

The Female Benevolent Society of Lancaster

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

IN the Proceedings of The Lancaster County Historical Society for December, 1907, Vol. XI, pp. 363-421, appears an interesting article, prepared by the late Mrs. James D. Landis, on the Female Benevolent Society of Lancaster.¹ It contained brief biographical sketches of the members of this most worthy organization at the time of its inception in September, 1816. Since the publication of this paper, my attention has been called to several items in old local newspapers which refer to the noble and self-sacrificing work accomplished by this fine charitable undertaking. I have felt that it might be well to preserve this information in our Proceedings and thus keep alive the memory of the holy devotion of a band of consecrated women who labored for the needy of our city more than a century ago, and whose self-denying service is worthy of the highest imitation.

A writer in the Lancaster Journal of Wednesday, November 6th, 1816, in referring to the work of the Society, stated:

"Few associations have had long continuance in Lancaster. It would be difficult to assign the reason; 'tis nevertheless most true. We hope, however, that the first instance of unanimity and perseverance in a pursuit so laudable has been peculiarly reserved for the honor of the ladies."

The first annual meeting of the Society was held in Judge Franklin's chambers, in the court house, on Thursday, September 18th, 1817, when trustees were chosen for the ensuing six months.²

The Lancaster Journal of Friday, March 13th, 1818, contained the second report of the Society, as follows:

"Since the Society was established (a period of 18 months) for the last 12 months we have received the following donations, for which we return our sincere thanks:

"From Mr. Breslow,	\$ 16.00
" John Stoner,	5.00
" Molton C. Rogers,	10.00
" John Reynolds,	10.00
" Samuel D. Orrick,	4.00
" Henry Y. Slaymaker,	4.00
" Gerardus Clarkson,	5.00
" Thomas Wentz,	3.00
" Henry Slaymaker,	5.00
" Daniel Moore,	5.00
" William Montgomery, Jr.,	5.00
" William M. Sample,	5.00
" George Louis Mayer,	5.00
" Jacob Mayer,	5.00
" James Humes,	10.00

and some of them are in want of the necessaries of life. These wants have arisen from various causes, some of which may be justly attributed to their own imprudence or bad conduct. Vicious practices should be discountenanced; but even the vicious must not be permitted to starve in a country where many of the inhabitants are blessed with plenty of the necessaries and comforts of life.

“At this inclement season there are many families in the city of Lancaster who feel the want of both food and raiment, and who must have their sufferings increased unless relieved by charity.

“The inhabitants of the city and its vicinity, who have the means and feel disposed to mitigate the wants of their fellow creatures, are respectfully requested to send to the dwelling house of Mr. Samuel Slaymaker, in Orange street, any articles which may be used at this season of the year in giving comfort and support to the indigent poor; such as wheat, rye, and Indian corn meal; old clothes, firewood, flax, potatoes, etc.

“The articles received will be distributed under the direction of the ‘Female Benevolent Society of Lancaster,’ who, in order to prevent imposition, will make every possible inquiry into the situation and character of individuals of families before any assistance is afforded them.”

In the *Intelligencer & Weekly Advertiser* of Saturday, April 8th, 1820, appeared a report of the good work accomplished by this Society. It is as follows:

“Although the Society commenced the winter with rather gloomy prospects, in consequence of the small amount in the hands of the treasurer, and the general complaint of hard times, yet the liberality of some of the citizens who still remember the poor soon dispelled the cloud, and caused the members to go on their way rejoicing, and filled their hearts with gratitude to the Great Giver for making them the humble means of distributing a share of His bounty.

“The Society has not been able, this year, to procure as much flax and tow as it wished; and, therefore, has not had it in its power to give employment to many who were desirous of it. The want of which is a subject of general complaint among the poor of this city in the winter season.

“Many idle children are permitted to roam the streets, and solicit charity, a practice which this Society thinks ought to be discouraged; and sincerely regrets that a stop cannot be put to so great an evil. Some of these children, it is said, are in the habit of selling cold provision which they collect; and it is therefore suggested, whether, as it would be hard to refuse to children who ask for it, it would not be better, when they are not known, to let

them present and eat it, than to permit them to carry it away and dispose of it in the manner which has been intimated.

"The Society begs the persons hereinafter mentioned, individually, to accept of its sincere thanks for their several donations; all of which have been received since its last report.

"The Society has received the following donations:

"Valentine Hoffman,	4 bushels	potatoes
	3	" wheat
William Webb,	7	" rye
	7	" corn
Mr. Brubaker,	70	" wheat four
Wm. & Abraham Gibbons,	6	" Indian meal
	4	" potatoes
	21 lbs.	bacon
Mr. Glonninger,	1½ bushels	Indian meal
	1	" potatoes
Abraham Brubaker,	2	" wheat
	2	" potatoes
Jacob Miller (Conestoga),	1 load	wood
	2 bushels	potatoes
William Dickson,	30	lbs. bacon
John Keasy,	2 bushels	wheat
Samuel Humes,	3	" "
Adam Reigart,	6	" rye
	6	" corn
Benjamin Brubaker,	2	" corn
	1	" potatoes
Abraham Miller,	1 cwt.	rye flour
Peter Bauchman,	2 cwt.	wheat flour
John Risdle,	1 barrel	shad

DONATIONS IN CASH.

"Received from Thespian Society,	\$ 67.37
" " William Webb,	10.00
" " Valentine Hoffman,	5.00
" " Henry Slaymaker,	10.00
" " John Hubley,	10.00
" " William Gibbons,	2.00
" " Fines of members,	20.12
28 yds, tow linen sold,	12.25
45½ doz. yards sold,	11.05
Balance of cash in hands of treasurer from last year,	24.36
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	\$172.15

EXPENDITURES.

"Cash paid for wood,	\$ 14.00
" " " coffee,	2.19
" " " flour,	2.08
" " " tea,	2.56
" " " sugar,	2.38

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“ “ “ coffee,	2.19
“ “ “ flour,	2.08
“ “ “ tea,	2.56
“ “ “ sugar,	2.38

Flannel, muslin, tape, thread, etc.,	56.06
Flax and spinning,	8.98

\$ 88.25

Balance in hands of treasurer,\$ 83.90”

In the Intelligencer and Weekly Advertiser of Saturday, April 28th, 1821, appeared a statement of the Society, as follows:

“The following is a statement of the receipts and expenditures of the Female Benevolent Society of Lancaster for the last year, ending March 12th, 1821. While the Society regrets that its means of relief have been so limited compared with the necessities of the poor, it returns grateful acknowledgments to all those who have favored it with a portion of their liberality.

DONATIONS.

“By Robert Coleman, Esq.,	15 bushels	wheat
“ Adam Reigart, Esq.,	9 “	wheat
	6 “	corn

IN CASH.

“Received from a collection held at the Presbyterian church,.....	\$ 36.03
Mrs. Robert Coleman,	10.00
“ John Hubley,	5.00
“ George Hoff,	1.00
“ Frederick Heinitsh,	1.00
Miss Catharine Hager,	1.00
“ Louisa Hager,	1.00
William Gibbons,	5.00
Cash received for 25 yards linen,	11.00
Fines of members,	30.62½
Balance of cash in hands of treasurer from last year,	83.90
	<u>\$185.55½</u>

EXPENDITURES.

“For wood, coffee, tea, sugar, flour, flannel, muslin, cloth, tape, thread, flax, and spinning, to the amount of.....	\$155.21
“Balance in hands of treasurer,	\$ 30.34

“The Society has during the winter made into different articles of clothing, 128 yards of flannel, 30 yards domestic gingham, and 30 yards domestic muslin.

“LYDIA REYNOLDS, *Sec'y.*”

The Lancaster Journal of Friday, November 2nd, 1821, contained the following:

“The Female Benevolent Society acknowledges the receipt of seven dollars within the last week, five from the hands of a former contributor and two from an anonymous friend, through the

medium of the post office, for both of which it returns its sincere thanks.

“At a time like the present, when we are surrounded with so much sickness and distress and such repeated applications are made to the charitable citizens, the Society felt a delicacy in obtruding itself upon the notice of the public, and it almost began to despair of being able to provide any flannel or wood for the approaching winter, but this little sum has brightened its prospects and given it fresh hopes, as it finds the benevolent have not forgotten it, but are still willing to cherish a society whose object it is to seek out the truly necessitous and prevent imposition.”

In the Lancaster Journal of Friday, April 26th, 1822, appeared a statement of the receipts and expenditures of the Society for the year ending March 12th, 1822. It is as follows:

DONATIONS IN CLOTHING.

“Mr. Henry Y. Slaymaker,	7 yards of coating
Mrs. Ellmaker,	13 pieces of infants' clothing
Miss Hester Fearass,	16 “ “ “ “

DONATIONS IN CASH.

“Mr. William Webb,	\$ 15.10
“ William Dickson,	5.00
“ Jacob K. Garber,	6.00
Mrs. Jennet Cunningham,	3.00
“ Forrester,	1.00
“ Ashmead,	1.00
Cash received from unknown persons,	13.00
“ “ “ 6 lbs. flax,	1.50
“ “ “ 18 doz. yarn,	4.38
“ “ “ sundry articles sold at vendue,	6.35
“ “ “ fines of members,	51.12½
Cash in hands of treasurer from last year,	30.34
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	\$137.79½

EXPENDITURES.

“Paid for wood, tea, sugar, flour, flannel, muslin, etc.,	\$108.72
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\$ \$29.07½”

During the winter members of the Society made into different articles of clothing 118½ yards of flannel and 51½ yards of domestic and cambric muslin. The report was signed by Mary Hubley, treasurer, and Ann Ross, secretary.

What was probably the last appeal made by the Society appeared in the Lancaster Journal of Friday, January 10th, 1823, as follows:

"The Female Benevolent Society of Lancaster earnestly requests those ladies whose fines are in arrears to send the amount of their respective bills to the treasurer, as the funds of the Society are exhausted, and the distressed situation of many of the poor at this inclement season, call for all the assistance in its power to bestow. It also takes this opportunity of tendering its thanks to its former benefactors, and soliciting a continuance of their patronage — remembering that 'those who give to the poor lend to the Lord'. It has left a subscription paper at the bar rooms of Mr. Slough and Mr. Slaymaker, where any donations for the Society will be thankfully received."

It is assumed that the Society passed out of existence shortly after, as no references to its good work, or any appeals for funds, appear in the local papers after this date.

It would be interesting to know for what the fines were imposed, as during the brief existence of the Society they amounted to more than \$243.00; and in the last appeal just quoted above, to "those ladies whose fines are in arrears," it is stated that should these fines be paid, "the distressed situation of many of the poor" would be relieved. This would seem to indicate that many of the fines were still unpaid.

It is also interesting to note in the last paragraph quoted above, that the subscription papers, seeking for more funds for the work, were left in the "bar rooms" of taverns.

¹ The article was published under the title "Who Was Who in Lancaster One Hundred Years Ago."

² Lancaster Journal, Friday, September 12th, 1817.

³ This is a typographical error. The Lancaster Journal of Wednesday, March 26th, 1817, in presenting the first report of the organization, stated that "the Society was established for a period now of six months, etc." This indicates that it was founded in September, 1816.

Location of James Buchanan's Law Office

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

The Lancaster Journal of Thursday, February 18th, 1813, contained the following announcement:

"James Buchanan, having completed the study of law under the direction of James Hopkins, Esq., intends practising in this borough. He has taken an office in East King street, two doors above Mr. Duchman's inn, and nearly opposite to the Farmers bank."

Author: Worner, William Frederic.

Title: The Female Benevolent Society of Lancaster / by William Frederic Worner.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Female Benevolent Society of Lancaster.
Charity organization.
Poor--Services for--Pennsylvania--Lancaster County
--History.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1930

Description: [11]-18 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 34,
no. 1

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.34

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

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Institution Name
Institution Address
Institution Phone Number
Institution E-mail Address