

“Halt, Blind, Lame, Sick, and Lazy”: Care of the Poor in Cedar County, Iowa, 1857–1890

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AMERICA, according to the nineteenth-century ideal, was the land of opportunity. There was a job for every man and, if he worked hard, prosperity followed. With thrift and frugality, he and his wife saved money for their later years and, if no longer able to live independently, they moved in with their children to live out their lives. Failure to achieve economic security was a personal shortcoming and a sign of moral laxity.¹ This ideal of

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1. Historians have placed the roots of these ideas in early capitalism. According to Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York, 1989), 7, the “culture of capitalism” measured a person by his ability to produce wealth; and the failure to prosper, or at least contribute to the overall economy, resulted in “moral condemnation.” According to Paul G. Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution, Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780–1860* (Albany, NY, 1981), chap. 6, the Second Great Awakening, the growth of manufacturing, and the Victorian moral code merged to bolster capitalism by emphasizing “self-discipline, industry, sobriety, self-denial, and respect for authority” while condemning “idleness and leisure, lewd and lascivious behavior, self-indulgence and prolonged celebrations.”

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self-reliance, home, and family failed to acknowledge that many Americans in the nineteenth century lived on the thin line between getting by and needing assistance.

In Cedar County, Iowa, the economic hardships experienced by Edwin and Sarah Lane exemplify the fragile boundary between independence and dependence in the rural Midwest. In the 1840s the Lanes moved into the Pedee settlement, planted roots in the community by buying land, and settled in to farm and raise their son, Evan.² Like millions of others, the Lane family carved out their small portion of the American dream, but the ideal crumbled in the face of life's problems. In the 1870s Edwin developed catarrhal consumption (tuberculosis). When he and Sarah needed assistance, the county government granted them a small monthly allowance. After Mr. Lane died, Mrs. Lane, an elderly widow and a longtime member of the community whose poverty came through no fault of her own, seemed to qualify for the status of "deserving." Yet the county discontinued the relief. Although she could no longer get by on her own, Mrs. Lane did not move in with Evan and his family, who lived nearby. On March 28, 1885, Sarah Lane, age 69, in "good health" and with "no home," entered the Cedar County poorhouse and lived there until her death five years later.³ For many people, like the Lanes, unforeseen troubles, such as of loss of employment, death of a spouse, illness, disability, or a myriad of other reasons left them as victims of the myth of abundance. In need of assistance and with family either unable or unwilling to help, poor individuals turned to local government for relief.

The details of Sarah and Edwin's economic difficulties illustrate the value of case studies for understanding the ways county

2. In accordance with a data use agreement with the Cedar County Board of Supervisors, the names of individuals that appear in the Poor House Register, except for the steward, are pseudonyms. All others are real names. I am grateful to the board of supervisors for access to the Poor House Register for the purpose of historical research.

3. The data on the Lane family was compiled from Proceedings of the Cedar County Board of Supervisors, Cedar County Courthouse, Tipton, Iowa, 1875–1883 (hereafter cited as Proceedings); Poor House Register, Cedar County Courthouse, Tipton, Iowa, p. 12 (the register covers the years 1873 to 1916); *Seventh Census of the United States in 1850* (Washington, DC, 1853); and *Tenth Census of the United States in 1880* (Washington, DC, 1883).

governments provided care and relief for the needy in their midst. Much of the historiography takes the top-down view by focusing on policy, poor laws, and reformers, thus telling us how poor relief was supposed to work but very little of how it really worked.⁴ The administration and distribution of poor relief is a local story documented in local records of how local relief officials met their obligations to neighbors and strangers while managing the expenses of relief. This case study of Cedar County, Iowa, benefits from rich local records: the Cedar County Poor House Register, the Proceedings of the Cedar County Board of Supervisors, the *Tipton Advertiser* (the newspaper in the county seat), deed records, probate and guardianship records, and the manuscript federal census. Other studies have used similar sources, but the population of this rural county is of a manageable enough size to allow individuals to be tracked through the records, and so to uncover how individuals moved between self-sufficiency and dependency, on and off outdoor relief, and in and out of the poorhouse.⁵

While the voices of the poor remained virtually silent, the voices of reformers rang loud and clear in blaming the idle, thriftless, alcoholic poor for their poverty. Throughout the nineteenth century, as reformers repeatedly attacked the govern-

4. David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston, 1971); James Leiby, *A History of Social Welfare and Social Work in the United States* (New York, 1978); Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston, 1988). For a more nuanced analysis, see Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (Boston, 1986). For poor laws in midwestern states, see John L. Gillin, *History of Poor Relief Legislation in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1914); Sophonista Breckinridge, *The Illinois Poor Law and Its Administration* (Chicago, 1939); Alice Shaffer, Mary Wysor Keefer, and Sophonista Breckinridge, *The Indiana Poor Law: Its Development and Administration, with Special Reference to the Provisions of State Care for the Sick Poor* (Chicago, 1936); Aileen Elizabeth Kennedy, *The Ohio Poor Law and Its Administration* (Chicago, 1934); Isabel Campbell Bruce and Edith Eickhoff, *The Michigan Poor Law: Its Development and Administration with Special Reference to State Provision for Medical Care of the Indigent* (Chicago, 1936).

5. In 1870 Cedar County was a rural county with 54 businesses and 2,299 farms. *Ninth Census of the United States in 1870*, 3 vols. (Washington, DC, 1872), 3:515, 351. The first white settlers moved into the county in the 1830s, and the population grew steadily until it peaked in 1870 at 19,731. *Iowa Historical and Comparative Census, 1836–1880* (Des Moines, 1883), 449; *Eleventh Census of the United States in 1890*, 25 vols. (Washington, DC, 1895), 1:130.

ment assistance given to individuals and families in their homes, or outdoor relief, as a disincentive to work, the provision of relief in government-run poorhouses, or indoor relief, remained the mainstay of poor relief. Even though reformers wrote disparaging reports on the conditions within poorhouses, there was no widespread support to close them.⁶ Reformers maintained their belief that the system of relief centered on the poorhouse and directed their criticisms at the overseers who, in their view, failed to effectively and efficiently administer the relief through the enforcement of labor requirements and the proper categorization of the poor.⁷ At national conferences, reformers presented the problems of poverty as sweeping generalizations that reveal very little about the individual experience of need. The experiences of individuals pieced together from the Cedar County records and documents challenge the notion that poor individuals could be neatly labeled and treated according to set rules. The rigid categories of “deserving” and “undeserving” and the pejorative labels of “vicious” and “social defect” used by reformers break down in the complexities of need and the individual circumstances of poverty.

Pragmatism rather than ideals governed local relief. Local studies peel away the layers of rhetoric and theoretical discussions of morals and discipline to examine relief at the point of administration and distribution. Such studies have revealed that local relief practices often did not match the intention of state poor laws or the rehabilitation ideals of reformers. Local officials neglected to enforce labor requirements on poorhouse residents who were either unwilling or unable to comply. Rehabilitation took time and money, and local officials had little incentive to expend either on reforming the poor.⁸

6. Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*, 204–5. By 1890, 85 of Iowa’s 99 counties had a poorhouse. *Census Bulletin: Paupers in Almshouses in 1890* (Washington, DC, 1891), 10 (microfiche).

7. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 28–32; Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*, 192–93.

8. See, for example, Glenn C. Altschuler and Jan M. Saltzgaber, “Clearinghouse for Paupers: The Poorfarm of Seneca County, New York, 1830–1860,” *Journal of Social History* 17 (1984), 573–600; idem, “The Limits of Responsibility: Social Welfare and Local Government in Seneca County, New York, 1860–1875,” *Journal of Social History* 21 (1988), 515–37; Priscilla Ferguson Clement, *Welfare and the Poor in*

This study furthers this theme. Cedar County officials sought to balance their legal obligation to provide adequate care to the poor and their obligation to local taxpayers for budgetary restraint, thereby concentrating their efforts on limiting expenses rather than achieving reform. Because this study covers both the poorhouse and support for the poor outside the poorhouse and includes data about the care of the disabled and insane in the home, as detailed in local census schedules, moreover, it reveals networks of social support available in a nineteenth-century rural county.

Care in the Home

The image of the poorhouse, the insane asylum, and the institutions for the “defectives” of American society as a dumping place for the dangerous, the unproductive, and the unwanted has obscured the vital role of the family.⁹ Institutions generated records, and scholars have used them to put the institution at the center of their studies. With a move toward a more bottom-up view, historians have examined institutional records from a new perspective in order to locate the role of the family.¹⁰ As institutions opened, families did not rush to commit their mentally and physically disabled family members. Rather, they continued to care for them at home and turned to institutional care only as a last resort. Institutions were not dumping places that hid problematic populations behind the walls of government-

the Nineteenth Century City: Philadelphia, 1800–1854 (Rutherford, NJ, 1985); Simon E. Newman, *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 2003); David Wagner, *The Poorhouse: America’s Forgotten Institution* (Lanham, MD, 2005); Monique Bourque, “The Creation of the Almshouse: Institutions as Solutions to the Problems of Poverty,” *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 102 (2000), 56–81; Eric H. Monkton, *The Dangerous Class: Crime and Poverty in Columbus, Ohio, 1860–1885* (Cambridge, MA, 1975), chap. 5.

9. In this essay, I use the nineteenth-century terms *feeble-minded*, *idiot*, and *imbecile*. Although these words today are offensive, in the context of the time they were the accepted terminology. See James W. Trent Jr., *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley, CA, 1994), 5.

10. Akihito Suzuki, *Madness at Home: The Psychiatrist, The Patient, and the Family in England, 1820–1860* (Berkeley, CA, 2006); David Wright, *Mental Disability in Victorian England: The Earlswood Asylum, 1847–1901* (Oxford, 2001); Nancy Tomes, *A Generous Confidence: Thomas Story Kirkbride and the Art of Asylum-Keeping, 1840–1883* (Cambridge, 1984), chap. 3.

supported buildings and away from “normal” citizens; nor did they replace family care.

In Cedar County, the institutional records from the poor-house reveal only one portion of the provision of care in this rural county. Data from the *Report on the Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes of the United States* (volume 21 of the 1880 federal census) and the Cedar County probate records uncover the role of family care.¹¹ At first glance, the published report of the special census seems a rather typical collection of tables, but the introductory remarks to the volume by Frederick Wines, the special agent in charge of the special census, make it clear that these were not merely statistics. One of the aims of this census was “to obtain approximately as complete an enumeration of defectives outside of institutions as of the inmates of such institutions.”¹² In addition to the general population schedule, the local enumerator documented the information about individuals in these classes on seven supplemental schedules: four for the defectives classes of insane, idiots, blind, and deaf-mutes; two for the dependent classes of paupers and homeless children; and one for the delinquent class of prisoners. Beyond an accurate accounting of each class, Wines hoped that his report made available the data needed to affect public policy. “For the information of legislatures it is important that the whole extent of the evil to be contended against shall be known, and that it shall be

11. The aggregate numbers in the published volume are larger than the numbers tabulated from the available schedules from the county. Of the 17 townships, only six have all seven schedules. The paupers, prisoners, and homeless children schedules are missing for nine townships. Two townships are missing all seven schedules. Either the missing data is on the schedules omitted from the microfilm, or the information came from local physicians. The census office sent a blank form to physicians requesting information, and those forms were used in addition to the schedules to compile the numbers. Microfilm copies of the schedules for Cedar County are located at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City. *Report on the Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes of the United States as Returned at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)* (Washington, DC, 1888), issued as volume 21 of the Tenth Census. For the policy issues and social science motives behind the special census, see the chapter “The Morphology of Evil,” in Michael B. Katz, *Poverty and Policy in American History* (New York, 1983), 134–56. For a discussion of the emergence of social statistics during the Gilded Age, see Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven, CT, 1988), chap. 4.

12. *Report on the Defective, Dependent and Delinquent Classes*, ix.

TABLE 1
 "DEFECTIVES" AND DEPENDENTS IN THE 1880 FEDERAL CENSUS

Poorhouse ^a	Family Care ^b	State Institutions ^c
12 paupers	10 paupers	
3 insane	27 insane	11 insane
3 idiots	36 idiots	3 idiots
2 deaf and dumb	18 deaf and dumb	2 deaf
2 blind	24 blind	3 blind
2 old age		
2 crippled		

SOURCES: *Defective, Dependent and Delinquent Census, Cedar County, Iowa*; *Defective, Dependent and Delinquent Census, Pottawattamie County, Iowa*.

^aTwelve individuals resided at the poorhouse in the 1880 federal census. All 12 were paupers; the form of disability appears in this column as documented on the pauper schedule of the special census. Some individuals are in more than one category.

^bThe numbers for the paupers and the deaf and dumb were compiled from the township supplemental schedules. Aggregate numbers for the insane, idiots, and blind were in the published special census.

^cThe number of deaf individuals was compiled from the township schedule for the deaf school in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

accessible in a single report, in order that they may make adequate provision for its care or alleviation."¹³ The report's value for this local study is that the supplemental schedules of the special census gathered the "defectives" and "dependents" into one source (rather than having to search through hundreds of census pages). With the 1880 federal census listing only 12 residents at the poorhouse and 19 individuals at state institutions in comparison to 115 individuals receiving care within the family (see table 1), the poorhouse was certainly not a dumping place for the county's "defectives." The primary site of care was still the home.

Family care in the home could span decades and cross generations. Daniel Seitzinger, for example, crafted his will with the intention that his 78 acres of farmland, which included the homestead, would provide lifelong income for those of his children he realized could never provide for themselves.¹⁴ Mary Jane and

13. *Ibid.*, x.

14. Daniel and Mary Seitzinger had nine children living in Cedar County: Rebecca, Hester, Edward, Jacob, Lavina, David, Ream, Mary Jane, and Ellen, ages 56, 52, 49, 48, 46, 45, 41, 37, and 30, respectively, in 1870. The ages are a best es-

Ellen, who never married, received 38 acres of land; Lavina, David, and Ream, who were classified as feeble-minded, received 40 acres. Their father provided a house and an income, but he made no provisions for their day-to-day care. The family identified Lavina, David, and Ream as mentally disabled throughout their lives; the mental abilities of Mary Jane and Ellen were less clear. In 1871, after both parents had died, Hester, their older sister who had been living with a family in another township, moved home. She either had a verbal agreement with her parents to accept the responsibility or, after the death of their parents, the four older, independent siblings (Rebecca, Hester, Edward, and Jacob) decided that Mary Jane and Ellen were not capable of independent living and someone needed to look after all of the five younger siblings. Until her death in the early 1890s, Hester provided day-to-day care for her siblings in their family home.¹⁵

After Hester's death, care moved out of the family sphere, and the income from the land no longer provided sufficient funds to cover expenses. By 1894, Lavina, David, and Ream had died, and Mary Jane and Ellen then divided all 78 acres of land for their support.¹⁶ After Edward's death in 1897, family discord and the ensuing legal battles over the rightful ownership of a portion of Mary Jane's land resulted in Mary Jane and Ellen being deemed of "unsound mind" and unable to transact their own business. In 1898 the court appointed Jacob as guardian over Mary Jane and Ellen in order to preserve their land and income. Jacob negotiated arrangements for the care of his sisters

imate compiled from the 1850 federal census, *Eighth Census of the United States in 1860* (Washington, DC, 1864); *Ninth Census of the United States*; Probate File 959, Probate and Guardianship Records, Cedar County Courthouse, Tipton, Iowa (hereafter cited as Probate File); and a Seitzinger family tree at [trees.ancestry.com/owt/person.aspx?pid42480231&st=1](https://www.ancestry.com/owt/person.aspx?pid42480231&st=1) (last accessed 9/25/2008). Rebecca, Edward, and Jacob were married; Hester, Mary Jane, and Ellen were not. The family identified Lavina, David, and Ream as either idiotic or insane in the 1850, 1860, and 1870 censuses. In the special census in 1880, David and Ream appeared on the individual schedule for idiots. Although no death or grave record exists, Lavina, by her absence in the 1880 census, presumably had died.

15. Compiled from Probate File 700; Probate File 2697; Deed Record, Book X, p. 559, Cedar County Courthouse, Tipton; and *Ninth Census of the United States*.

16. When Lavina, David, and Ream died, the land went to Jacob. He deeded the land to Mary Jane. Deed Record, Book 30, p. 148.

with William and Mary Tevus, a couple who lived in the Seitzinger neighborhood.¹⁷ When Mary Jane died in 1904 at age 70, Jacob, as guardian, had paid \$638.62 out of his own funds for her day-to-day care, legal expenses during the land dispute, maintenance on the farm, taxes, funeral expenses, and doctor's bills. Rather than lament the expenditure of this rather large sum of money, he stated in his final report to the court that "his ward has been a great care and worriment to him and that he has never received any compensation for his services, neither has he charged anything; he feeling under obligation to see that she was cared for during her life."¹⁸

In legal documents relating to a dispute over the payment of an attorney's fee, Jacob portrayed himself as the bulwark between Mary Jane and the poorhouse. W. G. W. Geiger, the attorney who represented Mary Jane at the hearing to establish the soundness of her mind, made a claim against her for \$75 in legal fees. Since Mary Jane's income did not cover her own expenses, she had no money to pay the bill. Throughout the many reports filed with the court, Jacob carefully drew a line between his sister's finances and his own. He repeatedly argued to the court that he, as guardian, was not personally responsible for the claim; that Mary Jane held the responsibility but had no money to pay it; and that the only way to pay the claim would make Mary Jane a charge on the county. He willingly paid out of his own pocket for her day-to-day care and the maintenance of the farm so that he could "keep said ward from the poor farm." But if the court ordered him to pay the claim out of her income, he would have "to take his ward to the Poor Farm to be supported by the county or live on air until money enough could be accumulated to pay such judgment." In the end, after four years of back-and-forth legal paperwork, Jacob paid the claim, and Mary Jane never set foot in the poorhouse.¹⁹

17. William and Mary Tevus boarded and worked on an adjacent farm. *Tenth Census of the United States*. The records give no indication of a separate rental agreement for the homestead. Most likely, the Tevuses moved onto the Seitzinger place and Mary Jane and Ellen continued to live in their own home.

18. Jacob died in 1908 at the age of 85, and his daughter Lena succeeded him as guardian. After Ellen's death in 1911 at the age of 62, Lena continued to rent the land for two years in order to pay off Ellen's debts. Probate File 2697.

19. Probate File 2697.

Although Jacob used the image of his elderly and vulnerable sister living at county expense in the poorhouse in an attempt to sway the judge's opinion, sending Mary Jane to the poorhouse was an idle threat. The Seitzinger family had the financial means to care for the dependent members of their family, but many others did not. For poor individuals whose families struggled just to get by, the specter of the poorhouse loomed as a real possibility in the event of a downturn in the family's fortunes.

The Poor Law

Nineteenth-century Americans maintained the belief that those closest to individuals in need knew best how to care for them. In the seventeenth century, emigrants from Britain brought this belief about family and community obligation to America. By designating family and local government as primary caregivers, colonial American poor laws turned social obligation into legal responsibility.²⁰ Family and community took care of their own while sending strangers or outsiders back to their place of origin.²¹ In the nineteenth century, as the country expanded westward, poor laws in the new territories retained the basic ideal of family and community responsibility for those in need.²²

Although the family as caretaker was the ideal in caring for the poor, the family, at times, failed to meet the need. Parents outlived their children or the children moved away. Sickness and disability sometimes were overwhelming. When family was either unwilling or unable to assist, the responsibility fell primarily to county government.²³ Iowa poor law structured

20. Josiah Henry Benton, *Warning Out in New England* (Boston, 1911), 4–8; Billy G. Smith, ed., *Down and Out in Early America* (University Park, PA, 2004).

21. For a brief discussion on the “invidious social category” of “stranger,” see Katz, *The Undeserving Poor*, 6–7.

22. For a discussion of the westward migration of poor relief legislation to early Ohio and the territories of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Iowa, see Gillin, *History of Poor Relief Legislation in Iowa*, 3–70.

23. Private charities provided some outdoor relief to the needy, but community and religious organizations lacked the funds to provide adequate care for all the poor. Only government had the resources to handle the vast problems of poverty. In Cedar County, the board of supervisors never discussed private charity

the process of relief to resemble the family-community ideal. In each of Cedar County's 17 townships, the voters elected three township trustees who, as part of their duties, were responsible for "the oversight and care of all poor persons in their township." When a poor person applied to a trustee for assistance or medical care, the trustee established that the person had legal residence in the county and was truly in a state of need. If the person qualified, the trustee "may afford such relief as the necessities of the person require, and shall report the case forthwith to the board of supervisors." In 1868 the law quantified "the necessities" as "either in the form of food, rent, clothing, fuel and lights, medical attendance, or in money; and shall not exceed two dollars per week for each person . . . exclusive of medical attendance." The trustees had to certify the accuracy of the providers' claims and bills for "the necessities" before submitting them to the board for payment.²⁴

The board of supervisors, the main administrative, decision-making body of county government, governed poor relief through its fiscal oversight of care provided by the trustees. The township trustees provided temporary relief until reporting the case to the county board. The board then decided whether to "continue or deny relief as they find cause." In counties without a poorhouse, the board could either pay a monthly allowance "to poor persons . . . who are of mature years and sound mind," or "enter into contract with the lowest bidder" to board the poor with one of their neighbors. In order to establish a poorhouse, the board needed the approval of a majority of the voters.²⁵

Iowa poor law established settlement or residency requirements to set the boundaries for county government's social and economic responsibilities. In order to qualify for poor relief in the county, an adult must have resided in the state for one year. If local officials could foresee a person without settlement becoming a charge on the county, the law permitted the county to prevent the person from obtaining settlement "by warning

as an optional source of assistance for the poor. See also Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 36–57; and Bourque, "The Creation of the Almshouse," 74.

24. Gillin, *History of Poor Relief Legislation*, 71–192; 1868 *Laws of Iowa*, chap. 95, sec. 1(1); 1873 *Code of Iowa*, Title XI, chap. 1, sec. 1364, 1365, 1366.

25. 1873 *Code of Iowa*, Title XI, chap. 1, sec. 1365, 1367, 1369, 1372.

them to depart . . . and thereafter they shall not acquire a settlement except by the requisite residence for one year uninterrupted by another warning." When a person had settlement in the state, the county in which he or she resided was responsible for "expenses incurred in the relief and care of a poor person." If the person crossed the border into another county and received relief, the law required the county of legal residence to reimburse the other county for those expenses. The law also enumerated penalties against anyone who brought a poor person into the state "with the intent of making him a charge of any of the townships or counties therein." The maximum fine was \$500.²⁶

Settlement alone was not enough to provide eligibility for relief; one had to be dependent and without family. The law designated family as the caretakers of the poor, but did so by taking into account the degree of relation and ability to work. Primary responsibility fell to "the father, mother, and children . . . who shall, jointly or severally, relieve or maintain such poor person." If the nearest relatives were unable, "the same liability shall extend to the grandparents, if of ability without personal labor, and to the male grandchildren who are of ability by personal labor or otherwise." If the trustees judged the family as able but unwilling to provide relief, the county officials could compel them to comply by ordering entire or partial monetary support "by taking the poor person to a relative's house."²⁷

The law stated the proper procedures for relief by channeling the initial requests for relief and the everyday tasks of relief through the trustees, but in their administration and distribution of relief Cedar County officials occasionally departed from the law.²⁸ The board acted upon petitions from citizens asking for relief of a neighbor and, on occasion, petitions directly from

26. *Ibid.*, sec. 1352(1), 1355, 1358; 1873 *Code of Iowa*, Title XXIV, chap. 11, sec. 4045. A wife followed the settlement of her husband, if he had settlement. If, at the time of marriage, she had settlement and he did not, she retained her settlement. If he abandoned her, she attained settlement as if she were single. Children followed the settlement of their father or, if they had none, they had the settlement of their mother. 1873 *Code of Iowa*, Title XI, chap. 1, sec. 1352(2)(3)(4).

27. 1873 *Code of Iowa*, Title XI, chap. 1, sec. 1330, 1331, 1337.

28. See also Bourque, "The Creation of the Almshouse," 69–74; and Alschuler and Saltzgaber, "Clearinghouse for Paupers," 574.

the poor person. This ended in 1874 when the board, instead of acting on a "petition of the citizens of Springdale Tp. asking aid for Mordicai M. Reeder and Family," referred the case to the trustees, as the law required. Occasionally, a provider of relief submitted a claim without certification by the trustees, and the board would "refuse to consider the bill . . . until put in proper form." In 1883, in an effort to end such paperwork problems, the board printed and distributed to all the trustees instructions that outlined the proper procedures. The board also clarified the ambiguous phrase "report the case forthwith" by mandating that relief cases be reported at "the next succeeding session of the Board of Supervisors," thus moving the case more quickly from the judgment of the trustees to the scrutiny of the board.²⁹

Although the law clearly laid out the responsibility of families, the role of the family in the enforcement of the law was not always clear. With the Boyle family, for example, the board enforced the letter of the law. Even though Mary Boyle, an elderly widow, had children living in the county, the board paid \$12 per month to board her with a neighbor. After an investigation into the family situation by the trustees, the board called a hearing and ordered her two sons to either care for their mother in their homes or pay the county for the expenses of her board. They took her home.³⁰ Sarah Lane, in the opening example in this article, was also an elderly widow with a son living nearby, but she went to the poorhouse. As with many other individual cases, without the documentation to explain the decisions of the relief officials, the role of family responsibility and financial obligation remains hazy.

The care of the insane entered into the poorhouse debate through the need for institutionalization rather than economic need. Before the opening of the state-run insane asylum at Mount Pleasant in 1861, the site of care for the insane remained within the county in either the home or, in the case of an individual who was a danger to the community, the jail.³¹ In 1857

29. Proceedings, 4/6/1874, 4/3/1877, 4/5/1883; 1880 *Code of Iowa*, Title XI, chap. 1, sec. 1365.

30. Proceedings, 1/10/1867, 10/14/1867, 1/8/1868.

31. The State of Iowa established other institutions as well. The asylum for the blind opened in 1853 and one for the deaf and dumb in 1855. After the Civil

the township trustees reported Hannah Wymer, a widow with six children ranging in age from 14 to 27 years, as "hopelessly insane" and requested that the court "so provide that the said Hannah Wymer may be provided for, restrained and taken care of." The judge assigned the care of Mrs. Wymer to her daughter Susanna and her son-in-law for \$5 per week. She remained in the care of her family until her death in 1885 at the age of 82.³² Pernina Brooks, on the other hand, "a married woman whose husband has abandoned her & gone to parts unknown," had no family to take her in. Neighbors reported that she "wandered from house to house" and was "disposed to injure both person and property." The court ordered the sheriff "to secure said Pernina Brooks into your custody and detain her in the jail of the county." In 1861 the county moved Mrs. Brooks from the local jail to the new state insane hospital.³³ With the opening of the state hospital, the board readily sent insane individuals to the state institution. In 1878, after years of overcrowding, the state returned some of the chronically insane to the county, thereby leaving local officials to grapple with the difficulties of local institutionalization.

War, the state took over the soldiers' orphans' homes that had been started by private enterprises. In 1876 the state legislature consolidated the three homes into the Soldiers' Orphans' Home in Davenport and expanded admission qualifications to include indigent children. The state then converted the abandoned orphans' home in Glenwood into the Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children. In 1886 the state opened the Iowa Soldiers' Home in Marshalltown to care for indigent and disabled soldiers, sailors, and marines. Gillin, *History of Poor Relief Legislation*, 195–284. See also Benjamin Talbot, "Iowa Institution for the Deaf and Dumb," *Annals of Iowa*, 1st ser., 5 (1867), 955–59; George Gallarno, "How Iowa Cared for Orphans of her Soldiers of the Civil War," *Annals of Iowa* 15 (1926), 163–93; and Gregory Calvert, "A Short History of the Mental Health Institute at Mount Pleasant, 1855–1899," *Annals of Iowa* 41 (1972), 1022–39.

32. Probate File 267; Records of County Judge, Book B, 2/12/1858, Cedar County Courthouse, Tipton. Wymer's family memorialized her as "a kind and affectionate wife, a fond mother and friend to all." Gravestone in Section 17 Cemetery, Gower Township, Cedar County.

33. Probate File 297. For Brooks's care, the sheriff received 25 cents per day for board, 10 cents per day for attendance, and 5 cents per article of clothing washed. Records of County Judge, 1/1/1859.

The Poor Farm

In the summer of 1865, as the people of Cedar County put four years of war behind them, the board of supervisors looked to the future and expected an increase in "pauperism . . . in consequence of said war."³⁴ During the war, the board had administered a system of monetary assistance to the families of the soldiers. On June 7, 1865, it put an endpoint on the support of the soldiers' families by resolving "that no orders be issued to families after the return of the soldier who is the head of the family."³⁵ Yet many families no longer had a breadwinner, or he came home crippled from his wounds and unable to work. The return of the soldiers also increased the availability of labor in the county and cast an uncertain future on the employment of temporary day laborers and hired hands. The board may have foreseen an increase in pauperism from its own experiences administering relief to families. In seeking a solution to the anticipated long-term problems of poor relief, the board decided that "it is therefore expedient that there should be some action taken by this board to secure lands whereas to erect a poor house."³⁶

Before the establishment of the poor farm in 1871, the only site for the care of the poor was the home, either their own or that of a family member or neighbor. For those who needed temporary help, the county paid a neighbor, merchant, or physician to provide "necessities" to the person in his or her home: "Doctor M. Mayer be allowed the sum of \$20 for professional services in attendance upon William Rogers"; "James Kelsey be allowed \$24.45 for provisions, food and other articles furnished to James Gould and family"; and "[Mr.] Carl be allowed the sum of \$3 per cord of wood furnished Mrs. Hagan."³⁷ If a poor person had no home, had needs beyond the capabilities of his or her family, or had no family, the township trustees made arrangements to board him or her with a neighbor. In 1859, for ex-

34. Proceedings, 6/6/1865.

35. Proceedings, 6/7/1865. For the experience of one Iowa town providing relief for soldiers, see Russell L. Johnson, "'A Debt Justly Due': The Relief of Civil War Soldiers and Their Families in Dubuque," *Annals of Iowa* 55 (1996), 207–38.

36. Proceedings, 6/6/1865.

37. Records of County Judge, 10/26/1857, 1/6/1859, 12/29/1859.

ample, the county paid John Reese \$1.50 per week “for boarding and taking care of” Mr. and Mrs. Blow, “two aged and infirm persons . . . having no property and no friends legally bound to take care of them.”³⁸ In all of these transactions, a trustee or provider handled the county funds. The poor did not touch government money.³⁹

The anticipated rise in the need for poor relief after the war did occur. With the increasing demands on the public treasury, the board tried to find the balance between providing adequate care and maintaining a low tax burden.⁴⁰ In the establishment of the poor farm, the members of the board of supervisors had their eyes on the bottom line.⁴¹ Rather than having 51 township trustees providing relief, they wanted one location in the county to take care of the necessities of the poor. The process of winning the voters of the county over to the idea started in the fall election of 1865. When voters were asked if they were “For” or “Against the purchase of a poor farm,” the measure passed 1,086 to 539. In 1866, however, when the board asked for “an appropriation of Six thousand dollars for the purchase of a poor farm,” voters, who liked the idea of a poor farm but not the expenditure of tax money to buy it, rejected the request 1,141 to 1,105. In 1867 voters defeated a similar proposition 1,237 to 912. The board then let the matter rest for a few years.⁴²

38. *Ibid.*, 6/18/1859.

39. In 1893 sociologist Charles Henderson stated in his principles of administration for outdoor relief: “Aid should be given in articles of primary necessity, as food, fuel and clothing. Never is it safe to give money.” Charles Richmond Henderson, *An Introduction to the Study of the Dependent, Defective and Delinquent Classes* (Boston, 1893), 45.

40. According to Clement, *Welfare and the Poor*, 38, the relative importance of the three main concerns of relief officials in Philadelphia — benevolence, controlling the actions of the poor, and economy — varied depending on the economic, social, and political outlook at the time. According to Katz, *Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 3, compassionate care always remained the lowest priority.

41. Elizabeth Gaspar Brown, “Poor Relief in a Wisconsin County, 1846–1866: Administration and Recipients,” *American Journal of Legal History* 20 (1976), 80–91; Alschuler and Saltzgaber, “Clearinghouse for Paupers,” 576; Alschuler and Saltzgaber, “The Limits of Responsibility,” 515; Bourque, “The Creation of the Almshouse,” 62–64.

42. Proceedings, October Term, 1865; 9/4/1866; October Term, 1866; October Term, 1867.

In 1870 the board invested more effort in taking its case of economy to the voters. On the first day of meetings in the January term, George Wooley, a new member and former township trustee, put forth a resolution that "whereas Cedar County is now paying for the support of near 40 paupers," the question of the poor farm be on the fall ballot. In an action that pushed its agenda out into the community, the board, at its September meeting, resolved to print 200 circulars "stating the cost of keeping our paupers under the present system." The *Tipton Advertiser* entered into the fray for the first time with an editorial supporting the poor farm so that "paupers may . . . be cared for consistently and economically by the public." This time, when asked for \$6,000 to purchase a poor farm, the voters approved the measure 2,408 to 430.⁴³

Throughout the six years of wooing the voters, the public language surrounding the poor farm emphasized home and economy rather than labor in exchange for relief or moral reform. In 1866 a board committee appointed to purchase a poor farm stated that the purpose of the farm was to supply "the wants of the paupers of said County with a comfortable home."⁴⁴ In 1867 Thomas Shearer offered a resolution to purchase a farm "for the purpose of establishing a permanent home for the poor of our County."⁴⁵ The language illustrates the supervisors' belief that the government had a duty to care for the poor, but that duty had to be weighed against the duty to the taxpayers to spend their money with care. If the board hoped that the poorhouse would provide economy by deterring individuals from applying for relief, they did not state it for the record. In articulating his support, the editor of the *Tipton Advertiser* incorporated the pragmatic with the altruistic, stating that "a collection of all the objects of charity under one roof, and a dignified, systematic and humane method of providing for their necessities, could not fail to be beneficial to them and economical for the county."⁴⁶ The supervisors' benevolent tone contrasted sharply

43. Proceedings, 1/5/1870, 9/6/1870; *Tipton Advertiser*, 9/22/1870; Proceedings, October Term, 1870.

44. Proceedings, 6/7/1866.

45. *Ibid.*, 6/6/1867.

46. *Tipton Advertiser*, 9/22/1870.



The Cedar County poorhouse. From A Topical History of Cedar County Iowa, ed. C. Ray Aurner (Chicago, 1910), vol. 1, opposite p. 64.

with the harsh rhetoric of reformers. The township trustees knew each of the 40 poor individuals that the county assisted at that time, and the supervisors, in handling the poor relief claims, at the very least knew the identities of each person. It was much easier for officials and reformers in urban areas to denigrate the abstract masses of poor than for the officials in a rural area to take a harsh tone with members of their community.

In 1871 the opening of the poor farm created so little interest that neither the meeting minutes nor the newspaper commented on the event. The first indication of its opening was a small item in the *Tipton Advertiser* relating the story of a man “who . . . now in the Poor House, allowed his angry passions to rise . . . and assaulted the Superintendent with a pitchfork — sharp end first.”⁴⁷ The poor farm was a working farm that raised chickens, pigs, and cattle; grew corn and put up hay; and cultivated a large garden and an orchard of fruit trees. A township trustee managed the farm until the end of 1872, when the county advertised for “a man and wife” — a man to manage the farm operation and a woman to run the household.⁴⁸ In 1873 George F. Burroughs, the first poor farm steward and former county jailor,

47. *Tipton Advertiser*, 8/10/1871.

48. *Ibid.*, 10/10/1872. The county paid the steward a salary of \$500 per year (compared with \$2,000 to the treasurer, \$1,600 to the auditor, and \$1,000 to the superintendent of schools). Proceedings, 1/5/1877.

initiated the registration of poorhouse residents into the Poor House Register by entering the names of the residents that "I found there when I came."⁴⁹ From that initial list of residents, only Daniel Burns had an admission date from 1871. The fate of the other 39 paupers supported by the county before the commencement of the poor farm remains unknown.

In early 1883 the nature of care at the poor farm shifted dramatically with the opening of the Cedar County Insane Asylum. In April 1878 the board of trustees of the Iowa Hospital for the Insane at Mount Pleasant decided to alleviate the overcrowding at the hospital by returning the "incurable insane" to the counties.⁵⁰ The number of insane in the state was increasing faster than the state could provide care. According to the hospital superintendent, the overcrowding "is not only positively injurious to many, but prevents or retards cure in others," thereby altering the purpose "from a curative hospital to a receptacle mainly for the incurable insane." The hospital's board of trustees set the date of November first for the removal of "a portion of the incurable insane now under care . . . some of whom may require a portion of the time such restraint as is implied in locked doors and guarded windows." To avoid overcrowding in the future and to provide the proper care to those with the best chance for improvement, the board requested that only individuals with disorders of less than one year's duration be sent to the state institution.⁵¹

With the care of the incurable insane thrust upon it, the county board of supervisors had to find "a receptacle" in which to house them. No good alternatives existed within the county. The county had sent these individuals to the state institution because their care went beyond the capabilities of family and government. Now they were back. To solve the immediate problem of housing the five individuals from the state insane asylum,

49. Poor House Register, p. 3.

50. At the time of the letter, "630 persons are confined in the space only designed and intended for less than one-half this number." Mark Ranney, superintendent, to Commissioners of Insanity of Cedar County, Iowa, 4/24/1878, copied by clerk into Proceedings, 6/5/1878.

51. For patients not meeting this stipulation, the county had to make a formal application "stating the class to which the patient belongs" and wait for a reply as to whether or not the person could be admitted. Proceedings, 6/5/1878.

TABLE 2
ADMISSIONS BY YEAR

Year	Poor	Insane
1873	11	0
1874	11	1
1875	16	0
1876	11	0
1877	20	4
1878	22	0
1879	24	0
1880	8	0
1881	23	1
1882	23	0
1883	22	12
1884	21	7
1885	25	4
1886	14	2
1887	9	3
1888	14	2
1889	17	0
1890	9	1
Total	300	37

SOURCE: Compiled from Poor House Register, pp. 3-16, 97-98.

the board contracted with the sisters at Mercy Hospital in Davenport to provide care at a cost of \$16 per person per month.⁵² In 1881 the board took action toward a long-term, more economical solution by deciding to erect "a suitable building" on the poor farm "for the purpose of keeping the incurable insane of the county."⁵³ In early 1883 the new brick asylum on the poor farm opened, receiving 12 insane persons the first year and 7 the next year (see table 2). Although these individuals required monitoring more than care, they surely increased the workload, with additional laundry and more mouths to feed. The board did not hire another superintendent to manage the asylum. The poor farm steward and his family added the responsibility for the incurable insane at the poor farm to their duties with the poorhouse and the farm.

52. Proceedings, 10/15/1878. In April 1882 the Mount Pleasant hospital released five more insane individuals back to the county. The board sent four of them to Mercy Hospital in Davenport and released one woman to the custody of her mother. Probate File 1644.

53. Proceedings, 6/10/1881.

TABLE 3
AVERAGE OCCUPANCY OF POOR FARM AND COST PER PERSON

	1877	1878	1879	1880	1889	1890
Average Occu- pancy per Week	15	18	18	14	36	39
Cost per Person per Week	\$1.82	\$2.18	\$1.39	\$1.02	\$1.15	\$0.76

SOURCE: Proceedings, 1/11/1878, 1/9/1879, 1/9/1880, 1/8/1881, 1/8/1890, and 1/6/1891.

With both the poorhouse and the insane asylum founded on the goal of providing relief with lowered costs, the available year-end poor farm reports show that the institution achieved its goal. Receipts from the sale of hogs and cattle offset some, but not all, of the expenses. The farm turned a profit in just one year, but it did not have to operate in the black to accomplish its aims. Any net cost less than the \$16 per month that Mercy Hospital charged clearly defined success in housing the insane. The benchmark for the poor is somewhat less clear. The board could not eliminate all forms of outdoor relief, but boarding, the most costly form of relief, virtually disappeared from the claims reports. The board had paid about \$3 per week to board a single person, which was significantly more than the cost per person per week at the poor farm (see table 3).⁵⁴ Although the poor farm lost money, it proved to be a more economical form of relief than outdoor relief for the homeless.

Medical Care

Medical care was expensive and different from other forms of relief.⁵⁵ Physicians provided a professional service and charged a

54. Proceedings, 6/7/1866, 1/10/1867.

55. In a study of Philadelphia in the first half of the nineteenth century, Clement argues that relief officials, who paid about 1/6¢ per house call, readily supplied medical care as outdoor relief because it was inexpensive. Physicians accepted such low payments in exchange for gaining clinical experience. Clement, *Welfare and the Poor*, 78. Relief officials of urban poorhouses controlled medical costs of indoor relief by allowing the almshouse hospital (and the poor individuals in them) to be used for training medical students. *Ibid.*, 93–94, 105–7. See also Katherine A. Harvey, "Practicing Medicine at the Baltimore Almshouse, 1828–1850," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 100 (2005), 298–314.

TABLE 4
MEDICAL EXPENSES CLAIMED AND ALLOWED

Year	Expenses Claimed	Expenses Allowed	Percent Allowed
1866	\$389.20	\$237.90	61.1%
1870	\$737.95	\$377.10	51.1%
1875	\$519.75	\$158.00	30.4%
1880	\$865.65	\$427.92	49.4%
1885	\$589.75	\$450.75	76.4%

SOURCE: Compiled from the claims reports in Proceedings for the years 1866, 1870, 1875, 1880, and 1885.

professional fee. Along with the charge for the actual service rendered, such as stitching a wound or amputating a limb, the fee also included and placed a value on the physician's knowledge and time. Physicians' claims differed from those for clothing or groceries. With a bill for 75¢ for a shirt, the board could see the price of shirts in the store and see the man wearing the shirt. The board could not "see" knowledge and time, and so medical bills could be a contentious issue for administrators and doctors (see table 4).

Iowa poor law addressed this tension between county fiscal concerns and physicians' professional fees but did not help in resolving it. In 1868 Iowa statutes limited the support of the poor "in the form of food, rent, clothing, fuel and lights, medical attendance, or in money" to \$2 per week for each person, "exclusive of medical attendance." The Code of 1873 added that "no more shall be charged or paid [for medical services] therefor than is usually charged for like services in the neighborhood." In 1880 the legislature rewrote the clause and deleted that phrase. In 1888 the legislature again addressed the problem by allowing the board, when examining all claims, "including claims for medical attendance," and finding the amount "to be unreasonable [or] exorbitant," to "reject or diminish the claim as in their judgment would be right and just." By specifically addressing medical care in these laws, the legislators acknowledged that medical care differed from other forms of relief and that it was expensive, but they did not directly address the problem by putting a price cap on physicians' fees, as they did with the \$2 per week limit

on other forms of outdoor relief. Instead, they empowered the board of supervisors to handle decisions about medical expenses within the county.⁵⁶

In Cedar County, the board and the physicians did not always agree on the value of the intangibles of knowledge and time. For the majority of the claims submitted by physicians, the board paid the full amount. The size of the bill did not affect whether it was paid in full. For example, in 1878 the board paid the full amount of Dr. Minthorns's bill for \$89.25 but none of Dr. Yule's bill for \$9.⁵⁷ Physicians sometimes aggressively pursued payment of their unpaid bills. When, in June 1886, the board rejected payment on two of his bills totaling \$35.50, Dr. Melbourne resubmitted the bills three times until, in June 1887, the board paid \$22.50 on the total bill.⁵⁸ Drs. James Donnelly and David Donnelly provided the most extreme example of a contested bill: the board granted only \$25 on their claim for \$329.⁵⁹ The percentages of total amounts allowed shown in table 4 thus reflect the disagreement over the value of specific claims, but not a generalized devaluing of all claims by physicians.

In 1875 the board took the first step to control the costs of medical attendance by contracting physicians' services for the care of the poor. The board placed a notice in the *Tipton Advertiser* "To Physicians" requesting "sealed proposals . . . for the necessary medical attendance at the Poor Farm." They awarded the contract to Dr. S. Ensign for \$75 "to furnish medical attendance, medicines, perform surgical operations, and render such other medical attentions as may be required."⁶⁰ Between 1875 and 1884, the duties expanded to include the poor living within a six-mile radius of the courthouse, and the contracted fee varied from a low of \$75 to a high in 1881 of \$200 (see table 5). In 1885 the board sought to expand the contractual agreements to cover all the poor in the county. After reviewing the bids, the

56. 1868 *Laws of Iowa*, chap. 95, sec 1; *Code of 1873*, Title XI, chap. 1, sec. 1361; 1880 *Laws of Iowa*, chap. 133, sec. 1; 1888 *Laws of Iowa*, chap. 101, sec. 1.

57. Proceedings, claims reports in January Term, 1878; and April Term, 1878.

58. Proceedings, claims report in June Term, 1886; September Term, 1886; November Term, 1886; and June Term, 1887.

59. Proceedings, claims reports in September and November Terms, 1888.

60. *Tipton Advertiser*, 3/25/1875; Proceedings, 4/6/1875.

TABLE 5
 PHYSICIANS' CONTRACTS FOR THE POOR FARM

Year (from April to April)	Physician	Contracted Fee (per year)
1875–1877	Dr. S. Ensign	\$75
1878	Dr. S. Ensign	\$115
September 1879–September 1880	Dr. P. R. Pine	\$150
January–April 1881	Dr. G. W. Wilson	\$150
April 1881–March 1882	Dr. G. S. Focht	\$200
1882	Dr. Shoemaker	\$175
1883	Dr. O. E. Deeds	\$124
1884	Dr. O. E. Deeds	\$144

SOURCE: Proceedings, 4/6/1875, 4/6/1876, 4/2/1877, 4/3/1878, 9/4/1879, 1/8/1881, 4/8/1881, 4/6/1882, 4/5/1883, and 4/10/1884. (There was no contracted physician from April to September 1879 and from September 1880 to January 1881.)

board awarded contracts for “medical attendance, including Medicine and Surgery” in 8 of the 17 townships (see table 6).

By contracting the services of the physicians, the medical costs of those townships went from unknown (and possibly very large) claims to known, set expenses. A bill from a physician in 1889 located in a probate file provides examples of medical fees in Cedar County. Dr. G. W. Wilson of Tipton charged \$1 for an office consultation, \$3.50 to \$5 for a house call in the country, and \$4.50 to \$6 for a night visit. Beginning on November 5, 1889, until the patient’s death on December 23, 1889, the doctor visited the patient every day, and many days he called twice. With daily charges ranging from \$3.50 to \$10, the final bill totaled \$341.⁶¹ The fee for one service mattered less than the accumulation of charges over the length of an illness. With a contract, the board locked the medical expenses to a flat fee and eliminated the expenses incurred in resolving disputed claims.

The reasoning behind the bids of the physicians is less clear. The dollar amounts of the four contracts in 1885 bore no relation to the population covered (see table 6). Dr. Deeds was responsible for the largest population, plus his contract required him to visit the poor farm once a week, and yet his contracted fee was not the highest. Drs. Greig and Joerger were responsible for only somewhat smaller populations than the others, but they submitted

61. Probate File 1555.

TABLE 6
POPULATION IN RELATION TO PHYSICIANS' BIDS IN 1885

Name of Physician	Townships	Population of Contracted Area	Bid Amount
Dr. Deeds	Red Oak and Center*	3,532	\$120
Dr. Darner	Springdale and Iowa	2,564	\$150
Dr. Greig	Dayton and Fairfield	1,882	\$40
Dr. Joerger	Springfield and Massillon	2,163	\$25

*Included the Poor Farm.

SOURCES: Proceedings, 4/7/1885; and population data from *Census of Iowa for the Year 1885* (Des Moines, 1885), 13–14.

much lower bids. The expenses of one patient with a lengthy illness could far exceed a doctor's yearly contract. Drs. Pine, Wilson, and Greig were recent graduates when they won their bids and may have needed the income while they established their private practices.⁶² For the physician with a winning bid, the contract guaranteed income and removed the uncertainties of payment, but it also limited potential earnings.

The benefits for the poor in contracting medical services are even more unclear. Access to medical care was not guaranteed. The poor individual could not seek medical care without first going to the township trustees, who decided whether or not the poor individual received medical care from the contracted physician. What the records fail to reveal is whether contracting made medical care more accessible because the county paid a flat amount no matter how many poor individuals received care, or less accessible because physicians and the county wanted their expenses to fit their bids.

Contracting continued in the ensuing years, expanding to include 11 townships for a total of \$445.⁶³ Physicians continued to bid for the contracts, and the county awarded them, which strongly suggests that both groups found financial benefits in this system of providing care. This did not necessarily leave the

62. Pine graduated from Bellevue in New York in 1877, Wilson from the University of Iowa in 1877, and Greig from Bellevue in 1881. Charles H. Lothrop, *The Medical and Surgical Directory of the State of Iowa for 1886 and 1887* (Clinton, 1886), 125–26.

63. Proceedings, 4/9/1890. See also *ibid.*, 4/7/1886, 4/6/1887, 4/7/1887, 4/6/1888, and 4/2/1889.

poor without benefits. No matter how the board chose to fit medical care into the bureaucratic structure, government remained the avenue of access for the poor.

Outdoor Relief

Throughout the nineteenth century outdoor relief withstood repeated attacks by reformers calling for its abolishment. The rhetoric of the reformers focused on the vices of alcohol and idleness and trumpeted the dangers of outdoor relief in creating a disincentive to work among the able-bodied while overlooking the dependent poor who truly needed government assistance. In large American cities in the 1870s, a coalition of reformers and wealthy professionals demanded the repeal of the poor tax and the transfer of outdoor relief from government to private charities. A few large cities found a balance between public and private funding of relief, but during severe economic downturns, such as the depression in the mid-1870s and the Panic of 1893, assistance from private sources fell short of the overwhelming need. Government stepped in, and outdoor relief continued.⁶⁴

The people of Cedar County may have shared some of these urban attitudes about the poor and poor relief, but the decision by county officials to end outdoor relief had more to do with implementing a more fiscally efficient system of relief than with abstract ideals and images surrounding dependency. The board had persuaded the county's voters to fund the poor farm on the premise that indoor relief would be a more economical means of providing relief. Several months after the poor farm opened, the board of supervisors announced the end of outdoor relief and notified the township trustees that all "county charges must be sent to the county Poor Farm by the 1st of December as no allowance will be made by the board after that date."⁶⁵ After spending \$6,000 to establish the poor farm, the board proclaimed the end of outdoor relief as the next step in consolidating relief expenditures.

Actually ending outdoor relief turned out to be easier said than done, however. At the same meeting in which it voted to

64. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 36–57.

65. Proceedings, 11/13/1871.

end outdoor relief, the board made its first exception “in favor of the pauper taken care of by widow Fell.” The board chose not to send a 75-year-old widow and her two adult disabled sons to the poorhouse. Nor did they deny assistance of \$1.50 per week to a woman caring for her sick and blind sister or \$1.50 per week to a 64-year-old blind man and his wife.⁶⁶ The board granted an allowance to several elderly couples. For example, William and Hildah Miller received monthly allowances off and on from 1875 to 1884. On April 8, 1884, some time after Mrs. Miller had died, Mr. Miller entered the poorhouse at age 76 for the reason of “old age.” The board had not discontinued his allowance, which suggests that he could no longer care for himself, and so entered voluntarily. He lived at the poor farm until his death in 1889.⁶⁷ In each case, the board granted allowances to a caretaker so that the disabled or elderly family members could remain at home.

The public also expressed opinions on who should receive relief. In the early 1870s, before the board ceased hearing petitions, citizens bypassed the township trustees and appealed directly to the board on behalf of their poor neighbors. In January 1872 the board granted a “petition of citizens of Springfield Tp.” to give \$5 per month for four months to Mrs. Schoeff and her four young sons and Mrs. Myers and her six children. At the end of the four months, neither woman requested additional assistance. Other allowances went to “a petition for aid” for an epileptic boy and his mother and a “petition of Citizens of Massillon township asking for aid” to assist a 78-year-old veteran of the War of 1812 and his wife. Citizen petitions did not always bring assistance. The “petition from Citizens of Iowa township asking for aid for Nancy McVey pauper” was not granted. Public opinion only carried influence if it fit into the economics of relief.⁶⁸

66. *Ibid.*, 11/13/1871, 6/3/1874, 2/18/1875. Relief officials in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, also failed in their attempt to end outdoor relief. In 1826 they abolished outdoor relief except in cases needing only temporary relief. Expenses lessened but did not disappear as overseers “reclassified” individuals as recipients of temporary relief. Bourque, “The Creation of the Almshouse,” 73–74.

67. Compiled from Proceedings, 1875–1884; Poor House Register, p. 11; and *Tenth Census of the United States*.

68. Proceedings, 1/2/1872, 6/3/1872, 10/20/1873, 11/25/1873.

With the opening of the poor farm, the board eliminated the expense of boarding the poor, but could not abolish outdoor relief. Trustees provided small amounts of relief, evidenced by the claims for groceries, goods, clothing, shoes, and wood that reappeared in the meeting minutes, and the board paid them. Although public opinion influenced the board to continue monthly allowances even after the poorhouse opened, the amounts granted were less than the expense of care in the poorhouse (see table 3). For example, the \$1.25 per week granted to Mr. and Mrs. Miller in 1879 was less than half the \$1.39 per person per week it would have cost the county to place them in the poorhouse. With the poorhouse as the alternative, poor individuals accepted these small amounts of relief in order to stay in their homes.

Although the individuals receiving outdoor relief came from the traditional "deserving" groups, the board did not use the language of "deserving" and "undeserving," nor did they make decisions based solely on an individual's inclusion in a certain category, such as widowed, elderly, or disabled. In addition to economic need, the decisive factors for individuals to receive outdoor relief were an existing roof over their heads and the capability to care for themselves. For those who met those measures, the county dispensed an amount of outdoor relief that enabled them to get by. Individuals from these same "deserving" groups also entered the poorhouse. Although a lack of housing was a criterion for admission, a variety of other reasons brought the needy to the poorhouse.

The Poor and the Poorhouse

In 1877 the editor of the *Tipton Advertiser* reflected on the new poor farm: "The attractions in the way of charges at this domicile are many and various. They range in years from two to eighty — sane and insane, halt, blind, lame, sick, and lazy." His comments echoed common nineteenth-century sentiments. In 1871, the year the poorhouse opened in Cedar County, the national periodical *Harper's Weekly* published the poem, "Over the Hill to the Poor-House," in which an elderly woman whose son sent her to the poorhouse asked, "What is the use of heapin' on me a pauper's shame? / Am I lazy or crazy? Am I blind or lame?"

In his report to the National Conference of Charities in 1879, C. S. Watkins of Davenport, Iowa, referred to almshouses as “mere legalized cesspools or reservoirs for the reception, and, it may be added, the cultivation, of the most repulsive features of our social defects.” Such contemporary descriptions represented the poorhouse as a dumping place and the residents as unproductive to society or unwanted by family.⁶⁹

Were the poorhouse residents in Cedar County the broken-down and degraded paupers portrayed in these trenchant remarks? The information from the Poor House Register provides a demographic picture of the residents over time. For each person admitted to the poorhouse, it contains columns for name, age, date of admission, place of birth, township or city from which removed, condition when admitted, date of discharge, length of stay, condition when discharged, and additional remarks.⁷⁰ Although some stewards were more scrupulous record keepers than others, the information is fairly complete. When combined with data from other sources, details from the Poor House Register provide ways to test the veracity of popular and historical perceptions about poorhouse residents.

The reasons for admission reflect the complexity of economic circumstances (see table 7). The conditions of “in need,” “no home,” and “destitute” imply simply a lack of money. Although the elderly and orphans also lacked money, they represented the more traditional “deserving” groups at the two ends of the life cycle. Physical circumstances brought some to the poorhouse in need: the crippled, the blind, the deaf-mutes, and

69. *Tipton Advertiser*, 11/29/1877; Will Carleton, “Over the Hill to the Poor-House,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 6/17/1871, 1; C. S. Watkins, “Poorhouses and Jails in the North-Western States,” *Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Conference of Charities* (Boston, 1879), 97–98.

70. The Poor House Register did not have a column to record an individual’s race. For the American Indian family, the steward wrote “Indian” in the place of birth column for all five family members, even though, according to the 1880 census, the husband was “Indian,” his wife was “white,” and the children were “I/W.” On their second admission after the husband died, the steward made no reference to race. Poor House Register, pp. 9, 13; *Tenth Census of the United States*. For the African American admissions, the steward indicated “colored” for 9 of the 12 admissions; he made no reference to race for one child and the two adult black men admitted. Poor House Register, pp. 5, 8, 11; *Tenth Census of the United States*.

TABLE 7
REASON FOR ADMISSION AS DOCUMENTED BY POOR FARM STEWARD

64 in need	3 deadbeats	1 feeble
35 no home	3 epileptic fits	1 felon
24 destitute	3 frozen feet	1 fever
20 crippled	3 lost one arm	1 heart disease
15 sick	3 palsy	1 hurt by fall
11 old age	3 poor health	1 infirm
10 orphans	2 blind	1 invalid
9 tramps	2 broken arm	1 lame back
7 pregnant	2 deaf & dumb	1 lame knee
7 rheumatism	2 debilitated	1 lazy
6 children of disabled parent	2 liver complaint	1 mumps
6 no home & destitute	1 broken leg	1 paralytic
6 seeking employment	1 deaf, dumb, & blind	1 partly blind
4 feeble-minded	1 disabled by wound	1 quinsy
4 sore leg	1 dropsy	1 railroad accident
3 ague	1 encumbered by flesh	1 smallpox
3 chills & fever	1 erysipelas	1 tolerable health
3 consumption		

SOURCE: Compiled from Poor House Register, pp. 3–16.

the feeble-minded. Local officials admitted the “undeserving” tramps, transients, deadbeats, and lazy but did not identify them as a particular problem.⁷¹ Lack of work discipline and alcohol, the two great vices that, according to social reformers and policy-makers, sent the poor to the poorhouse due to their own moral weakness, rarely appeared in the local records.

Those admitted to the poorhouse were needy, but many were also sick (see table 7). Although county officials did not articulate the connection between ill health and poverty, the poor farm was a necessary site for medical care. If nothing else, it provided food and shelter during the course of illness and injury as family would for those temporarily incapacitated in the community. The documentation of an illness in the Poor House Register as a reason for admission did not necessarily reflect the diagnosis of a physician, but rather the steward’s as-

71. The board addressed vagrancy only once in accordance with an act of the General Assembly “to restrain vagrancy and common beggary.” The law allowed the county to keep vagrants in the jail and order hard labor. The board designated the entire county as an area in which vagrants could serve time and could be ordered to labor at any job done by an ordinary man. Proceedings, 6/7/1876.

assessment or the person's perception of the ailment. Physicians had no official involvement in admitting the sick poor to the poorhouse.⁷² A township trustee or county board member granted permission for admission, and they or the steward decided whether it was necessary to call a physician.

In establishing the poorhouse, the board emphasized fiscal efficiency rather than the ideal of requiring labor in exchange for relief. In the 1820s advocates promoted the connection between labor and the provision of relief as an advantage of the poorhouse over outdoor relief. Residents of the poorhouse would produce income to offset at least part of their expenses.⁷³ In the ensuing decades, the growing fear of the able-bodied living off government money trapped reformers in a circular argument. Labor at the poorhouse taught work discipline to the able-bodied but lazy poor while producing goods that the superintendent sold to offset the expenses of the poorhouse. At the same time, the threat of having to labor at the poorhouse was supposed to prevent the able-bodied poor from applying for relief. Without able-bodied laborers at the poorhouse, production waned. The income from the labor of the residents failed to offset their expenses, and the government taxed the citizenry for support.⁷⁴ In the latter part of the nineteenth century a paper presented at the National Conference of Charities

72. According to Joan E. Marshall, "Shaping Poor Relief for the Sick-Poor in Indiana's Pioneering Era, Tippecanoe County, Indiana, 1826-1846," *Social Service Review* 74 (2000), 560-87, in rural Tippecanoe County, Indiana, the county physician was the gatekeeper for the poorhouse. The county owned a poor farm but leased the land and the care of the residents to the man who offered the highest bid to rent the land with the lowest per diem charge to provide care for the poor. It was to his advantage to keep residents as long as possible. The county physician evaluated the admission and discharge of residents so that they stayed no longer than necessary, thus controlling costs at the poorhouse.

73. Bourque, "The Creation of the Almshouse," 63; Clement, *Welfare and the Poor*, 89-92; Altschuler and Saltzgaber, "Clearinghouse for Paupers," 578.

74. For an example of the difficulties in inducing residents to labor, see Clement, *Welfare and the Poor*, chap. 4. In Seneca County, New York, in the 1830s and 1840s, the residents provided very little labor on the poor farm. The land did not produce enough to offset the expenses of the hired help. County officials complained that the county would be better off selling the land, except for the 25-acre vegetable garden, and buying what they needed. Altschuler and Saltzgaber, "Clearinghouse for Paupers," 579-80.

TABLE 8
RESIDENTS OF THE POORHOUSE IN THE 1880 FEDERAL CENSUS

Age	Gender	Reason for Admission
67	F	in need
45	F	rheumatism
N/A	F	sore leg
50	M	feeble
57	M	rheumatism
60	M	crippled
52	M	deaf & dumb
56	M	blind, deaf, & dumb
47	M	idiot
52	M	idiot
37	M	insane
53	M	insane

SOURCES: *Tenth Census of the United States*; Poor House Register, pp. 3–7.

suggested that reformers acknowledged the chasm between the ideal and the reality of labor at the poorhouse. While remaining firmly in the belief that “idleness is the cause of a large part of pauperism” and that “regular employment . . . discourages lazy loafers,” local officials and poor farm stewards found it difficult to force residents into long hours of unpaid labor in order to support the poorhouse. “Labor in poorhouses has little pecuniary value. . . . It is easier and perhaps cheaper to hire the work all done than to secure it from unwilling and inefficient help.” Instead, residents, including the insane and the feeble-minded, should be given tasks to keep them occupied, “which keeps them busy and therefore out of mischief,” and to promote feelings of satisfaction and self-respect.⁷⁵ Labor was still a means of moral reform, but no longer was it expected to produce income for the poorhouse.

No records exist to document whether or how the steward apportioned the labor at the Cedar County poor farm.⁷⁶ None of the residents in 1880 seemed able to work (see table 8). Yet on the

75. A. O. Wright, “Employment in Poorhouses,” *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Conference of Charities* (Boston, 1889), 197–203.

76. Iowa poor law allowed the steward to require “reasonable and moderate labor as may be suited to [the residents’] ages and bodily strength.” 1851 *Code of Iowa*, Title XII, chap. 48, sec. 836.

TABLE 9
HIRED HELP

Year	Amount Spent on Hired Help
1872	\$207.85
1873	\$120.69
1874	\$232.00
1875	\$282.20
1876	\$271.50
1877	\$470.08
1878	\$ 26.00
1879	\$ 75.00
1880	\$ 0.00
1881	\$ 33.00
1882	\$ 54.00
1883	\$169.00
1884	\$ 0.00

SOURCE: Compiled from claims reports in Proceedings for the years 1872–1884.

the supplemental schedule for paupers in the Dependent, Defective and Delinquent Census that year, the poor farm steward identified three individuals as “able-bodied”: two insane men, ages 37 and 53, and a feeble-minded man, age 52.⁷⁷ Considering the mental disabilities of the three men, it is unclear how the steward interpreted the meaning of “able-bodied.” Were the men able to work for long hours at a time, thereby meeting the reformers’ definition of “able-bodied,” or were they simply the only residents who could perform any tasks around the farm? Residents of the poorhouse with physical and mental disabilities and those of early and advanced ages probably performed clearly defined tasks that required little supervision, such as gathering eggs, picking beans in the garden, and sweeping the floor. The approach to labor most likely was task-oriented rather than requiring residents to labor all day in the house or the field.

Hired help for the poor farm became a point of negotiation in the steward’s contract. Almost from the beginning, the poor farm required hired help (see table 9). At the end of 1877, with the cost of hired help almost equaling the steward’s annual sal-

77. Dependent, Defective and Delinquent Classes Census, Cedar County (microfilm).

ary of \$500, the board advertised "for bids for the Superintendent of the Poor Farm" to replace G. F. Burroughs as steward. Walter Jeffers beat out nine other men with a bid to run the poor farm for an annual salary of \$525 and to furnish "all the needed girl help, (except in case of an epidemic)." Jeffers provided that help at no cost to himself by having his sister and mother-in-law live with him at the poor farm. In 1882 the board changed the contract so that the county provided "one hired hand on the farm" and Jeffers continued to furnish "all help in the house and asylum." W. F. Moorhead took over the steward position in 1883 and contracted to supply "all help to run the Poor Farm and Asylum for three hundred dollars additional per annum to the salary already allowed him as overseer." Moorhead had five sons between the ages of 8 and 23 to provide the needed help. In negotiating the contract for labor for the following year in the fall at the end of the growing season, the board did not expect able-bodied poorhouse residents to provide labor. The contracts were advantageous for both sides. The board controlled the expense by contracting hired labor at a set amount. Jeffers and Moorhead used their families to fulfill their end of the agreement and not have to pay out of pocket for extra help.⁷⁸

The foreign-born were often thought to be potential burdens on hard-working Americans. Some claimed that countries dumped their paupers on American shores. At the National Conference of Charities in 1876, Dr. M. B. Anderson stated that "both foreign municipalities and foreign nations have provided, at the public expense, for the transportation of considerable number of their pauper class to the United States. It is beyond all question paupers and criminals, in considerable numbers, have been sent to the United States by their relatives."⁷⁹ Between 1875 and 1885, the foreign-born made up 36.5 percent of individuals in the Cedar County poorhouse, which was much higher than their representation in the general population of the county (13.7 percent).⁸⁰ Germany and Ireland were the most com-

78. Proceedings, 10/16/1877, 11/29/1877, 11/16/1882, 11/28/1883.

79. Quoted in Henderson, *Introduction to the Study of the Dependent, Defective and Delinquent Classes*, 31. See also Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 9–10.

80. Based on a comparison of the nativity data for residents of Cedar County in the 1880 federal census with nativity information documented in the Poor

TABLE 10
COUNTRY OF BIRTH
FOR POORHOUSE ADMISSIONS VS. COUNTY POPULATION

Country of Birth	Cedar County 1880 Census		Poorhouse Admissions, 1875–1885	
	N	%	N	%
German Empire	1,429	53.7	31	34.1
Ireland	472	17.7	44	48.4
England and Wales	196	7.4	7	7.7
British America	198	7.4	2	2.2

SOURCES: *Tenth Census of the United States*; Poor House Register, pp. 4–12.

mon countries of origin in the population of the county at large and among the residents of the poorhouse, with the Irish making up almost half of the foreign-born admissions (see table 10). The populations used to calculate these percentages are problematic in that they include individuals from the entire life cycle. Children, for the most part, entered the poorhouse based on the need of their parents. With only one child out of 67 being foreign-born, children skew the numbers. By removing them from the tabulations, the proportion of foreign-born adult admissions increases from 36.5 percent to 50 percent of the poorhouse admissions. Even with that high percentage, no comment or complaint about the number of foreign-born individuals entering the poorhouse appeared in the official record. It is impossible to discern whether local taxpayers looked to the poor farm to confirm prejudices or simply accepted it as reflecting the struggles of new arrivals.

Data from the Cedar County poor farm also support common views about nineteenth-century gender relations: that men, being more independent and transient, were more likely

House Register for admissions between 1875 and 1885. The 1880 federal census was the first census to enumerate nativity data at the county level. With only eight individuals entering the poorhouse in 1880, I included the admissions for five years on each side of 1880 in order to create a larger group for comparison. By the mid-1850s in Seneca County, New York, the foreign-born represented three-quarters of the men entering the poorhouse. Altschuler and Saltzgaber, "Clearinghouse for Paupers," 584. See also Monkkonen, *The Dangerous Class*, 113–14.

TABLE 11
REASONS FOR ADMISSION BY GENDER

Reason for Admission	Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%
Needy or Destitute	30	17.0	32	50.0
Old Age	9	5.1	2	3.1
Tramps	9	5.1	0	0
Looking for Work	5	2.8	1	1.6
Deadbeats and Lazy	4	2.3	0	0
Disabled	32	18.2	3	4.7
Insane	26	14.8	11	17.2
Sick	61	34.7	15	23.4
Total	176	100.0	64	100.0

SOURCE: Compiled from Poor House Register, pp. 3-16 and 97-98.

to end up alone (see table 11).⁸¹ Of the 105 men admitted to the poorhouse between 1875 and 1885, only 26 appeared in the 1880 federal census. Many of the men who stayed in the Cedar County poorhouse most likely were single men with no family ties who worked as day laborers or hired hands, stayed in the county for a short time, and then moved on to seek better opportunities.⁸² Even though farm and day laborers usually boarded with a family, they had no family of their own to provide care when needed. Instead, they turned to county officials for assistance when they ran short of money or needed care during an illness

81. Altschuler and Saltzgeber, "Clearinghouse for Paupers," 581; Brown, "Poor Relief in a Wisconsin County," 96; Katz, *Poverty and Policy in American History*, 76. For discussions of population mobility in other poor relief studies, see Monkkonen, *The Dangerous Class*, 119-21; and Altschuler and Saltzgeber, "The Limits of Responsibility," 528-32.

82. A study of a township in Mahaska County, Iowa (about 70 miles west of Cedar County) found that between the 1870 and 1880 federal censuses, half of the households turned over and 70 percent of the males aged 12 to 25 no longer lived in the township. Thomas R. Baker, "Farmer Migration and the Depopulation of Rural Eastern Iowa, 1880-1885" (M.A. essay, University of Iowa, 1986), 19-21. See also Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (1963; reprint, Ames, 1994), chap. 1; Seddie Cogswell Jr., *Tenure, Nativity and Age as Factors in Iowa Agriculture, 1850-1880* (Ames, 1975). The mobility of the population raises questions about how closely Cedar County officials followed the residency requirement. The records do not answer such questions.

or after a work accident.⁸³ The poorhouse provided a refuge for men in old age who had never married and could no longer pay for their board, as well as for widowers who lacked family assistance. For example, in three consecutive censuses, Edward Haines, a farm laborer, boarded with a different member of the Long family: Samuel Long Sr. in 1860, Elizabeth (Long) Tomlinson in 1870, and William Long in 1880. Even with his long-term connection to a single family name, Mr. Haines, age 78, entered the poorhouse in 1885 "homeless & a cripple." Two years later he "died [at the poorhouse] after 8 months of sickness" and was "buried in sand hill semitery."⁸⁴

Women, in contrast, were most needy after the loss of a breadwinner.⁸⁵ Of the women under the age of 50 whose documented reason for admission implied a lack of money, such as "in need," "no home," or "destitute," over three-fourths entered with one other family member, usually her children. The poorhouse served as a temporary refuge until a new source of support could be established. Women over the age of 50 went into the poorhouse in much smaller numbers than men (see table 12). In her 1892 study of almshouse women in San Francisco, Mary Roberts Smith argued that the sense of family obligation differed. "The world recognizes the inevitable dependence of women by considering it a most disgraceful thing for relatives or children to allow an old woman to go to the almshouse." Men, on the other hand, "have had their chance to lay up money, and if they have not done so they must take the consequences. This one-sided filial obligation keeps large numbers of women out of the almshouse who are wholly dependent."⁸⁶ Although men went to the poorhouse with palsy and rheumatism, no woman over the age of 45 entered the Cedar County poor-

83. Men in their twenties and thirties accounted for half of the men admitted with an illness, suggesting that they perhaps needed the justification that they were too ill to work.

84. Poor House Register, p. 12.

85. The number of "Females to 1,000 Males" in Cedar County was 876 in 1860, 916 in 1870, and 932 in 1880. *Iowa Historical and Comparative Census*, 218.

86. Mary Roberts Smith, "Almshouse Women: A Study of Two Hundred and Twenty-Eight Women in the City and County Almshouse in San Francisco," *Publication of the American Statistical Association* 4 (September 1895), 244.

TABLE 12
ADMISSIONS BY GENDER AND AGE

Age Range (in years)	Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%
16-19	5	3.9	4	7.9
20-29	17	13.2	13	25.5
30-39	20	15.5	16	31.4
40-49	20	15.5	8	15.7
50-59	35	27.1	4	7.9
60-69	14	10.8	2	3.9
70-79	15	11.6	2	3.9
80-89	2	1.6	2	3.9
90-92	1	0.8	0	0
Total	129	100.0	51	100.1

SOURCE: Compiled from Poor House Register, pp. 3-16.

house because of a medical condition, and no feeble-minded woman entered the poorhouse. With a few exceptions, women in the older age groups and those with mental impairments were vulnerable and did not enter the poorhouse. They remained at home in the care of their families.

Individuals in the first decade of life had the largest number of admissions; 83 out of 340, or one-fourth of all admissions, were children under the age of 16. Most of the children entered the poorhouse with at least one parent, but exited with differing outcomes. Lettie, Beth, Sarah, James, Homer, and Ella, ages 10, 9, 8, 6, 5, and 2, respectively, entered with their mother and stayed at the poorhouse for about one year until the county spent \$61.75 to send the seven of them to Kansas, presumably to family. Henry, Emma, and Ellie, ages unknown, came with their mother because they were "in need"; one month later they had "runaway." For one family, poverty became so pressing that the parents could not afford to keep their children. William, Belinda, and Margaret (ages 10, 8, and 7) and their parents had been on and off outdoor relief for four years when their father "came [to the poorhouse] to get homes for his children." The board of supervisors placed a notice in the *Tipton Advertiser* "to advertise for homes for them." All three children found homes with different families. Margaret rebelled against the decision made on her behalf by adults and, after 11 months, was "sent

back" to the poorhouse. Ten days later "her Father came for her."⁸⁷

The county had the responsibility for orphans who had no family in close proximity to take them in. Six children entered the poorhouse without family.⁸⁸ The county found homes for three of the children with local families, and the board spent \$40 to send two boys, ages 11 and 15, to New York.⁸⁹ With only six orphans entering in 17 years, the poorhouse provided shelter for the six children who needed a temporary home, but it was not the sole administrative mechanism for handling the care of orphans.

Although the board had established a "permanent home for the poor of our County," the majority of those admitted to the poorhouse used it more as a stopover than as a home. Of the 311 admissions with known discharge dates, 30 percent stayed 30 days or less, 49 percent stayed three months or less, and 76 percent were in the poorhouse for less than one year (see table 13).⁹⁰ For the 33 individuals who stayed longer than five years, the poorhouse became a home. Eighteen of the 33 were residents of the insane asylum; the other 15 simply needed a place to live. Elizabeth Stone, for example, had lived with her son and his family until her son died in 1874. Two years later, at age 63, she

87. Poor House Register, pp. 4, 7, 8, 9; Proceedings, 1/7/1874, 9/5/1882. See also Altschuler and Saltzgaber, "Clearinghouse for Paupers," 576-77.

88. Table 7 lists ten admissions as orphans. Two of the orphans entered the poorhouse on more than one occasion.

89. The county sent a 17-year-old young man to New York at the same time. Poor House Register, p. 8. In 1876 the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home in Davenport expanded its admission guidelines to accept the children of indigent parents. The county was financially responsible for the expenses of children sent to the Soldiers' Orphans' Home. Gillin, *History of Poor Relief Legislation in Iowa*, 202. The board did send children from the county to the orphans' home, but it sent only one orphan from the poorhouse to the orphans' home. In 1878 the county tried twice to place Harry Cooper, age 8, with a local family; both times he re-entered the poorhouse in less than a month. After almost two more years of living in the poorhouse, he was "sent to orphan home by county." Poor House Register, p. 6. Further discussion of indigent children and orphans would require access to admission records at the orphans' home.

90. Proceedings, 6/6/1867; Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 90. A 27-year-old insane man who entered the insane asylum when it opened in 1883 and a 32-year-old man with heart disease who was admitted in 1888 still resided at the poor farm when the Poor House Register ends in 1916.

TABLE 13
LENGTH OF STAY

Length of Stay	Number of Admissions	Percent of Total
1-7 days	31	10.0
8-30 days	62	20.0
1-2 months	37	11.9
2-3 months	23	7.4
3-6 months	60	19.3
6-12 months	24	7.7
1-2 years	24	7.7
2-3 years	10	3.2
3-5 years	7	2.2
5-10 years	8	2.6
10-15 years	8	2.6
15-20 years	7	2.2
20-30 years	8	2.6
> 30 years	2	0.6
Total	311	100.0

SOURCE: Compiled from Poor House Register, pp. 3-16.

entered the poorhouse "in need" and lived there for more than 20 years until her death. Unlike the other long-term residents who, before their admittance to the poorhouse, had their names recorded in insanity hearings in the probate records, guardianship records, or the board's meeting minutes for receiving monthly allowances, Mrs. Stone's name appeared nowhere in the local public record other than the census. In the 1870 census she reported owning some real estate, which may have supported her for two years and kept her off relief. Her daughter-in-law may have helped out, but an in-law did not have the same legal or family obligation as a blood relative. Mrs. Stone seemingly just ran out of money and family. When she died in 1896, the county buried her in the cemetery at the poor farm.⁹¹

The case of Daniel Burns further illustrates the complex circumstances of those who spent many years at the poor farm. In 1859 Daniel, a minor at "sixteen or seventeen years of age," was "of imbecile or weak mind" and had "no connections in the County except a Brother who pays no attention to him." People

91. *Ninth Census of the United States*; Poor House Register, pp. 5, 6, 18.

hired him to work and then “owing to his imbecile mind” did not pay him. Without a guardian, Daniel would “be in a suffering state if attention is not paid him.” L. D. Cleghorn, “a citizen & householder of said County of Cedar,” stepped forward and petitioned the court to appoint a guardian to look after Daniel and his few assets. In his 1861 report to the court, the guardian, Robert Gower, reported that Daniel had “lived with Geo. E. Baker for the last year, and as I understand he works enough to pay his board, and I think he is improving, physically and mentally.” Despite this optimistic assessment, the county decided that he should enter the poor farm when it opened in 1871, and he lived there for more than 31 years until his death in 1902.⁹² Most of the individuals who passed through the door of the poorhouse needed only a temporary shelter during an illness or economic crisis, but for Elizabeth Stone, Daniel Burns, and others who needed a permanent residence, the county provided a home.

IN CEDAR COUNTY, the care provided within families reflects the American ideal of self-reliance, home, and family. Families gathered together under one roof to provide a home and source of support for grandparents, grandchildren, parents, married sons and daughters and their families, widowed daughters and their children, nieces, nephews, and siblings. Local records reveal that most families extended the ideal to include family members with disabilities and did not turn to government for assistance or institutional care. The care of the disabled remained within the family sphere as a part of everyday life.

For those who asked for government assistance, most experienced a brief respite from self-reliance rather than a move into dependence. Whether it was a few groceries, a cord of wood, or a stay in the poorhouse, relief officials provided as-

92. Probate File 345. At one time L. D. Cleghorn ran the hotel in Cedar Bluff. He was also one of the lay preachers for church services held in the schoolhouse. *History of Cedar County, Iowa* (Chicago, 1878), 533–34. In the 1860 federal census, he listed his occupation as farmer. Robert Gower moved into the county in 1841. He was a surveyor and ran the ferry on the Cedar River. He “was a public spirited, highly esteemed man, prominent in many county and local actions, and a member of the Second Constitutional Convention.” *History of Cedar County*, 533.

sistance until an individual or family regained health or established a new source of financial support. In this rural county, the individuals who entered the poorhouse were not the broken-down, degraded paupers portrayed by reformers in their pamphlets, speeches, and conferences, but rather individuals in need. Some were "strangers" who would move on; others were long-time residents with connections in the community. The poorhouse served the community of Cedar County as a place of refuge and as a home. When individuals or families could no longer get by on their own, they turned to local government for assistance, and government met their needs.