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AT HOME IN THE BRONX:

CHILDREN AT THE

NEW YORK CATHOLIC

PROTECTORY (1865-1938)

by Janet Butler Munch

Before the Parkchester housing complex was built in The Bronx, it was the site of the New York Catholic Protectory. The Protectory was created in 1863 as a home to care for destitute or truant children. The need for the Protectory grew out of the reality of thousands of vulnerable Catholic children wandering the streets of the city and fending for themselves. The Protectory was also established to counter the initiative of the Protestant-orientated Children's Aid Society that sent these city children West by "orphan trains." There they were placed in homes, with no regard for the religious faith into which the child was born. Outgrowing their original Manhattan quarters, the Protectory moved in 1865 to a large farm in what was then the village of West Chester (now The Bronx) where they expanded their work and greatly increased the number of children they could serve. Here were nurtured the physical, spiritual and intellectual needs of the "inmates" (boys and girls). Attention was given to both scholastic and industrial education so that children would learn useful skills in trades that could earn them employment upon leaving the Protectory. At one time the largest child welfare organization in the country, the Protectory's methods drew attention and study by others. Its leaders came to influence the emerging field of social work, and their voices carried weight in the development of national policy on the care of dependent children.

Factors Leading to Establishment of the Protectory

During the 19th century, American urban centers faced mass immigration of poor Europeans. Ireland's Great Famine (1845-1850) brought many escaping Irish to New York City only to contend with social dislocation, alienation and poverty. Nativists discriminated against the Irish and were openly anti-Catholic. Immigrant family life was precarious and
many lived in squalid conditions of unhealthful crowding, disease, want, inadequate diets, and abuse. It has been estimated that as many as 15,000 vagrant and destitute children lived just in New York City's Five Points neighborhood. Casualties of the American Civil War, too, left many fatherless children and widows. For those closest to the edge, war conditions exacerbated their instability and children even as young as five years of age were being arrested for vagrancy and truancy.

Many homeless children were placed in the county poorhouse on Randall's Island.

Native-born social reformer Charles Loring Brace (1826-1929) considered the Irish, then the largest group of city immigrants, to be "dangerous classes" of "bad blood" and "inferior stock." His Children's Aid Society fed, clothed and housed children who might otherwise have been left sleeping on the streets. Catholics, however, strongly objected to the Society's proselytizing shelters, Sunday schools and most especially their orphan train program, started in 1853, that placed poor children in the West to live with Protestant farm families. Many of these children were not orphans or even half-orphans, but the civil administrators of Poor Laws routinely invoked a limited "assumption of paternity" clause to terminate parental rights. This termination of parental rights undermined the family unit, directly threatening its economic survival. Complicating matters, the Children's Aid Society changed children's names, making it virtually impossible to trace them. The situation is perhaps best summarized in the following excerpt:

"...suppose these children differ from their benefactors in religion. Here a temptation arises to wean them from the faith of their parents. The temptation prevails. Steps are taken, in effecting this purpose, to place a bar between these children and their parent; to sever the precious tie which binds them to their parental heart and the parental influence. Concealment is first resorted to, a veil of secrecy is drawn over the proceeding, parental inquiries are baffled, the yearning of the mother are stilled by tales of wonderful advantages to her children and promises of their speedy restoration to her arms. Yet all this while they are undergoing a secret process by which, it is hoped, that every trace of their early faith and filial attachment will be rooted out; and finally, that their transportation to that indefinite region, "the far West," with changed names and lost parentage, will effectually destroy every association, which might revive in their hearts a love for the religion of which they have been robbed—the religion of their parents....What charity commenced, fanaticism has grossly perverted; or what we supposed charity, turns out to be only sectarian zeal."

New York's Archbishop John Hughes was aware of the difficulties of his fledgling diocese and the incursions of the Children's Aid Society partic-
ularly into Irish Catholic life. Of necessity, though, Hughes focused his limited resources on building: an archdiocesan infrastructure with a seminary to train priests; churches for worship; and parochial schools to inculcate the faith in reaction to overtly Protestant public schools. The Church had made limited forays into child care but Hughes knew that he needed the commitment and financial support of his laity to put a dent into the scale of the problem.

Who Will Lead?

An unlikely leader named Dr. Levi Stillman Ives (1787-1867) emerged to resist the Children's Aid Society's orphan train placements and deal directly with the needs of destitute Catholic children. The native-born Ives was married to the daughter of John Henry Hobart, the Episcopal rector of Trinity Church, then the largest and richest church in the country. An ordained minister himself, Ives served at one time as rector of St. Luke's Church in Greenwich Village—even doubling its congregation. He rose in the Episcopal hierarchy and became the second Bishop of North Carolina, where he served for twenty years. The Episcopal Church was shocked when Bishop Ives converted to Catholicism, went to Rome and was received into the faith by the Pope in 1852. Upon his later return to New York City, Ives taught Latin and Greek at Manhattan College and other Catholic institutions. He allied himself with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic layman's organization devoted to the poor. Along with his fellow Vincentians, Ives tried to place needy Catholic children in Catholic homes. When it became clear that there were too few homes available for placements, creating an institution specifically for destitute Catholic children became the goal. Ives approached Archbishop Hughes about establishing a protectory with an industrial school. Hughes had long wanted such an institution for children and encouraged Ives' plan, knowing that it would require significant financial pledges to succeed. As an experienced administrator, Ives studied the methods of the Children's Aid Society and persuaded Catholic lay leaders of the necessity of a protectory for Catholic children.

Organizational Charter

A committee of twenty-six influential men of Irish birth or ancestry (who were prominent city attorneys and judges, merchants, and Emigrant Bank trustees) was embarrassed by the plight of city children with whom they shared their ethnic heritage. They wanted to lend a hand and pledged financial support. Working with Ives, they drew up the "Articles of Organization of the Society for the Protection of Destitute Children." A sub-committee of the organization went to Albany to secure a charter, but faced stiff opposition. The legislators claimed that there were already ample institutions for children. Ives countered by expressing dissatisfaction with the supposed non-sectarian nature of childcare at municipal
institutions, where Protestantism was almost the official religion. Ultimately the charter was granted by the Legislature. No doubt the large number of registered Irish voters helped sway reluctant legislators who might have feared political repercussions from a negative vote.

On April 14, 1863, the Legislature granted the Protectory’s original charter under the initial organizational name the “Society for the Protection of Destitute Roman Catholic Children in the City of New York.” The charter legally allowed the Protectory to take and care for children:

— under 14 years entrusted for protection or reformation, in writing, by parents or guardians;
— between 7 and 14 years committed as idle, truant, vicious or homeless, by any NYC magistrate as empowered by law;
— those 7 to 14 years transferred to the Protectory by the N.Y.C. Commissioners of Public Charities and Correction.

The Protectory served children as young as age 1 1/2 and was later funded to care for the destitute up to age 16. Later changes in the law provided for continuation of industrial training up to 18 years.

Though the New York State Legislature granted the charter, it provided no funding for the Protectory. This was the responsibility of its Board of twenty-five men, who provided uncompensated lay management. Each Board member individually pledged various annual amounts up to $5,000 to get the institution started. Additionally, with the help of Archbishop Hughes, they secured commitments from two religious orders to carry out the daily work with the children. The Irish Christian Brothers would work with the Boy’s Department and the Sisters of Charity would work with the Girl’s Department. The Brothers and Sisters who cared for, and lived with the children considered their work a special calling or vocation, and they received no salaries.

From Small Beginnings—The Work Begins

The Society (renamed the New York Catholic Protectory in 1872) initially rented two houses on 36th and 37th streets and Second Avenue where they received boys from the courts or from the Commission of Public Charities and Correction. Under the Brothers’ guidance, the children were in school five days per week, seven hours per day. About 40 boys learned trades like shoe making and tailoring (which took longer to learn) and had English school five hours per day. Music, religious instruction, and open-air exercise in the yard connecting the two houses were also scheduled. Within five months, the shoe department was showing a profit but the Boy’s Department needed more space and relocated to East 86th Street near Fifth Avenue. The Girls Department, under the Sisters of Charity, was housed uptown at East 86th Street and Second Avenue and had an academic program similar to the boys. Between the Boy’s and Girls departments, 120 children were cared for in the first year.
Moving to West Chester and Funding

The Board of Managers was happy with its early initiatives, but felt that it would be better if the children were away from the temptations of the city and in a more healthful environment. Dr. Ives delivered a major lecture at Cooper Union on November 23, 1864 in which he spoke about the Protectory and solicited financial help from New York's Catholic community. By the next month, finding new quarters became an urgent need when a typhus epidemic struck. The Board of Managers searched all the islands in the East River and found them wanting.

That the Protectory was to be relocated to the The Bronx is in large measure due to Fr. Jeremiah A. Kinsella, then pastor of St. Raymond's Church. Fr. Kinsella wanted to see the Protectory established on the farm adjoining his church. His attorney friend John B. Haskin was managing this very property under the estate of the late William Varian. In 1865, the Board of Managers purchased the 114 acre property (which would grow to 160 acres) for $40,000; and all of the children were finally brought together on one property in the village of West Chester.

The State offered $50,000 to help construct a new boy's building with
the understanding that the Protectory would privately raise the balance needed. A separate building was planned for the girls and the $160,000 cost was raised primarily at a Great Charity Fair held at Union Square from May 16 to June 14, 1867, but also with contributions from individual Catholic parishes from around the city. While new buildings were under construction, the boys and girls were in temporary buildings on the farm.

No taxpayer monies were provided to the Protectory from 1863 to 1865. The Protectory's income for this period relied on subscriber contributions, donations, proceeds from trades, and non-mandated parental or guardian support. The Board of Managers requested reimbursement from the city and state for expenses related to the public function they provided and noted that they should be on equal footing with other child care institutions. They further indicated that since they did not pay salaries for the religious carrying out the Protectory mission, their costs were about half that of other institutions. By 1866, the Protectory started receiving $50 per capita for children sent by the courts or the Commissioner of Public Charities and Correction for work with delinquents.

What had the greatest impact on the Protectory, however, was the passage of what was commonly called the Children's Law of 1875. Sponsored by Protestant charity workers, this law made it unlawful to retain children over age 2 in poorhouses. Significantly, it had an amended "religious clause" requiring that children not placed with families of their faith, "be provided for in asylums ... operated by persons or officers of the same faith as the parents of the child." Protectory President Richard H. Clake, LL.D., was instrumental in having this clause amended to the law and it effectively guaranteed public funding for the childcare role played by Catholic and Jewish religious institutions. This system of funding religious institutions providing foster childcare became known as the "New York System," and was atypical in the rest of the country.

By 1878, the number of children annually served at the Protectory rose to 3,332, and daily averages remained in the 2,000-3,500 range throughout the century. From 1914 to 1925, the number of children served yearly ranged from 3,430 to 4,750, peaking at 5,397 in 1920. The Protectory had to remind justices of the illegality of not committing Catholic children to its care. In 1891, in fact, the Protectory sued for the transfer of two Catholic boys illegally placed at the House of Refuge and won in the State Supreme Court.

The Children's Law had the unintended consequence of swelling the number of children in institutionalized care and the Protectory became the largest childcare organization in the United States. It effectively served as a safety net for children and families in need. The goal was not long-term commitments for children but return to their families when conditions stabilized. In Habits of Compassion, Maureen Fitzgerald finds that the Catholic system was "an immense revolving door through which poor children were to enter when parents deemed their financial need to
be greatest and through which they would be returned when parents' financial struggles were less urgent.” She notes that in 1894 “three-quarters of the children in the Catholic Protectory...had been there for fewer than three years, and 82 percent of those who left that year were discharged to parents... and that by 1909...the average length of time any child spent in a Catholic institution was down to eighteen months.”

What Records Tell Us about the Children Sent to the Protectory

Each child admitted to the Protectory had a Resident Identification Card that provided details about their parents, prior residence, physical condition, and education—including religious instruction. If one or more siblings were at the Protectory, that was noted. The card also indicated why the child was committed and by whom—typically naming a specific judge and court. Supplemental documentation on the child might include fuller details about their specific home situation, academic progress, correspondence, physician’s report, or case manager recommendations made on the child’s discharge. A few cases give us insights on the child’s situation when taken into the Protectory:

—Reception #34105 was a destitute 5-year old girl. Both her parents were dead; her mother dying just two months earlier. The step-father could no longer care for her, or her sister, and the courts placed her at the Protectory in 1902. Five years later, she was sent on trial to live with an aunt.

—Reception #A.1166 was a destitute 8-year old boy. His father was temperate, but his mother was not. He and four other siblings were sent to the Protectory by Children’s Court in 1907. Because of his age he was assigned to the Girl’s Department Eighteen months later, he left the Protectory and was sent on trial to his mother.

—Reception #A.2359 was a 15-year old boy who had previously been in another asylum. Both his parents were dead and two older brothers were “somewhere out West,” whereabouts unknown. He kept bad company and would not work. The courts considered him destitute and sent him to the Protectory in 1908. Two years later, he was sent on trial to the Protectory’s St. Philip’s Home where he was helped in finding a job with a company in lower Manhattan. Within a month and gainfully employed, he left St. Philip’s and boarded with his married sister.

—State Board #26,126 was a special case of a 3-year old girl received as a boarder in 1909. Her father abandoned the family prior to her birth and her brother drowned the previous summer. Her mother was to be dispossessed by her landlord the next day. The parish priest intervened in this crisis on the mother’s behalf and she was asked to pay $10 per month to the Protectory when she secured employment. Ten months later, the situation stabilized and the girl was discharged to her mother.
—State Board #60755 was a 13-year old boy who was an habitual truant. He was expelled from parochial school, arrested for truancy and was placed on probation. The Children's Court of Renssalaer County committed him to the Protectory in 1929 and he was released to his mother ten months later. In 1931, he was caught robbing a store with three other boys; and all of them were sent to the Protectory by the court.

Daily Life at the Protectory

Children committed to the Protectory came through a house on Broome Street in lower Manhattan that served as a receiving station. As part of the intake procedure, they were fed, outfitted and examined by a physician. Children stayed at the house for at least 20 days to be sure they
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had no contagious diseases like typhus, cholera or tuberculosis. From Broome Street the children were typically brought up to the Protectory via the Harlem Line to the Tremont station and from there had a short ride to West Chester. The Sisters cared for all girls and boys less than ten years of age. The Brothers cared for the older boys.

The children slept in large, well-ventilated dormitories with a capacity of 200 per room. They rose between 5:30 and 6 A.M. daily and retired at 7 or 8 P.M., depending on their age. Weekdays revolved around industrial training (for most), school, religious instruction, recreation and meals.

Educating the Children

All children attended school in classrooms on the Protectory grounds. From its outset, the Protectory took a different approach to educating destitute and delinquent children than other charitable institutions and orphanages. It recognized the importance of character and spiritual formation and knew that those in its care needed to earn a living upon discharge, if they were to ultimately be self-supporting. So, in addition to providing religious training in the faith and a thorough grounding in elementary or common school subjects, practical training in mechanical or industrial areas was also emphasized.

Industrial Training

From Monday through Friday all boys, except those too young to work, trained for 4 1/2 hours in the industrial departments and attended school for an additional 5 hours daily. The machinery was full scale and not miniaturized or of a hobby shop variety. Children were motivated to work since they were paid. They had individual accounts for their earnings and were encouraged to be responsible and save. Industrial work was thought to steady the mind while also occupying the energies of the children. The great variety in industrial training options at the Protectory gave each child ample opportunity to match their interests and determine their aptitude.

In the Printing Room, for example, boys worked under experienced foremen who guided them in operating steam-power presses, stereotyping, typesetting, and proof reading. The department routinely handled the printing and binding of books, including textbooks, their own newsletter “Protectory News,” posters, programs and announcements. The boy’s work was of sufficient quality that the Protectory had contracts with large publishing houses to print books of fiction, natural history, etc. The Brothers carefully selected the types of jobs that were appropriate for the boys. One major printing job of 225,000 copies was a quarto on the cornerstone laying of the archdiocesan seminary.13

A comment on training of the student printers turned out by the Protectory was specially noted in a Letter to the Editor of The American Printer in 1913, saying:
You will find employed on the New York World today at least ten men holding permanent jobs who are graduates of this institution, and throughout New York City printing offices, scores of expert workmen, both compositors and pressmen, who owe their introduction to the trade to this grand old institution.14

Boys instructed in the Tailoring Department cut cloth, operated sewing machines or did hand sewing and repairs. All of the children's clothes were made on site including coats, Sunday suits, corduroy pants, day and night shirts, stockings, and even uniforms for the cadets who did military drills and the Protectory's marching band. The children did not wear uniforms but were outfitted in various styles, fabrics and colors. Other clothing items produced were sold to vendors. The boys also worked on table linens, aprons, sheets and towels.

The Shoemaking Department was the first successful trade instituted at the Protectory's original Manhattan location and continued to be a steady revenue source over the years.

The shop produced some 3,000 pairs of new shoes annually and about 20,000 shoes were repaired. A Box-Making Department handled the packaging of shoes.

The Catholic Protectory responded to trends and taught the most remunerative trades of the day. When fashion changed, for example, hoopskirt making was replaced with chair caning. Each year more industrial equipment was added for training purposes. The boys handled all maintenance work on the property including painting, carpentry, masonry, bricklaying, and electrical work.

An example of the quality of industrial work emanating from the Protectory can be seen in special mention made by the National Board of Fire Underwriters. The Board noted the fine work done by the boys of the Electrical Department when they repaired 40 arc lamps and 8,000 incandescent lamps for the Boy's and Girl's Departments, and re-wired the dining rooms, lavatories and chapel.15

Boys in the Carpentry Department had their own kit of tools (chisels, plane-irons, saws, carpenter's two-foot rule) and learned to cut openings for door jambs, complete casings, and make panel doors, lay floors, erect fences and replace stairways.

Those training in the Bricklaying Department learned to use the trowel, square, level, and plumb rule. They could distinguish various kinds of brick and mastered mixing and laying of concrete and mortar. The boys built walls, chimneys, fireplaces, gauged arches, cornices, panel moldings and concrete floors.

Other trades or skills taught at the Protectory included: blacksmithing, wheelwright, horseshoeing, wagon-making, machine work, gardening and farming. The boy's also manned the Laundry Department and helped in the Fire Company on the grounds. During an earlier 1872 fire in the top
two floors of the Girl's Building, there had been insufficient water in the area to quell the fire. The Protectory then had artesian wells built and maintained its own reservoir on the grounds. With a fire engine supplied by the city's Fire Department, the Protectory boys also helped fight fires for surrounding neighbors.

The Girl's Department also received industrial training, but not to the extent that the boys did. Their schedule was for 6 hours of industrial training and 2 hours of school daily, in addition to rotating housekeeping duties. The girls were trained in making shirts, dresses, kid and silk gloves, neckties, lace work, embroidery and bead work, fitting shoes, typewriting, stenography and telephone service. The Protectory secured the services of Miss Juliet Corson, founder of the New York School of Cookery (1876-1883), to teach twelve lessons in cooking and baking. Afterwards, the Sisters took over this instruction. The number of girls at the Protectory was much lower than boys, and was at various points in ratios ranging from 1:3 to 1:4, but typically 1:4.

Industrial products were used primarily at the Protectory or otherwise sold through their shop on Warren Street or by jobbers. By 1887 alone, over $431,000 was earned in the sale of products from the industrial classes. Not all departments generated profits every year, but those that did helped defray Protectory expenses and allowed for reinvestment in programs, materials and equipment for training.

**Expositions**

The quality of work coming out of the Boy's and Girl's industrial departments were displayed and praised in many expositions over the years, including: International Health Exposition (London) 1883; Columbian Exposition (Chicago) 1893; World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition (New Orleans) 1884-1885; Universal Exposition (Paris) 1900; Louisiana Purchase Exposition (St. Louis) 1905. Other displays of products produced at the Protectory were prepared for the Conference of State Charities, and the Comptroller of the City of New York.

**Visit to Tuskegee Institute**

In 1903, a delegation of Protectory officials attended the National Conference of Charities and Correction in Atlanta and displayed the children's work. On their return trip to New York, they made a side trip to nearby Alabama and visited the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial School. Though Booker T. Washington was absent, his elder brother, John H. Washington and the Institute's faculty received their guests and invited them to examine their agricultural and industrial training departments. The Protectory officials observed features at Tuskegee that might be adopted by some of the nation's foremost institutions. They noted the contrast between their two institutions. Tuskegee students were "all over 14
## DIETARY, BOYS' DEPARTMENT

### SUNDAY

**BREAKFAST**: Rolls or Raisin Bread, Butter, Coffee, Cup of Milk.

**DINNER**: Soup, Beef or Mutton, Potatoes, Lettuce, Bread, Coffee.

**SUPPER**: Syrup or Butter, Bread and Tea, Cup of Milk.

### MONDAY

**BREAKFAST**: Farina boiled in Milk, Bread and Coffee, Cup of Milk.

**DINNER**: Beef Stew or Frankfurters, Beans, Potatoes, Bread, Coffee.

**SUPPER**: Boiled Rice or Corn Starch, Bread and Tea, Cup of Milk.

### TUESDAY

**BREAKFAST**: Rolled Oats, Milk, Bread and Coffee, Cup of Milk.

**DINNER**: Soup, Corned Beef and Cabbage, or Bologna and Potatoes, Bread and Coffee.

**SUPPER**: Stewed Prunes or Rice, Bread and Tea, Cup of Milk.

### WEDNESDAY

**BREAKFAST**: Hominy boiled in Milk, Bread and Coffee, Cup of Milk.

**DINNER**: Lamb Stew, Potatoes, Bread and Coffee.

**SUPPER**: Stewed Apples or Cheese, Rye Bread and Tea, Cup of Milk.

### THURSDAY

**BREAKFAST**: Oatmeal and Milk, Bread and Coffee, Cup of Milk.

**DINNER**: Beef Stew or Roast, Potatoes, Bread and Coffee.

**SUPPER**: Rice, Rye Bread and Tea, Cup of Milk.

### FRIDAY

**BREAKFAST**: Water Rolls, Butter, Coffee, Cup of Milk.

**DINNER**: Soup, Boston Beans or Fish, Bread, Butter, Coffee.

**SUPPER**: Syrup, Bread and Tea, Cup of Milk.

### SATURDAY

**BREAKFAST**: Oatmeal, Milk, Bread, Butter, Coffee, Cup of Milk.

**DINNER**: Beef Stew, Potatoes, or Turnips, Bread and Coffee.

**SUPPER**: Hominy boiled in Milk, or Bologna, Bread, Butter, Tea, Cup of Milk.

### REMARKS

Vegetables in season are served at meals and fruits in season are given as dessert. Such articles as rice, hominy and rolled oats are prepared in milk. Tea and coffee are mixed with milk in the proportion of two to one.

New York Catholic Protectory, Boys' Menu.  

years of age, voluntary students paying tuition or giving labor for their support.” In contrast, Protectory inmates are “detained generally against their will and their residence is limited to a short period.”

### School Curriculum

In addition to their industrial training, the boys and girls had a relatively similar academic curriculum across their four divisions: The Primary Division (ages 5-7) included reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, cate-
chism and geography. The Grammar Division (ages 7-10) had the same classes but included mental & written arithmetic, and history. The First Division (ages 10-14) added sacred history, linear & object drawing. The Superior Division (ages 14+) added bookkeeping and higher mathematics.

Qualified Brothers and Sisters taught all of the school classes, except kindergarten, since the Board of Education supplied a teacher. Representatives of the local Board of Education tested children at the Protectory and their educational attainment met accepted standards.

Sports and Games

When the children were not in industrial classes or school, they had ample time every day to enjoy many recreational outlets on the extensive grounds. This included baseball games in which teams composed of "shoemakers" and "plumbers" might play against each other. Lawn tennis, roller- and ice-skating, kite flying, punching bags and chutes, swings and rings were other popular activities.

On Field Days, children participated in 100-yard dashes, or egg, stilt and hurdle races. Usually alumni came back for the fun as well. On Halloween, there would be an abundance of apples and peanuts; and good work in class would be rewarded with informal spreads and ice cream festivals.

September 24, 1923, marked the "greatest of all treats" for the Protectory boys who were visited by George Herman "Babe" Ruth, along with teammates "Jumping Joe" Dugan, Harry Heilmann, and Wally Pipp. Some 1,200 boys greeted the celebrities with cheers, loud applause, and great enthusiasm. After each of his teammates spoke, "Babe" counseled the boys to heed the "good Brothers" and "success would surely come their way." He also advised them against smoking if they were to make good ball players. Fifty letters written by the boys were given to the "Babe" and he promised to answer each one. He then presented two league baseballs to the "best all-round player" and the boy with the "best batting average of the season."

The Catholic Protectory Oval field was considered one of the finest in the area and many schools and colleges enjoyed this facility for competitive baseball games. The Protectory's own team, the Emeralds, was considered a leading amateur baseball team in the East. Even the New York Lincoln Giants, an all-black professional baseball team, used the Protectory Oval throughout the 1920s. When Olympic Field, the team's former home site in Harlem, closed in 1919, its bleachers and grandstand seats were transferred to Protectory Oval. Thousands turned out to watch the team play at Protectory Oval. The Protectory boys were among the team's most enthusiastic fans and were responsible for keeping the infield grass and stadium clean. To the enjoyment of the crowd, music was provided at intermission and even between Sunday's double-headers.
Music and Cultural Events

The children had extensive exposure to musical instruments and instruction. In addition to their industrial and academic courses, the well-known Protectory Band was considered almost professional and they were in demand at many patriotic, civic, social and religious affairs. The Band even marched in parades and regularly played at the annual closing of the New York State Legislature session. The Band was a favorite of Theodore Roosevelt and he invited them to play his favorite marching tune “Garry Owen” at his 1904 presidential inauguration in Washington, D.C. Patriotic holidays at the Protectory were always celebrated with music and singing in addition to dramatic sketches, dances and calisthenics. As a special treat, children might enjoy outings to local parks, the Van Nest Hippodrome, theaters, city museums and the circus.

In addition to speakers who might address the children, weekly evening public lectures, sponsored by the Board of Education, were held in the Protectory’s large Assembly Hall. Topics might include: the City of Washington; the Historic Hudson; Cowboy Life in the Far West; Personal Reminiscences of Appomattox; Song Birds; Halley’s Comet; U.S. Navy ships, or the Moki Indians.

Other Facilities

St. Philip’s Home for Working Boys was established by the Protectory in 1902. For boys leaving the Protectory who had no one to go home to, this Broome Street site helped ease the transition from a large institution to an independent life. Some 60-70 young men lived at the home at any one time. The Brothers who lived at St. Philip’s helped the boys with job placements, handling money, and even encouraging them in continuing their educations at places like the Mechanics Institute. Former Protectory boys who were out of work or temporarily homeless were welcome. Some 20–30 boys visited every Sunday to see the Brothers, use the library and gymnasium, or play billiards. Music and singing were also encouraged. The boys even had their own Athletic Association and visited the Protectory for annual Field Day events. At first, the Home was fully paid for by the Protectory, but this moved to 50% with the rest covered by the boys paying rent, and contributions of friends. The Protectory had a 32-acre estate in Inwood (northern Manhattan) on the former Dyckman Estate. The boys from St. Philip’s used the mansion there during the hot summer months and even swam in the Hudson River until the property was sold to Columbia University in 1922.

Among the Protectory’s proudest innovations was the establishment of a subsidiary institution called the Lincoln Agricultural School. Starting in 1907, the Protectory purchased several adjoining farms comprising nearly 600 acres in Somers Center, New York so that boys could learn the skills needed for placing out on farms. The property afforded a departure from
large congregate living and regimentation at the Protectory. Instead, the boys were housed in cottages in small groups of fifty each, with two Brothers in charge of each house. This system offered the boys a more home-like setting allowing for more individual attention.

Boys trained in all aspects of farming at Lincoln and their dairy farm and garden products provided a steady food supply throughout the Protectory. By canning and preserving seasonal fruits and vegetables in glass jars, the Protectory’s supplies could last through the winter months. In addition to truck farm products, Lincoln supplied surplus eggs, hams, bacon, and pork. In game season, Lincoln could supply quail, wood duck and mud hen; and in fishing season, there were always bass, frogs, pike and trout to catch. Cornell University certified Lincoln’s milk and it used the most advanced State standards. The boys heard lectures from leading agricultural experts who visited the property. Deliveries of milk and food were even sent from Lincoln for the St. Philip residents at the Dyckman Estate (until the property was sold to Columbia University).

Trends

By the early 1900s, land values were rising in The Bronx and the neighborhood around the Protectory was becoming more urbanized. To meet expenses, they started selling parcels of their acreage and began buying land in the Lincolndale area. The Protectory even considered selling its city property and consolidating its operation at Lincolndale.

By the mid-1920s, the Protectory was receiving less destitute children and more delinquents. Truants from school districts were committed from as far away as Albany. Since these children were at the Protectory for too short a time period, they were placed in a separate department and did not take part in industrial education. Officials were finding that up to 50% of arriving boys had been in other institutions for perhaps 2 to 5 times before their arrival at the Protectory. Some 40% were remanded children, who came back to the Protectory again and again, for just a few days to a few months.21 Realizing this, the Protectory encouraged the courts to have the child’s file on hand before sentencing. They were frustrated, too, that they did not have the child long enough to make a significant impact on reforming their behavior. The city allocated aftercare monies for follow up on delinquents and paroled boys and by 1928, the Protectory estimated that 65% of those that reached them did not get in trouble again.22

More attention was being given to the family situation, at this time, to avoid the need for placement at congregate institutions like the Protectory, which were out of favor by social workers. Mother’s pensions and later Aid to Dependent Families eased family financial situations and living conditions were improving. Centralized charity, too, was filling many social service needs.

The Protectory sent five staff members to get university training in
sociology and social services and hired caseworkers to counsel families and make pre-parole inquiries. Children placed in foster homes in the state were first given physical and mental exams by the Catholic Charities Guidance Institute to assist in proper placement and adjustment. Follow up by Protectory staff meant travel for personal on-site visits and correspondence several times a year, possibly communicating with the local pastor as well. Other aftercare issues were also addressed, e.g., employment, medical needs, school lunches, summer camp, and Home Relief especially during the Depression. The Catholic Guardian Society was responsible for children leaving the Protectory and their plan of treatment.

Closing and Re-definition

The Protectory was designed to handle twice its numbers but even with a diminished population of children, its operating expenses did not decline. Legislative prohibition on the sale of institutional products also cut a dependable Protectory revenue stream. The need and practicality of maintaining a large institution was clearly waning.

As the Protectory was reaching its closing years, Brother Michael, who
directed the Boy's Department eloquently, expressed the most essential mission of the Protectory when he wrote:

Despite the extreme need of many things that would increase the usefulness of our program, our fundamental purposes remain unchanged and bring us a gratifying modicum of success. We aim to kindle within the boy a spark of virtue; to imbue him with a sense of religious and social values, to recreate around him a fresh environment that will reclaim his ideals and lead him to a finer sense of living; to instill in him those attributes of character, which make for his independence and yet bring vividly to his mind the integral part he must play in the social scheme. To achieve these ends we rely fortunately, not upon equipment but on the precept and example of men."

Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. bought the 129-acre Catholic Protectory property on June 1, 1938 for $4,010,000 in order to construct the private housing development we know today as Parkchester.

The Protectory consulted with experts on what to do with some 1,200 children still in its care. It was decided to close the Girl's Department since there were other institutions able to care for them. The girls were either sent back to their own families, to foster care, or to other Catholic institutions. The boys' placements were more complicated and their department continued to operate on the grounds, under contract with Metropolitan, until April 1939.

The Trustees decided to recast their mission, working exclusively with problem boys ages 11-16. With the sale of their Bronx property, the Trustees were able to pay down debt, retain and completely upgrade their Lincolndale property with new buildings and renovations.

Many agencies, groups and individuals helped in the closing of the Protectory: Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, judges of the Children's Court, the New York City Welfare Department and various city and state departments. Columbia University sent two psychiatrists to evaluate the children and teams of specially appointed social workers studied each child's family situation. Those children not returning home, or going to foster care were placed in sixteen different institutions.

Over its 75 years of operation, the New York Catholic Protectory touched the lives of 141,000 children and their families, supporting and sustaining them in difficult times. Today, its successor, Lincoln Hall continues the Protectory's tradition in meeting the needs of troubled boys assigned by the courts. More recently, it has been working with the federal government in providing sanctuary for unaccompanied minor boys fleeing Central America, but not qualifying as refugees.
NOTES


4 "Address of Dr. Levi S. Ives, delivered at Cooper Union, Nov. 23, 1864." In: Third Annual Report of the New York Catholic Protectory to the Legislature of the State, and to the Common Council of the City. (West Chester, NY: The Protectory, 1866). pp.73-86.

5 It should be noted that the Protectory, like the Children's Aid Society, placed-out children from its earliest years. This was due to its inadequate funding and crowding before its facility was more fully developed. The Brothers and Sisters out of state were at odds with the Protectory Board over out-placements or apprenticeships, equating it with servitude. By 1883, placements stopped and the Board recognized that children should learn skills more appropriate to urban labor.


8 “An Act to Provide for the Better Care of Pauper and Destitute Children.” New York State Laws of 1875, Chapter 173.

9 Based on a tally of statistics reported in the New York Catholic Protectory Annual Reports from 1864-1938.


12 New York Catholic Protectory records for the children it served were microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah in 1992. These records are found under Lincoln Hall School (Lincolnndale, New York) which was the successor to the New York Catholic Protectory and can be made available at LDS (Latter Day Saints) Family History Centers. See https://familysearch.org/ The illustrative profiles given in this document were reviewed in film #1851263. This entire record group comprises 79 microfilm reels.
