

APPLICANT NAME: OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK, MANCHESTER, NH
PROJECT TITLE: RESTORATION OF THE JOURNALS OF THE BOARD OF
THE OVERSEERS OF THE POOR, 1855-1910

PROPOSED PROJECT: The Office of the City Clerk, Manchester, New Hampshire, is requesting funding to deacidify, mend, rebind and microfilm six (6) journals of the Board of the Overseers of the Poor, 1855-1910. These records document the care and treatment of those individuals who were experiencing dire poverty and who had to rely on the City of Manchester for the most basic needs. Preservation of the journals will allow for their use at the Manchester City Archives, and microfilm copies of the journals will allow for their use as research materials at the State level.

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The Board of the Overseers of the Poor was elected to represent each ward in the City of Manchester. The Mayor of Manchester chaired the organization. The record of each meeting begins with a statement of attendance and is followed by a list of expenses incurred since the last meeting. The most common expenses were for “paupers off the farm” who were those individuals in need of support but who did not reside at the City Farm/Almshouse. The expenses included groceries, wood, board, nursing care, physician attendance, clothing, transportation and death related costs (grave clothes, coffin, burial). City Farm expenses were for items such as grass seed, rye, manure, salt, meat, tools, working the night cart and labor and were submitted by the Superintendent of the Farm.

Residency was an important issue in relation to the poor. Some of the poor living in Manchester and receiving assistance were the responsibility of the City; others were county paupers and the City of Manchester was reimbursed by the County for disbursements made on behalf of these individuals. But some individuals were from as far away as Plymouth, Washington, Hillsboro, Rumney, Bow, Greenfield, Alton, Weare, Lyndeborough, Holderness, Northfield and Newport. Unfortunately, the journals do not indicate how these impoverished individuals ended up in Manchester, but the towns and cities that were initially the residences of these individuals were responsible for their care even if it was in another locale.

Prior to the establishment of orphanages, children without parents were frequently boarded off the farm in individual homes. An entry for April 20, 1869, indicates that Joseph Cate was paid \$69.00 to board and clothe the two Leighton children for a period of 23 weeks. The first reference to an orphanage was in 1872 when a three year old minor, Grace Julia Vincent, was formerly transferred to the New Hampshire Orphan Home in Franklin by the Mayor of Manchester and the Board of the Overseers of the Poor. No fees for her care were listed.

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The Board also paid the expenses of Manchester citizens who were boarded by other municipalities or by the State of New Hampshire. For instance, in October 1855, the New Hampshire Insane Asylum sent the Overseers of the Poor a bill for \$49.87 for the care of Leonard Dakin and Tamar Garvin.

The Overseers of the Poor also operated the House of Correction, which was initially located at the City Farm and the State Reform School. Again, other communities paid for the support of inmates whose original residence was outside of Manchester. In 1866, the town of Holderness paid the Overseers of the Poor \$58.62 to board their "inmates".

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL SIGNIFANCE TO THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE:

According to social historians, living at the City Farm or being a pauper was the worst situation that could befall an individual or a family. The City of Manchester endeavored to care for these individuals through the offices of the Board of the Overseers of the Poor. This resulted in one of the largest line items in the city budget, especially when outbreaks of disease left families without breadwinners and children without parents.

Other types of disasters like tenement fires would also bring families under the care of the Overseers of the Poor. As has been demonstrated in the examples given above, the City of Manchester also cared for individuals from other cities and towns. This may have been due to the size of the facility at the City Farm, which is now the location of the Derryfield Country Club, or because individuals moved to Manchester seeking work and when hard times came, had to appeal to the Overseers of the Poor for financial assistance. Even after the closure of the City Farm in 1907, the Board reaffirmed its mission "to give reasonable and needful aid without cultivating a Spirit of Pauperism" (Dec. 31, 1909).

PROVENANCE: The Journals of the Board of the Overseers of the Poor are part of the collection of the Manchester City Archives, administered by the Office of the City Clerk for the City of Manchester.

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CURRENT CONDITION AND IMMINENT THREAT:

The bindings of calf and leather are very dirty and worn. All six books are kept in individual archive boxes because of their fragility and loose pages. The first volume, which begins in 1855, has blue paper and is very difficult to read because of the faded print. All the books will require individual page cleaning as the pages are extremely dirty. None of the books can be handled extensively, and we do not list them on the Manchester Archive website as available to the public because of their condition.

The Office of the City Clerk has already restored the first volume of the Overseers of the Poor, 1846-1855, as part of our ongoing effort to preserve the records of the Manchester City Archives. The six volumes in question represent the balance of the collection. Restoration will allow these remaining volumes to be used by social historians, educators and genealogists. The journals can show researchers how the poor from Manchester and throughout the State were cared for in their time of need and also how this care changed from living at an almshouse or individuals' homes to the establishment of orphanages and a county farm outside the Manchester boundaries.

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PROPOSED CONSERVATION WORK:

Preservation work by Brown's River Records Preservation Services will stop the continuing deterioration of the Overseers of the Poor records through deacidification of the paper, mending tears and rebinding each volume. The aim is to stabilize and then restore the records. Under the supervision of conservator Charles Remmey, each volume will be dismantled, surface dry cleaned using mending tissue, reinforced and finally rebound using acid-free board and hard-finished Hewit vegetable tanned goatskin. Mr. Remmey has over thirty years experience as a restoration bookbinder.

The Manchester City Archives has preservation practices in place in the form of a climate controlled vault and reading room, fire suppression devices and a trained archivist to supervise the use of the material. Access to all the materials is restricted, and there are no open stack areas. Visitors must sign in and are allowed only pencil and paper with which to make notes. The archivist is present in the room at all times.

In addition to the restoration, Brown's River will also microfilm each volume. The Manchester City Archives has a microfilm reader/printer that will allow the public to view the contents of the Overseers of the Poor journals instead of handling the books. Copies of each microfilm roll will also be sent to the NH State Library and the NH State Archives for use by individuals throughout the State of New Hampshire

The City of Manchester has a website with a section devoted to the Manchester City Archives. The URL is www.manchesternh.gov/CityGov/CLK/archives.html. The Overseers of the Poor records would be added to the website, and the Moose License Plate Grant would be mentioned as the source of restoration funding. A copy of the finding aid will also be sent to the New Hampshire State Library, the New Hampshire State Archives and the Manchester City Library.

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BUDGET JUSTIFICATION:

The request is for the preservation of six (6) Journals of the Board of the Overseers of the Poor. Brown's River Records Preservation Services of Essex, Vermont will do the restoration and microfilming. Work will include deacidification, mending, reinforcement of the paper and rebinding or Mylar encapsulation. The volumes will be re-sewn with linen thread and bound in goatskin. Microfilming will be done in accordance with applicable ANSI/AIIM specifications and recommended practices. The scope of work and pricing is attached to this budget narrative.