

Relief of the Poor in Lancaster

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

ONE hundred and twenty-three years ago there was no "Welfare Federation," or other organized agency, in Lancaster existing for the purpose of collecting funds to be systematically used in the relief of the destitute and suffering of the borough. Although charity was dispensed with a liberal hand, it was done in an irregular manner. There was, doubtless, much suffering among the poor in those days, as there is at the present time. The winter of 1804-5 seems to have been an unusually severe one.

In *The Intelligencer and Weekly Advertiser* of Tuesday, January 29th, 1805, it was stated that a number of families in the borough were in distressed circumstances. The editor suggested that a town meeting be called in order to devise a plan for their immediate relief. "The sufferings of the poor," he wrote, "in this inclement season, call for the exertions of the humane."

On the evening of Wednesday, February 6th, 1805, a number of the citizens of the borough met at the house of Mr. John Whiteside, for the purpose of arranging for the immediate relief of the local poor. Samuel Humes was appointed chairman; and James Houston, secretary. A committee of eight citizens was appointed to call on the inhabitants to "solicit such donations in money or otherwise, as their humanity may dispose them to grant, for relieving the sufferings of the poor."

The committee consisted of the following:

	North-east Ward	
John P. Helfenstein		John M'Kissick
	South-east Ward	
Henry Pinkerton		Leonard Eicholtz
	South-west Ward	
George Brungard		Peter Getz
	North-west Ward	
William Dickson		George Musser

Another committee of eight was appointed for the purpose of distributing the monies received, to those who were destitute of fuel or other necessaries. They were also authorized to make "pecuniary grants, as in their discretion they may find most expedient."

This committee consisted of the following:

	North-east Ward	
William Bausman		Matthias Young
	South-east Ward	
John Messenkop		Emanuel Reigart
	South-west Ward	
Adam Wilhelm		Alexander Scott
	North-west Ward	
William Kirkpatrick		Casper Shaffner, junr.

The members of the Collecting Committee, while seeking contributions, were requested also to make inquiry relative to such persons as might be deemed suitable objects of relief. They were to report such names to the Distributing Committee; and also to pay to that committee all they received for the use of the poor.

In the event of refusal or inability on the part of any member of the two committees to give active service, each ward sub-committee was given power to fill any existing vacancy in its membership.

The committee appointed to distribute donations collected lost no time in becoming active. Six days after its appointment, a notice appeared in *The Intelligencer & Weekly Advertiser* of Tuesday, February 12th, 1805, stating that the committee wished to purchase a few cords of oak wood, agreeing to pay the market price upon its delivery to Mr. Emanuel Reigart, in South Queen street. This would also seem to indicate that the Committee on Collection had been successful in securing funds.

The younger men of the borough, emulating the fine spirit and good deeds of the older men, met at the house of Mr. John Whiteside on the evening of Saturday, February 9th, 1805, three days after the first meeting, for the purpose of taking into consideration the necessitous condition of the poor. William Boyd, Esq., was chosen chairman, and John Eberman, secretary. The chairman stated that the object of the meeting was to adopt such measures as would afford some relief to indigent widows, helpless orphans, and other persons in the borough, who were in great distress in consequence of the inclement season.

A committee, of two members, was appointed in each ward, to solicit donations for this purpose from the young men in the respective wards. The following were appointed:

	North-west Ward	
Benjamin Grimler		George Weaver
	South-west Ward	
Henry Reigart		Adam Forst
	South-east Ward	
Joseph Demuth		George Hubley
	North-east Ward	
John Long		Joseph Clendenin

The monies collected by the young men amounted to more than one hundred dollars—a large sum for those days. This amount was paid to George Musser, Jr., and by him was placed at the disposal of the Committee of Distribution appointed by the elderly citizens on February 6th.

In *The Intelligencer & Weekly Advertiser* of Tuesday, April 30th, 1805, appears a financial statement, showing the receipts and disbursements of Matthias Young, treasurer of the Distribution Committee. The statement is as follows:

	Dr.	
To cash received from North-east Ward		\$185.56
“ “ “ “ South-east Ward		75.01
“ “ “ “ North-west Ward		105.29
“ “ “ “ South-west Ward		50.29½
“ “ “ “ the Young Men in the Borough		104.21
To Donations of different Persons		8.08

\$528.44½

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By distributing, by orders of the Committee, among 91 persons in cash, \$16.50; bread, meat, meal, sugar, tea, coffee, and 14¾ cords of wood, etc., etc., amounting to	184.35½
Balance, deposited in the Bank	344.09
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	\$528.44½

The foregoing account was settled by the committee on April 26th, 1805.

New Holland Debating Society

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

THE "movies" and the radio mark a remarkable forward step in mechanical ingenuity and in furnishing means of entertainment and information; but, like the newspapers, while they serve to entertain for the time being, yet, for the most part, what is learned from them to-day is forgotten by to-morrow. The good old days of what Wordsworth calls "Plain living and high thinking," are no more,—the days of real application to study, of serious thought, of memorizing, of reading for the purpose of retention and profit; the evenings spent in the old school house in debating, reciting, spelling bees, in contests in geography and history and other forms of mental exercise, are, alas! no more, and, as a people, we are the losers.

A very interesting paper treasured by the Lancaster County Historical Society, recalls the good old times of which we have just spoken, when debating societies were an important and helpful part of the social life of communities, and by means of which many of our young people were taught to defend their opinions successfully in open discussion. This paper, yellow with age, and only forty years younger than our nation, contains the following information, which though brief, is full of interest:

"We, for the purpose of improving in the art of speaking, having thought it expedient to form ourselves into a society denominated the 'New Holland Debating Society,' do for the well regulating of said Society, promise to obey and conform to such rules as shall by us be agreed to, and in case of any transgressions pay such fines as shall thereby be incurred."

The paper is dated January 3rd, 1816, and is signed by the following: Th. Seeger, Mat. Shirk, William Diller, David Otenbruk, John Lightner, Richard Goshen, Samuel Diffenderfer, Solomon Diller, Wendell Holl, Isaac Winters, Peter Filbert, Henry Roland, Roland Diller, Samuel Diller, Hugh Thompson, Henry A. Martens. H. G. Weaver, Jno. Leaman, Jacob Diffenderfer, John Luther, David Shirk, Geo. Thompson, Joseph Jones.

The late Dr. Frank Reid Diffenderfer, a former President of the Lancaster County Historical Society, examined this paper on September 3rd, 1907. He made a note on it at that time that all the members were dead; that he had known, in his early boyhood, ten of them; and that twenty out of the twenty-three signers were of German descent.

Another note on the paper, signed by Roland Diller, August 6th, 1879, is as follows: "Members of Debating School in New Holland, January, 1816, now all dead excepting my brother, Solomon Diller, and myself."

Of the twenty-three signers, only two use a middle initial. As two of them were alive at least sixty-three years later, in all probability the members were quite young men (school boys, doubtless) at the time of organization.