

POOR RELIEF IN A MASSACHUSETTS VILLAGE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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COLONIAL town records furnish valuable information regarding early methods of administering the poor laws. These scattered and fragmentary records help us to understand the local governmental procedures that have, unfortunately, survived into the twentieth century.

The town of Chelmsford, Massachusetts, from whose records most of the following extracts were taken, was settled in 1653 and incorporated in 1655. Like other colonial towns of New England, its poor relief policy was based upon English precedent—especially upon the Elizabethan statute of 1601—combined with the peculiar experimentation demanded by the New England system of complete local self-government.

For nearly one hundred years after its settlement, no demand for public poor relief was made to the authorities of Chelmsford except in the case of an elderly couple who came from another town to gain, about 1720, the doubtful distinction of being the first persons to be maintained at public expense.

July ye: 18: 1727. At a meeting of the Selectmen and overseers of the Poor, the overseers agreed that Samuel Gould should have one frie room in Zachary Emery's house to dwell in with his wife. 2dly it is agreed that in compliance with the order of the Genll Sessions that what is due to Samll Gould at three shillings pr week from the first day of January last be paid to such persons as he is now indebted for necessary provision for his subsistence. 3dly that Samll Gould shall have suitable maintenance provided for him. 4ly that Samll Gould shall be employed according to his ability in order to help forward his maintenance. 5ly that Samll Gould shall have a Horse provided for him to ride to meeting when he is capable of attending the publick worship. . . .

This century-long dearth of "paupers" may be attributed in part, at least, to the practice of "warning out,"¹ which prevailed in Chelmsford until the passage of the Massachusetts Settlement Act

¹ J. H. Benton, *Warning Out in New England* (Boston, 1911), pp. 114 ff.

of 1794.² This Act repealed all previous laws as to town settlements and provided eight different ways in which legal settlement could be obtained. Prior to this, for example, an order of the General Court (in 1659), an article in the Articles of Confederation (1672), and an Act of 1692 had all stated that, unless persons were warned to depart from the town within three months of their arrival, they would gain a settlement there, and the town would be liable for their support if they became dependent. In 1700 the period within which a warning might be given to prevent settlement was extended to twelve months; and in 1789 a more comprehensive statute was enacted on this subject; in 1790 the period was extended to three years; in 1791 to four years; and, finally, in 1793 to five years.

The early colony laws just mentioned, as well as the Settlement Act of 1794,³ were undoubtedly influenced by the English Law of Settlement and Removal and its various amendments, which provided, at successive periods, that persons might be removed from the town in which they were living to the place where they were legally settled if the removal took place, first, within forty days of their arrival and, later, within one year—forty days and one year being, respectively, the length of residence required to gain a settlement in England.⁴ Likewise, the settlement laws of other states were very probably influenced by those of the New England colonies. For example, Ohio adopted the measure of warning out that was used by Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut,⁵ while Indiana in 1818 provided for the removal of persons who were likely to become dependent to the place of their last legal settlement unless they provided some security to the contrary.⁶ Indiana, however, unlike Ohio, did not use warning out, and the provision for removal was omitted

² *Acts of 1794*, ch. 34, quoted in R. W. Kelso, *History of Public Poor Relief in Massachusetts* (Boston, 1922), p. 59.

³ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government: English Poor Law History*, Part I: *The Old Poor Law* (London, 1927), p. 344, quoting from 13 & 14 Charles II, c. 12 (1662).

⁴ 59 George III, c. 50 (1819), quoted in Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

⁵ *Ohio Laws*, 3 v p. 274, sec. 4 (1805) quoted in A. E. Kennedy, *The Ohio Poor Law*, p. 22.

⁶ *Laws of Indiana*, ch. 14, p. 154 (1817-18), quoted in A. Shaffer and M. W. Keefer, *The Indiana Poor Law*, p. 31.

from the revised statutes of 1852. Ohio in 1854 omitted from the pauper act its provision for giving warning to leave the township.

Being warned out often meant a very real hardship to the persons whose presence was, for some reason, considered undesirable. During the year 1795, and within the space of fifteen days, Chelmsford warned 211 persons to leave the town. Family relations had little effect upon the exercise of warning out, for it appears that, in January, 1670, notice was given to Henery Merrifeild

to discharge the towne of his daughter Funnell which hath been at his hous about a weeke; vnless he gitt a note vnder the hands of the Select men of Melton that they will receaue her againe if need be and to looke at her as an Inhabetant of their Towne, notwithstanding her residence at her fathers hous for the p^rsent.⁷

Under date of December 8, 1671,

the wife of Henery Merrifeild appeared before the Select men, to answer for entertaining of their daughter Funnell, Contrary to towne order, whose answer was, that she was their daughter and Could not turn her out of doars this winter time but she would willingly returne to her husband as soone as a passadg p^rsents; but they were not approued in entertaining her, but the penalty of the town order the Select men would remitt and would leaue it to the County Court to determine the thing, if in Casse she be not gon before.

In 1672, there is this record:

The Select men haueing sent for John Plum and his daughter Mercy, and finding that his said daughter being marryed to Thomas Chub of Beuerlee, and being alsoe neere the time of her deliuery is not p^ruided for by her said husband, nor taken home to him, but continues heer with her father, contrary to good order, and to the hazarding of a charge vpon the towne, doe therfore order and requier, that the said Mercy Chub doe speedily within Six or eight days leaue this towne, and betake herself to her said husband. And doe also warne and order the said John Plum that he noe longer entertaine his said daughter, but hasten her to her husband as aforesaid vpon the penalty by the town order in that Case p^ruided, and of being complained of further to Authorety that soe the towne may be saued harmeless.

By giving some security to the town, it was possible to avoid being warned. In 1667, for example:

Richard Curtice came to the Select men, and desiered ther app^rbation to Come into the Towne to liue, which was granted on Condition that he doe make ouer his house and land at Melton for the Towns Security that he be not chargable to the towne.

⁷ Benton, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

And again :

March, 1685/6. Caleb Littlefield, living in the house formerly Thomas White's, warned to leave town, not being an inhabitant, or bring security to the selectmen.⁸

The warning-out order and its return became more or less standardized in form if not in spelling.

To mosis tiler Constable of Boxford

thes aer to Requier you in her majesties name forth with to warn the wief of After Carey to depart out of our Town to the place of hir former Residence the Selact men of Boxford not allowing her to Reseid in our Town. dated the 22 of october 1703 as witness our hands the Selact men of Boxford.

October the 26 1703: in obedianc to this warent I haue warned the wief of After Carey to depart out of Boxford and not to Com in to it a gaien as an inhabitant as witness my hand

Mosis Tiler

Constabel of Boxford⁹

As the practice of warning out increased and as the difficulty of insuring departure from the town grew, "cautions" were entered with the Court of Sessions.

Capt. Joseph Estabrook was authorized to request the Honorable Court of Sessions in June [1714] next, to enter cautions against Daniel Cutting and his wife, Sarah Cook, and Johanna Snow, that they might not be burthensome to Lexington.¹⁰

In some cases, the unfortunate person was actually carried out of town bodily by the constable. The story of an old man in Hanover is told, for example, who, when young, was employed by the selectmen for the purpose of removing families. "He said he left Hanover after dark, travelled all night, camped the next day in the woods, at night resumed his journey, and about midnight, reaching his destination, left the family in the street."¹¹ In the town treasurer's accounts in Weston such entries as these are selected at random:¹²

1757. For carreing Thos. Partridge & family out of town. o-4-o

1762. Carring Pacence Clark & Son to Waltham. o-4-o

Carreing woman & child to Newton. o-2-8

⁸ G. Nash, *Historical Sketch of Weymouth* (1885), p. 41.

⁹ *Boxford Town Records, 1685-1706*, pp. 94-95.

¹⁰ Benton, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹¹ J. Dwelley and J. F. Simmons, *History of Hanover* (Hanover, 1910), p. 23.

¹² *Town of Weston Records, 1754-1803*.

1762. Carreing woman & child to Sudbury.	0-1-4
Carreing Cox & famely to Waltham.	0-18-8
1764. Carring Moses Larkin out.	0-4-0
1766. Carreing Mary & Sary Evans to Waltham.	0-4-0
Carreing Jane Kendrick to Natick.	0-3-0
1767. Carreing Widow Beoynton to Waltham.	0-3-0

In warning out those who were considered “undesirables” (i.e., chiefly those who appeared likely to look to the town for support in the event of their dependency and by virtue of residence), the town was merely exercising a right that existed because of the theory of inhabitancy or right to live in a certain settlement, which, according to English tradition, imposed upon the inhabitants of that settlement a common responsibility for the support of any needy member. If each town were a corporation, established by free consent, it was reasoned, then each town should exercise its sovereignty by the admission or exclusion of its inhabitants. In Chelmsford, for example, it was voted that no one should own land within the town unless he had been approved and admitted as an inhabitant by a majority vote at a public town meeting.

Month: 2: Day: 1st: 1654. Wm. How, weaver, is admitted an Inhabitant and granted by the Town Twelve acres of meadow and eighteen acres of upland, promising to the Town to sett up his trade and perform the Town’s work so far as he can.

Fifth Month: 1656. James Parker and Timothy Brooks admitted Inhabitants with grants from Town.

7th: ye 12 month: 1681. Joshua Sawyer at his request was admitted an Inhabitant in this Town and had Libberty granted him to purchase the Town’s land as he can agree with the Committee appointed to sell Land.

John Lowell admitted as Tanner.

It was impossible to foresee all possibility of dependency, however, and, further, it was very difficult to enforce the theory of warning out even though the cause was just and the expense to the town was small.

July 20, 1738

for warning out Timothy Fletcher and fam. 0-03-0

Feb. 19, 1738

To John Davis, constable, for warning out John Buck and family
and Jane Marlin

0-4-6

For warning out Andrew Bailey and pd. to John Spaulding

0-6-0

Feb. 29, 1739

To Capt. Chamberlain for money paid to the Clerke of the Court
for entering a Caution against 2 persons that was warned out
of the Town of Chelmsford 0-7-0

To Jos. Warren for serving upon persons warrents to warn them
out of town 0-15-6

Old residents became enfeebled and ill.

March 21, 1733/4. To Nathaniel Harwood for paying for a coffin for Samuel
Gould's wife: 0-6-6

Sept. 30, 1734. To Ebenezer Foster for digging a grave for Goody Gould:
0-6-0

Jan. 2, 1734/5. To Dr. Blazedil in part for houserom for Samuel Gould and
for Goody Gould's funeral: 0-14-6

In 1733 the town voted that "Capt. Saml. Chamberlin be the
surety in the Room and sted of Deacon Stephen Peane who is im-
paired in his Reason."

The colonial wars injured some of the town's soldiers and wid-
owed their wives. Children became orphans or half-orphans.

Nov. 17, 1727. Voted that Elizabeth Virgin alias Elizabeth Wait's child to
be subsusted at 3s. per week by Zachary Emery until the Town or Selectment
shall dispose of it in a more easy maner and that the Town find sd. child cloathes
during its abode at Zachary Emery's, and Zachary Emery consented to the
above said vote at the meeting.

The child being voted to Mr. Emery, probably because he was an
overseer of the poor and not because he desired it, he did not hesi-
tate to board it out. In May, 1728, Elias Foster was keeping the
child and being paid in addition for clothing and nursing it. Within
a week, however, Zachary Emery was given "6d. a week more for
keeping the child of Elizabeth Wait 16 weeks," so it is evident that
Mr. Emery was still officially interested in the case and that the care
of the child was becoming burdensome. It is not surprising, then,
to find that in January, 1728-29 certain negotiations were carried
out between the selectmen and one Josiah Tucker of Groton. It was
"Voted, that John Robins and Zachary Emery, overseers of the
poor, agree with Josiah Tucker of Groton abote the sd. Tucker's
taking and keeping the child of E. Waite's and freeing the town of
any further charges about the child." The town treasurer is then
authorized to "pay to Mr. Emery £6 to pay Josiah Tucker of Groton

for taking and keeping the child of Elizabeth Waite and securing the Town from any further charges concerning the said child." A receipt was also given:

Feb. 25, 1728. Received of John Robins and Zachary Emery, overseers of the poor, £6, the sum which the said voted me for taking as an apprentice Elizabeth Wait [?] a poor infant child and acknowledge myself hereby to clear the said town from any further charge which may arise concerning the said child.

J. Tucker (his mark)

In November, 1753, the town paid to "Mr. Wm. Parker for taking one Joanna Cory, a poor child of John Cory, deceased, and to take care of her while 18 years old: 1-4-0." Later, another member of the same family was placed out:

Jan. 26th, 1771. I, the Subscriber, promise to pay or cause to be paid unto the Selectmen of Said Town the sum of Two pound, eight Shillings and Eleven pence Lawful money, it being for the use and Benifit of Benoni Cory, a poor child of the said town, to be paid when he shall arrive at the full age of twenty-one years with Lawfull Interest for the same untill Paid as witness my hand.

Test

Aaron Chamberlin

Amos Kidder

Another case is that of Mary Lambert and her child.

February 17, 1728/9. It was putt vote whether the town would allow or disallow of a Bill of £7 signed by the Selectmen of Dotchister for Mary Lambert's lying in and nursing at Dotchister. It passed in the negative.

Voted, that there should be an answer sent to the Selectmen of Dotchister concerning the bill that they charge upon the Town for Mary Lambert's lying in at said town of Dotchister.

February 25, 1728/9. Expended aboute Mary Lambert, 0-12-0.

To Edward Foster for Jos. Barritt for keeping Mary Lambert and child, 0-10-0. To Sam. Chamberlain for 1 day aboute Mary Lambert, 0-3-0. To Sam. Chamberlain to cost of Court convicting Mary Lambert, 1-10-2. To Leut. Adams for 1 day waiting at court aboute Mary Lambert, 0-3-0. To Deacon Fletcher for going to Dunstable and getting a warrant for Mary Lambert, 0-10-0. To Josiah Fletcher for carrying Mary Lambert to the House of Correction, 0-1-6. To Josiah Scotton for keeping Mary Lambert and her child with victuals and drink and fireing in the House of Correction at Charlestown from Jan. 10, 1728/9, to the 28th of the month following, 11 weeks' allowance being made for her labour in that Time, 6-9-10. To Zachary Emery for his time and charge in bringing up Mary Lambert from Charlestown and finding her a pair of shoes, 1-7-0.

To such persons as these, the town definitely owed aid. Sickness, death, and misfortune did not wait to strike until their victims were

beyond the boundaries of the town, and grim necessity overcame at one stroke the careful planning of the town fathers. Even unsettled persons—travelers, visitors, those living in town illegally (i.e., without permission, a fact that prevented the town from becoming legally responsible for their support)—had to be cared for at some time or other.

“The affair of Jane Williams,” as town records term it, was doubtless that of a woman who was ill and in need of care in Chelmsford but whose place of settlement was Beverly, to which place she was returned as promptly as possible. Chelmsford was reimbursed by Beverly for its care of her.

Dec. 28, 1764. Paid for conveying Jane Williams to Beverly, 8 shillings. For keeping Jane Williams, £3, 24 shillings. For doctor for Jane Williams, 1-1-0.

June, 1766. Received of Beverly for Jane Williams’s last sickness, £7.

July, 1766. Trip to Beverly, 9 shillings. Letters to Beverly about Jane Williams, 6 shillings.

The following entries are similar examples of sickness and misfortune:

For Saml. Woods, lately of this town, having lost his substance by fire—Dec. 11, 1743, was collected £16.

For Hannah Shed, in this town, though not properly as inhabitant, being sick and destitute, was collected April 12, 1744, £9.

For Daniel Raymond of Concord, whose son was wounded by a loaded sled running over his leg, and is languishing, was collected Jan. 13, 1745, £9, 11s. 2d.

In 1791, two years before the law regarding warning out was repealed, the town was still struggling to free itself of unwanted poor persons. An article in the warrant for a town meeting at the time reads:

To see if the town will take into consideration the matter respecting the maintaining Mary Brown and see if they cant be some way to free the town from that cost, as we conclude that she belongs to Billerica, or for the town to act anything thereon, as they may think proper.

Voted to choose a committee¹³ to see if this town can be freed from the maintaining of Mary Brown.

Then, too, there were the Acadians, about a thousand of whom were taken to Massachusetts and supported at province expense for

¹³ No report of this committee is found.

a long period. Their expulsion from Nova Scotia during the French and Indian Wars (1754-63) caused them to be dependent upon public support, and, while individual towns did "subsist" them, these towns were reimbursed by the Province.

Province accounts show such items as the following:

June 14, 1758. Allowed to the selectmen of Chelmsford for supporting French neutrals, £25.2.5¼.

January 17, 1759. Allowed to the selectmen of Chelmsford for supporting French neutrals, £42.2.6½.

The town rendered an account from time to time to the secretary of the Province for the support of these people, as in the case of this record of April 27, 1767:

At a meeting of the Major part of the Selectmen it was agreed upon and ordered that Oliver Fletcher, Esq., pay to Mr. Samuel Perham, Town Treasurer for the Town of Chelmsford for the year A.D. 1761, the sum of twenty-nine Pounds eight Shillings and two pence lawful money, which the sd. Oliver received of Harrison Gray, Esq., Province Treasurer, a Grant made to the Town of Chelmsford for their last account exhibited for supporting Jean Landrie and Family in this Town, which grant was made on or about the first of April current, £29-8-2.

The names of Jean Landrey and family appear most frequently in the *Town Records* from June, 1762, to December, 1764, but it is shown by the following that they came to town in 1756:

1756. Jean Landrie and a large family, being French from Nova Scotia, were thrown upon the town and maintained at the public expense, until the end of the war in 1763, at an expenditure of £200, which was reimbursed by the province, agreeable to an order of Counsel.

Chelmsford, Oct 24, 1757. In obedience & pursuant to an Order of the Great and General Court of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, made & passed the 21st Day of January A.D. 1757.

The following is a true list of the several French Persons names in the Town of Chelmsford, the amount of their age sex & the circumstances of their Health & capacity for Labour.

The Number of French are seventeen.

Vizt. Names	Aged
Jean Landrie a man	62 yrs.
Maudlin his wife	60 weekly & unable to labour & labouring under the misfortune of a broken arm & the charges there of now.

Vizt. Names	Aged
Paul Landrie his son	22 able to Labour.
Charles Do Do	20 Sickly & not able to Labour
Simon	18 able to Labour
Asam	16 " "
Charles Trawhorn a man	29 Sickly & not able to Labour
Tithorne his wife	29 able to Labour
Mary their daughter	6½
Maudlin " "	5½
Joseph " son	4 sickly
Grigwire " "	3
Margaret " Daughter	0:7 months
Joseph Landrie a son of the sd Jean Landrie	26 years Healthy & able to Labour.
Maudlin his wife	26 " " " " "
Jean their son	2 years sickly and weakly.
Murray Maudlin their daughter	5 months.
	David Spaulding
	Daniel Proctor
	Henry Spaulding
	Jonas Adams
	Andrew Fletcher

} *Selectmen*
of
Chelmsford

The selectmen or overseers of the poor of the various towns were ordered to bind out to service all children of the Acadians for whom places could be found. Many were taken from their parents to serve under hard taskmasters. Some of these parents sent to the General Court a petition as follows, signed by Jean Landrey at Chelmsford, and by representatives at Oxford, Concord, Worcester, Andover, and Waltham:

To his Excellency the Governor General of the Province of Massachusetts Bay of New England and to the honorable Gentlemen of the Council.

We have taken the liberty of presenting you this request, as we are in sorrow on account of our children. The loss which we have suffered, of our houses, and brought here and our separations from one another is nothing compared with what we meet with at present, that of taking away our children by force before our eyes. Nature herself cannot endure that. If it were in our power to have our choice we should choose rather the taking away of our bodies and our souls than to be separated from them. Wherefore we pray in pity and to your honors that you would have the goodness to mitigate this cruelty. We have not refused from the first to work for our support of our children, provided it were permitted for our own families. Praying you in mercy to have the goodness to have regard to our Petition, thus doing you will oblige your very humble and very obedient servants.

What treatment they received may be guessed, since this petition was investigated in Council by a committee, their report being accepted April 17, 1756, ordering that "there should be no more binding out, that the Acadians were to be provided with such things as they could work up for necessary clothing, and that they were to be treated with kindness and humanity."

Various subsequent entries show payments from the town treasury for such items to the Landreys as subsistence, wood, and rent; use of cart; care of the family; and, last of all, "rent until the family moved away [December 28, 1764]."

From such records as these emerge certain conclusions as to the care of dependent persons in colonial times which are already familiar. This care was not based on any settled policy except perhaps that of the greatest economy in effort and expenditure. There was no investigation of the homes to which the poor were sent, and no investigation of the dependent's circumstances except where some aid might be drawn from their relatives or some other source.

The January, 1801, town meeting was asked "to see if the Town will appoint some suitable person or persons to make inquiry and see if there is an estate belonging to the widow Abigail Bates that can be recovered for her support, or to act anything relative thereto that the town may think proper." It was voted "to choose an agent and make inquiry to see if there is any estate belonging to the widow Abigail Bates that can be recovered for her support."

The February, 1803, warrant contained this article:

Whereas Lt. Elijah Proctor has made application to the selectmen for the support of his mother-in-law, to see if the town will appoint some suitable person or persons to see if there be any property to be found that belongs to her for her support, or to act anything thereon that the Town may think proper.

It was voted "to appoint a committee to examine and see if there is any property to be found belonging to the widow Proctor for her support."

There was no supervision after the dependent person was placed out, and no oversight or control over the living conditions of apprenticed children except, perhaps, as in the case of the Acadians, where the situation was so bad that public sympathy was aroused. The family was not considered as a unit, and little thought was

given to the hardships imposed by its being broken up. With regard to the use of individual treatment for each case, however, the wheel has now turned full circle. What was then the easiest method of care has now become the most adequate when properly investigated and supervised. It must be remembered also that, granted the philosophy of local sovereignty which existed in the colonial town, the rights of inhabitancy and warning out followed naturally, and only through the agency of settlement laws and the introduction of state aid was this autonomy partially broken down in preparation for a later and more comprehensive plan of public relief.

As the number and expense of keeping dependents increased, individual disposition of their cases grew less simple and less satisfactory. Almshouse care was not common in Massachusetts until 1700 or later, although the first almshouse in Boston was built in 1660. Like the entire state, Chelmsford was slow to adopt the almshouse principle. Instead, various experiments were tried by which the responsibility of the town and the cost of support should be decreased, while the poor person was encouraged to become as self-supporting as possible by his own efforts. From being boarded out first for short periods and then for a year or more, the authorities turned to the vendue or auction, where the "paupers" were auctioned off to the lowest bidder, singly or together, for a specified period.

In 1796, there were the following entries:

To see if the Town will allow Mr. Ephraim Parkhurst 1 shilling a week for finding house room and fier wood for the widow Ruth Dutton from the last day of February last past to the first of September following, or allow it to Deacon Aaron Chamberlin for his bidding her off at the vendue and his trouble, or to act anything thereon that they may think proper.

Voted, to give Deacon Aaron Chamberlin one shilling per week for his bidding off the widow Ruth Dutton and for his trouble.

In December, 1815, the following article appeared in the warrant for a town meeting:

To see if the Town will give some directions respecting the support of the poor or act anything respecting their support that the Town may think proper.

Voted, That the overseers of the poor be directed to give contract for the support of town and state paupers which are or may be within the limits of the town of Chelmsford for the ensuing year, to commence on the first Monday in

February next, that such suitable persons as will undertake the same for the lowest sum to be ascertained at public vendue of paupers, said contract to include all expenses of every nature arising within said town for their support, clothing and nursing, doctoring, burials, etc., provided they be kept and supported to the acceptance of the Overseers of the Poor, and that the undertaker receive of the town all the money the town may receive of the state for the paupers aforesaid, and shall pay all expenses which may arise from the absconding of any pauper which may have been committed to him for support by the Overseers aforesaid, with such further conditions as the overseers may think proper.

Where all the "paupers" were taken together, a "private poor farm" might be said to have existed; and later, when "written and sealed proposals for supporting the poor" were given, this type of care was quite definitely established.

May 4, 1801. By desire of Samuel Marshall and others to see if the Town will take into consideration the propriety of John Dunn or other in his circumstances to keeping the poor of this town, or act anything thereon that the Town may think proper.

Voted, That the poor be taken from John Dunn's.

Feb. 22, 1812. To see in what way and manner the Town will support their poor the year ensuing, and act anything thereon or relative thereto that the Town may think proper.

Voted, That the poor be let out by the 6 months or the year or other ways as the Selectmen may think proper.

May, 1821. Voted, That the selectmen be directed to receive written and sealed proposals for supporting the poor of the town previous to their putting them out again and then put them out separately or together for 1 or 5 years, as they may think proper.

These methods could not have been entirely satisfactory from the point of view either of economy or of good care for the poor persons.

May 25, 1768. At request of Gershom Proctor and others, to see if the freeholders of this town will think of and come into some method to maintain the poor of this town with less cost and expense to the town than they have been for a number of years past, or act anything that they think proper thereon.

Again and again from 1732 on, the proposal to build or buy a building suitable for an almshouse or workhouse was voted down in the town meeting. In 1769 and in 1786 it was apparently decided to hire a house.

Feb., 1769. At the request of Zachary Emery and others to see what method the town shall think proper to take with Reuben Cory and his family, or any other poor in said town. . . .

Voted, To build or hire an house for the poor of this town for the year ensuing:

Voted, To hire an house;

Voted, To appoint a committee to do this and report at the next meeting;

Voted, That the selectmen take some speedy and affectual meathod to put Reuben Cory into sum business in order to maintain himself and family as far as he is able in case he doth not improve his time for the purpose aforesaid.

1786. To see if the town will proceed to build a workhouse in said town, or to act anything thereon that they may think proper.

Voted, not to build a workhouse.

These recommendations were not carried out, it seems, for in 1796 and 1815 the vendue was still being held. In 1822, however, a committee appointed to investigate the problem of the poor advocated the purchase of a certain piece of property, and by 1823 the town workhouse was opened under the direction of the overseers of the poor. The report of the committee follows:

REPORT OF A COMMITTEE ON THE SUBJECT OF THE POOR

The maintaining the poor has become a subject of great interest and importance to many of our towns, and especially so to this town, within a few years, and has now become so burthensome as to render it highly necessary to introduce some less expensive method of supporting them, as well as to check the increase of pauperism.

This town has generally adopted the method first introduced here, which is to put out the poor annually to the lowest bidder at auction by the week. This custom originated probably when the number of the poor was few and the expenses small and no doubt was at that time the best method which the town could adopt. But inasmuch as the number and expenses of our poor have greatly increased and continue to increase, your committee are of opinion that the time has arrived when the town ought at least to make an effort to reduce the expenses of their poor by introducing some new system of supporting them. As there is little prospect of the number of our poor's being less, the town probably would prefer making some lasting and permanent provision for their support. 56 persons have been either partly or wholly supported by the town during the present year, and from information received from the selectmen it is calculated that the expense of our poor this year will not be less than \$1354.00 and may amount to more of this sum. \$60 is paid for house rent the present year.

What new system will best promote the interest of the town, experience must determine; but your committee are of opinion that it is expedient for the town

to try some new method of maintaining their poor, and from the best opinion which they have obtained on the subject, they are induced to recommend to the town to purchase a farm with buildings convenient for their accommodation, so that the poor may be employed and supported on said farm, subject to such orders, rules and regulations as the town shall see fit to adopt. With this view your committee have examined several farms in this town offered for sale, and are of opinion that the farm owned by Capt. Salathiel Adams will best accommodate the town; this farm contains about 120 acres, is well supplied with wood, is capable of great improvements, may be bought for \$2050, and by your committee is considered to be well worth the sum. They therefore recommend that the town purchase the farm owned by Capt. Salathiel Adams for the accommodation of the poor of this town, and that after the first Tuesday in February next the poor be supported and employed on said farm. All which is respectfully submitted by

Josiah Fletcher	} <i>Committee</i>
B. Butterfield	
John Butterfield	
David Perham	
Joel Adams	

Jonathan Perham, *Town Clerk*
[November, 1822]

The rest of the story is told by the following records:

This report being accepted by the town, it was

Voted, To choose a committee to take a deed of the farm of Captain Salathiel Adams.

Voted, That said committee consist of 3 persons.

Voted, For said committee, and chose Jonathan Perham, Joel Adams, and Capt. Josiah Fletcher.

Voted & Instructed the above committee to borrow on the credit of the town the sum of \$3500 for the purpose of paying for the farm of Capt. Salathiel Adams and putting the same in repair and stocking the farm for the reception of the poor.

Voted & Instructed the Overseers of the Poor to provide such help both mens and womens, as they may think proper for the care of the poor.

At the March, 1823, town meeting it was

Voted, That the house lately bought by the town of Capt. Salathiel Adams be constituted a workhouse wherein the poor of this town shall be employed.

Voted, That the Overseers of the Poor be overseers of said workhouse.

Voted, That the Overseers of the Poor be directed to prepare by-laws and orders for the government of said workhouse and report the same to the annual meeting in April next.

Voted, That the Overseers of the Poor be directed to keep an accurate account of all the expenses of supporting the poor at the said workhouse, and report the same to the town at their annual meeting in March, 1824.

The "Report of the Committee who Purchased the Farm for the Poor" follows:

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE WHO PURCHASED THE FARM
FOR THE POOR

The committee appointed to take a deed of the farm of Capt. Salathiel Adams and to make the necessary preparations for the reception of the poor have attended to that duty, as stated in the following report.

On the first day of February last your committee received a deed of the farm of Capt. Salathiel Adams to the inhabitants of Chelmsford, for which they paid \$2950. They have also, agreeably to the vote of the town, borrowed the sum of \$3500 on the credit of the town and have given notes for the same to the following persons, viz.:

To Capt. Abraham Prescott a note of	\$1500
To Abbott and Fletcher, do.,	600
To Capt. John Butterfield, do.,	426
To Henry Adams, do.,	300
To Samuel Davis, do.,	274
To Zebulon Spaulding, do.,	200
To Oliver Parkhurst, do.,	100
To Moses Parker, do.,	100
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Amounting in all to the sum of	\$3500

Your committee have expended the sum of \$530.72 for provisions, repairs to furniture, stock and other necessaries for the accommodations of the poor, having a balance of \$19.28 unexpended. They further request the town to direct your committee to pay said balance to the Overseers of the Poor, and that your committee be discharged from further service.

All which is respectfully submitted.

Jonathan Perham	} Committee
Joel Adams	
Josiah Fletcher	

Joel Adams, *Town Clerk*

[Reported and accepted on March 3, 1823]

Then came the need of regulations for the workhouse, according to Article VII of the Warrant for the April town meeting, 1823:

To see if the town will accept of the regulations and by-laws made by the overseers of the workhouse for the government of the same, or act anything thereon that the town think proper.

Voted, To accept of the regulations and by-laws made by the overseers of the workhouse, and that the same be adopted by the town.

The following are by-laws and regulations made by the Overseers of the Poor and adopted and approved of by the town in legal town meeting on the 7th day of April, A.D. 1823, to wit:

At a stated monthly town meeting of the overseers of the workhouse in the town of Chelmsford the 6th day of March, 1823, the following orders and regulations were made and are now presented to the town for their approbation, viz.:

BY-LAWS

OR

ORDERS AND REGULATIONS FOR CHELMSFORD WORKHOUSE

1. The Overseers of the Poor shall have the inspection and government of the workhouse, with full powers to appoint a master and needful assistants, and to contract with them for their wages. Also to remove them from said trust whenever they shall deem it expedient.
2. The said Overseers shall meet at the workhouse on the first Saturday in every month at 2 of the clock, P.M., as their stated monthly meeting, to make such orders and regulations relating to such house as they shall judge necessary. One of the overseers shall visit the workhouse once a week, to ascertain if the master thereof conforms to the rules and regulations of the said workhouse.
3. Whenever any person liable to be sent to said workhouse shall be sent there by an order in writing of one or more of the said overseers or by any justice of the peace on complaint, it shall be the duty of said master to receive such person into said workhouse and there support and employ such persons agreeably to the rules and regulations thereof.
4. The master of the workhouse shall keep a book wherein shall be entered all orders and regulations made for the government of said house.
5. The master of the workhouse shall have the control and government of all persons employed therein and shall manage and employ them from time to time as the overseers shall order and direct, and shall keep a book wherein the names of all persons received into said workhouse and the time when received and dismissed shall be entered. He shall also keep an account of the expenses of said workhouse and also an account of the produce of the farm attached to the said workhouse, and also an account of the articles of produce or manufacture sold, and exhibit the same to the Overseers of the Poor whenever thereunto requested.
6. The master of the workhouse shall keep an inventory of the farming tools, household furniture, beds and bedding, and other property belonging to the town.
7. The master of the workhouse shall have power to reward the faithful and

industrious by granting favors and indulgences, but he is at the same time fully empowered and authorized to punish at his discretion the idle, stubborn, disorderly and disobedient by immediate confinement without any food other than bread and water.

8. The master of the workhouse shall cause said house and furniture to be kept clean and in good order, and shall cause habits of cleanliness, neatness and decency to be strictly observed by all persons received into said workhouse.
9. The master of the workhouse shall cause the Lord's Day to be strictly observed.
10. Every person who may be received into said workhouse or be a member thereof must obey the orders and regulations thereof and the commands of the master, and will be required by him diligently to work and labor as he shall direct, according to age, health and capacity.
11. Every person who shall absent himself from the said workhouse and the appendages thereof and farm thereunto belonging, or go without the limits thereof without leave of the master, or shall conceal him or herself from the master, shall be deemed to be an idle, stubborn and disorderly person, and punished accordingly.
12. The use of spirituous liquors is strictly prohibited except when the master, physician or overseers of the workhouse shall otherwise order; and no person shall be allowed to have or keep in their possession or bring or receive any spirituous liquors into said workhouse.
13. The regulations or bill of fare for persons received into the workhouse shall be as near as possible as follows:

For breakfast and supper, hasty pudding and milk, or molasses, bread and milk, or milk porridge, shells or chockolate; and for dinner each day in the week as follows:

- Sunday, baked meats and beans and Indian pudding;
- Monday, boiled salt meat and vegetables;
- Tuesday, soup;
- Wednesday, salt fish and potatoes.
- Thursday, roast or baked meat and vegetables;
- Friday, stewed beans or peas, with meat;
- Saturday, salt fish and potatoes;

provided, however, that suitable food and necessaries shall at all times be provided for the sick and infirm, according to their age and condition.

John Butterfield Sherebiah Spalding Ephraim Adams	}	<i>Overseers of the Poor</i>
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In this period of semi-institutional and finally institutional care, there appears a stronger sense of responsibility for caring for the poor, doubtless influenced by the offer of state aid and by the im-

possibility of either preventing dependency or confining membership in the dependent group to legal inhabitants. That method of care was apparently considered best which involved the least expenditure on the part of the town and the most effort on the part of the person aided. So the workhouse comes into being, its inmates unclassified as to age, sex, and "offense"; regulated by a fairly complicated set of by-laws and under supervision of the overseers of the poor.

In turn, the mixed almshouse and the workhouse—where little actual work was done because no authority existed to compel labor—are being superseded. Spasmodic care is being supplanted by continuous and supervised care. No longer is a poor person required to "resign herself into the hands of the selectmen to be taken care of by the town," nor, once so "resigned," "to be dealt with as the other poor persons are dealt with." No longer is the poor person forced to face a town meeting which discusses his plight in the baldest of terms; and no longer are the poor given over to the lowest bidder at the vendue held at a friendly tavern. The principles and the methods may change, but the problems remain essentially the same—relief of the destitute; care and treatment of the aged, the crippled, the insane, and the blind; treatment of the sick poor; care of dependent and delinquent children; and the unmarried mother. Problems of administration and finance remain, also, as well as those of organization and personnel and interrelationships existing between various interested administrative units and legislative bodies, etc.

If the history of poor relief shows anything at all, it bears witness to the painfully slow growth of public interest and knowledge concerning the problem of dependency and its causes—an interest and knowledge that must be stimulated still further to provide a reasonable and more adequate type of care for these unfortunates.