in the city, and the Mayor was chair. The board was charged with the welfare of Manchester's poorer residents; it also administered the City Poor Farm and Almshouse. The House of Corrections was located on the City Farm.

Collection Description

This collection is comprised of all surviving records created by the Overseers of the Poor, and holds some of the oldest government documents in the archives. It documents the City's efforts to care for its poorer residents, through the use of funds and programs. It includes meeting minutes, reports, and financial documents.

Series Descriptions and Inventory

Series 1: Meeting Minutes, 1846-1910 (Accession 2000.5)

The handwritten, official, and attested meeting minutes of the Overseers of the Poor are bound in seven separate volumes, in chronological order. The minutes of each meeting record the board's official actions and decisions, the names of members (the mayor was the chairman), and most include a listing of line item expenses. These expenses were in support of Manchester's poorer residents, and included costs for groceries, wood, board, nursing care, physician fees, clothing, transportation, and death related costs (coffin, burial, etc.). Another common expense listed is for "paupers off the farm", or people who needed support but did not live on the City Farm. Other expenses went towards the administration and maintenance of the City Farm. These costs include grass seed, rye, manure, salt, meat, tools, labor, etc.

Volume Title
Volume 1, 1846-1855
Volume 2, 1855-1863
Volume 3, 1864-1880
Volume 4, 1881-1895
Volume 5, 1895-1903
Volume 6, 1904-1909
Volume 7, 1909-1910

Series 2: Reports, 1847-1910

This series consists of reports created by the Overseers of the Poor, which were sent to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen. Most reports cover financial needs, although others go into some detail about the number of people requiring assistance, the number of people that died on the City Farm, activities of the Almshouse, etc. Some of the documents are marked as annual reports.

Description	Box Number	Folder Number
1847-1910 (non-inclusive)	163	09
1853	Map Drawer 01	-

Series 3: Financial Documents, 1891-1916

This series consists of financial ledgers related to various administrative activities of the Overseers of the Poor. Although originally created and used for accounting purposes, they are also a source of Manchester residents who benefited from the programs and funds of the Overseers of the Poor. They are arranged alphabetically by topic:

Auction at the City Farm, August 28-30, 1907

Documentation covering a three day long auction held at the City Farm, which involved approximately 2,000 transactions of sales totaling \$1,798.11. Sales ranged from five cents for a hook to \$82.50 for 30 cords of wood.

City Farm/House of Corrections Financial Ledger, 1857-1894

One volume documents the income and expenditures of the City Farm. It also lists names of paupers, their date of arrival, and their age. The section for the House of Corrections records the name of the prisoner, the date of arrival, length of sentence, and date of release. Most sentences averaged from 10 – 60 days in length.

Expense Ledger, 1918-1919

The ledger alphabetically lists individuals receiving aid from the city. Columns indicate the date aid was received, the name of the dealer (the provider such as a hospital, orphanage, etc.) and the type of assistance (provisions, fuel, rent, shoes, board and care, medicine and miscellaneous). Most individuals received \$8.00 per month for either provisions or board. Orphanages received \$10.00 per month per child.

Indigent Soldiers, Journals of Bills, 1891-1916 (non-inclusive)

Journals of bills for the relief of indigent soldiers and their dependent families. The journals record the bills presented to the Overseers of the Poor for payment. The bills are listed in the journals by ward designation, date, the soldier's name, and the monetary amount. After each year, a report was created and entered into the journal. The report was also given to the Mayor, Aldermen, and Common Council. Reports documented the number of indigent soldiers and the total financial expenditures for the year.

State Reform School Ledgers, 1869-1907

Two volumes list the names of the children in the State Reform School, as well as the monetary amount it cost to support each individual. The standard cost was \$2.00 per individual per week; each line item entry usually totaled \$26.00 for six months. Prorated amounts are included next to some individuals. The standard rate dropped to \$1.50 per week in October 1877.