



Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America

By Timothy A. Hacsí

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As orphan asylums ceased to exist in the late twentieth century, interest in them dwindled as well. Yet, from the Civil War to the Great Depression, America's dependent children--children whose families were unable to care for them--received more aid from orphan asylums than from any other means. This important omission in the growing literature on poverty in America is addressed in *Second Home*.

As Timothy Hacsí shows, most children in nineteenth-century orphan asylums were "half-orphans," children with one living parent who was unable to provide for them. The asylums spread widely and endured because different groups--churches, ethnic communities, charitable organizations, fraternal societies, and local and state governments--could adapt them to their own purposes.

In the 1890s, critics began to argue that asylums were overcrowded and impersonal. By 1909, advocates called for aid to destitute mothers, and argued that asylums should be a last resort, for short-term care only. Yet orphanages continued to care for most dependent children until the depression strained asylum budgets and federally-funded home care became more widely available. Yet some, Catholic asylums in particular, cared for poor children into the 1950s and 1960s.

At a time when the American welfare state has failed to provide for all needy children, understanding our history in this area could be an important step toward correcting that failure.

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Editorial Review

Review

Hasci's deeply researched, well-written study overcomes the inherent defect of recent case studies of orphanages--their lack of representativeness--by surveying the entire range of institutions from 1800 to the Great Depression...Hasci's systematic, comprehensive, and concrete account of the institutions' functions, managerial style, funding, admission policies, daily routine, and treatment of children makes his book especially authoritative. Also of value is the author's identification of the long-term changes in the functions of asylums...[This is an] excellent overview of American childcare.

--E.W. Carp (*Choice*)

Hasci's well researched and well written account of the rise and decline of orphan asylums in America is essentially a heartfelt and subtle argument about the best ways in which a society can care for its dependent children. He has written the first full-length account of the development of orphan asylums from the early nineteenth century. A prodigious amount of research has found its way into this hook, and facts, opinion and argument are interwoven in a delicate and deftly nuanced study... This book is essential reading for those who wish to understand how current issues around child welfare have developed.

--Maria Luddy, *Social Policy*

Tim Hasci has produced a wise and humane account of a complex American social institution now all but forgotten, the orphanage. Deeply researched and clearly argued, *Second Home* reminds us of the sharp historical debates about how best to care for dependent children. This important book shows how we have so often failed to place the needs of children above the rhetoric. The rise and fall of the orphanage, described so impressively in *Second Home*, has critical implications for contemporary debates about poverty, child care, and child welfare.

--Wall M. Brandt (*Harvard University*)

"[*Second Home*] raise[s] important questions about American social welfare history... Hasci's major contribution is to demonstrate conclusively that asylums across time and space were primarily concerned with protecting children and preparing them for life rather than reforming them. As Hasci shows, almost all asylums shared the common goals of providing children with a secular education and moral values and making the institution feel like a 'second home.'

--Susan L. Porter (*Journal of American History*)

Second Home is an important synthesis of current literature on the history of the orphan asylum and should be considered a thorough introduction to the subject at this time. It is certainly important reading for those looking to the past for solutions to the present.

--Judith Dulberger (*Journal of Social History*)

[*Second Home*] raise[s] important questions about American social welfare history...The book discusses a wide variety of orphanages--religious and secular, public and private--and is based on published annual reports from eighteen orphan asylums and several state, national, and religious conferences; statistics gathered from earlier works on child welfare institutions and censuses; and other studies of orphan asylums. Hasci's major contribution is to demonstrate conclusively that asylums across time and space were primarily concerned with protecting children and preparing them for life rather than reforming them. As Hasci shows, almost all asylums shared the common goals of providing children with a secular education and moral values and making the institution feel like a 'second home.'

--Susan L. Porter (*Journal of American History*)

From a national perspective, Hasci examines the similarities and differences of orphanages over time and across different regions. He also compares orphanages sponsored by different religions and serving different ethnic and racial groups...Hasci seeks to set the record straight as to just what orphan asylums were like. In that sense, his book is invaluable.

--Judith A. Trolande (*North Carolina Historical Review*)

[An] excellent history of orphanages in the United States...Hasci's well researched and well written account of the rise and decline of orphan asylums in America is essentially a heartfelt and subtle argument about the best ways in which a society can care for its dependent children. He has written the first full-length account of the development of orphan asylums from the early nineteenth century. A prodigious amount of research has found its way into this book and facts, opinion and argument are interwoven in a delicate and deftly nuanced study...This book is essential reading for those who wish to understand how current issues around child welfare have developed. While it deals with American institutions, many of Hasci's insights are relevant to the development of childcare policies in European countries. Hasci argues that it is by addressing the causes of poverty rather than dealing with its causalities that the care of children can best be addressed. It is difficult to disagree with him.

--Maria Luddy (*Social Policy [UK]*)

The most thorough investigation of orphanages available to date. This book is packed with insights about funding, management, lengths of stay, corporal punishment, and many other issues.

--Kenneth Cmiel, author of *A Home of Another Kind: One Chicago Orphanage and the Tangle of Child Welfare*

Tim Hasci has produced a wise and humane account of a complex American social institution now all but forgotten, the orphanage. Deeply researched and clearly argued, *Second Home* reminds us of the sharp historical debates about how best to care for dependent children. This important book shows how we have so often failed to place the needs of children above the rhetoric. The rise and fall of the orphanage, described so impressively in *Second Home*, has critical implications for contemporary debates about poverty, child care, and child welfare.

--Allan M. Brandt, Harvard University

Second Home makes an original and significant contribution to the growing field of welfare history...Hasci's study is a pioneering work. It is based on a careful reading of a great body of secondary literature, and on critical research into a wide range of primary printed and manuscript records...Hasci writes clear, direct prose...His findings will inform the understanding of specialists in welfare history, add to the knowledge of social historians (whose fields may be women's, family, urban history), and be accessible to laypersons concerned with current issues of child welfare...His judgments are both subtle and balanced; they are firmly grounded on empirical evidence...Hasci sets forth the personal and human dimensions of the subject whether the actors are parents, agency boards, superintendents, social workers, organizers of private agencies or proponents of public policy, and the children themselves. He is sensitive to factors of gender, class, region, ethnicity, and religion. His descriptive analyses of orphans, half-orphans, of length of stay, of placement, and of underlying motives are all sound.

--Clarke A. Chambers, University of Minnesota

About the Author

Timothy A. Hasci is a Lecturer in the History Department at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

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