

“Remove Him to the Poorhouse:” Poor-Relief in Montgomery County, VA, 1830-1880

Jennifer Ann Gallagher

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Arts

in

History

Marian B. Mollin, Chair

Melanie A. Kiechle

Daniel P. Thorp

May 28, 2019

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Social Welfare; Poverty; Rural South; Race; Nineteenth Century

Copyright 2019 by Jennifer A. Gallagher

“Remove Him to the Poorhouse:” Poor-Relief in Montgomery County, VA, 1830-1880

Jennifer Ann Gallagher

ABSTRACT

In 1962, historian Michael Harrington published *The Other America*, the inaugural work in the field of the history of poverty. Part history and part call to action, Harrington argued that the poor have largely remained invisible in American society. He endeavored to make America’s poor visible as the first step towards addressing the tragedy of poverty.

Today, 40 million Americans live in poverty, indicating that it is as much a societal issue in need of solution in the twenty-first century as it was in Harrington’s time. Although the field is small, a few scholars have taken up Harrington’s call and written histories of the poor and poor relief. This work seeks to complicate and expand upon the conclusions reached by these historians by studying poor relief at the local level of one singular community in the rural South.

This research asks how the residents of nineteenth-century Montgomery County, Virginia understood the county’s responsibility for providing poor relief, and what underlying values and beliefs informed that understanding. Using local government records and state legislative and administrative records, this research will argue that, largely because the county had not yet industrialized, poor relief in nineteenth-century Montgomery County diverged from national and regional trends in three significant respects.: attitudes towards the poor in Montgomery County tended to remain more benign than national attitudes well into the postbellum era; poor relief in Montgomery County was available to black residents, both before and after the Civil War; and Montgomery County continued to offer outdoor relief well into the postbellum era. An analysis of why poor relief differed to such a degree in a rural, Southern community, as opposed to more urban, Northern, or Midwestern locales, illuminates the effects of economy, geography, and demography on societal conceptions of the poor.

“Remove Him to the Poorhouse:” Poor-Relief in Montgomery County, VA, 1830-1880

Jennifer Ann Gallagher

GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

In 2017, the number of Americans living in poverty stood at just under 40 million, or approximately 12% of the total population. For these Americans, daily life presents not only a material struggle, but a psychological battle as well. For in addition to facing the hardships inherent in poverty, they must also contend with societal scorn and condemnation. In modern America, popular culture frequently blames the poor for their own condition, characterizing them as lazy, criminal, or unintelligent. This research explores the historical roots of these negative attitudes towards the poor.

Specifically, this research asks how the residents of nineteenth-century Montgomery County, Virginia understood the county’s responsibility for providing poor relief, and what underlying values and beliefs informed that understanding. Using local government records and state legislative and administrative records, this research will argue that, largely because the county had not yet industrialized, poor relief in nineteenth-century Montgomery County diverged from national and regional trends in three significant respects.: attitudes towards the poor in Montgomery County tended to remain more benign than national attitudes well into the postbellum era; poor relief in Montgomery County was available to black residents, both before and after the Civil War; and Montgomery County continued to offer outdoor relief well into the postbellum era. An analysis of why poor relief differed to such a degree in a rural, Southern community, as opposed to more urban, Northern, or Midwestern locales, illuminates the effects of economy, geography, and demography on societal conceptions of the poor.

Acknowledgments

I offer my most sincere thanks my thesis committee, who provided continual feedback and encouragement throughout the many iterations of this project. I thank Dr. Thorp for sharing his exhaustive knowledge of Montgomery County's history, and Dr. Kiechle for helping me navigate larger trends in nineteenth-century history, and I simply cannot offer enough thanks to my advisor, Dr. Mollin, for her constant guidance and encouragement. This project simply would not have come together without her. I would also like to thank Dr. Danna Agmon and Dr. Matt Heaton for teaching me how to write history, and for providing constant, honest feedback as I learned the craft.

I would like to thank the amazing staff at the Montgomery County Clerk of Court's office, especially Clerk Erica Conner and Deputy Clerk Kayla Lambert. Clerk Conner's commitment to preserving the county's historical documents made this research possible, and Deputy Clerk Lambert was unfailingly helpful throughout my many months of research.

Finally, I could not have completed the past two years without the support of my friends and family. I was so fortunate to be supported by so many, including my three amazing kids, my boyfriend, Justin Spees, my mom and siblings (Joan Gaskins, Tim Long, Brandi Adriance, AJ Anderson, Sally Anderson, Billy Gaskins, Bobby Gaskins, Amy Gaskins, Melissa Gaskins, and Julie Gaskins), my political family (including Steve and Victoria Cochran, Jessica Bennett, Andrew Whitely, campaign staff too numerous to name, and the MCDC), my best friend, Niki Myles, and my "village" (Leonore Nadler, Anna Champion, Laura Krisch, and Nathalie Aguirre). I am especially thankful for my children, who encouraged me relentlessly. Jack, Josh, and Maggie, I appreciate how much you pitched in to keep our lives running over the last two years. You are my reason for everything, and I love you so much. Justin, thank you for giving me the courage to go back to school, for sticking with me through all the stress of graduate school, and for making me think I can do anything. Finally, many thanks and best of luck to my wonderful classmates; I can't wait to see what life has in store for you!

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....iv

Introduction.....1

Chapter I - Neighbors in Need: Poor Relief in the Antebellum Era.....15

Chapter II - Provisioning Families: Poor Relief During the Civil War.....44

Chapter III - Bureaucratizing Relief: Poor Relief in the Postbellum Era.....65

Conclusion.....94

Bibliography.....100

Introduction

Should you have cause to visit the historical records room of the courthouse in Montgomery County, Virginia, you may happen upon a few boxes labeled “County Claims,” which huddle with dozens of others on the shelves lining the walls. Although plain and nondescript on the outside, once opened, these boxes reveal long-silenced snippets of life from this rural, Southern county. Musty scraps of paper, organized into legal-sized envelopes with the year scratched on the back in pencil, reveal the struggles and hardships of men and women who lived and died in nineteenth-century Montgomery County. These claims tell stories of hardship, poverty, family ties, and community, for they recorded the county’s efforts to provide relief to its most destitute citizens. One such story emerges from a poor claim from the fall of 1867, which documents the payment of \$6.50 from the Overseer of the Poor to Beverly Deaton. Beverly was owed this payment “for removing Andy [colored] to Poor house by order of Jonathan H Graham.”¹ This document cannot tell us how Andy found himself in such desperate circumstances as to be sent to the poorhouse, what his experience was like once he arrived, or how he came to the attention of Jonathan Graham. However, taken together with other similar historical fragments, this brief document can provide a window into how rural, Southern communities understood and addressed poverty, and can complicate long-held assumptions about poor relief and the history of social welfare.²

Since colonial times, America has been home to individuals who struggled to secure the shelter, food, and goods necessary for survival. They have been known by different terms

¹ Beverly Deaton to Montgomery County Overseer of the Poor, October 1867, Poor Claims, Montgomery County Clerk of Court, Christiansburg, Virginia.

² Being concerned with societal responses to poverty (as opposed to an objective study of those *living in* poverty), this research focuses on individuals who received poor relief services. This includes residents to whom the county provided money or goods, medical care, and burial assistance, and individuals who resided in the poorhouse.

throughout the last four hundred years: waste people, paupers, and trash, to name just a few.³ Today, they are known simply as “the poor.” Often invisible to their neighbors in life, they have remained largely unseen by history as well. The histories that *have* been told about America’s poor have largely focused on Northern, Midwestern, or urban Southern locales. Focusing on the local community of Montgomery County, Virginia will expose whether the historiographical conclusions about poor relief drawn at the national and regional levels translate to the very local level in a rural, Southern setting. This research will argue that, because the county had not yet industrialized, poor relief in nineteenth-century Montgomery County diverged from national and regional trends in three significant respects. First, attitudes towards the poor in Montgomery County tended to remain much more benign than national attitudes. Although national conceptions of poverty began to shift from neighbors in temporary need of help to lazy, immoral strangers in need of reform and control in the early nineteenth century,⁴ little of this shift is evident in the records of Montgomery County. Furthermore, the majority of records do not reflect a preoccupation with the notion of “worthy” versus “unworthy.” A few poor claims refer to recipients who were of admirable character, but most of them make no reference to the character of the recipient at all, indicating that the main concern was the *need* of the recipient, not their perceived moral constitution.

Second, poor relief in Montgomery County was available to black residents, both before and after the Civil War. Historians of both national and Southern poor relief have argued that services were denied to black residents,⁵ but the evidence in Montgomery County suggests

³ Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York: Viking Press, 2016).

⁴ Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).

⁵ John Hope Franklin, “Public Welfare in the South during the Reconstruction Era, 1865-80,” *Social Service Review* 44, no. 4 (1970): 379–92; Michael A. Cooke, “Race Relations in Montgomery County, Virginia 1870-1990,” *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association* 4 (1992): 94–104; June Axinn and Stern, Mark J., *Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2001); Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*.

otherwise. For example, in 1850, the Montgomery County poorhouse sheltered twelve residents, one of whom was a 90-year-old black man identified simply as “Paul.”⁶ The poorhouse was an integrated institution during the antebellum period, and it continued to be so throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, housing adults and children of both races. In addition to relief in the poorhouse, black residents also received cash and goods, medical attention, and burial services from the county.

Third, this research will argue that Montgomery County defied the national push towards abolishing outdoor relief by the mid-nineteenth century, and instead continued to offer cash and goods to individuals in their own homes throughout the period. Throughout the nineteenth century, residents were receiving either cash payments or access to goods from local merchants to help them weather periods of hardship. The poorhouse continued to house up to a dozen residents well into the 1920s, but during this time the majority of recipients were receiving some form of outdoor relief instead of living on the poor farm.

As this research seeks to uncover how and why local officials responded to poverty, county records provide the foundation of the source base. These sources include the county’s Overseer of the Poor reports, poor claims, and court order books. Federal government documents, such as census, birth, death, and marriage records, are also utilized to fill out personal and demographic details. In addition to local sources, this research also relies upon state legislative records and national newspaper and journal articles, both of which illuminate conceptions of poor relief amongst the larger society.

Although only extant for the first half of the period, and even then not consistently, the county’s Overseer of the Poor reports provide invaluable documentation of poor relief practices. These reports, filed biannually to state administrators in Richmond, include the names, races, and

⁶ 1850 U.S. census, Montgomery County, Virginia, population schedule I., Forty-First District, dwelling 3, family 495; digital image, www.ancestry.com: accessed February 9, 2018.

length of stay for each poorhouse resident during a six-month period. In addition, the administrator itemized the expenses incurred by the poorhouse, the amount of livestock and crops on hand, how many residents were able to perform manual labor, and whether any residents died. These reports not only provide a glimpse of the lives of those enduring life in the poorhouse, they also reveal fluctuations in the number of residents, the age of the average resident, the length of stay, and racial and gender proportions over time. These documents also reveal how the supervisor of the poorhouse spoke about those in his care, providing a revealing glimpse into local attitudes towards poverty.

In addition to the Overseers of the Poor reports, this research also relies heavily upon the county's poor claims. These claims, although scant (indeed, mere literal scraps of paper in many cases), offer a wealth of information on who received aid, what kind (indoor or outdoor, cash or goods, burial expenses, etc.), the cost of that aid, and the reasons for aid (disability, old age, etc.). Additionally, these sources often designate whether recipients are white or black, allowing for an examination of the impact of race on poor relief in Montgomery County. Unlike the biannual reports, poor claims have survived from the entire period of 1830-1880, although only a few survive from the Civil War years, and far fewer from the antebellum period than the postbellum period. Enough documents survive, however, to chart changes over time in how officials spoke about the poor. Additionally, these documents illustrate changes in the administration of services for the poor over time.

The county court order books provide a complementary source base to further contextualize the Overseer of the Poor reports and poor claims. These books document the monthly meetings of the county court, during which directives were frequently made regarding poor relief. These included general orders such as those directing the construction and maintenance of the poorhouse, and orders specific to individuals, such as edicts to bind out poor

individuals to community members. These books also contain the yearly financial accounts for the county, documenting the amount spent on poor relief from year to year. Taken together, these fragmented county documents can be pieced together to reconstruct a portrait of the beliefs and practices surrounding poor relief in the county.

Although these documents allow for an informative – if incomplete – reconstruction of the administration of relief, what they *cannot* allow us to reconstruct should also be acknowledged. With the vast majority of the documents having been written by the white, male leaders of the community, they provide a limited window into how the rest of the community conceived of the poor. This research cannot reliably theorize on community-wide attitudes about poor relief within Montgomery County; rather, it offers a focused analysis of how social, economic, and geographic factors influenced local government officials' attitudes about poverty, and how those attitudes were translated into policy. The authorship and nature of the documents provides a similar limitation on our ability to fully ascertain the experience of the poor. Thus, while this research seeks to reposition the poor as equal actors within the history of poor relief, capturing their daily experience remains ephemeral and can only be gestured towards.

This project will engage with the historiographies of poor relief and social welfare policy. When discussing the history of rural, Southern poor relief, two subcategories of scholarship must be consulted. The first is the historiography of American poor relief, which spans the whole of U.S. history from the colonial era to the present. This research speaks of general trends in poverty relief and how they developed over time. Although useful as a foundational basis for an understanding of national trends, this body of research focuses almost exclusively on Northern and Midwestern states. Within the larger historiography of poor relief, however, sits a smaller body of research focusing specifically on Southern poor relief. These scholars identify the ways in which Southern practices followed national trends, and which policies and attitudes were

unique to the South. The majority of these works focus on the urban South, with the notable exception of Timothy Lockley's *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South*.⁷ This research aims to build upon the foundation set by Lockley in exploring the history of poor relief in the rural South.

Considerable overlap exists between the historiographies of poor relief and social welfare policy, as they are intricately related. Numerous scholars, such as Michael Katz, Linda Gordon, John Hope Franklin, Timothy Lockley, and Elna Green all address the intersection of relief and social welfare policy. This research will follow, and build upon, their example.

Historians of poor relief share a general consensus on the ways in which nineteenth-century Americans provided for the poor. Communities employed a number of methods to address poverty, such as providing cash, goods, or services directly to individuals, removing individuals to a poorhouse, reimbursing local citizens for taking the poor into their own homes, and auctioning the poor's labor out to the lowest bidder.⁸ These scholars have reached different conclusions, however, about the reasons *why* communities provided poor relief.

One school of thought maintains that the public has always held a negative view of the poor, blaming them for their own condition and believing that poverty stems from individual moral shortcomings. Historians Michael Harrington, Stephen Pimpare, and Nancy Isenberg most clearly exemplify this approach, with a strong emphasis on the ill treatment that the poor have received throughout American history as a result of these negative societal conceptions of poverty. Pimpare argues that attitudes towards the poor "have been fairly constant...with roots

⁷ Timothy James Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).

⁸ Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986); Stephen Pimpare, *A People's History of Poverty in America* (New York: The New Press, 2008); David Wagner, *The Poorhouse: America's Forgotten Institution* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Stephen T. Ziliak, "Pauper Fiction in Economic Science: 'Paupers in Almshouses' and the Odd Fit of *Oliver Twist*," *Review of Social Economy* 60, no. 2 (June 2002): 159–81; Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Monique Bourque, "Women and Work in the Philadelphia Almshouse, 1790—1840," *Journal of the Early Republic* 32, no. 3 (2012): 383–413.

that run deep.”⁹ Harrington echoes this assertion, but finds negative views of the poor to be secondary to the fact that the poor have largely been invisible in American society. By contrast, Isenberg argues that the poor have not been invisible, but have been constantly denigrated as an immoral, lazy, and entirely expendable sub-class.¹⁰ Although their assertions differ by degree, these three historians all assert that throughout American history, societal conceptions of poverty have centered around ideas of personal moral failure, laziness, and unworthiness.

Michael Katz has sketched a more nuanced picture of societal attitudes towards the poor. Although he concedes that notions of immorality and laziness have held sway over the last two hundred years, he argues that these ideas only gained prominence in the early nineteenth century. Prior to the 1800s, no stigma was attached to poverty. As Katz asserts: “Resources were finite; life was harsh. Most people would be born, live, and die in poverty.”¹¹ Thus, the pre-modern British model of poor relief focused not on *whether* or *why* poor relief should be offered, but *to whom*. It was a given that individuals would need relief, but communities did not want to expend resources on strangers. Families and communities had an obligation to take care of their own, but had no such obligation to outsiders. Responsibility for poor relief within a community first fell to the family of the impoverished, but if the family was unable to offer help, the locality assumed the responsibility.¹²

Attitudes towards the poor began to change only with the rise of a capitalist economy. Once individuals began to be measured by “their ability to produce wealth,” society began to condemn those who “for whatever reason, fail[ed] to contribute or prosper.”¹³ At the same time that industrialization was creating higher levels of poverty due to changes in social structures,

⁹ Pimpare, *A People's History of Poverty in America*, 8.

¹⁰ Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1962); Isenberg, *White Trash*.

¹¹ Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 11.

¹² Katz, *The Undeserving Poor*; Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*.

¹³ Katz, *The Undeserving Poor*, 7.

evolving negative beliefs about the poor led to a public backlash against poor relief. The rise of poverty without a concurrent increase in poor-relief efforts assured a continual supply of cheap labor. In Katz's history of poverty, capitalism resulted in a marked shift from viewing the poor as neighbors in need of temporary assistance to seeing them as lazy, immoral architects of their own fates.¹⁴ This research will build upon Katz's theory, but from the other side: rather than examining industrialized communities, it will explore the beliefs and administration of poor relief in a pre-industrialized county.

A third school of historians rejects the pessimism of the first two schools, arguing that negative conceptions of the poor were tempered by an altruistic and humanitarian impulse. In his examination of the working poor in nineteenth-century Baltimore, historian Seth Rockman argues that the institution of the almshouse served as both a means of capitalist control and a benevolent institution that the poor could use to their own benefit.¹⁵ Similarly, historian Monique Bourque maintains that an almshouse factory in Boston from the same period exemplified two competing attitudes towards poverty: the poor as a source of cheap factory labor, and the poor as charitable subjects in need of moral reform.¹⁶ While somewhat less optimistic than this school of thought, this thesis also acknowledges the often-complex motivations behind a community's provision of relief. Government officials in Montgomery County did indeed view poor relief as an obligation to the less fortunate, but the provision of that relief also offered the administrators power, control, and the respect of their peers.

Although most scholars of national poverty express conclusions about the societal attitudes informing poor relief practices, comparatively few have examined the intersection between race and poor relief. In his seminal 1962 work on poverty, Michael Harrington made

¹⁴ Katz, *The Undeserving Poor*, 14.

¹⁵ Rockman, *Scraping By*.

¹⁶ Bourque, "Women and Work in the Philadelphia Almshouse, 1790—1840," 383—413.

little reference to race. Although he recognized the pervasiveness and entrenchment of racial discrimination, and the unique difficulties facing the black poor, his conclusions were based on twentieth-century, urban communities.¹⁷ Writing twenty years after Michael Harrington, Michael Katz discusses the complicating factor of race in the South's welfare practices, maintaining that poor relief was necessary to allow poor whites to uphold white supremacy by securing a higher level of material security than their black neighbors.¹⁸ He also relates that contemporary critics lamented that poorhouses were not segregated, and that "poor of all classes and colors, all ages and habits, partake of a common fare, a common table, and a common dormitory."¹⁹ There is no analysis of if/how society viewed the black poor and the white poor differently, only a record of the criticism that arose as a result of them being housed together. As with Harrington, most of Katz's conclusions on the impact of race on poverty focus on twentieth-century attitudes and urban settings, rendering them less instructive for an analysis on the impact of race on rural, Southern, nineteenth-century attitudes towards poverty.

In her 2012 monograph, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*, Nancy Isenberg offers one of the most comprehensive reviews on the relationship between race and poverty. Her work focuses on the history of white poverty, but she actually discusses race quite frequently. Similar to Michael Katz, Isenberg views the history of poverty through a Marxist lens, arguing that America is (and always has been) a classed society. She maintains that, throughout the past four hundred years, the underclass has served the economic needs of the upper class. Her analysis of race deals less with how it impacts the experience of poverty, and more on how government and corporations have used race to prevent the challenge to their power that a shared class consciousness among whites and poor blacks could invite. Isenberg

¹⁷ Harrington, *The Other America*.

¹⁸ Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

argues that, although an underclass exists, those in power have exploited the racial divide to prevent the development of a class consciousness among the poor.²⁰

The few historians who have researched poor relief in the South discuss the same methods of relief as do the national historians: the use of poorhouses; provisions of money, goods, or services; and temporarily housing or auctioning off the labor of the poor to wealthier residents. These scholars also note, however, the role of the Confederacy (and after the war, the U.S. Government) in providing relief. Elizabeth Wisner, Emory Thomas, and Elna Green note that, although poor relief had previously been solely a local responsibility, the social disruption and poverty brought about by the Civil War gave rise to state and national governmental involvement in poor relief.²¹ In 1864 in Virginia, Governor William Smith went to extraordinary measures to personally ensure that his constituents received food.²² The Confederacy also provided food to hungry Southerners, and the U.S. Government provided poor-relief services after the Civil War to white and black Southerners through the Freedman's Bureau.²³ The evidence in Montgomery County supports these conclusions, and the second chapter of this thesis will examine the significant impact of the war on poor relief.

Similar to the scholars of national poverty, the historians of Southern poor relief generally agree on *how* communities cared for their poor, but disagree as to *why*. Timothy Lockley argued that poor relief in Southern communities was more benevolent than in the North, and that in the South the main concern was the alleviation of suffering, whereas in the North, communities were most concerned with cutting costs for poor relief. He tempers this utopian

²⁰ Isenberg, *White Trash*, 313.

²¹ Elizabeth Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South: From Colonial Times to WWI* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970); Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971); Elna C. Green, *Before the New Deal: Social Welfare in the South, 1830-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999).

²² Thomas, *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience*, 71-72.

²³ Green, *Before the New Deal*, xiv-xv.

conclusion, however, with the acknowledgement that this benevolence towards the white poor was partially motivated by a desire to maintain racial division and white supremacy. Wisner and Thomas take a more cynical view, arguing that circumstance, not benevolence, motivated Southern poor relief. They credit the desperation of Southerners during and after the Civil War for the level of poor relief offered by the state and national governments. As fully articulated by Stephanie McCurry, the destitution caused by the war prompted Southern citizens, especially women, to demand assistance. Finally, in an argument that foreshadows Nancy Isenberg's, Shifflett provides the most critical of interpretations, suggesting that poor relief laws were employed as a means to control the labor supply as the South moved from a system of paternalism to one of patronage.²⁴ This research will most closely align with Lockely's conclusions, arguing that government administrators exercised genuine concern for the care of the poor, but that the administrators and/or the community often benefited more from the provision of relief than the recipients themselves.

Whereas the discussion of race and relief in the historiography of national poor relief tends to focus on the twentieth century, the field of Southern poor relief focuses on the changes that took place over the nineteenth century. These conversations focus on two themes: the denial of poor relief to black residents and the use of poor relief for white residents as a means of upholding white supremacy. Wisner and Green both contend that black Americans were denied services – in practice if not in law – during the antebellum period. Green further asserts that they were denied assistance in the postbellum era as well, with the exception of whatever aid they could secure through the Freedman's Bureau or black mutual assistance societies. In contrast, Lockley argues that black residents were not always denied relief, but they consistently received

²⁴ Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South*; Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South: From Colonial Times to WWI*; Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010); Crandall A. Shifflett, *Patronage and Poverty in the Tobacco South: Louisa County, Virginia, 1860-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982).

inferior services.²⁵ He also shares Isenberg's assertion that those in power used poor relief to demonstrate that "poor whites were valued and respected and had a special status in this society merely because of their skin color."²⁶ This thesis will challenge and complicate these conclusions, providing evidence that Montgomery County extended poor relief to black citizens throughout the period of 1830-1880. Rather than denying relief to black residents as a means of control, the power of granting and distributing aid likely reinforced administrators' self-image as magnanimous patriarchs providing for their community.

As mentioned above, significant overlap exists between the historical fields of poverty/poor relief and social welfare policy. Indeed, some scholars, most notably Michael Katz, address the two subjects together. The history of social welfare policy, however, offers a far deeper analysis of the cultural norms and beliefs that underlie poor relief, making it an invaluable resource for this project.

Historians of social welfare policy have looked to the impact of industrialization on the British poor relief system that had been in use in America since the colonial era. Walter Trattner, Michael Katz, June Axinn, and Mark Stern have drawn a causal link between the rise of the wage labor economy and the association of poverty with laziness and unworthiness. Industrialization created the false narrative that if an able-bodied man was not working, it was due to his own laziness or moral failure. This belief was closely related to the rise during the nineteenth century of the worthy/unworthy dichotomy: the infirm, very old, very young, and widows made up the "worthy" poor, while unwed mothers and able-bodied men were considered to be "unworthy."²⁷

²⁵ Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South*; Green, *Before the New Deal*; Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South*.

²⁶ Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South*, 59.

²⁷ Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*; Michael B. Katz, *Poverty and Policy in American History* (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1983); Axinn and Stern, *Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need*.

Another prominent strain in social welfare policy maintains that poor relief was viewed as a means to control and reform the poor. Scholars of this school, including John Alexander and Mimi Abramovitz, argue that the movement in the nineteenth century to abolish outdoor relief (the provision of cash or goods to individuals outside of the poorhouse), and instead place the poor in poorhouses, grew out of a desire to directly supervise the poor and “teach” them the value of work. This period also witnessed the rise of the societal notion that providing outdoor relief encouraged, rather than discouraged, poverty.²⁸ By focusing on the relatively slow progression of negative attitudes about poverty in a rural, Southern locality, this thesis supports the conclusion reached by these scholars that the rise of industrialization led to a hardening of attitudes towards poverty and poor relief.

As with any historical research, this project contains multiple limitations. Any research on subaltern populations suffers from a scarcity of sources and the difficulty of locating the subjects in historical records. As a general rule, their voices are not recorded by history, and their existence is often missing from official records (census, birth, marriage, death) as well. The only solution to this limitation would be to abandon research on the poor, which is not an ethical option. Therefore, this research attempts to fill out the history by reading local sources against the grain, as modeled by historians such as Marisa J. Fuentes and Michel-Rolph Trouillot.²⁹ Through this method, some of the experience of the poor can be captured, even if it is not a complete picture.

It should be acknowledged that, in part due to the nature of the sources, this research does not attempt to fully reconstruct the experience of living in poverty in nineteenth-century

²⁸ John K. Alexander, *Render Them Submissive: Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760-1800* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston: South End Press, 1996).

²⁹ Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

Montgomery County. Rather, it seeks to uncover how local administrators understood their duty to care for the poor. As such, this thesis does not engage with other resources that may have been available to those struggling for survival, such as assistance from family and friends, churches, private charity organizations, and the Freedman's Bureau (during Reconstruction). This research focuses specifically and narrowly on how county administrators thought about and enacted poor relief in one specific community.

The localized nature of this research poses another possible limitation. Since it will be focused on one specific county these findings cannot be generalized to the state or the country. In answer to this limitation, this research does not aim to provide a comprehensive picture of Southern, rural poor relief, but rather, to support and complicate the comprehensive picture currently drawn by the historiography. Specifically, this research supports the connection drawn by the historiography between industrialization and hardening attitudes towards poverty; this research argues that the relatively benign attitudes and practices in Montgomery County defy the picture drawn by the larger historiography because – unlike the majority of research conducted on poor relief thus far – it focuses on a rural, Southern county which had not yet industrialized.

Finally, a caveat should be posed regarding the conclusions reached by this thesis. The amount of aid distributed by the Montgomery County office of the Overseer of the Poor demonstrates that county administrators took their responsibility for poor relief seriously, but this should not be misconstrued to mean that the poor were lifted out of poverty into comfortable, secure lives. As the historiography demonstrates, America's poor have always endured incredible hardship, even if they were receiving aid.³⁰ For many, receiving relief simply meant access to the needs required for basic survival.

³⁰ For the most comprehensive analysis of the social condition of living in poverty, see Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse* and Pimpare, *A People's History of Poverty in America*.

Chapter I

Neighbors in Need: Poor Relief in the Antebellum Era

The local government in early nineteenth-century Montgomery County provided for its most destitute citizens in a number of ways, including providing money or goods to individuals, housing them in the poorhouse, paying other residents to provide shelter to them, and paying medical and burial expenses. Montgomery County was not unique in providing poor relief to its residents; indeed, throughout the antebellum era communities across the continent enacted these same measures. This rural, Southern community, however, stood apart from the rest of the country in two significant respects: the manner in which they spoke about the poor and their practice of extending relief to black residents. The current historiography on poor relief maintains that poor relief during this period resulted from a desire to control and reform the poor, and that poor relief was generally limited to white citizens.³¹ Montgomery County's history of poor relief complicates both of these assertions.

The documentary evidence suggests that a sense of societal obligation served as the foundational ethos behind Montgomery County's poor relief practices. This stands in contrast to the changing beliefs about poverty and poor relief that were being adopted in other parts of the country. During the nineteenth century, coinciding with the rise of industrialism, national conceptions of poverty began to shift from viewing the poor as neighbors in temporary need of help to characterizing the poor as lazy, immoral strangers in need of reform and control.³² This chapter argues that in Montgomery County, a rural community which had not yet industrialized,

³¹ Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South: From Colonial Times to WWI*; Alexander, *Render Them Submissive*; Shifflett, *Patronage and Poverty in the Tobacco South*; Katz, *Poverty and Policy in American History*; Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*; Katz, *The Undeserving Poor*; Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*; Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*; Green, *Before the New Deal: Social Welfare in the South, 1830-1930*; Axinn and Stern, *Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need*; Pimpare, *A People's History of Poverty in America*.

³² Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*; Katz, *The Undeserving Poor*, 9-16.

residents were slower to make this transition and adhered to the “neighbors in need” philosophy well into the nineteenth century. As a result, poor relief in antebellum Montgomery County was primarily driven by the belief, held over from the colonial era, that localities were responsible for the care of their poor if the recipients did not have family who could provide for them.

Two significant findings within the documentary evidence support the claim that Montgomery County’s system of poor relief was primarily motivated by a sense of governmental obligation towards its neighbors. First, the evidence suggests that the county government’s main concern in assessing qualification for poor relief was whether the individual was a county resident in legitimate need, and not the moral quality of the individual. The majority of records do not reflect a preoccupation with the notion of “worthy” versus “unworthy,” as is found in more industrialized areas during this time period. A few poor claims refer to recipients who were of particularly admirable character, but most of them make no reference to the character of the recipient at all, indicating that the main concern was the *need* of the recipient, not their perceived moral constitution. Secondly, citizens of Montgomery County used more benign terms when referring to the poor than were used in other areas during the same time period. Rather than employing the derogatory terms that were becoming popular during the period, such as “idle” and “intemperate,”³³ government officials in Montgomery County primarily referred to the poor as “pauper” or “poor person.” In many instances, they simply refer to the recipient of poor relief by name, without any qualifier at all.

Poor relief in Montgomery County also differed from the majority of the country in that it did not limit relief to white residents; it consistently provided services to black citizens, although during the antebellum period only freed men and women were eligible, as slaves were

³³ R. C. Waterson, “Address on Pauperism, its Extent, Causes, and the Best Means of Prevention; Delivered at the Church in Bowden Square, February 4, 1844” (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1844) in David J. Rothman, ed., *The Jacksonians on the Poor: Collected Pamphlets* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1971).

considered to be the responsibility of their owners. Although numerous historians have argued that black residents were denied poor relief or received significantly inferior services,³⁴ this was not the case in Montgomery County. Black residents did not receive access to all of the services that white residents did, but they did receive shelter within the poorhouse, outdoor relief (i.e., aid “outdoors” of the poorhouse, such as money or goods), medical attention, and burial services. They may have received inferior services, and were at times denied services, but it would be incorrect to assert that they were always denied poor relief. This should not, however, be taken to indicate that black residents did not suffer from the institutional and cultural racism which was endemic during this period.

Thus, Montgomery County’s antebellum history provides a complicating addition to the historiography of American poor relief. Rather than following the national trend of utilizing poor relief as a means of punishing (for their perceived moral failings) and reforming (through the work and regimentation of the poorhouse) the poor, individuals in Montgomery County continued to provide poor relief out of a societal obligation to their neighbors, and with little moral judgment. Furthermore, whereas other locales denied services to freedmen and freedwomen of color, Montgomery County offered services to their black, freed neighbors. These two anomalies suggest that residents of this rural, Southern community viewed poverty and poor relief differently than many of their nineteenth-century countrymen. This is not to say that the county administrators were especially kind or magnanimous, or that the poor lived lives of comfort and security as a result of relief. Quite the contrary; for those living on the margins of subsistence, life was a daily struggle for basic necessities, comfort and security, and personal autonomy. However, due to the persistence of colonial-era beliefs about poverty, local

³⁴ Shifflett, *Patronage and Poverty in the Tobacco South*; Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*; Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*; Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*; Green, *Before the New Deal: Social Welfare in the South, 1830-1930*; Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South*.

administrators did not add moral condemnation to the burdens carried by their impoverished neighbors.

A brief history of the county will prove useful before beginning an analysis of the sources. Located in the southwest of Virginia, Montgomery County was created from portions of Fincastle, Augusta, and Botetourt counties in 1776. By this time, the land had already been inhabited for millennia by Native Americans. English explorers began arriving in the mid-1600s, and the area was the site of numerous exploratory expeditions over the next fifty years. English, and possibly German, settlements began to emerge as early as the 1730s. By 1750, the region that would come to be known as the New River Valley was home to roughly three hundred European settlers of mostly English, German, and Scots-Irish ancestry, who would eventually displace the native population.³⁵ Over the course of the next fifty years, the European settlers raised livestock, farmed, and engaged in trade by way of a trail connecting the New River Valley to the Shenandoah Valley to the north, in addition to engaging in a number of violent conflicts, first with the native population, and during the Revolutionary years, with the British as well.³⁶ During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the county's economy began to transition from a primary reliance on the raising of livestock to an increasing dependence on farming.³⁷

Rural Montgomery County experienced a number of changes over the three decades leading up to the Civil War. In 1830, the county's population sat at 12,306, and fell significantly during the 1830s as parts of the county were carved out to form the neighboring counties of Floyd and Pulaski. By 1850, the now geographically smaller county's population totaled 8,359. Despite the shrinking acreage, the antebellum period witnessed significant development in the

³⁵ Despite their original ties to the land that would become Montgomery County, this project has not been able to include Native American voices in the history of nineteenth-century poor relief. If a native population still resided in the county by 1830, its members were silenced by the documentary body.

³⁶ Lindon, *Virginia's Montgomery County*; Lula Porterfield Givens, *Highlights in the Early History of Montgomery County, Virginia* (Pulaski, Virginia: B.D. Smith & Bros., Printers, Inc., 1975).

³⁷ Lindon, *Virginia's Montgomery County*, 208-209.

county, including the opening of mineral springs tourist resorts, the development of turnpikes, and the extension of the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad past the county seat of Christiansburg.³⁸

The history of poor relief within the state of Virginia heavily influenced the ways in which residents of Montgomery County cared for their poor. As in the other colonies, the Virginia colonists brought English poor laws across the sea with them.³⁹ Michael Katz identified the characteristics of poor relief that American society adopted from Britain: the notion that responsibility for caring for the poor fell first to an individual's family; the obligation of the local government to fill this role if the family could not; and the practice of apprenticing poor children and orphans to local farmers or artisans. Such apprenticeships were considered mutually beneficial arrangements which provided food and shelter to the apprentice in exchange for labor for the farmers and artisans.⁴⁰ In colonial Virginia, administrators regularly apprenticed out poor children and provided both apprenticeships and outdoor relief to poor adults. A special poor tax was collected for this purpose, which was in addition to the annual levy that the county charged to cover its general expenses.⁴¹

As the nation transitioned from British colonies to independence, Virginia's poor relief laws underwent change as well. Colonial Virginia was divided into administrative units based on Church of England parishes. In 1755, the colony enacted legislation allowing counties to erect poorhouses to accommodate the growing population of the poor:

Whereas, The number of poor people hath of late years much increased throughout this colony, and it will be the most proper method for their maintenance, and for

³⁸ Lindon, *Virginia's Montgomery County*, xiv, 245, 296-301.

³⁹ Axinn and Stern. *Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need*. Green, *Before the New Deal: Social Welfare in the South, 1830-1930*; Elna C. Green, *This Business of Relief: Confronting Poverty in a Southern City, 1740-1940* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003); Katz, *The Undeserving Poor*; Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South*; Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*.

⁴⁰ Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 13-14.

⁴¹ Arthur W. James, *Disappearance of the County Almshouse in Virginia: Back From "Over the Hill"* (Richmond: The State Board of Public Welfare, 1926), 5.

the prevention of great mischiefs arising from such numbers of unemployed poor, to provide houses for their reception and employment.⁴²

From 1755 to 1785 the operation of the county's poorhouse fell to the vestry, a group of local leaders responsible for the civic and religious administration of the parish. In 1786, Virginia's General Assembly passed the "Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom," disestablishing the Anglican Church as the official state religion. The collection of taxes for poor relief, as well as the administration of poor relief, transferred to the newly-created constitutional office of the Overseer of the Poor.⁴³ Each locality elected its overseer for a term of three years, eligible for reelection, and it was not unusual for an overseer to remain in office for multiple terms. This office remained in existence until poorhouses fell out of use in the early twentieth century.⁴⁴

In 1849, the Virginia legislature passed an amended code which expanded upon the requirements of relief and the role of local governments in administering it:

On application by, or on behalf of, any person unable to maintain himself, or by or on behalf of the family of a person, when he is unable to maintain it, and the family is unable to maintain itself, such person or family shall be provided for or assisted, if he or they have a legal settlement in a town which has overseers, by one of the said overseers, and if he or they have a legal settlement not within such town, by a majority of the overseers of the district wherein such settlement may be.⁴⁵

As reflected in the above section of the Code of Virginia, an inability to "maintain" oneself and "legal settlement" in the county were the primary requirements for receiving poor relief.

Although the 1755 legislation encouraged the construction of poorhouses, Montgomery County was slow to make this transition. They eventually erected a poorhouse in 1830, which remained in use at least until 1927.⁴⁶ In Montgomery County the house was often referred to as a

⁴² James, *Disappearance of the County Almshouse in Virginia: Back From "Over the Hill,"* 8.

⁴³ Carl H Esbeck, "Protestant Dissent and the Virginia Disestablishment, 1776-1786," *Public Policy* 7 (2009): 55.

⁴⁴ James, *Disappearance of the County Almshouse in Virginia: Back From "Over the Hill,"* 12.

⁴⁵ 1849 Code of Virginia, Chapter LI, Section 13.

⁴⁶ John Nicolay, "Virginia Poverty: Paupers and the Almshouse: An Examination of Montgomery County's Response to Poverty, 1790-1860," 1984; Montgomery County Order Book, #25, MCCC; Poor Farm Report, June 31, 1927, Poor Farm Reports, MCCC; Lindon, *Virginia's Montgomery County*, 245-246.

poor farm, as it was not just a residence, but an actual working farm. If the residents were physically able, they were expected to perform labor to help with household chores, farming, or tending the livestock. Census records and poor farm reports, however, suggest that during any given time a significant percentage of residents were either mentally or physically disabled and unable to perform work. In many cases, the poorhouse stood in for what would later emerge as mental hospitals, orphanages, and old age homes, and it was common for the majority of residents to have physical or mental disabilities.⁴⁷

For those whose circumstances were dire enough to lead them to the steps of the poorhouse, they lived under the guardianship of an appointed Supervisor of the Poor. This appointee lived on the farm with the residents, as did his wife and children. The supervisor's family contributed the majority of the labor on the farm, including fixing meals and taking care of the infirm. The supervisor was paid for his service, but he may have been only slightly financially better off than the residents he oversaw.⁴⁸ In Montgomery County, supervisors often served multiple terms, in some cases overseeing the poor farm for over a decade.

Montgomery County utilized at least two different structures as poorhouses. The only surviving structure, located in Ellett Valley outside of Blacksburg, now functions as a single-family home. In the nineteenth-century, the county's poorhouse was located atop Poorhouse Knob in Christiansburg, but this structure is no longer standing. Both of these locations were quite remote, located several miles from the town center, in a period when transportation was not easy, which would have resulted in significant isolation for the residents.

The most indigent of citizens were given aid through residence in the poorhouse, referred to as indoor relief, but a greater number of citizens received outdoor relief in the form of cash or goods. This could be an allowance of cash, either on a one-time basis or a designated amount per

⁴⁷ Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South*, 16.

⁴⁸ Wagner, *The Poorhouse: America's Forgotten Institution*.

month or year, or credit towards the purchase of goods from local merchants. In a few cases, a recipient's request for relief has survived, allowing for a unique opportunity to observe how recipients of poor relief referred to themselves and their conditions. In most cases, however, the request for an individual's relief was written by a third party, and then approved by the Overseer of the Poor.

In addition to providing cash, goods, or housing, the county also provided medical and burial services to its most destitute citizens. The sources indicate that these services were provided to individuals both inside and outside of the poorhouse, and to both white and black residents. For medical care for the poorhouse residents, local doctors would present their invoices to the Supervisor of the Poor. These documents itemize the number of visits that they made to the patients over a period of time (usually 6-12 months), and detail what kind of service was provided to which individuals. When residents died without means to pay for their burials, the county would procure coffins from local merchants on their behalf. Similar to outdoor relief, indoor relief, and medical care, this service was provided regardless of race. The county paid \$3-\$6 per coffin, and the surviving documents include not only the cost of the coffins but also the names and race of the deceased.

Thus, up until the early nineteenth century, poor relief in Montgomery County adhered to many of the same practices and beliefs that historians have documented at the national level. Montgomery County provided the same services – indoor and outdoor relief, medical care, and burial expenses – which were informed by the same general beliefs about poverty, its causes and solutions, and the role of local governments in addressing the issue. Extensive documentary evidence exists proving that Montgomery County officials provided poor relief to its most vulnerable citizens, but the more challenging (and informative) historical question to answer is

why they provided such relief. What values and beliefs informed their practices, and how did those values and beliefs compare to those held in other parts of the country?

Prominent national theories of poor relief emphasized the value of relief as a vehicle to morally reform the poor. Virginia legislation also alluded to this reformatory nature of poor relief:

The council of a town or overseers of a county may provide a poorhouse, workhouse and other buildings and improvements; employ managers, physicians, nurses and servants; and prescribe regulations for the government of the several overseers, and **discipline for the said houses and the persons therein** (emphasis added).⁴⁹

Despite this emphasis on reform reflected in the state code, the existing Overseers of the Poor documents in Montgomery County reflect little to no concern with reforming the recipients of poor relief. Rather, the sources reflect nothing more than a desire to provide services to residents who need it. A review of a representative sample of the documents pertaining to each type of poor relief will demonstrate the officials' focus on providing services and their relative lack of concern for reform.

The reports of the county's Overseer of the Poor, submitted by law to the state government in Richmond, provide an invaluable source of information about the county's poor relief services. Unfortunately, not all of the records have survived, but records do exist for the antebellum years of 1840-1844 and 1851-1856. Despite the national trend towards eliminating outdoor relief in favor of indoor relief, in order to control and reform the poor, these reports indicate that the opposite trend was occurring in Montgomery County. During the antebellum period the amount of outdoor relief *increased* rather than decreased [Table 1].

⁴⁹1849 Code of Virginia, Chapter LI, Section 18.

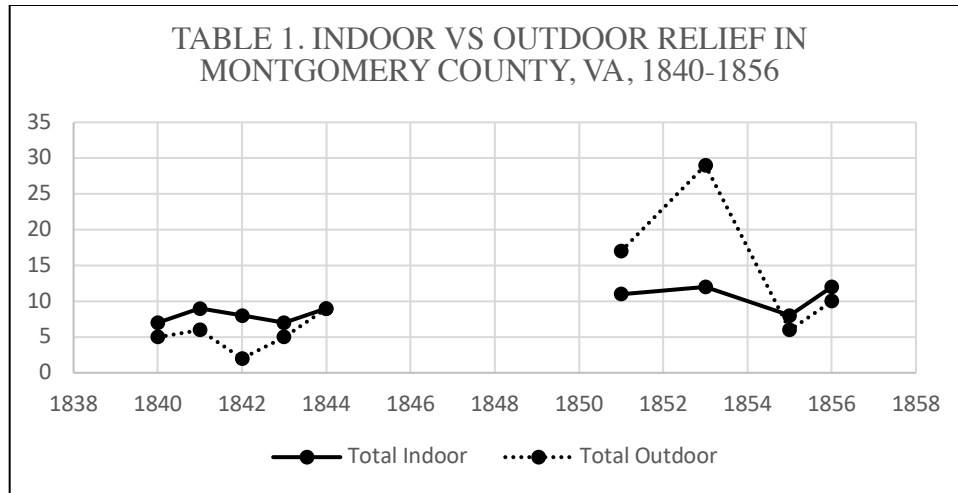


Table 1: Montgomery Overseer of the Poor Reports, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 2, SPEC; Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1851-1855, Overseers of the Poor Annual Reports and Checklist, Montgomery County, 1800-1909, Accession APA 739, LV.

In 1840, five individuals were receiving cash or goods in a location other than the poorhouse; in 1853 the number of recipients of outdoor relief had risen to a high of 29 individuals. Whereas during the early 1840s the number of individuals in the poorhouse was consistently equal to or higher than the number of those receiving outdoor relief, the reverse was true ten years later for the period of 1851-1853. Indoor relief again surpassed outdoor relief in 1855-1856, but only by two individuals.

This trend of increasing outdoor relief is quite remarkable in light of the national conversation occurring during the early- to mid-nineteenth century about poor relief. In England, the rise of industrialism and the theory of laissez-faire economics revolutionized the conceptions of poverty which had informed British poor relief for hundreds of years. No longer viewing poverty as a natural phenomenon that could affect nearly anyone, politicians and thinkers of the period began to consider poverty a personal moral failing. In an industrialized society, an

individual's worth became linked to their productive output. Individuals who did not produce, especially if they were physically capable of work, were deemed lazy freeloaders.⁵⁰

Coinciding with changes in industrialization and economic theory, the early nineteenth century also witnessed the rise of reform movements. Reformers took on a number of causes, including temperance, suffrage, abolitionism, child welfare, and treatment of the poor and the insane. Reformers began to look to the institution as a means of addressing societal ills: orphanages for children, mental institutions for the insane, and almshouses for the poor. Two governmental reports, informally known as the Yates and Quincy reports, were commissioned by the New York and Massachusetts state governments, respectively, in the early 1820s to analyze the effectiveness of poor relief laws and offer suggestions for improvement. Both commissions recommended the abolition of outdoor relief, to be replaced with housing the poor in almshouses where they could be subject to supervision and moral reform. In theory, the poorhouse would provide shelter and care to the disabled, and discipline and work to the able-bodied.⁵¹

Returning to poor relief in Montgomery County, an examination of the records reveals that this community primarily housed the infirm, elderly, and very young in the poorhouse, and provided outdoor relief to everyone else. During the antebellum years for which data on physical infirmity is available, the majority of poorhouse residents are listed as "unable to work" [Table 2].⁵²

⁵⁰ Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*; Axinn and Stern, *Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need*; for connection between capitalism and individual worth, see Katz, *The Undeserving Poor*.

⁵¹ Axinn and Stern, *Social Welfare*, 44-61.

⁵² Overseer of the Poor Reports, 1851-1855, LV.

The Overseer of the Poor reports, from which this data is provided, do not include the residents' ages, but the U.S. Census can provide that information for the years 1850 and 1860. In 1850,

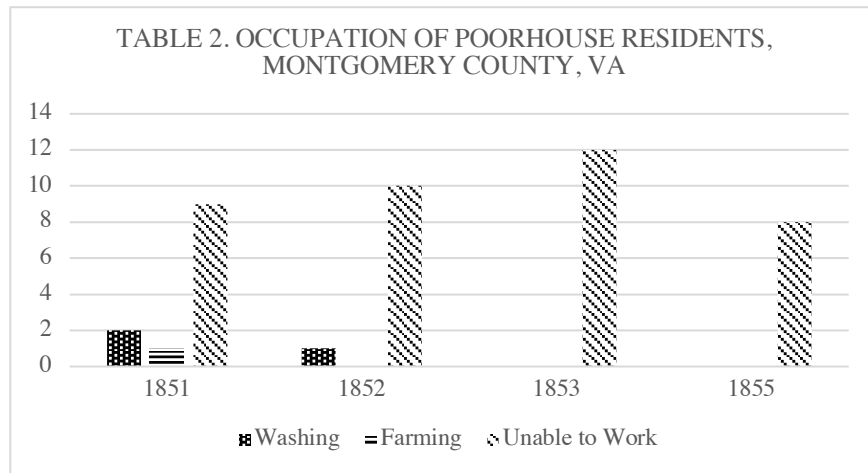


Table 2: *Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1851-1855, Overseers of the Poor Annual Reports and Checklist, Montgomery County, 1800-1909, Accession APA 739, LV.*

twelve individuals resided at the poorhouse. Of those, five were over 55 years old, four were under 12 years old, and three (all women) were between 27 and 41.⁵³ In 1860, out of seven residents, three were over 55, one was a child, and three (all women) were between 35 and 48.⁵⁴

As these graphs make visible, the Montgomery County poorhouse provided primarily for the aged, the young, and the infirm, while the “able-bodied” poor were provided with outdoor relief. This stands in contrast to the recommendations of the Yates and Quincy reports, which suggested exactly the opposite – that the able-bodied be sent to the poorhouse for punishment and reform.⁵⁵

Indeed, in their own documents, the Overseers of the Poor make no mention of a reforming nature of the poorhouse. The clerk of the Board of Overseers of the Poor made the following notation at the end of the 1830 report to Richmond:

To the auditor of Public accounts:

⁵³ 1850 United States Census.
⁵⁴ 1860 United States Census.
⁵⁵ New York State Board of Charities, *Annual Report for the Year 1900*, vol. 1, “Report of the Secretary of State in 1824 on the Relief and Settlement of the Poor” (James B. Lyons, State Printer, Albany, New York: 1901), 937-1145; Josiah Quincy, “Report of the Committee on the Pauper Laws of this Commonwealth,” (Boston: Shaw and Shoemaker, 1821).

Sir

You will see from reference to the last [year's account] that there is a great difference between last [year's account] and this the reason is this that the court of this county has purchased land and erected a poor house and the \$2000 is for the purpose of furnishing it with cooking utensils & bedding and the Overseers were uncertain as to the number of paupers that would go to the Poorhouse.

Edmund B Goodrich Clk
Of the Board of overseers of the Poor⁵⁶

As with the vast majority of the existing Overseers of the Poor documents, this notation by Clerk Goodrich does not convey any sense of moral condemnation of the poor or reluctance to provide for their needs.

Clerk Goodrich's note also makes clear that the Overseers were not planning to move all recipients of outdoor relief into the poorhouse. Their yearly records indicated how many individuals were receiving outdoor relief, and who they were; Goodrich's statement that they did not know how many residents to expect indicates that they did not intend the poorhouse to completely replace outdoor relief. This suggests that, although they constructed a poorhouse, they saw it as a last resort to provide relief to individuals who could not get by with outdoor relief. Their main concern was relief, not moral reform.

In addition to the \$2000 expenditure for initially furnishing the house, the Overseers made frequent purchases to support the residents. In 1846, the county submitted 29 payments totaling \$351.16 to individuals or businesses for supplies and services at the poorhouse, such as food, clothing, and medical services.⁵⁷ Two years later, in 1848, they made 25 payments for a total of \$335.50.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, comprehensive records only exist for these two years, but

⁵⁶ Edmund B Goodrich to the Auditing Office, Richmond, Virginia, November 30, 1830, Accession APA 739, Box 8, Folder 4, LV.

⁵⁷ William Wade, A List of Claims Allowed by the Overseers of the Poor for Montgomery County, 1846, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 5, SPEC.

⁵⁸ William Wade, A List of Claims Allowed by the Overseers of the Poor for Montgomery County, 1848, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 3, SPEC.

individual invoices throughout the period reflect that the Supervisor of the Poor made regular purchases for medical care, food, and supplies for the residents in his care.

As table 1 demonstrates, although the county employed indoor relief more often than outdoor relief in the 1840s, by the 1850s outdoor relief had become more predominant. This relief could take the form of goods or services or a cash payment. The goods could be provided outright, as when eighteen bushels of corn were provided to Thom Littens' family, or the recipient could receive credit for goods with a local merchant.⁵⁹ Cash payments could be provided on a one-time basis, or continually at regular intervals, such as when the Board approved to "continue to furnish Mr. E Woods supplies at the rate of two 50/100 dollars per month from date until otherwise directed."⁶⁰ The increasing use of outdoor relief, combined with the general infirmity of individuals in the poorhouse, suggests that the county's main concern continued to be providing for a basic level of subsistence; if an individual was able to remain in his own home, or the home of another community member, and survive with the assistance of cash or goods, that remained preferable to moving him to the poorhouse.

The county's sense of obligation for providing for its most vulnerable citizens can also be surmised from their commitment to medical care. Invoices from doctors constitute a significant portion of the extant documentary body.⁶¹ One such example includes seven itemizations for treatment from July 1858 to July 1859. The \$29 invoice included charges ranging from \$1 to \$8 apiece. One poorhouse resident, Jessie Bornettes, was the patient in four of the seven visits. The physician characterized these visits as "med [sic] & attention to Jessie

⁵⁹ John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 1, SPEC.

⁶⁰ John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 1, SPEC.

⁶¹ Jackson & Templeton to Overseers of the Poor for Montgomery County, July 1859, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 6, SPEC; John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 1, SPEC; Geo W. Kabrich to Dr. Jackson, September 4th, (n.d.), John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 6, SPEC.

[Bornettes'] eyes,” and also charged \$3 for pulling a tooth for another resident.⁶² This claim makes clear that individuals’ medical needs were attended to, but it should be noted that the provision of medical care to poorhouse residents may have been motivated by less-than-altruistic reasons. The supervisor of the poorhouse and his family would have lived in close quarters with the residents; extreme physical discomfort experienced by residents would have affected the entire household. Not only would pain or illness prevent residents from performing labor on the farm, it may also have resulted in frustration for the rest of the household if the ailing individual loudly expressed discomfort or required caretaking. The county frequently provided medical assistance to individuals outside of the poorhouse, however, suggesting that some level of obligation – as opposed to self-interest – motivated this service.

Just as the nature of the poor relief provided by the county suggests that Montgomery County was defying national trends, so does the manner in which they spoke about the poor. Two aspects of their language, in particular, demonstrate that community leaders considered poverty to be a natural condition of life, and viewed the poor as neighbors in need of temporary assistance as opposed to morally deficient, lazy citizens. In the extant documents, the poor are nearly always referred to by name; they are rarely identified as simply “pauper.” Additionally, although the designation of “pauper,” or “poor person” is usually appended to their names, these identifiers seldom contain any pejorative adjectives. Both of these characteristics sit in opposition to documents from other localities during this period.

According to historian Nancy Isenberg, the decades leading up to the Civil War gave rise to the term “poor white trash,” as poor white Southerners began to be “classified as a ‘race’ that passed on horrific traits, eliminating any possibility of improvement or social mobility.”⁶³ She

⁶² Jackson & Templeton to Overseers of the Poor for Montgomery County, July 1859, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 6, SPEC.

⁶³ Isenberg, *White Trash*, 136.

provides this scathing summary of attitudes towards poor, Southern whites in the antebellum years:

Few were concerned about, much less offered any solution to, their terrible poverty. Regarded as specimens more than cognitive beings, white trash sandhillers and clay-eaters loomed as abnormalities, deformities, a “notorious race” that would persist, generation after generation, unaffected by the inroads being made by social reformers.⁶⁴

The term “clay-eaters” refers to the practice of the poor eating dirt or clay. Although researchers are still debating the cause of this practice, a prevalent theory suggests that it results from iron deficiency.⁶⁵ This would make sense for those living in poverty, as they would have difficulty obtaining sufficient nutrients. Alternatively, an *American Historical Review* article from 1925, “The Poor Whites of the Antebellum South,” posits that this practice resulted from chronic hookworm infection. Referred to as “the poor man’s malady,” the combination of infection and clay-eating resulted in “anemic, milky complexions, and the stupid, lazy attitude of the poor whites.”⁶⁶ These characterizations of poor, white Southerners permeated antebellum popular culture in the United States.⁶⁷

Supporting Isenberg’s claim, numerous references to the poor in antebellum publications cast the poor in an extremely negative light. A short piece in the *New York Observer and Chronicle* from 1856 conveys a common theme:

WHY THE POOR ARE POOR. – Recently I had an interview with the minister of a parish in Scotland – (and I may observe he was not an abstainer) – when he said, “I am trustee for some money which is for the *virtuous* poor. Two things in my opinion are essential to virtue – 1st, industry; 2d, sobriety. The result is,” said the minister, “I cannot get quit of the money, for all the needy poor about here are either *drunken or idle.*” [italics in original]⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Isenberg, *White Trash*, 152.

⁶⁵ Simpson, E. "Pica during Pregnancy in Low-income Women Born in Mexico." *Western Journal of Medicine*, 173, no. 1 (2000): 20-24.

⁶⁶ Paul H. Buck, “The Poor Whites of the Ante-Bellum South,” *The American Historical Review*, 31, no. 1 (1925): 41–54.

⁶⁷ Isenberg, *White Trash*, 135-153.

⁶⁸ “Why the Poor Are Poor.,” *New York Observer and Chronicle (1833-1912)*; *New York*, October 30, 1856.

This brief article manages to encapsulate nearly all of the prevailing attitudes about the poor in antebellum America: the dichotomy of the worthy versus the unworthy poor, the belief that poverty resulted from personal moral failures such as laziness or drunkenness, the implied connection between an individual's worth and his capitalist output, and the insinuation that a government's role rests primarily in providing reform rather than relief.

These attitudes were reflected in the terms that Americans used to speak about the poor. Newspaper articles on the subject of pauperism contain morally loaded phrases such as "unrestrained indulgence of vices," "drunkard," "prostitute," "deterioration of public morals,"⁶⁹ "evil," "indolence," "poor beggars...clamorous and importunate with open hands and extended fingers,"⁷⁰ "abuse of ardent spirits," "below the level of a brute," "an outcast from all respectable society," and "habitual indolence,"⁷¹ to provide a small representative sample.

Whereas the poor during this period were consistently characterized as lazy, dissolute, or drunk in the national discourse, this did not appear to be the case in Montgomery County. This author did not find any such references to recipients of poor relief during the period of 1830-1860. Rather, the recipients were almost universally referred to by name and characterized simply as "pauper" or "poor person," if they were characterized at all. This is significant considering the rise of denigrating language about the poor during this period; despite the prevalence of negative attitudes towards the poor in national publications and documents of the era, none of this condescension and judgement appears in the Montgomery County sources.

The choice of the term "poor" over "pauper" in the majority of the documents that employ a qualifier also conveys the officials' conception of those receiving relief. Popular

⁶⁹ "The Honorable the Delegates to the General Assembly of Maryland, from Baltimore City and County," *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, January 15, 1823, Volume XXI, No. 41.

⁷⁰ "Pauperism," *Independent Chronicle and Boston Patriot*, March 1, 1823, Volume XXI, Issue 11.

⁷¹ "Causes, Consequences, and Cure of Pauperism," *Hampshire Gazette*, March 31, 1830, Volume XLIV, No. 2274.

thought during the period maintained that the difference between poverty and pauperism rested in the moral quality of the individual. Quoting a speech delivered by Charles Burroughs in 1834, Michael Katz discusses the perceived difference between the two concepts:

Poverty was an “unavoidable evil, to which many are brought from necessity, and in the wise and gracious Providence of God.” Poverty resulted not from “our faults” but from “our misfortune,” and the poor should “claim our tenderest commiseration, our most liberal relief.” But Pauperism was a different story. “Pauperism is the consequence of willful error, of shameful indolence, of vicious habits. It is a misery of human creation, the pernicious work of man, the lamentable consequence of bad principles and morals.”⁷²

The documentary evidence suggests that Montgomery County officials tended to view their neighbors in need as suffering from poverty, not pauperism.

As noted previously, the poor in Montgomery County were referred to by name, occasionally with an added designation of “pauper” or “poor person.” The nearly universal use of individuals’ names in poor relief documents in Montgomery County illustrates that community leaders had not dehumanized them as merely “paupers,” rather, they were neighbors in need of assistance. A few examples will demonstrate the point. On November 26, 1837, a claim was submitted to the Overseers for “making a coffin for Ann Shelor.”⁷³ Similarly, a claim from 1857 was submitted for “making walnut coffin for Martha Hundley daughter of James Hundley.”⁷⁴ The identification of Martha Hundley as the daughter of James Hundley is significant. This clarifying detail suggests that the writer of the document knew the family well enough to identify the deceased as the daughter of Mr. Hundley. She was not simply a poor person who could not afford her own coffin; she was the daughter of James Hundley.

⁷² Charles Burroughs, “A Discourse Delivered in the Chapel of the New Almshouse, in Portsmouth, N.H. Dec 15, 1834 on the Occasion of its First Being Opened for Religious Service,” (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: J.W. Foster, 1835), quoted in Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 19.

⁷³ John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 1, SPEC.

⁷⁴ John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 1, SPEC.

The only circumstance under which a recipient of relief was not identified by first name was when the claim referred to a child. For example, an 1860 claim requested repayment for a “making one coffin for Wm Peilars child.”⁷⁵ Although the children were seldom identified by name, this was a factor of their age, not their socioeconomic status. Furthermore, the emphasis on their family, through the naming of their parents or grandparents, identified them as a member of the community, as a neighbor entitled to assistance.

Individuals receiving outdoor relief and medical assistance were also referred to by name in the documents. For example, a claim from February 1, 1849 was paid for continuing “to furnish Mr. E Woods supplies at the rate of [\$2.50] dollars per month from date until otherwise directed.”⁷⁶ Similarly, a claim for medical care submitted by Dr. Joseph Edie requested payment for medical care for ten impoverished citizens, all of whom were identified by name except for one child, who was referred to as a named individual’s grandchild.⁷⁷ It is significant that none of the extant claims for poor relief for this period even use the designation of “poor” or “pauper.” Whereas those terms can be found in the regular reports submitted to Richmond, they are entirely absent in the individual claims. The individual claims identify the recipients of relief by name only, except in the case of children, as noted above. Although impossible to discern with any certainty, the dichotomy between how administrators referred to the poor when writing to Richmond and when composing internal documents suggests that they may have adjusted their language to their audience; when discussing the poor amongst themselves they treated them as community members, but when dialoguing with state authorities they adopted the language of the larger community and were more likely to refer to them as “paupers.”

⁷⁵ John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 1, SPEC.

⁷⁶ John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 1, SPEC.

⁷⁷ Dr. Jos S. Edie to Overseers of the Poor of Montgomery Co., John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 5, SPEC.

Much as they referred to individual poor relief recipients by name and without derogatory adjectives, Montgomery County officials also discussed the poor as a class in more respectful terms than other localities. Claims for payment to the teachers of poor children were titled: “The school commissioners of Montgomery County for tuition of poor children.”⁷⁸ In 1846, the Overseers of the Poor processed an invoice of \$3.61 to purchase paper and books “for the poor.”⁷⁹ The use of the phrases “poor children” and “the poor,” absent any morally weighted adjectives, suggests that the education of these children was viewed as a valid governmental obligation. The children themselves were not devalued or deemed responsible for their own condition; they were simply a category of neighbors in need.

Similarly, the directives in the county’s Order Book regarding the establishment of a poor house do not contain any moral judgments in their language. The county began the process of establishing the house in 1829 with the appointment of three commissioners charged with locating a suitable tract of land for “erecting thereon a poor house for this county.”⁸⁰ The court subsequently appointed three more commissioners who were “authorized to contract for the erection of comfortable log buildings on the tract of land.”⁸¹ In its itemizations for expenses for the fiscal year of 1829-1830, the court documented a payment of \$5 to Creed Taylor for his services to “contract for suitable buildings for the use of the poor.”⁸² This language not only lacks moral judgment, it conveys a commitment to provide for the county’s poor, and a tacit acknowledgment that they are entitled to comfortable, suitable accommodations.

A comparison between poor relief practices in Montgomery County, Virginia and the rural, northern community of Seneca Falls, New York highlights the role of the neighbor-in-need

⁷⁸ 1839, No. 371, County School Claims, 1838-1851, MCCC.

⁷⁹ Mr. John R. Chareilton to the Treasurer of the School Commission, December 8, 1847, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 5, SPEC.

⁸⁰ Montgomery County Order Book /#24, September 1829, page 303, MCCC.

⁸¹ Montgomery County Order Book, #25, November 1829, page 10, MCCC.

⁸² Montgomery County Order Book, #25, June 1830, page 78, MCCC.

philosophy on a local government's treatment of their poor. In their study on Seneca Falls' poor relief practices from 1830 to 1860, historians Glenn Altschuler and Jan Saltzgaber argued that an increase in immigration resulted in a decreased commitment to providing for the poor. As they concisely put it: "...they viewed the poor less and less as 'theirs,'" and as a result, they were not willing to "accept communal responsibility for the welfare of those strangers."⁸³ The authors maintain that the influx of immigrants, coupled with the cause of that influx – a growing and industrializing economy – resulted in the fracturing of the social bonds which had previously informed poor relief efforts. The poor in Seneca Falls were no longer considered neighbors; they were now strangers.⁸⁴

As Michael Katz has argued, the rise of industrialization, coupled with an increase in immigration, contributed to the breakdown of the "neighbors in need" philosophy of poor relief.⁸⁵ However, in a locality such as Montgomery County, in which industrialization had not fully penetrated, and in which foreign immigration was minimal, the neighbor-in-need mentality was able to persist. When the Overseer of the Poor knew the recipient of poor relief personally, when he could recall that individual's childhood and knew his family, it likely became more difficult to dismiss the recipient as lazy or morally deficient. If the Overseer had personal knowledge that the recipient fell on hard times due to an illness, or a downturn in the local economy, it would be easier to provide relief without moral condemnation. To put it another way, knowing the recipient of poor relief prior to his or her request for assistance made it more difficult to dismiss his humanity and view him solely as a pauper.

Whether they were providing shelter, food, medical care, or burial expenses, officials in Montgomery County took seriously their obligation to provide for their neighbors living on the

⁸³ Glenn C. Altschuler and Jan M. Saltzgaber, "Clearinghouse for Paupers: The Poorfarm of Seneca County, New York, 1830-1860," *Journal of Social History* 17, no. 4 (1984): 573–600.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Katz, *The Undeserving Poor*, 6-7.

edge of subsistence. Although they were mandated by law to do so, the documentary evidence suggests that they also did so willingly out of a sense of societal obligation. Whereas other localities throughout the country were pushing paupers into poorhouses in order to punish and reform them, Montgomery County was moving in the opposite direction, increasing its use of outdoor relief and using the poorhouse primarily for the disabled, the elderly, and women with children. Additionally, they were not merely providing food and housing – the bare minimum of subsistence – but were also providing medical care. To be sure, recipients of poor relief in Montgomery County still lived terribly difficult and uncomfortable lives, but their community leaders did not seem to add moral condemnation to the weight of challenges that they carried. Despite the national trend towards blaming the poor for their own condition, residents in this southern, rural community still adhered to the colonial-era philosophy that poverty was a natural part of life, and a community bore a responsibility to take care of poor residents who did not have family who could assist them.

Having established that Montgomery County provided poor relief out of a sense of governmental obligation, the reader may be tempted to presume that these services were only offered to white residents. After all, Montgomery County sat in the southwestern corner of a slave state and was home to over two hundred slave-owning families at the outbreak of the Civil War.⁸⁶ Indeed, numerous scholars have argued that Southern poor relief excluded black citizens during the antebellum period. In her history of social welfare, Mimi Abramovitz argues that free blacks seldom received government assistance, instead turning to personal networks of family and friends. She further argues that “when they did enter the poor law system, mostly in the North, black men and women were treated as the most undeserving of the poor.”⁸⁷ Historian

⁸⁶ “1860 U.S. Federal Census – Slave Schedules,” Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁷ Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*, 90-91.

Walter Trattner echoed Abramovitz's conclusion, asserting that free blacks were "prohibited from receiving aid under most of the poor laws [and] were simply denied assistance."⁸⁸

Both Abromovitz and Trattner studied poor relief at the national level; what did historians of Southern poor relief have to say about the impact of race on relief services? Two prominent scholars in the field, Elna Green and Timothy Lockley, generally support the national historiography while providing additional context. Writing in 1999, Green cites Trattner in support of her claim that free blacks were generally denied poor relief and instead relied on informal mutual-assistance arrangements.⁸⁹ Her next work on poor relief in Richmond, Virginia, however, provides a more nuanced analysis. Here she argues that free blacks did indeed receive relief, as evidenced by their admittance to the poorhouse, but their assistance was inferior to that received by white residents. The administrators' main concern appeared to be segregating the black residents in separate facilities, not providing them adequate relief.⁹⁰ Agreeing with Green's later analysis, Timothy Lockley argues that free blacks did receive a modicum of poor relief even if it was inferior to the relief offered to their white neighbors. Lockley ties the inferior level of relief provided to free blacks with the "privilege of race" enjoyed by poor white residents. In his analysis, poor relief provided a means for the white elite to promote racial solidarity over class solidarity.⁹¹

The documentary evidence in Montgomery County suggests that, although Overseer of the Poor officials remained highly conscious of race while discharging their duties, they did not categorically deny relief to free black residents. Throughout the antebellum era, the county provided outdoor relief, indoor relief, medical care, and burial to free black residents. As was the case with white poor relief recipients, the officials generally referred to the black poor by name,

⁸⁸ Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*, 23-24.

⁸⁹ Green, *Before the New Deal*, xi.

⁹⁰ Green, *This Business of Relief*, 36.

⁹¹ Lockley, *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South*, 39, 52-54.

albeit, often only by first name. The Overseer of the Poor reports which were submitted every year to Richmond divided the poor into four categories: “poor whites maintained at public charge,” “free blacks maintained at public charge,” “poor maintained at poor or work house,” and “poor boarded out” [Table 3]. In addition to listing total numbers, the reports for some years included addendums providing the names and races of the individuals in each group. Officials’ attention to categorizing poor relief recipients by race, as well as their practice of using the terms “free black” or “colored” when identifying black recipients in the records, suggests that race was a relevant factor in providing relief, but certainly not a disqualifying factor.

An examination of the Overseer of the Poor reports over the antebellum period illustrates the biracial nature of Montgomery County’s poor relief. An elderly black man identified only as

TABLE 3: POOR RELIEF BY TYPE, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, 1829-1854				
	Outdoor Relief – White	Outdoor Relief – Free Black	Maintained at Poorhouse	Boarded Out
1829	32	1		
1830	8	0		
1833	4	0	4	
1834	3	0	3	
1835	5	0	7	
1840	11	1	7	5
1841	14	1	9	6
1842	9	1	8	2
1843	11	1	7	5
1844	17	1	9	9
1851	9	1	12	10
1852	16	1	11	17
1853	26	3	12	29
1854	7	1	8	6

Table 3: Montgomery Overseer of the Poor Reports, 1829-1829-1835, 1840-1845, 1851-1855, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 2, SPEC.

“Paul” resided in the poorhouse for at least the five-year period of 1850-1855. The only facts about Paul left to us by history are that he was approximately 90 years old in 1850, and he was

described as “unable to work” by the Overseer of the Poor.⁹² During the same period, a free black man named James Ligon was receiving outdoor relief.⁹³ We know a little more about James; he was in his forties in 1860, and described as “5’8”, ‘very black,’ two small scars over his right eye, several small scars on the right hand, and had his two middle fingers of the right hand cut off. He was the son of Sarah, who was emancipated by deed from Robert Shanklin.”⁹⁴ He had clearly fallen on hard times by 1851, and as such, was receiving outdoor relief from the county.

The historiography of poor relief references black residents of antebellum poorhouses, usually in the context of how communities attempted to segregate the poor within these institutions based on race, but references to free blacks receiving outdoor relief are far more elusive. It is therefore significant that for ten of the fourteen years for which records survive, outdoor relief was provided to at least one free black resident [Table 4]. Furthermore, the black recipients received a level of support comparable to that of their white neighbors. For the twelve months ending March 31, 1851, the county provided outdoor support to nine white and one black resident (Mr. Ligon). The average amount expended per person for the white residents was \$23.77; the amount provided for Mr. Ligon’s care was much higher at \$50. For the following calendar year, the average amount expended per person for the white residents was \$18.03; for Mr. Ligon, \$25.⁹⁵ These numbers make clear that Mr. Ligon did not receive an inferior level of service due to his race.

⁹² Montgomery Overseer of the Poor Reports, 1829-1829-1835, 1840-1845, 1851-1855, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 2, SPEC.

⁹³ James’s last name was spelled in a variety of ways in different documents. Variations included Ligon, Liggins, Liggons, and Liggans.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Lindon, *Virginia’s Montgomery County*, 620.

⁹⁵ Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1851, Overseers of the Poor Annual Reports and Checklist, Montgomery County, 1800-1909, Accession APA 739, LV; Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1852, Overseers of the Poor Annual Reports and Checklist, Montgomery County, 1800-1909, Accession APA 739, LV.

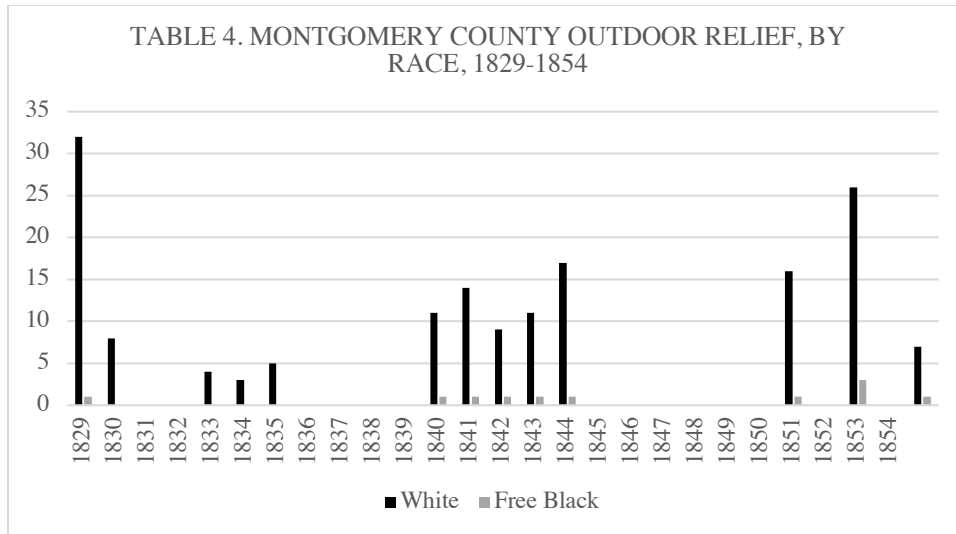


Table 4: *Montgomery Overseer of the Poor Reports, 1829-1829-1835, 1840-1845, 1851-1855, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 2, SPEC.*

The Overseer of the Poor report for the year ending March 31st, 1853 provides further evidence that free black citizens received poor relief services. During this year, in addition to providing support to Mr. Ligon, the county provided outdoor relief to a black man identified as “Simian” and to a black child who remained unnamed. The average amount expended per white citizen during this year sat at \$20.12; the average amount per black citizen slightly below at \$19.16.⁹⁶ It should be noted that the three black recipients of outdoor relief – Mr. Ligon, Simian, and the child – were most likely not given the poor relief funds directly. Although they were not housed in the poorhouse, and thus were technically recipients of outdoor relief, they were residing with other county residents. The head of the household in which they were residing would most likely have received the funds. Interestingly, though, not all three of the heads of household were white. Two were indeed prominent white citizens, but Simian lived with a free black man named King.⁹⁷ The fact that funds were provided to free black citizens who housed

⁹⁶ Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1853, Overseers of the Poor Annual Reports and Checklist, Montgomery County, 1800-1909, Accession APA 739, LV.

⁹⁷ Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1853, Overseers of the Poor Annual Reports and Checklist, Montgomery County, 1800-1909, Accession APA 739, LV.

poor black residents suggests that the county’s main concern lay in providing for the destitute, regardless of race.

An analysis of the percentage of the white and free black population who received poor relief provides further evidence that Montgomery County officials provided significant relief to their free black neighbors. The 1850 United States Census identified 6,822 white residents and 66 free black residents.⁹⁸ Based on those totals, the county provided relief to a higher

TABLE 5. PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION RECEIVING POOR RELIEF, BY RACE		
YEAR	White	Free Black
1851	.29%	3%
1852	.38%	3%
1853	.54%	6%
1854	.18%	3%

Table 5: Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1851; Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1852; Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1853; Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1854, Overseers of the Poor Annual Reports and Checklist, Montgomery County, 1800-1909, Accession APA 739, LV.

percentage of the free black population than the white population [Table 5] during the first four years of the 1850s (the only years of that decade for which comprehensive records have survived).⁹⁹ As Table 5 illustrates, county officials did not consider race to be a (dis)qualifying factor for receiving aid.

The existing documentary evidence from the Montgomery County Overseers of the Poor reflects an attitude towards poor relief carried over from the colonial era. County officials provided assistance to their most destitute citizens, both white and black, and did so seemingly without judgment. They consistently and overwhelmingly referred to poor relief recipients by

⁹⁸ 1850 U.S. Census.

⁹⁹ Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1851; Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1852; Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1853; Montgomery Report of the Poor, 1854, Overseers of the Poor Annual Reports and Checklist, Montgomery County, 1800-1909, Accession APA 739, LV.

name (with the exception of identifying children by naming their parents or grandparents) and did not employ any of the derogatory language often applied to the poor during this period in other parts of the country. At a time when the national attitude was moving away from the use of outdoor relief and towards the implementation of poorhouses as a means of controlling, punishing, and reforming the poor, Montgomery County was *increasing* its use of outdoor relief. The poorhouse served as a last resort for the elderly, infirm, and women with children; everyone else received relief either in their own homes or in the home of another citizen.

Although the percentage of individuals receiving relief remained relatively small, and but a fraction of the total population (<1% to 6%), Montgomery County's approach to providing poor relief exposes possible connections between a community's geography and economy and their attitudes towards poverty. This research supports Michael Katz's claim that the shift from an agricultural to a capitalist society resulted in hardening attitudes towards poverty. As a primarily agricultural community of fewer than 10,000 citizens eligible for poor relief (white and free black residents), Montgomery County maintained the neighbor-in-need philosophy of poor relief throughout the antebellum era. Three aspects of the county made this possible: first, the Overseers of the Poor would have personally known many of the poor relief recipients. These personal relationships would have minimized the tendency for county officials to dehumanize the poor as simply "lazy paupers." Second, since Montgomery County was not yet a fully industrialized economy, the association between personal worth and capitalist output had not yet been internalized by its citizens. Montgomery County residents did not devalue the worth of the poor because of their material condition. Third, unlike more populous areas in the nation during this period, Montgomery County did not experience an influx of foreign immigrants. Thus, the poor were not "outsiders" or "others," but rather, long-standing members of the community or region. Taken together, these factors resulted in more benign conceptions of poverty as

compared to other parts of the country, which continued to inform the way Montgomery County chose to care for the poor into the Civil War years.

Chapter II

Provisioning Families: Poor Relief During the Civil War

Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, residents of Montgomery County had already been caring for their poor neighbors for over a century. Although attitudes towards poverty were undergoing drastic change in the rest of the country during the early nineteenth century, citizens in Montgomery County had not yet adopted these new beliefs. While the national narrative on poverty had shifted by the end of the antebellum era towards conversations on how to control, punish, and reform the poor, officials in Montgomery County remained focused on providing relief to their neighbors living on the edge of survival. Interestingly, the Civil War briefly reversed the negative trajectory of social views of poor relief throughout the nation.¹⁰⁰ Thus, during the war period, practices in Montgomery County became less of an outlier as other communities began to increase their poor-relief efforts in response to the pervasive hardships of war. This chapter will argue that Montgomery County continued to care for its poor throughout the Civil War, motivated by their neighbors-in-need philosophy of poor relief; however, due to the widespread devastation wrought by the war, they greatly expanded the number of citizens they provided for.

As was the case throughout the nation, the Civil War upended every aspect of life in Montgomery County. The decade leading up to the war had delivered general prosperity to the county. With the arrival of the Virginia and Tennessee railroad, the opening of the Olin and Preston Institute (a Methodist school established in 1851), and the continuing success of the mineral springs, the county experienced a period of economic growth. Increasing from the 1850 free population of 6,888, the 1860 census listed the total free population at 8,398 (8,251 white and 147 free black) with an additional slave population of 2,219. Although manufacturing was

¹⁰⁰ Green, *This Business of Relief*, 68-70.

beginning to increase with the newly acquired ability to move goods out of the region by train, however, the county's economy remained primarily agricultural. Although the majority of the county's citizens made a living farming, the county did boast forty-five manufacturing businesses in 1860. These included blacksmiths, shoe makers, cabinetmakers, carpenters, carriage makers, a coal mine, a cooper, distilleries, flour and gristmills, a gunsmith, a jewelry repairer, a mason, a painter, a photographer, a printer, a saddler, sawmills, tailors, and tanners.¹⁰¹

Montgomery County did not suffer as severely as many other Virginia counties during the Civil War, but the conflict halted the prosperous trend of the 1850s and ushered in an interlude of severe privation. Due to its mountainous geographic location, Montgomery did not witness any fighting within its borders. The county did, however, send its men away to fight in the 4th Virginia Infantry (the Stonewall Brigade), the 21st Virginia Cavalry, and the 54th Virginia Infantry.¹⁰² As was the case throughout the South, the absence of able-bodied men created significant hardships for the community left behind, as white women, children, and free and enslaved blacks attempted to take on all household and economic responsibilities. Without enough hands to complete the necessary work, food and money became scarce.¹⁰³ Just as in the rest of the Confederacy, Montgomery County found itself facing hardship, privation, and hunger.

Historians of poverty have examined varying aspects of the intersection between the Civil War and social welfare policy. Writing in the 1970s, historian John Hope Franklin discussed Southern poor relief as it related to changes resulting from the Civil War. He argued that Southern states had neglected social problems during the antebellum era, as they were focused on maintaining slavery and little else; they only began to take notice of social issues such as poverty during Reconstruction.¹⁰⁴ In recent years this argument has been refuted by historians

¹⁰¹ Lindon, *Virginia's Montgomery County*, 57; 330-331.

¹⁰² Lindon, *Virginia's Montgomery County*, 60-62.

¹⁰³ Lindon, *Virginia's Montgomery County*, 60-61.

¹⁰⁴ Franklin, "Public Welfare in the South during the Reconstruction Era, 1865-1880," 379-392.

such as Walter Trattner, Elna Green, and Stephanie McCurry, who argue that poor relief did indeed exist in the Civil War South and that, in fact, the war served as a catalyst to changing conceptions about poverty and state-sponsored poor relief.

The Civil War resulted in temporary changes in attitudes towards poverty and permanent changes in beliefs about government's role in poor relief. Trattner and Green give considerable attention to the ways in which the war changed perceptions of the poor as a class. As men went to fight and families struggled to eat, the widespread privation triggered a reversion to the colonial-era conception of poverty as a condition driven by outside forces, not by the internal moral quality of the individual. In Trattner's words: "Like all wars, the War between the States created enormous relief problems...problems which could not be blamed on the individuals or families involved. As a result...the war aroused the charitable energies of the American people as never before."¹⁰⁵

Green similarly identifies the fundamental, if temporary, impact of the war on conceptions of poverty and poor relief, although she focuses on how attitudes changed specifically in the South. Similar to Trattner, she argues that during the destruction and hardship of the war years, southerners began to see poverty as a widespread condition unrelated to an individual's moral character. Recounting the effects of the war in Richmond, Virginia, Green exposes the complicated and contradictory conceptions of poverty inherent in public discourse during the period. Local newspapers carried sympathetic stories about the suffering of mothers and children, while at the same time upper-class Richmonders complained in personal correspondence that the poor were monopolizing all of the resources and were thus faring better during the war than the non-poor.¹⁰⁶ The Bread Riot of April 1863 further exposed these contradictory views. Whereas the local press initially expressed support for the rioters, they

¹⁰⁵ Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*, 77.

¹⁰⁶ Green, *This Business of Relief*, 74-75.

eventually adopted the talking points of the local government, accusing the poor of criminal behavior and punishing those involved in the riots by refusing them access to free markets that were established to provide relief to the poor.¹⁰⁷

The Civil War thus served as an interlude in the history of poverty during which societal attitudes about the poor underwent significant, albeit temporary, change. The war years witnessed a general relaxation of the judgment and moral condemnation that had developed over the first half of the nineteenth century. This relaxation of harsh attitudes towards poverty was not uniform or complete, however. Even during this time of national crisis, when views towards the poor were softening, Green exposes the persistence of the worthy/unworthy dichotomy during the opening years of the war. She argues that Richmond officials attempted to provide for the poor, but limited assistance to those they deemed to be “deserving.” They characterized the deserving poor as those who knew their place and did not make trouble (by rioting, for example); they were expected to patiently wait for relief, and be sufficiently grateful once it was received. As phrased in a local newspaper, “There is no danger of suffering among the deserving poor, if they will quietly attend to their business and give no heed to the councils of mischievous agitators.”¹⁰⁸ By the last year of the war, however, Green argues that “public discussions about the poor and poor relief seldom questioned whether the needy were ‘worthy’ or ‘deserving.’” Likewise, the rhetoric about able-bodied but idle, common before the war, disappeared from the discussion.¹⁰⁹ During a period when nearly every citizen teetered on the brink of starvation, questions regarding the moral character of the poor, or their perceived culpability in their own condition, became irrelevant. War forced Richmonders to view each other as neighbors in desperate need.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

¹⁰⁸ “The Poor of the City,” *Richmond Sentinel*, April 10, 1863, 1, as quoted in Green, *This Business of Relief*, 78.

¹⁰⁹ Green, *This Business of Relief*, 78-82.

Approaching the topic of wartime poverty from a political angle, Stephanie McCurry discusses the role of poor Confederate women during the Civil War in pushing their government, the Confederate States of America, to provide relief. McCurry argues that the hardship of the war resulted in soldiers' wives putting pressure on government officials to provide for their well-being in the absence of their husbands, thus redefining the social contract between the Confederacy and white women. McCurry emphasizes that this transformation was not driven by all women, but by "poor white rural women with no previous history of political participation." McCurry argues that this phenomenon not only allowed disenfranchised women a previously-denied political power, but also introduced the idea of citizens looking to their government for welfare assistance.¹¹⁰

In her work on poor relief in Richmond, Virginia from 1740-1940, Green also discusses the political impact of the war on conceptions of governmental roles and poverty. She argues that poor relief existed in the antebellum South, and that it was primarily offered by local governments, with private organizations filling in gaps where needed. She maintains that, in their desperation, southerners looked to their governments for relief and assistance. In response, local and state governments, as well as the Confederate government, attempted to provide aid. Green outlines the various methods used by these governments to provide a modicum of relief: tax exemption for soldiers' families; furnishing food or money directly to citizens; curtailing the production of non-food items such as cotton, tobacco, and alcohol; providing loans to localities to support the poor; fixing prices for food staples; hiring poor women for work that supported the war effort; and granting exemptions from the draft. Although it is likely that government officials were motivated by some level of genuine concern for the suffering of the poor, it is also

¹¹⁰ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*.

likely that maintaining morale and limiting soldier desertions provided the primary impetus for these efforts.¹¹¹

So how does Montgomery County fit into the historiography of poor relief during the Civil War? The documentary evidence from Montgomery County supports the claim put forth by Green and McCurry that public poor relief did indeed exist in the South during the war, and that local governments attempted to assuage the widespread devastation caused by the conflict. In Montgomery County the local government saw to the needs of the poor during the Civil War, just as they did before and after the war, but they expanded their concern to include caring for the struggling families of soldiers and other citizens suffering from the unique devastation wrought by the crisis.

Unfortunately, only a few actual poor claims survive from the war years, but a great deal can be deduced from the one existing Overseers of the Poor report and the County Order Book from the period. Confirming Green's conclusions on the effects of the war on poor relief, the County's concern for their impoverished citizens appeared to take on an especial urgency during the Civil War. This concern is evident as early as the summer of 1861, in the Overseers of the Poor report filed to the Montgomery County Court, transcribed in full below.

To the County Court of Montgomery County

As President of the Board of the Overseers of the Poor of said county and in connection with tabular statement herewith submitted I would submit the following report explanatory of the same.

The allowance for 1860 were at the poorhouse \$1004.77 at places other than poor house \$610.78 making \$1615.55. The levy made to meet this at June court 1860 was only \$1272.00 having a deficit of \$343.55. The allowance for the current year made by our Board at their annual meeting in March 1861 amount to \$1538.50 to add the deficiency in levy of 1860 of \$343.55 makes the actual amount needed in present levy \$1882.05.

I find there are a great many poor persons in the County who are on the border of pauperism and a little assistance would perhaps enable them to support themselves. I therefore suggest that the present levy be made for \$2200.00. This will give a fund of \$317.95 which if judiciously managed would render the

¹¹¹ Green, *This Business of Relief*, 68-84.

assistance necessary to prevent [their] poor persons from becoming a constant charge. It will be seen by reference to our poor list that the number of paupers at Poorhouse has doubled in the last two months, and your Board are of opinion that this rapid increase arises from the fact that the only relief we can afford is through orders that are not payable under twelve months. I hope the Court will see the importance of making the levy to cover the full \$2200.00 as we are satisfied it will be a great saving in future. We take pleasure in informing you that the property is much improved under the energetic management of [illegible] James Thompson who has proved himself every way suitable for the [illegible] of Steward & he has done a great deal of clearing fencing [illegible] eight acres in corn, six in wheat, [illegible] which will enable us to curtail expenses for provisions considerably after the grain is harvested. The paupers now number 16 and should the number increase there will be no room for them. The present [illegible] of country causes us to fear that the number will increase & I cannot close this report without urging upon you to make ample provision for every emergency.¹¹²

This document is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, the amount allocated to the poor in 1860/61 made up 57% of the county's total expenditures for the year. By comparison, the city of Richmond's expenditures on the poor in 1861 made up only 7% of its overall expenses.¹¹³

Furthermore, when this amount did not cover the total expense, instead of suggesting a reduction in services, the Overseer of the Poor suggested increasing the levy to make up the difference. The county court subsequently approved this request, increasing the levy for 1861 to \$2200.

Mr. Montague's report also stands apart from the national dialogue in how he spoke about the poor. As was the case in Montgomery County documents from the antebellum era, this report does not contain any sense of blame directed at the poor for their condition. Indeed, rather than seeking to punish the poor for any perceived moral failing, Mr. Montague maintains that these individuals can become self-sufficient with just a small amount of governmental assistance. There is no mention of the poorhouse as a reforming institution to teach lazy paupers the value of labor; rather, it is portrayed as a safety net meant to see vulnerable citizens through difficult times.

¹¹² W Montague, Report of Overseers of the Poor Montgomery, 1861, Overseers of the Poor Annual Reports and Checklist, Montgomery County, 1800-1909, Accession APA 739, LV.

¹¹³ Green, *This Business of Relief*, 76.

Finally, Mr. Montague's last line suggests a genuine concern for the welfare of the poor. He acknowledged that the poor house could not accommodate more than the sixteen current inhabitants, and that with the country at war the number of residents needing assistance was sure to increase. Thus, he urged the Court to plan ahead for the care of these individuals. He was not only reactively caring for those currently in need, he was proactively lobbying for his neighbors who would find themselves in need in the future.

Alongside his concern for the welfare of the poor, Mr. Montague also expressed a fiduciary commitment to the county, but this should be considered a coexisting – not competing - concern. He maintained that providing relief to citizens on the brink of destitution would save the county money in the long run, but this appears to be an attempt to convince his audience of the need for more funds, and not his primary concern. If the county's bottom line were his main concern, he could have recommended a reduction in poor relief services, or a commitment to require more labor from the recipients. He did neither of these, but instead asked the Court to increase the levy to cover the deficit.¹¹⁴

An examination of the Montgomery County Order Book from 1860-1867 provides further evidence of the importance that the county government placed on caring for the poor through the war years. For each of these years, the funds allocated to the Overseer of the Poor comprised a significant percentage of the total expenses. For example, in 1865, the Overseer of the Poor received \$1059.05, out of total expenditures for the year of \$2118.85. As noted above, the expenditures for the poor comprised *more than half* of the total expenditures for the entire county's administration. During this seven-year time period, the allotment to the care of the poor varied from a low of \$1059.05 in 1865 to a high of \$2750.00 in 1864 [Table 6]. This consistent concern and significant expense for the welfare of the poor, even during times of crisis, confirms

¹¹⁴ Montague, Report of Overseers of the Poor Montgomery, 1861.

Green’s argument; it is quite clear that the county government attempted to provide for its most destitute citizens. Although the amount spent on poor relief decreased considerably during the final years of the war, it still made up the largest single expenditure for the county (with the exception of the payment of war bonds). Not only did they expend considerable resources on poor relief, they apparently did so to a greater degree than their neighboring counties. In a discussion of wartime relief efforts, a history of the county makes the following assertion: “Montgomery County’s benevolence toward its less fortunate citizens is remarkable. Other counties in Southwest Virginia of similar population came nowhere close to providing as much money to their citizens in similar situations.”¹¹⁵

TABLE 6. POOR RELIEF EXPENSES AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL LEVY EXPENSES IN MONTOMGERY COUNTY, 1860-1865

Year	1860	1861	1862	1863	1864	1865
Poor Relief Expenses	\$1272.00	\$2200.00	\$1285.08	\$2000.00	\$2750.00	\$1059.05
Total Expenses ¹¹⁶	\$2943.74	\$3807.44	\$3309.07	\$4571.53	\$10330.91	\$2118.85
% Poor Relief of Total Expenses	43.21%	57.78%	38.83%	43.75%	26.61%	49.98%

Table 6: Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1868, MCCC.

It should be noted that, in addition to the funds allocated to the Overseers of the Poor, the yearly levy during the Civil War also included miscellaneous payments for services rendered to the poor which are not included in the figures in Table 6. These include allocations to local merchants for the construction of coffins for paupers, funds paid to individuals for boarding

¹¹⁵ Lindon, *Virginia’s Montgomery County*, 73.

¹¹⁶ These totals exclude the amounts designated to the county treasurer to redeem bonds which had been sold for the purpose of equipping the soldiers and providing food and supplies to families within the county. The amounts of the bonds to be paid were as follows: \$2,000 in 1861, \$6,000 in 1862, \$15,000 in 1863, and \$50,000 in 1864, as per the County Order Book, 1859-1868, MCCC.

paupers, and payments of outdoor relief to citizens. For example, Andrew Richards was provided an allowance of \$25 per annum from the general levy, and Moses G. Lee and L.G. Godbey were each paid \$3 out of the levy for furnishing a coffin for a pauper.¹¹⁷

Throughout the war, the county court ordered that the Overseers of the Poor make a variety of provisions for the county's destitute citizens. At the April meeting of the court in 1861 they ordered that "Coleman Martin be allowed the sum of \$25 for keeping & supporting Mrs. Haley this year to be paid out of the county levy" and that "Dr. E. F. Sheltman be allowed the sum of \$60 for medical services rendered paupers to be paid out of the county levy."¹¹⁸ These orders display a continuation of the antebellum practices of providing outdoor relief (by means of housing poor citizens with other residents) and administering medical attention. We do not have the poorhouse reports from 1862-1865 to indicate which county residents received indoor relief, but the Order Book contains entries for numerous individuals being boarded out with other community members. In several instances, the bound individual was a child, as was the case for "Mary Dobbins daughter of Lucinda Dobbins," who was bound to James Howerton in March 1862, and the son of Nancy Burke, who was bound to Hamilton Gardner in January of 1863.¹¹⁹ An examination of the recipients of poor relief at the outbreak of the war also suggests that, as was the case during the antebellum period, the local government prioritized aid, not reform. Of the twenty-two recipients, fully half were disabled in some way, and only four were listed as performing any kind of labor. Furthermore, of the four who performed work on the farm, three of them were short-term residents of two months or less [Table 7]. These data suggest that the Overseers had little – if any – interest in using the poorhouse as a reformatory institution through

¹¹⁷ Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1868, MCCC.

¹¹⁸ Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1868, MCCC.

¹¹⁹ Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1868, MCCC. These entries reveal one of the ways in which gender informed poor relief; despite having a living mother, these children were considered orphans and bound out to other (male) citizens, as opposed to being supported with their mothers in the poor house or through outdoor relief provided to the mothers.

the use of manual labor. Out of the twenty-two individuals listed as receiving relief, Mr. Montague indicates that sixteen resided in the poorhouse. The report indicates that only four individuals performed any amount of work.

TABLE 7: RESIDENTS RECEIVING POOR RELIEF FROM MONTGOMERY COUNTY, 1860-1861			
<i>Name</i>	<i>Duration of assistance</i>	<i>Work Performed</i>	<i>Infirmities</i>
Muncy	1 year		
John Gunter	1 year		
Jacob Akers	1 year		
Ann Whitton	1 year		
Nancy Smith	1 year		
Mrs. Moore	1 year		
Mary Strakey	1 year		
Nathan Woodall*	1 year		Blind
Thomas Mowles	1 year		Helpless, 90 years old
James McDaniel	1 year		Dwarf
James McFall*	2 months	On farm	
Orlando Bailey*	1 month	On [illegible]	Idiotic
Sally Gray*	1 year	[illegible]	
Elizabeth Rose*	1 year		Can't walk
Maria Rose*	1 year		Blind & helpless
Sarah Dun*	1 year		[illegible] & has but one hand
Susan Shively	1 year		Idiotic
Hannah Fowler	1 month		Very old
Polly Deck	1 week		Helpless
Caty Fowler	1 month		Idiotic
Elizabeth McFall*	2 months	Cook	
Wm Adams	2 months		Was badly [illegible] he is a Native of Halifax & was sent home after [illegible] him. His expenses will be refunded by Halifax County.

*Indicates citizens who most likely resided within the poorhouse based on an analysis of census records and the Overseers report. During this period sixteen residents lived in the poorhouse, but the report does not indicate which individuals were the sixteen.

Table 7: W Montague, Report of Overseers of the Poor Montgomery, 1861, Overseers of the Poor Annual Reports and Checklist, Montgomery County, 1800-1909, Accession APA 739, LV.

¹²⁰ In this context the term “almshouse” is interchangeable with poorhouse.

During the Civil War, the Overseers of the Poor also cared for Montgomery County citizens in ways beyond providing solely material relief. Such was the case in March of 1863, when the court issued the following order: “It appearing to the Court that Joel Luckadoo and family are in a helpless condition with the smallpox, it is ordered that the Overseers of the Poor of this County furnish him a nurse and such necessaries as he may need.”¹²¹ This directive stands apart from others for its lack of specificity; there is no dollar amount designated, nor is there a clear definition of the services to be provided. The lack of parameters in the order suggests that the court’s main concern was the support of the Luckadoo family, regardless of cost.

An especially intriguing entry in the Order Book from October 1863 further demonstrates the county’s concern for the poor. The court charged Mr. Montague, the Overseer of the Poor, to “investigate the difficulty between the Keeper of the Poor House and Hannah Fowler and make report to the Court.”¹²² Unfortunately, we have no additional documents that might reveal the nature of the “difficulty,” but the fact that the court found the circumstance worthy of the court’s time suggests a genuine concern for the experience of those living in the poorhouse. This entry also provides a glimpse, however opaque, into the daily experience of poverty. The existence of an apparent dispute between one of the female residents and the Keeper – a “difficulty” of such gravity that it prompted the intervention of the county court – highlights the negative aspects of being on the receiving end of poor relief. Although she was provided shelter and food, Ms. Fowler’s life within the poorhouse would not have been easy. In exchange for the county’s assistance, she would have sacrificed a great deal of her personal autonomy.

In addition to caring for those who had been struggling under poverty before the war, the county also began providing relief on a larger scale during the war period. The county court met during the first days of each month, and their order book for the war years catalogues the near-

¹²¹ Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1867, MCCC.

¹²² Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1867, MCCC.

constant concern of the local government for the well-being of soldiers' families, as well as the rest of the citizenry. In April of 1861 the court raised \$10,000 through the issuance of bonds for the purchase of equipping their volunteers for war.¹²³ Just two months later, at the June meeting of the court, the following order was recorded:

It appearing to the Court that an additional sum of \$10,000 will be necessary to provide [equipment] for our soldiers and furnish provisions for the families of volunteers [absent] in the service of the state, the Court more than two thirds of the magistrates being present and all of them concurring therein, doth hereby authorize the issue of additional Bonds, to the amount of \$10,000, to be executed in the same form, and payable at the same time the Bonds heretofore issued. On the said Bonds, when executed to be placed in the custody of the Executive Committee and to be by them dispensed of at [illegible] value, whenever the said committee shall require funds for the equipment of troops or means to supply the families of volunteers.¹²⁴

The final sentence of this order speaks to the local government's concern for the ability of its citizens to make ends meet upon the absence of the male heads of household. No definitive evidence exists in the county records to suggest that the local government's concern arose as a result of pleas from the white women of the county, as McCurry argues was the case throughout the Confederacy, but this was certainly possible. McCurry suggests that Confederate women of the lower classes "intruded into local circuits of power and authority and claimed qualification to speak, power to act, [and] entitlement to state resources."¹²⁵ In a population of approximately 10,000, in which most individuals would either know each other or know *of* each other, it would be natural for the women of the county to appeal for relief to the men in charge of the county government, men whom they would have already been familiar with as neighbors, lawyers, doctors, and merchants.¹²⁶

¹²³ Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1867, MCCC.

¹²⁴ Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1867, MCCC.

¹²⁵ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 136.

¹²⁶ For a discussion of the relational politics of small towns (defined as a population of <25,000), and the dynamic of the "dense networks" of relationships, see Thomas J. Catlaw and Margaret Stout, "Governing Small-Town America Today: The Promise and Dilemma of Dense Networks," *Public Administration Review* 76, no. 2 (2016): 225-29.

It is also possible that the county's concern for supplying soldiers' families also arose, at least in part, from a desire to prevent desertion. As Green pointed out, men were less likely to desert if they knew that their families were not starving in their absence. A declaration from June 1, 1863, suggests that desertion was indeed a concern: "Ordered that the Commissaries for the purpose of furnishing rations to soldiers' families of this County will continue to furnish supplies to the families of deceased soldiers, but furnish nothing to the families of soldiers who deserted."¹²⁷ This order indicates that desertion had in fact been an issue within Montgomery County, and that the court was motivated to provide relief, at least partially, by a desire to control levels of desertion.

The issuance of bonds to purchase supplies for the soldiers' families comprised only one of the means of support initiated by the county government. On January 6, 1862, the court authorized the purchase of ten thousand pounds of bacon to be distributed to the families of soldiers. Later that year, on May 5th, they ordered that an agent be appointed "to proceed at once to North Carolina and purchase One thousand Bales of Cotton to be distributed among the families of soldiers now in service & other citizens." It is significant that this directive included not only the families of soldiers, but "other citizens" as well. This suggests that the county's motivation lay outside of solely preventing desertion and extended to providing relief to anyone within the county suffering privation.

At the same court session in May of 1862, the court also made arrangements for the procurement of a maximum of 20,000 bushels of salt to be distributed to the populace:

Dr. John B. Radford having contracted with Stuart Buchanan & Co. for Eight thousand bushels of salt to be delivered in twelve monthly instalments, the year commencing the first day of May (present month) for distribution at cost & charges among the people of the county, this court in behalf of the county accepts and adopts the said contract and agreed to comply with its stipulations and John B. Radford as the agent of this court is authorized to contract with the said Stuart Buchanan & Co.

¹²⁷ Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1867, MCCC.

to furnish the people of this county upon the same terms, with any number of bushels salt not exceeding 20000. And Eldred A. Anderson is hereby appointed the agent of the court to distribute the said salt among the people of the county, and as a compensation for his trouble he is to receive twenty five [sic] cents per sack. The said salt to be equally distributed in proportion to the numbers in each family.¹²⁸

The following month, the court ordered the purchase of an *additional* 12,000 bushels of salt “to be distributed among the citizens of the county.” Similar to the directive regarding cotton, these orders do not limit the salt to soldiers’ families, but instead offer relief to the “people of the county,” to be distributed in proportion to family size.¹²⁹ It should be noted that at the December meeting of the 1862 court, the distribution of salt was limited to established county residents. The directive that “no salt be allowed in future to persons who were not residents of this County at the time the first order for the purchase of the salt was made” exemplifies the emphasis within the neighbor-in-need philosophy of limiting services to those who were established members of the community.

Over the ensuing years, the county continued to make provisions for county residents. The courts of 1863 issued orders for the procurement of 10,000 pounds of yarn “for the benefit of the citizenry,” two separate directives for the purchase of “Pork and other provisions for the use of families of soldiers in this County,” and the issuance of an additional \$10,000 in bonds to purchase supplies. Over the following year, the court authorized the purchase of grain and corn for the use of families of the soldiers, and furthermore, ordered the “County Commissaries of this County furnish all the destitute families in their respective districts, who are not in their opinion able to furnish themselves.”¹³⁰ This final directive, issued on January 4, 1864, gave the commissaries permission to extend aid to *all* needy families, not just those of soldiers. The requirements for assistance were twofold: residence within the county and demonstrable need,

¹²⁸ Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1867, MCCC.

¹²⁹ Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1867, MCCC.

¹³⁰ Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1867, MCCC.

which were the same two requirements brought over from England by the colonists and that had been the motivating factors behind Montgomery County's poor relief for generations.

A handful of claims relating to one specific family provide a fascinating glimpse into the effects of the war on (previously) financially secure residents. The claims address the plight of the Gearheart family. As of 1860, the family consisted of parents Dred T. and Emmaline Elizabeth (who is most often referred to as Elizabeth), aged 30 and 25 respectively, and their children: John, aged 7, James, aged 5, David, 2, and Mary, 8 months. Dred earned his living as a farmer, with real estate valued at \$3,000 and a personal estate valued at \$1,000 in 1860.¹³¹ In 1862, Dred enlisted in the Virginia 54th Infantry.¹³² Within a year he was dead, leaving Elizabeth a widow with four small children to support. She was apparently unable to do so, as all four of the children were boarded out to live with other community members.¹³³ As was the case with Dobbins and Burke children, the amount spent on their support was used to reimburse other citizens for housing them as opposed to supporting them in the custody of their own mother. It is not clear whether they were boarded within the same home, or separated into different residences, but payments were made for the expenses associated with each child. The guardian of the oldest son, John, received a payment of \$94.65 for 20 months' boarding, clothing, medical, and burial expenses (he died sometime in 1863 at the age of 10).¹³⁴ The guardian of next child, James, received \$209.20 for 44 months' boarding, clothing, and schooling.¹³⁵ The third son, David, incurred charges of \$197.95 to be paid to his guardian, including boarding and clothing

¹³¹ 1860 U.S. Census.

¹³² *Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Virginia*; Series Number: M324, Roll 955, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.

¹³³ These claims are not explicitly identified as poor claims, and there are no line items in the annual levies regarding the Gearheart family, so it is not clear how these claims were paid.

¹³⁴ Claim regarding John Gearhart son of Drd T. Gearhart & Elizabeth, 1863, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 5, SPEC.

¹³⁵ Claim regarding James A. Gearhart, 1865, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 5, SPEC.

but no educational expenses.¹³⁶ Finally, the youngest, Mary, who like her older brother died in 1863 (at the tender age of 4), incurred expenses of \$75.80, including boarding for 14 months, clothing, medical bills, and burial expenses.¹³⁷ These claims for the children's care are accompanied by a separate claim authorizing payment of \$40.00 for Mary's and John's coffins.¹³⁸ On March 23, 1864, Elizabeth remarried, but it is not clear whether she found financial security or was able to reclaim custody of her two surviving children, as she disappears from the records after her marriage.¹³⁹

The Gearheart's story illustrates the widespread devastation of the war, and its ability to plunge previously secure families into poverty. In 1860 they had a net worth of \$4,000. In 1862, their wealth had decreased, but the household could still claim one horse or mule, 5 cattle, 7 hogs, and 1 clock, and an estate valued at \$555.¹⁴⁰ Upon the death of her husband, however, Elizabeth was apparently rendered destitute and her children orphans. The extant records do not illuminate what kind of relief Elizabeth received (if any), but they do make clear that the local government upheld their responsibility for relief in respect to her children. In keeping with practices from the antebellum period, government officials referred to the children by name, and without any denigrating adjectives. Indeed, they were not even referred to as "poor" or "paupers." Rather, they were referred to by name usually with a qualifying phrase indicating their parentage. John was referred to as "son of Drd T. Gearhart & Elizabeth," and the claims for the other children identified them by name and listed the claim as being "in a/c with Elizabeth."¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Claim regarding David Wade Gearhart, 1865, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027 Box 1, Folder 1, SPEC.

¹³⁷ Claim regarding Mary Gearhart, 1863, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027 Box 1, Folder 1, SPEC.

¹³⁸ To L.M. Snidow, March 22, 1863, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 5, SPEC.

¹³⁹ Ancestry.com. *Virginia, Select Marriages, 1785-1940* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc, 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Montgomery County Tax Records, 1862, LV.

¹⁴¹ Claim regarding John Gearhart son of Drd T. Gearhart & Elizabeth, 1863, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 5, SPEC; Claim regarding James A. Gearhart, 1865, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-

It should be acknowledged that, as previously financially secure residents, Elizabeth and her children may have engendered greater sympathy from the Overseers of the Poor. The few other documents from the period, however, demonstrate that the Overseers continued to provide for those who presumably had a longer history of privation than the Gearhearts. The report filed by Mr. Montague covering the opening months of the war reflects their dedication to those residents whose poverty predated the war. Of the twenty-two individuals listed as recipients of poor relief for the twelve months leading up to the filing of the report (June 1861), fifteen had received services for a full year. Of the remaining residents, four received services for two months, two for one month, and one for one week.¹⁴² Therefore, fifteen of the twenty-two had been rendered destitute well before the outbreak of hostilities; the Overseers were certainly providing services to individuals who were pushed into financial crisis by the war, but the majority of the recipients for whom Mr. Montague was advocating were most likely long-standing members of the lower class.

The only extant poor claim from the period provides further evidence that, although the Overseers provided relief to citizens such as the Gearhearts and the five individuals who received poor relief for short durations (according to the 1861 Overseers of the Poor report), their main constituency was comprised of residents who had been struggling even before the war. A \$75 claim filed to the county refers to “medicine used for paupers during the years 1865 & 1866.”¹⁴³ The use of the term “paupers” is suggestive; it seems likely that it refers to individuals for whom poverty was more than a circumstance resulting from the war. The claim affirms that the government maintained their obligation to provide for the poor of all stations: those newly thrust

027, Box 1, Folder 5, SPEC; Claim regarding David Wade Gearhart, 1865, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027 Box 1, Folder 1, SPEC; Claim regarding Mary Gearhart, 1863, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027 Box 1, Folder 1, SPEC.

¹⁴² Montague, Report of Overseers of the Poor Montgomery, 1861.

¹⁴³ In a/c with William S. Figgatt, Aug 5, 1861, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 5, SPEC.

into poverty as a result of the war, and those who had struggled even before then. This claim also makes clear that the Overseers continued to view their responsibility as greater than providing the very basics of shelter and food.

Numerous county documents from the Civil War period exhibit a concern for the financial stability of the county, but fiduciary responsibility was not the overriding concern in regard to the county's decisions on poor relief. In each instance, although concern for the county's financial security is evident, services were not denied to recipients in need. This dynamic was most evident in relation to the county's care for children born out of wedlock and individuals from other counties. The county offered assistance to unwed mothers and their children, but if the paternity of the child could be determined, the court ordered restitution from the father. Such was the case when, in August 1861, the court ordered Daniel J. Lucas to pay \$12 per year for seven years to compensate the Overseers of the Poor for the cost of providing relief to his child.¹⁴⁴ The county similarly sought recompense when providing relief to an individual from another county, as was the case for a Mr. William Adams, who received relief for two months in the early 1860s. The notes associated with his stay indicate that "he is a Native of Halifax & was sent home...His expenses will be refunded by Halifax County."¹⁴⁵ These two cases suggest that, although the county remained mindful of minimizing expenses and securing repayment for services when possible, they provided services first and sought recompense second.

Although numerous documents throughout the antebellum and postbellum periods affirm the extension of poor relief services to black residents, no such documents exist for the war years. Of course, this cannot be taken as proof that services were denied to black residents – especially considering the overall dearth of extant sources for this period – but that possibility

¹⁴⁴ Order Book, County Court, Common Law, and Chancery, 1859-1868, August 5, 1861, MCCC.

¹⁴⁵ Montague, Report of Overseers of the Poor Montgomery, 1861.

must be considered. The only reference related to black residents and poverty occurred in the context of the county court resisting a requisition from the Governor calling for thirty black men to assist with the building of fortifications:

The Governor of the Commonwealth having made a requisition upon the County of Montgomery for thirty negro men to work upon the public fortifications. The Justices of the County would respectfully represent to the Governor that the lands of this County were before the commencement of the pending war worked principally by white labor that almost all the ablebodied and efficient white laborers have been withdrawn from the cultivation of the soil and placed in the army, that within the past twelve months a large number of the able bodied negroes say about one-fifth of the class called for by the Governor, have been carried off by or made their escape to the yankees; that if this call for negroes be now urged by the Governor, such is the aversion that the negroes have to go to the fortifications that others will make their escape as our County is entirely unprotected and the way open to the Country occupied by the Yankees. They would further represent that there are now within this County from two thousand to twenty-five hundred persons – wives and children of soldiers in the services who have to be supplied mainly by the labour of slaves now remaining in the County; that the surplus of crops made by the labour of the County during the past year, has not been sufficient to feed the families of the soldiers and the other inhabitants of the County, and if any more labourers are withdrawn from the cultivation of the soils a great portion of our population will be reduced to destitution and great suffering.”¹⁴⁶

In this context, (enslaved) black residents are portrayed as the *providers* of relief, rather than the receivers. It is their labor which is credited for staving off “destitution and great suffering” within the county. It would be useful to know whether free black residents continued to receive relief during this period, or if they were excluded during this period of crisis, but unfortunately no documents remain to resolve the question.

Montgomery County was not unique in its attempt to lessen privation during the Civil War. Indeed, as the historiography makes clear, the war resulted in a general softening of attitudes towards poverty throughout the country and an increased governmental involvement in providing relief. In the face of widespread destitution, poverty and individual character were no longer conjoined in popular thought; when nearly everyone was poor, poverty was viewed as a

¹⁴⁶ Montgomery County Order Book, 1859-1867, MCCC.

normal condition of the times, not a personal or moral failing. Furthermore, individuals began to look to their governments – local, state, and national – for relief. Thus, during the war years, Montgomery County fit squarely into the trends of national and Southern poor relief. They continued to provide services to those whose struggles predated the conflict, but also expanded their purview to encompass those suffering as a result of the war. The alignment between beliefs and practices in Montgomery County and the rest of the nation would not hold, however, as officials in this still-rural county would continue to be motivated by the neighbors-in-need philosophy of poor relief throughout the postbellum years while, in the more populous and industrializing parts of the country, attitudes towards the poor would begin to re-harden.

Chapter III

Bureaucratizing Relief: Poor Relief in the Postbellum Era

In the years following the Civil War, the United States went through a period of rapid industrialization, resulting – at least nationally – in a reversal of the softening attitudes towards the poor that had occurred during the war. Popular thought again began to associate poverty with personal moral or constitutional failure. With the advent of a “survival of the fittest” mentality, social Darwinists began to argue that not only were the poor responsible for their own inability to rise above poverty, but that helping them would be subverting the natural order. As a result of these hardening attitudes, state and local governments renewed their commitment to eradicate outdoor relief, believing that the provision of cash or goods to the able-bodied poor further encouraged their laziness and dependence.¹⁴⁷ Montgomery County, however, defied the national trend toward the abolition of outdoor relief and continued to provide poor relief services to individuals both in their own homes and in the homes of other residents, as well as in the poorhouse. Not coincidentally, Montgomery County did not experience the postbellum industrial boom felt throughout other parts of the nation during this period. This chapter will argue that Montgomery County, still a fairly non-industrialized locality up to 1880, continued to defy national trends regarding poor relief through the postbellum era. Specifically, it will argue that practices in Montgomery County differed from national trends in three significant respects: (1) county administrators continued to be motivated by a neighbor-in-need mentality, with a primary focus on relief and not reform; (2) poor relief continued to be biracial, with a significant amount of relief provided to black citizens; and (3) the county continued to provide outdoor relief, establishing a bureaucratic organization to administer these services.

¹⁴⁷ Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South*, 24; Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*, 56-57; Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*, 137; Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 36-42; Katz, *Poverty and Policy in American History*, 5; Axinn and Stern, *Social Welfare*.

The end of the war brought some level of economic relief to the entire country, but the level of recovery varied significantly based on region. The Northeast and Midwest experienced rapid industrialization, whereas in the South, the post-war economy remained largely agricultural, although the structure of the economy shifted from slave labor working large plantations to sharecroppers and tenant farmers working smaller farms. Significant poverty persisted in the post-war South among lower class white and black Southerners as states attempted to recover from the destruction of the war, the loss of hundreds of thousands of men, and food shortages.¹⁴⁸

The widespread poverty throughout the South required a federal response, ushering in a new era of social welfare. For the first time in the country's history, the federal government entered the business of poor relief. This relief initially came at the hands of the Union army, which provided food, shelter, and clothing to impoverished southerners. Responsibility for social welfare, however, soon transferred to the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (popularly referred to as the Freedman's Bureau), which the federal government established in March 1865. The Freedman's Bureau provided food and medical treatment to both black and white southerners, in addition to other services, such as providing transportation to returning refugees. Green argues that while in the early days after the war white southerners were happy to receive any kind of relief, they eventually came to resent the actions of the Bureau in assisting black citizens. White southerners began to perceive the Bureau as a threat to their continued racial dominance. But at the same time that they criticized the Bureau for providing relief to black residents, local governments refused to provide county relief services to those same residents. In her study of Reconstruction-era poor relief in Richmond, Virginia, Green maintains that racial tensions resulted in the bifurcation of relief: the civil administration provided relief for

¹⁴⁸ Green, *This Business of Relief*, 85-102.

white citizens, while the Freedman's Bureau did so for black Richmonders. The Freedman's Bureau continued to provide relief to southerners until its termination in 1869, at which time all poor relief reverted to local governments.¹⁴⁹

The decade following the elimination of the Freedman's Bureau witnessed another period of transition in national social welfare, as the depression of the 1870s led to a wave of charitable activity. Private organizations and citizens, as well as municipalities, joined forces to provide relief to millions of unemployed laborers. The lack of coordination between the different providers, however, led to the development of the "scientific charity" movement. This movement sought to "[eliminate] fraud, inefficiency, and duplicity in the field [and devise] a constructive method of dealing with or treating poverty."¹⁵⁰ Trattner offers the following definition of the movement:

...the charity organization philosophy rested upon a series of preconceived moral judgments and presuppositions about the poor which were embodied in the 'self-help' cult of the Gilded Age. Leaders of the movement believed in the individual-moral concept of poverty; they accepted the prevailing economic and sociological philosophy that attributed poverty and distress to personal defects and evil acts – sinfulness, failure in the struggle for survival, excessive relief-giving, and so on.¹⁵¹

Thus, although the war and the economic downturn of the 1870s helped introduce into the public consciousness the concept that the federal government had a role to play in poor relief, public discourse about the poor as a class was continuing to harden.

The Civil War may have offered a brief reprieve from negative characterizations of the poor in national popular discourse, but those characterizations returned, and indeed increased, during the postbellum period. The postwar decades saw a return of concepts such as the worthy/unworthy dichotomy, the moral culpability of the poor in their own condition, and the need to reform, rather than relieve, the poor. An 1872 article in *Harper's Bazaar* tells the story of

¹⁴⁹ Green, *This Business of Relief*, 85-102. Axinn and Stern, *Social Welfare*, 86-87.

¹⁵⁰ Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*, 91-92.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

a woman in rural New York who took a couple who was visiting from the city on an outing to the county's poorhouse. The couple, surprised that poverty should exist in such a wealthy, rural county, queried "what can be the chief cause of pauperism in a state of society like this?" They were answered thus:

I believe pauperism to come more frequently from weak individual self-indulgence than from any other one cause, self-indulgence in idleness, in drinking, in wasteful expenditure, and in other evil habits—gradually undermining the moral character, and taking root as so many vices. The want of a sound moral education lies at the foundation of very much of this evil. You seldom find among our rural population an industrious, conscientious, prudent person sinking into pauperism. In the few exceptions I have known the poverty was brought about by the self-indulgence of others—the misconduct of husband, father, or wife—or by disease, which may often be traced also to some form of weak self-indulgence...Moral weakness, want of self-control, under one form or another, will generally be found to have caused the evil, at least among our rural population. A sound education would be the best preventative. By a sound education I mean a sound *moral* education: mere intellectual education will never suffice to prevent this evil.¹⁵²

This reply explicitly demonstrates how intricately poverty and morality had become entwined in the national public consciousness. The speaker not only identified "the want of a sound moral education" as the chief cause of pauperism, she also equated the condition of poverty with "evil," using the word four times in this one brief passage. Furthermore, although she acknowledged that pauperism could be caused by disease, she still placed the blame on the poor themselves, claiming that disease itself "may often be traced also to some form of weak self-indulgence."¹⁵³

The connection between inherent worth and capitalist output, which was just beginning to develop in the early nineteenth century, became increasingly entrenched throughout the postbellum period of rapid industrialization. As Trattner relates: "The poor were held in contempt in an acquisitive society in which wealth became almost an end in itself. It was not difficult to believe that indigence was simply punishment of the improvident for their lack of

¹⁵² Susan Fenimore Cooper, "The County Poor-House Facts.," *Harper's Bazaar* (1867-1912); *New York*, July 20, 1872.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

industry and morality – the direct consequence of sloth and sinfulness.”¹⁵⁴ These notions joined with the theory of Social Darwinism in the post-war era, resulting in a harsh survival-of-the-fittest philosophy which argued that the poor should be left to fend for themselves. Proponents of this theory argued that providing relief to the poor would only encourage their degeneracy and allow them to pass their presumably immoral and deficient genes onto the next generation. Although only a fraction of society subscribed fully to this philosophy, aspects of it permeated the nation’s social thought and discourse.

Not surprisingly, this period witnessed the extension of the idea that poor relief only exacerbated the poverty issue, which developed into the notion that poverty was a *moral* – not *material* – problem. Proponents of this belief suggested that the poor needed “soul, not soup,” and “not alms but a friend.” They believed that the poor needed only to be taught the virtues of hard work and temperance, and then they would be able to lift themselves out of poverty.¹⁵⁵ Although this mentality was most closely associated with the charity movement, as opposed to governments providing poor relief services, the association between moral character and poverty had become so entrenched in public thought by this time that even governmental representatives, who were in fact providing material services, were influenced by it. In Virginia, state-level administrators of the Freedmen’s Bureau expressed concern that providing relief services “would serve to pauperize the recipients.”¹⁵⁶ Prior to the Civil War, national popular thought held that the poor were morally culpable for their condition, and thus should receive their material relief with a heavy dose of supervision and reform; after the Civil War, proponents of the scientific charity movement removed material relief from this equation, and argued that *only* supervision and reform should be offered.

¹⁵⁴ Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*, 88.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

¹⁵⁶ Green, *This Business of Relief*, 91.

With the increasing influence of the pseudoscientific theory of social Darwinism, the national public discourse on poverty became even more severe. No longer deemed *just* lazy or intemperate, national discourse had begun to speak about the poor as an inferior race of people. As Isenberg argues in her history of white poverty: “the popular vocabulary had become more ominous. No longer were white trash simply freaks of nature on the fringe of society; they were congenitally delinquent, a withered branch of the American family tree.”¹⁵⁷ A *New York Times* article from 1866 provides a contemporary sample of the language used to describe the South’s poorest citizens. Recounting his interaction with these “clay eaters,” the author describes them thus:

They are the lowest representatives of the United States I have seen—little more than mere animals—totally uneducated and have not generally been ten miles from the spot where they were born. They live for the most part in wretched cabins, tilling a few feet of wretched soil, and sometimes in caves or pits in the ground; have no ideas beyond the immediate present, and are in everything the grossest materialists.

They talk a strange kind of gibberish, which is half the time so unintelligible that it must be conjectured by the context and by gestures. Their complexion is a dirty yellow, quite the hue of the clay they eat; their persons are very thin and lank generally, and their habits of the most filthy and repulsive character...

...Strange, undeveloped, repulsive creatures they.¹⁵⁸

Here we see a devaluation of the poor in the public consciousness from morally inferior individuals to a subclass who more closely resemble “creatures” or “animals” than human beings. This was the national philosophical backdrop against which poor relief officials in Montgomery County were operating.

Before examining how beliefs about poverty in Montgomery County compared to the national dialogue, it will prove useful to review the demographic and economic conditions of the county during the fifteen years after the war. As was the case in most of the South, the decade

¹⁵⁷ Isenberg, *White Trash*, 180-181.

¹⁵⁸ Correspondence of the New-York Times, “From the South: Southern Journeyings and Jottings.,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1866.

immediately following the Civil War was a period of hardship and recovery. By the mid-1870s, however, the county was experiencing substantial growth. The 1870 census reflected a population of 12,556, comprised of 9,674 white residents and 2,882 black residents.¹⁵⁹ This represented an 18% increase over the 1860 population, which sat at 10,617. From 1870 to 1890, the total population had increased 41% to 17,742, with 14,227 white residents and 3,515 black residents.¹⁶⁰ Agriculture continued to drive the local economy, and indeed, the number of farms more than doubled between 1860 and 1890, from 572 farms in 1860 to 1,351 farms in 1890.¹⁶¹ The main crops were corn, wheat, and tobacco, with corn and hay being the most profitable. In addition to agricultural production, the economy also heavily relied upon livestock. Although the number of livestock did not return to pre-war levels until the 1900s, the number of sheep nearly doubled from 1870 to 1900, and the number of cows, cattle, and horses also increased substantially.¹⁶² Industry did exist in Montgomery County, but it remained a much smaller portion of the economy than was the case in neighboring counties. The majority of the industry that did exist was in trade; in the 1870s, the *Virginia State Business Directory* listed blacksmiths, shoemakers, brick and cabinet makers, carpenters, wagon and saddle makers, tanneries, mills, and general merchandisers. The county also boasted a number of mineral springs resorts, which catered to both residents and tourists.¹⁶³ Clearly the county did engage in limited industry, but its overall economy remained based in agriculture and husbandry. Montgomery County was certainly experiencing growth throughout the 1870s and 1880s, but it remained a pre-industrial community.

¹⁵⁹ 1870 U.S. Census, www.socialexplorer.com, Accessed March 27, 2019.

¹⁶⁰ 1890 U.S. Census, www.socialexplorer.com, Accessed March 27, 2019.

¹⁶¹ 1860 U.S. Census, www.socialexplorer.com, Accessed March 27, 2019; 1890 U.S. Census, www.socialexplorer.com, Accessed March 27, 2019.

¹⁶² Lindon, *Virginia's Montgomery County*, 217-220.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 341, 297-321.

Throughout the postbellum era (and indeed, into the twentieth century), the office of the Overseer of the Poor of Montgomery County continued to provide indoor relief, outdoor relief, medical care, and burial expenses to the county's poorest residents in a manner which emphasized relief over reform. Unfortunately, no Overseer of the Poor reports have survived for this time period, so a yearly record of who resided at the poorhouse does not exist. Based on the 1870 and 1880 censuses, however, it appears that the county continued to provide indoor relief to the very old, very young, the disabled, and women with small children. The 1870 census reflects eleven residents: an elderly couple, two women aged 36 and 51, four individuals listed as "idiotic," and three children under the age of six.¹⁶⁴ In 1880, the county provided relief to six individuals listed as "idiotic" or "insane," and three children under the age of ten, for a total of nine residents.¹⁶⁵ Although popular thought held that poorhouse residents were supposed to provide labor to minimize the costs of relief and to provide moral reform, based on the demographics of the Montgomery County residents it seems unlikely that they were able to perform any significant amount of work.

With the majority of residents unable to contribute labor to the functioning of the farm, the county purchased supplies for their support from local merchants. Invoices for the purchase of these supplies demonstrate the county's commitment to provide for the residents' basic needs. One such invoice itemizes the supplies purchased for the poorhouse for a six-month period from Nov 28, 1870 to May 27, 1871. The county purchased from a Christiansburg dry goods seller, Spindle & Bro., \$130.45 worth of goods, including coffee, sugar, molasses, salt, dried apples, bacon, fabric, shoes, and thread.¹⁶⁶ This invoice is representative of the frequent purchases made by the supervisor of the poorhouse from local businesses, who in turn billed the county on a

¹⁶⁴ 1870 U.S. Census.

¹⁶⁵ 1880 U.S. Census.

¹⁶⁶ Poor House to Spindle & Bro, 1870, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1871, MCCC.

semiannual or annual basis. In addition to the regular provision of food and clothing, the documents also reflect other charges for the maintenance of the poorhouse, such as a payment of \$27 in 1868 for the making of six bedsteads.¹⁶⁷ Whereas, theoretically, poorhouses were intended to be self-sustaining based on the labor of its residents, and not incur any additional cost to the county, this was clearly not the case in Montgomery County.

In addition to moving individuals into the poorhouse, the county also continued their practice of “boarding out” individuals to live with other county residents. Based on the number of extant documents, this practice appears to have been fairly common, with the period of boarding ranging from days to years. A claim from 1868 from a Dr. William R. Pepper is representative of this type of relief. He submitted a request for \$15 to the county for “board for Kitty Burks & nurse [colored] for three weeks,” which the county subsequently approved and paid.¹⁶⁸ Perhaps surprisingly, those receiving payment for housing the poor were not always white men; several documents demonstrate that both women and free black men provided shelter to the poor and received recompense from the Overseer of the Poor.¹⁶⁹

The county clearly provided for a small number of individuals in the poorhouse or the homes of other residents, but the county offered outdoor relief to the majority of poor relief recipients. Although a comprehensive accounting of how many individuals received outdoor relief during this period is not possible due to the absence of Overseer of the Poor reports, a sense of the numbers can be ascertained from individual poor claims. One such claim itemizes the cash allotments for outdoor relief in one of the county districts. A claim titled “Auburn District Paupers” lists a total amount of \$248 that was paid out to twenty individuals for the

¹⁶⁷ Overseers of the Poor for Montgomery County, 1868, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1868, MCCC.

¹⁶⁸ Dr. Wm R. Pepper to Montgomery County, April 1, 1868, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1868, MCCC.

¹⁶⁹ Montgomery County a/c Mrs. E. Lucas, n.d., County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1872, MCCC; John F. Lester O.P. to C.D. Cromer, 1878, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1878, MCCC.

calendar year of 1878, with amounts per person ranging from \$3 to \$25.¹⁷⁰ Thus, in just one of the four districts, the number of individuals receiving outdoor relief was greater than the number of indoor relief recipients from all four districts combined.

The “Auburn District Paupers” claim reflects outdoor relief in the form of cash payments, but the county continued to provide outdoor relief through goods as well. In 1871, the Overseer of the Poor approved bushels of corn to John Danfore and John Roop, at a cost to the county of \$12.75 and \$1.80, respectively.¹⁷¹ Similarly, the county spent \$6.44 in 1876 for meat and corn “per order of overseer of [the] poor” for Mrs. Sarah Preston.¹⁷² Although provisions of food (or credit to purchase food) were the most common type of relief, the county also provided for non-consumables. The Overseer of the Poor approved allotments of coal to two men in 1875, \$25.76 for one, \$28.70 for the other. In another case, from 1879, the county paid for six yards of black cloth, one pair of white satin gloves, and one pair of shoes, to be sent to an H. Lee, and “to be charge[d] to Montgomery County.”¹⁷³ This request, issued by an Overseer of the Poor and approved by a Supervisor of the Poor, appears to be providing clothing to a poor relief recipient for a funeral. If the clothing referenced above was indeed provided in order for the recipient to attend a funeral, it is especially indicative of a heightened level of care as compared to other localities during the period. The care taken to provide for not just the recipients’ physical – but also emotional – needs, suggests that the community did indeed view the recipients of poor relief as neighbors. The payments for coal and clothing are significant; they suggest a concern for poor residents beyond their physical subsistence.

¹⁷⁰ J. F. Lester, O.P., 1879, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC.

¹⁷¹ E. Thompson Sup O. P. to Montgomery Co, August 26, 1871, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1871, MCCC.

¹⁷² Montgomery Co, April 1876, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1875, MCCC.

¹⁷³ H.D. Hudgins, O.P. to T.W. Spindle & Bro., April 20, 1879, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC.

Medical claims for the period also reflect a continued concern for the poor beyond mere survival. Doctors' bills for the treatment of residents of the poorhouse, inmates in the jail, and the poor who remained in private homes permeate the document base for this period. The majority of these claims were for a medical visit and "prescription and medicine" without any details about the ailment being treated. Occasionally, however, the sources offer a glimpse of patients' conditions. One such invoice, from the winter of 1868/69, provides for medical attention for the removal of lice: "one box medicine to kill lice for Black man named Lewis Leftwich." It appears, based on another line item in the invoice, that Mr. Leftwich was an inmate in the jail. Mr. Leftwich received three treatments from December 29, 1868 to February 2, 1869, which were billed to the county at \$.25 each.¹⁷⁴ The county's payment for lice treatment is especially interesting, as it is not a condition which could cause death if left untreated. It cannot be assumed that administrators' actions were entirely altruistic, however, as they would have had an invested interest in preventing a widespread infestation throughout the jail.

A greater number of documents appear which provide blanket pre-authorization to doctors to treat the poor and submit their bills to the county. One such document from 1878 reads: "Dr. W. A. Wilson, I hereby authorize you to render such medical services to Mrs. Catharine Dove, Mrs. Adaline Willard and David Jones & his family as they may require and charge the county for the same. H. D. Hudgins, O.P."¹⁷⁵ Dr. Wilson provided an itemized invoice covering his visits from December of 1878 to June of 1879, for a total of \$26.25.¹⁷⁶ Although the county did not pay the full invoice, they did approve \$15.20 to be paid to Dr.

¹⁷⁴ Dr. John D. Scott to Montgomery County State of Virginia, 1868, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1868, MCCC.

¹⁷⁵ H.D. Hudgins O.P. to Dr. W.A. Wilson, December 10, 1878, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1878, MCCC.

¹⁷⁶ The county paid for each of the itemized charges but reduced the amount allowed for each charge. The first column reflects the amount charged by Dr. Wilson, while the last column reflects the amount approved by the county.

Wilson. The services rendered included prescriptions and medicine, extracting teeth, and opening an abscess for a child.¹⁷⁷ The emerging trend in the county during this period of providing blanket pre-authorization to a doctor to provide whatever medical attention necessary suggests that the Overseers of the Poor continued to prioritize relief over reform; they were not attempting to exercise control over the poor through line-item approval/disapproval of medical procedures.

In addition to maintaining a focus on relief over reform, Montgomery County administrators continued to utilize more benign language when referring to the poor than their contemporaries. Throughout the antebellum and war years, county administrators referred to poor relief recipients by name, seldom referencing their moral quality or their status as a “pauper,” a term which denoted moral culpability in one’s own poverty. During the postbellum era Overseers of the Poor officials began to pay greater attention to the worthiness of recipients, and also began to characterize recipients as “paupers,” but their language still remained relatively benign. The attention paid to the worthy/unworthy dichotomy was employed to emphasize the worthiness of individuals as opposed to criticizing recipients for their unworthiness. The following directive issued by Overseer of the Poor Kabrich is representative of these documents:

The board of supervisors of Montgomery County will at its next annual meeting allow Fifteen Dollars for the benefit of John Morris who has been sick for over two years and not able to work he is now deranged has a wife & three small children. He was before his sickness an industrious [hard-working] man. His friends are not able to support him & family...¹⁷⁸

Mr. Kabrich emphasized Mr. Morris’s deteriorating mental and physical health, as well as his status as an “industrious [hard-working]” man, both of which qualified him as a worthy recipient.

¹⁷⁷ Dr. W. A. Wilson to Montgomery County, 1878, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1878, MCCC.

¹⁷⁸ Geo W. L. Kabrich, O. Poor, January 7, 1879, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC; Bill of articles furnished John Morris and family by Meary E. Kiss, n.d., County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC.

Furthermore, the presence of a wife and children who were relying upon him for support, and a lack of family or friends able to assist him, strengthened Mr. Morris's case for relief.¹⁷⁹

Mr. Kabrich did not designate Mr. Morris a "pauper," but even when he did employ this term, as he did for a resident named William Simpkins, his characterization of the recipient remained non-critical. In a request in which he asked the board to provide \$25 to Mr. Simpkins, he characterized him as "entirely deformed and helpless as a child, who has to be lifted in bed and out, is over sixty years old, [and] has been a county pauper for many years. The above sum is but a very small compensation for his clothing, board [and] waiting upon him for which purpose it is intended."¹⁸⁰ Mr. Kabrich emphasized Mr. Simpkins' physical infirmity, and furthermore, suggested that the requested sum of \$25 is not quite sufficient. Although he designated Mr. Simpkins a pauper, the rest of his description of him as an individual in extremely poor health more closely aligned with popular conceptions of the worthy poor.

It is clear that by this period the national discourse on poverty had begun to permeate local thought, as officials began to use the term "pauper" with greater regularity and made references to the physical and moral constitution of the poor. Although it was still quite rare, the first documents exhibiting significant criticism of the poor appear during this period. In 1877, Overseer of the Poor J. Wormack penned the following note to a local doctor:

Dear [sir,] I do not [doubt] the correctives of your accounts, but paupers disregard expenses as they do not pay any and I can't conveniently arrange each account. I will bring them to an aggregate and approve as much as fifteen dollars of the entire amount of your accounts for medical attention to the paupers.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ An accompanying document indicates that the family received \$15 worth of goods, including bacon, meal, flour, coffee, calico, cotton, shoes, a tin bucket, dried apples, Kentucky jeans, and tea: Bill of articles furnished John Morris and family by Meary E. Kiss, n.d., County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC.

¹⁸⁰ Geo W. L. Kabrich, O. Poor, January 7, 1879, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC.

¹⁸¹ J. Wormack, O.P. to Dr. James, December 17, 1877, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 6, SPEC.

Mr. Wormack's assertion that "paupers disregard expenses as they do not pay any" gestures toward the conception of the poor as irresponsible fiscal burdens. This type of language remained exceedingly rare within the documentary body of Montgomery County, however, suggesting that although these ideas were beginning to penetrate local thought, they had not yet gained prominence.

The documentary evidence from 1865-1880 suggests that, whereas the county administrators were beginning to pay greater attention to the worthy/unworthy dichotomy, they were generally categorizing their own poor relief recipients as worthy. With the possible exception of Mr. Wormack, referenced above, officials had clearly not yet ascribed to the philosophy that paupers were responsible for their own condition, nor to the notion that providing them relief reinforced their poverty and subverted the natural order of "survival of the fittest." When administrators referred to the worthiness of recipients it was overwhelmingly to bolster their case that the individual should receive relief. This was partially a factor of national attitudes towards the poor not having fully permeated the county, but it was also influenced by the strong social ties of a rural, agricultural community.

As was the case during the earlier decades, a number of the documents from this period suggest that the administrators were personally acquainted with recipients of poor relief. A level of familiarity is implied in many of the directives issued by Overseers of the Poor, such as the order discussed above regarding Mr. Morris. Mr. Kabrich's affirmation that Mr. Morris had been an "industrious, hard-working" man prior to his illness suggests that he had known him before his illness and application for relief. A document for outdoor relief for John Andy Young exhibits even more explicitly the familiarity between providers and recipients of poor relief. Mr. Kabrich wrote: "I have filled an order for the benefit of J A Young. You can see his [condition,] you know him. He has been a [hard-working,] industrious man [and] I recommend that you

approve this order.”¹⁸² In this request, Mr. Kabrich lobbied the Board of Supervisors for the provision of ten dollars to Mr. Young, emphasizing both Mr. Young’s worthiness as a formerly-industrious man, as well as the board’s acquaintance with him with the phrase “you know him.”

Invoices for payment for the construction of coffins often also suggested a personal relationship between administrators and the poor. Invoices for coffins consistently identified the deceased by name, and sometimes referred to them familiarly. One such invoice requested payment for coffins constructed for “old John Jones,” “Irene [Webb’s] child,” “John [Webster’s] daughter,” “Isac at Poor House,” and “Fighting Frannie.”¹⁸³ The use of nicknames such as “old John Jones” and “fighting Frannie” implies a significant level of familiarity between the author of the document and Mr. Jones and Frannie. Furthermore, the language in this claim reflects not only personal knowledge of the deceased, but also of their families. The children were not identified by their own names, they were identified by their parents’ names.

The sampling of poor claims referenced above clearly demonstrate that Montgomery County, throughout the postbellum decades, and despite the hardening national attitude towards poverty, continued to provide similar poor relief services as they had during the antebellum and wartime years. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that they still did so out of a colonial-era mentality of assisting their neighbors in need. Several factors support this claim. First, whereas the national dialogue on poor relief was increasing its focus on moral reform, at the expense of material relief, Montgomery County’s poor relief practices continued to provide direct *material* relief, without any apparent motions toward reform. Second, an analysis of the language used in these documents illustrates that the county administrators continued to use more benign language regarding the poor than other locales, even if they had begun to adopt aspects of the national

¹⁸² G. W. L. Kabrich to Montgomery County Board of Supervisors, July 22, 1878, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 6, SPEC.

¹⁸³ Hickock & Bros to Montgomery County, September 1, 1879, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC.

discourse on poverty such as a more consistent use of the term “pauper” over “poor” and a greater attention to the physical and moral qualities of the recipients. Finally, the manner in which administrators sometimes referenced the poor suggests that they often had personal knowledge of the poor relief recipients that they were providing for, increasing the likelihood that they viewed them as neighbors, not strangers.

In addition to diverging from national trends in their general attitude towards poverty, Montgomery County officials also continued to stand apart with regards to the impact of race on poor relief. The historiography on poor relief asserts that county governments consistently denied relief to freedmen and women. Green argues that in Richmond city authorities resisted providing relief to black residents, arguing that the burden to do so fell upon the Freedman’s Bureau.¹⁸⁴ In his discussion of race and relief during Reconstruction, Trattner says:

For the most part, though, blacks were treated separately from the white poor and in an inferior manner. Thus, while the new state constitutions generally included sections that required the provision of aid to all the needy on an equal basis, usually in state or county institutions, integration rarely occurred in the provision of such assistance.¹⁸⁵

Daniel Thorp’s history of the African-American community in Montgomery County relates the experience of Charles Schaeffer, the white official sent to the county by the Freedman’s Bureau. Shortly after he arrived in 1866, Schaeffer discovered that the Overseers of the Poor had been ignoring claims for relief from freedpeople. Within months the Overseer of the Poor had resigned, to be replaced by an administrator more conscientious of his duties. Thorp relates that by 1867 poor relief in Montgomery County was being provided to both white and black recipients.¹⁸⁶ Although Thorp’s findings make clear that relief for black residents could be highly dependent upon the particular administrator, relief was definitively being provided by 1867.

¹⁸⁴ Green, *This Business of Relief*, 89-90.

¹⁸⁵ Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*, 84-85.

¹⁸⁶ Thorp, *Facing Freedom: An African American Community in Virginia from Reconstruction to Jim Crow*, 191-192.

The documents indicate that, indeed, the county was providing the same types of services to black residents as to white, namely boarding out, indoor relief, medical treatment, and the provision of coffins, throughout the postbellum period. A claim from 1867 requests payment of \$56 to a black resident, Samuel Mays, for “keeping Joseph Israel [colored] from the 1st day of [May] 1865 to the 12th day of July 1867.”¹⁸⁷ This claim is remarkable for two reasons: first, the duration of the boarding, which was particularly lengthy for one claim at over two years, and second, both of the parties were black. Thus, not only was the county paying for relief for a black resident, they were paying those funds out to another black resident. Although the county was clearly willing to reimburse black residents for their assistance in housing the poor, it was far more common for black citizens to be boarded out to live with white residents. This was the case for John Matthew Jackson, who was boarded out to Henry Smith for “23 weeks and 5 days at 75 cents per week.”¹⁸⁸ The county boarded out not only men, but women and children as well. A \$30 claim from 1871 requests reimbursement for “diets & room for colored woman Charlotte & her two children” for twenty days. These boarders would have been expected to provide their labor in recompense for shelter, but on occasion, residents also provided housing to infirm residents who would have been incapable of labor. Fran Henderson, for example, provided housing to an “aged infirm colored [woman named] Sally” in 1876.¹⁸⁹

Although the practice of boarding out the poor clearly prevented individuals from physical homelessness and starvation, a caveat must be raised regarding the practice’s reflection of the neighbor-in-need philosophy. The host, not the indigent boarder, reaped the greatest benefit from the arrangement, especially if the boarder was of good physical and mental health.

¹⁸⁷ Samuel Mays to County Court of Montgomery, July 12, 1867, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 6, SPEC.

¹⁸⁸ Henry Smith to the County Court of Montgomery County, May 28, 1868, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 6, SPEC.

¹⁸⁹ Geo W.L. Kabrich, August 3, 1876, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1876, MCCC.

The host received free labor, as well as financial compensation, and while the boarder did indeed receive shelter and food, he would have had little (if any) control over the most rudimentary aspects of his life. Indeed, freedpeople may have experienced little difference between the institution of slavery and the experience of being boarded out, especially if they were boarded out to white residents. The possibility exists that the lure of free labor, and not a concern for providing for the poor, motivated county administrators in the continuation of this practice.

In addition to being boarded out, black residents were also housed within the poorhouse during the postbellum era. This stands as one of the most remarkable discoveries within the documentary base, as the historiography indicates that integrated poorhouses were extremely rare. Where they did exist, administrators expended a great amount of energy attempting to create separation between the races.¹⁹⁰ Trattner notes that communities could use the same structure to house both white and black residents, but they established separate quarters within the building to keep them separate. Furthermore, he argues that: “More often than not...completely separate facilities were provided, usually fewer in number and poorer in quality.” Referring to practices in Richmond, Virginia, he relates how they used a large, brick building to house the white poor, and a small, wooden structure in ill-repair to house the black poor.¹⁹¹ In Montgomery County, only one structure existed, within which both white and black residents were housed.¹⁹² The maximum number of residents documented at any one time was fourteen, suggesting that the structure was not especially large, and that residents would have had frequent interaction with one another.

¹⁹⁰ Green, *This Business of Relief*, 36, 95.

¹⁹¹ Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*, 85.

¹⁹² No evidence exists to indicate the size or layout of the first poorhouse. The structure used in the late-nineteenth century, however, is documented as being a two-room abode: National Registration of Historic Places Registration Form, George Earhart House, November 13, 1989, United States Department of the Interior.

Numerous documents from this period detail the biracial nature of Montgomery County's poorhouse. Although no official Overseer of the Poor reports exist from this era, one informal report survives from the first half of 1871. The Supervisor of the Poor documented fourteen residents as of January 1, 1871: ten white and four black.¹⁹³ Thus, over a quarter of the residents in 1871 were black, closely aligning with their representation of 23% of the total population.¹⁹⁴ Claims from the throughout the period indicate that the provision of indoor relief to black residents was common. An 1877 claim requests reimbursement for "Moving a colored woman and child to the poor house."¹⁹⁵ A similar document from 1867 seeks payment for "Removing Andy (Col.) to Poor House."¹⁹⁶ A group of documents, also from 1867, recount the plight of a man identified as "Bob a colored poor person." The Overseers of the Poor of neighboring Giles County requested reimbursement for transporting Bob from Giles to Montgomery County, arguing that his place of legal settlement was in Montgomery. Fearing that Bob would "become chargeable to this county," the Giles County administrators took out a warrant against Bob and physically transported him to Montgomery County.¹⁹⁷ This incident highlights not only the continued importance of legal residence, a remnant of the colonial-era laws, but also the often-involuntary nature of indoor relief. Although the county appeared to consider the provision of indoor relief to be an obligation towards their neighbors, it is likely that the recipients of this particular type of relief, both black and white, did not experience it that way. The "removing" of individuals to the poorhouse, as well as the swearing out of warrants to have them apprehended

¹⁹³ Supervisor of the Poor Report, May 31, 1871, John Nicolay Paper, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 6, SPEC.

¹⁹⁴ 1870 U.S. Census, www.socialexplorer.com, Accessed March 27, 2019.

¹⁹⁵ C.K. Barnes, February 17, 1877, John Nicolay Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, SPEC.

¹⁹⁶ Beverly Deaton to Montgomery County O. of Poor, October 1867, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1876, MCCC.

¹⁹⁷ Enoch Atkins to John Rock, June 21, 1866, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1867, MCCC; Sylvester Snodgray, August 16, 1866, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1866, MCCC.

and transported to a neighboring county, likely would have been experienced by the poor as the county imposing its will upon the individual, and not as an offer of neighborly relief.

In addition to providing indoor relief, the county did also on occasion provide outdoor relief to black residents. This was exceedingly rarer than was the case for white, residents, however. Whereas the majority of white poor relief recipients received outdoor relief, the majority of black recipients were either boarded out to another community member or moved to the poorhouse. When they did provide outdoor relief to black residents, however, it was in a similar manner as it was provided to white residents. A directive from J. F. Lester, Overseer of the Poor, from 1878 orders that a local general merchant, Kinsey, Cromer & Co., “please let Mrs. Lizza Smith [colored] have [\$10.00] worth of goods and charge the same to me.”¹⁹⁸ An invoice from Kinsey, Cromer & Co. documents that the goods were indeed provided: “To bill goods Lisa Smith (col) pauper [per] order J. F. Lister O.P., \$10.00.”¹⁹⁹ In a document from the following year, Mr. Lester provides an accounting of all outdoor relief recipients in his district for the calendar year. Out of a total of seventeen recipients of outdoor relief, only one was black. It is interesting, however, that he received the second-highest amount of relief. He received \$20.00; the highest amount provided to an individual was \$25.00, and the lowest \$5.50.²⁰⁰ Although these two claims prove that the county did indeed provide cash and goods directly to black residents, it is significant that this was rare. Race clearly did not prevent the receipt of relief, but it did significantly affect the *type* of relief that black residents received; black residents were far more likely than white residents to be removed to the poorhouse or boarded out to other, usually white, community members.

¹⁹⁸ H. F. Lester to Kinsey, Cromer & Co., January 12, 1878, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1878, MCCC.

¹⁹⁹ Kinsey, Cromer & Co. to Montgomery Co., January 12, 1878, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1878, MCCC.

²⁰⁰ Auburn District Paupers, 1869, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC.

Unlike outdoor relief, the county frequently provided medical care and burial expenses regardless of race. A medical invoice from 1867/68 bills the county \$57.25 for “attention [and] medicine for the poor white [and] black.”²⁰¹ This claim did not itemize the charges, but the majority of medical bills did. A claim from William F. Figgatt from 1868 provides a representative example. The first line item charges \$4.00 for “visit examine [and] med Negroe per order Agent.” The second, for a visit conducted two days later, charges \$1.75 for treatment for “Negroe Ester.”²⁰² Invoices for burial expenses often included line items for coffins for both black and white deceased. One such document charged a total of \$46.00 for seven coffins, three for black paupers and four for white. The black deceased were referred to as “old Black woman at Poor house,” “a negro who died at old [Squire’s],” and “a negro who died at old Mag’s.”²⁰³ The language used here illustrates a shift from the antebellum era. Whereas the poor were nearly always referred to by name during the earlier period, that began to shift during the postbellum years. Although this shift applied to both white and black paupers, it was much more pronounced with black residents. This is not to say that all claims depersonalized the poor; in many instances black paupers were identified by name. Such was the case for the 1868 claim requesting payment for “Making coffin for Henry Donelson a black man.”²⁰⁴ This practice of referring to the poor by name was beginning to wane, however, especially for black poor relief recipients.

Just as practices of how administrators referred to the poor were beginning to undergo change during this period, so too was the manner in which they organized poor relief. Although many aspects of relief remained consistent from the antebellum period, a few changes became

²⁰¹ E.F. Sheltman to Overseers of the Poor of Montgomery County, April 6 1868, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 6, SPEC.

²⁰² William F. Figgatt to Overseers of Poor of County of Montgomery, 1868, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1868, MCCC.

²⁰³ Hickock & Bro. to Montgomery County, 1868, John Nicolay Papers, MS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 6, SPEC.

²⁰⁴ Anonymous, March 1868, John Nicolay Papers, MNS1987-027, Box 1, Folder 6, SPEC.

visible during the postbellum period. Most striking, perhaps, is the sheer number of extant documents. Whereas only a small number of documents exist from the antebellum era, and almost none from the Civil War years, hundreds of poor claims have survived from the postbellum era. This cannot be taken as evidence of a dramatic increase in services, of course, since it cannot be certain if documents from the earlier years never existed or were simply lost to time, but it should be noted that the postbellum period benefits from a much richer source base. These documents reveal important changes in the structure of providing relief: services were being issued on a district, rather than county, level; the number of documents per transaction was increasing; the office of the Overseer of the Poor began to form semi-formal contractual relationships with general goods suppliers; and the office began to require an accounting of what goods were purchased by relief recipients. These changes suggest that an increased bureaucratic organization was developing around the administration of outdoor relief.

During the antebellum era, claims were initiated and approved on the county level, but after the Civil War the four districts begin to take jurisdiction over their own transactions. The county was divided into four regions, the Auburn, Alleghany, Blacksburg, and Christiansburg districts, each with its own Overseer of the Poor administration. Requests for relief would be issued and approved at the district level, as was the case when the overseer for the Auburn District indicated his approval for payment for the construction of a coffin for William Dexter: “I approve the within a/c May 19th 1879, Floyd Lester O.P., Auburn District.”²⁰⁵ The overseer for the Blacksburg District during the late 1870s, Geo. W. L. Kabrich, frequently initiated requests for relief, following a general format in which he requested a specific amount for an individual, followed by his justification for such relief. This was followed by a nearly identical disclaimer in

²⁰⁵ Montgomery Co Dr to John Corder, August 30, 1878, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1875, MCCC. Representative examples from other districts include: Alleghany Township Montgomery County In a/c with Robert C. James, July 27, 1875, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1875, MCCC; and Christiansburg District to W. D. Hudgens O.P., 1875, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1875, MCCC.

each claim, indicating that the provider of goods must supply an itemized account of those goods. One such authorization reads as follows:

Blacksburg Va April 21st 1879

The board of Supervisors of Montgomery County Va will at the next annual meeting allow Twenty-Five Dollars for the support of Josephus Miller and family. Josephus Miller and wife are both sick and unable to [work.] They have a few acres of land and a cabin on it in the pine woods and it is very poor [land.] He has been unable to work for more than a year and both he and wife are under the [doctor's] hands. The county assisted him last [year.]

Persons furnishing him provisions upon this order will be required to make a bill of articles furnished and prices of each and make oath to the same and present with this order to board.

Geo. W. L. Kabrich, O.P.²⁰⁶

The structure of this request reflects a number of changes from requests during the antebellum era. It reflects an increased emphasis on the worthiness of the recipient, highlighting his physical infirmity, but it also reflects a greater adherence to bureaucratic organization. Mr. Kabrich followed a template in which he identified the recipient and the amount of relief requested, followed by a discussion of why the individual required assistance, and concluded with a disclaimer that the party providing the services must file with the board a full accounting of provisioned goods. Mr. Kabrich's document requesting relief was then filed with the accompanying account of the goods provided. Mr. Morris's family received bacon, meal, flour, coffee, calico, cotton cloth, a pair of shoes, a tin bucket, dried apples, Kentucky jeans, and tea totaling \$15.00 over the first half of 1879.²⁰⁷ Mr. Kabrich issued the most detailed requests for relief, but the other district overseers also employed formulaic templates. The overseer for the Auburn district in 1879, J. F. Lester, frequently used a shorter format, exemplified by this issuance: "Please let Clora Thompson and Huldy Roop have [three dollars'] worth of supplies

²⁰⁶ Geo W. L. Kabrich, O. Poor, April 21, 1879, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC.

²⁰⁷ Bill of articles furnished John Morris and family by Meary E. Kiss, n.d., County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC.

each and charge to Auburn District Pauper account.”²⁰⁸ These directives from Mr. Kabrich and Mr. Lester, as well as their accompanying documents itemizing the relief provided, suggest that administrators were beginning to standardize the process for providing relief.

By the 1870s, a claim for relief often required multiple levels of approval. This could include an Overseer of the Poor administrator from the district, followed by the approval of that district’s Supervisor of the Poor, and then the county’s Supervisor of the Poor. A directive from an Overseer of the Poor for the Alleghany District, Jesse Womack, stated that “[T. W.] Spindle & Bro will pay to Phoebe Taylor [\$2.00] per month [and] charge to County – for keeping paupers from [December 1, 1978] to [March 25, 1879].” Below his signature we find the notation “approved,” signed by an individual who appears to be an administrator from the Alleghany District. Beneath that signature lies another “approved” notation, with the signature of Ennis Thompson, the county’s Supervisor of the Poor.²⁰⁹ Although documents from the earlier period also required approval, it was often only documented with the single word “allowed” scrawled on the back of the claim. A signature from an official was not required. Over the course of the postbellum era, however, a bureaucracy began to develop that required multiple levels of official approval.

The county also began to establish semi-formal contractual relationships with local merchants to provide goods to relief recipients, contributing to the development of a bureaucracy. This often added another layer to the process of relief, as the merchant also provided approval as well as an itemization of goods and prices which was then provided to the Overseers of the Poor. Such was the case with an order from H. D. Hudgins, who asked that T. W. Spindle & Bro. “please furnish the following parties with supplies as enumerated below from

²⁰⁸ J. F. Lester to Mr. W. S. Surface, August 24, 1879, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC.

²⁰⁹ Jesse Womack, O.P. to T. W. Spindle & Bro., 1879, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC.

1st December 1878 until otherwise directed.” Hudgins lists eight individuals eligible for relief of between \$1.00 and \$2.50 per month. T.W. Spindle has scrawled his signature at the bottom of the request, with the notation “Approved.” The back of the document includes the additional approval of Ennis Thompson, the Supervisor of the Poor.²¹⁰

In many cases, these clusters of related documents have weathered the decades together, indicating the significance county administrators placed on collecting and retaining documents from each step of relief distribution. Oftentimes, the original request for relief and the itemization of the provided goods or cash have been fixed together, either with a small straight pin or by being folded within one another. One such example includes the request by H. D. Hudgins to Spindle & Bros to “Please pay Mrs. Sarah Dillow Two & 50/100 Dollars in Goods [per] month from [December 1, 1876.]”²¹¹ This document was attached by a straight pin to the corresponding invoice from Spindle & Bros for \$30 for “furnish[ing] Mrs. Sarah Dillow from [December 1, 1876 to December 1, 1877.]”²¹² During the antebellum era, a document for outdoor relief would contain a brief directive describing the relief and little else. An administrator would scrawl “approved” or “disapproved” on the back of the claim, closing out the transaction. By the 1870s, however, this process had become much more involved. An individual, usually an Overseer of the Poor for a district, would issue a lengthier directive, which often included details about the goods to be provided, the duration of relief, justification for why the individual needed relief, and a requirement that the party providing the goods issue an itemized account to the county. The process required multiple levels of approval, with each administrator indicating his consent with a signature and his title. Finally, care was taken to maintain the connection between

²¹⁰ H.D. Hudgins O.P. to Mess. T.W. Spindle & Bro, December 1, 1878, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1878, MCCC.

²¹¹ H.D. Hudgins to Mess T.W. Spindle & Bro, n.d., County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1876, MCCC.

²¹² T.W. Spindle & Brother to Montgomery County, November 22, 1877, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1876, MCCC.

separate documents pertaining to the same claim by affixing them together. These changes suggest that, rather than attempting to eradicate outdoor relief, county officials were creating an increasingly-structured bureaucracy for administering relief.

In the decades following the war, this emphasis on improving accountability and efficiency of poor relief administration was expressed not only in practice, but also in law. In the late 1870s the Board of Supervisors began to pass legislation specifically regulating the practice. In one such directive, they ordered that: “The Superintendent of the Poor of the County is authorized to receive paupers from the corporations of Christiansburg [and] Blacksburg [and] furnish them with board [and] lodging at the rate of \$6.25 per month. Said corporations to furnish all necessary clothing and medical attention.”²¹³ This directive points to both the increasing level of bureaucracy, in that it divides responsibility between the county and the towns, and the desire to more fully regulate the provision of relief.

Two additional orders from 1879 further reflect an increasing bureaucracy. One fixes the amount that the county would pay for coffins for the poor at \$2.00 for children under ten, and \$3.00 for anyone older than ten years of age.²¹⁴ Another, declared on the same day, reads: “Resolved that hereafter no allowance will be made to parties furnishing supplies to paupers under contract, unless an itemized account be furnished with the contract.”²¹⁵ This directive clearly provided the legislative basis for Mr. Kabrich’s final paragraph in his claims that “Persons furnishing...provisions upon this order will be required to make a bill of articles furnished and prices of each and make oath to the same and present with this order to board.”²¹⁶ These orders make clear that, while the county was endeavoring to regulate and streamline the provision of outdoor relief, they were not attempting to discontinue its practice.

²¹³ Montgomery County Supervisors’ Book #1, November 19, 1878, page 81, MCCC.

²¹⁴ Montgomery County Supervisors’ Book #1, September 19, 1879, page 91, MCCC.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Geo W. L. Kabrich, O. Poor, April 21, 1879, County Claims 1861-1881, County Claims 1879, MCCC.

It should be noted that the following year, in August of 1880, the Board of Supervisors did begin to limit some services. They decreed “that hereafter no medical bills will be paid for services at any place, except the Poor House.”²¹⁷ This suggests that, in 1880, the county may have started the transition to limiting some aspects of outdoor relief. They did, however, continue to offer cash and goods to the poor throughout the remainder of the century, even if they discontinued the provision of medical services to individuals outside of the poorhouse.

In summary, although the period of 1865-1880 witnessed both continuity and change with respect to the county’s administration of poor relief, Montgomery County continued to stand apart from other, more urban, localities. Administrators continued to be motivated primarily by the belief that poverty was a natural factor of life, and that they held a duty to provide for the poor in their community. At the same time, however, they were beginning to pay greater attention to the character of the poor, adopting the language of “worthiness” to justify relief to the infirm, elderly, and widows and children. Additionally, although the documents still predominantly refer to the poor by name, and without pejorative adjectives, the term “pauper” is becoming more common during this period. A greater racial disparity is becoming visible, as well, as black poor relief recipients are more likely to be referred to as paupers and have their names elided in the records.

In addition to popular conceptions of poverty, a mix of continuity and change also characterizes the intersection of poor relief and race in Montgomery County during the postbellum era. Just as they had during the antebellum period, administrators continued to provide relief to their black neighbors. Of course, the number of eligible recipients increased significantly as a result of the war, however, since formerly-enslaved residents were now theoretically eligible for relief. The evidence suggests that race significantly influenced the type

²¹⁷ Montgomery County Supervisors’ Book #1, August 30, 1880, page 101, MCCC.

of relief offered, and may have prevented relief if an individual Overseer of the Poor chose to wield race as a disqualifying factor, but that in general county officials did indeed consistently furnish relief to their black neighbors. They tended to favor housing black residents in the poorhouse or boarding them out to other residents instead of offering outdoor relief, but they did supply outdoor relief on at least a few occasions. Furthermore, black residents were frequent recipients of both medical care and coffins. Thus, whereas other localities were denying services to black residents, or insisting that they receive relief only through the Freedmen's Bureau, Montgomery County was continuing to provide relief through the office of the Overseers of the Poor.

Finally, the county continued to defy the national trend towards the abolition of outdoor relief. Not only were they continuing to provide cash and goods, they were developing a system of increasing complexity for the issuance, approval, and distribution of this relief. No longer a simple matter of scratching off a couple of sentences authorizing provisions, administrators were constructing templates for the request of relief. These missives included details on the good character of the recipient, the amount and type of relief to be provided, and often a requirement that the provider of relief furnish a full accounting to the county. These documents were then passed through a series of two or three approvals, and ultimately filed away with their supporting documentation. The care and attention paid to this process suggests that the county was not interested in ending outdoor relief; rather, they were attempting to organize and regulate the process to provide for greater efficiency.

The history of poor relief in Montgomery County from 1865 to 1880, exemplified by a continued commitment to providing reform over relief to both black and white residents, supports Michael Katz's theory on the evolution of poor relief. Katz argues that the rise of industrialization, especially rapid during the postbellum era, precipitated a shift in thought from

colonial-era notions of poverty as a normal societal factor to the conception of poverty as a personal moral failing.²¹⁸ Other scholars, studying poor relief in northern, midwestern, and southern urban locales, have echoed his assertion based on the dramatic transitions in poor relief in those areas during the nineteenth century.²¹⁹ Montgomery County maintained a primarily-agricultural economy throughout the period, and thus did not experience this dramatic shift; rather, they continued to operate from the neighbor-in-need philosophy: remaining focused on providing relief; continuing to recognize poor relief recipients as members of their community and not merely “paupers;” providing relief regardless of race; and maintaining the practice of outdoor relief. Thus, although national beliefs about poverty were beginning to infiltrate county practices to some degree, Montgomery County’s adherence to colonial-era beliefs during the latter half of the nineteenth century offers confirmation of Katz’s theory: if a rise in industrialization correlated to harsher attitudes towards the poor, a lack of industrialization allowed for the continuance of more benign attitudes.

²¹⁸ Katz, *Poverty and Policy in American History*, 3, 183.

²¹⁹ Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*; Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State*; Axinn and Stern, *Social Welfare*; Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Wagner, *The Poorhouse*.

Conclusion

The local government of Montgomery County provided for its poor throughout the entirety of the nineteenth century. The office of the Overseers of the Poor provided assistance to those hovering on the brink of survival through the allocation of cash or goods, housing individuals in the poorhouse, apprenticing them out to other community members, and administering medical care and burial assistance. If an individual resided within the county and could not rely on friends or family for assistance, the county attempted to provide enough aid to facilitate basic survival.

Although other communities across the country were similarly providing poor relief, Montgomery County's history stands apart from the histories written about other locales. This does not imply that Montgomery County was particularly unique or extraordinary in any way; rather, it is a factor of which localities scholars have historically focused on. The research on poor relief has centered predominantly on Northern and Midwestern communities, and when historians have studied poor relief in the South they have tended to concentrate on cities. The rural South has been largely understudied.

As discussed, the general historiography of nineteenth-century poor relief credits the rise of industrialization with changing conceptions about poverty, which in turn influenced how communities enacted poor relief. Specifically, historians have identified several trends taking place over the century: the developing belief that the poor themselves – and not normal life occurrences – were responsible for poverty; the increasing emphasis on the moral character – or more accurately, the perceived lack thereof – of the poor; the movement to implement reform, either in addition to or instead of relief; and the push to eradicate outdoor relief on the assumption that it encouraged pauperism and exacerbated the problem.

The evidence strongly suggests that, just as significant industrialization did not occur in Montgomery County until much later than it did in other parts of the country, the dominant trends in poor relief also did not emerge in Montgomery County until much later. Rather, from 1830-1880, the county's administration of poor relief continued to be driven by pre-industrial theories on poverty. This ideology emphasized the expected occurrence of poverty in society, as well as the responsibility of local governments to provide assistance to members of their communities. During the antebellum period, when people began dividing the poor into categories of "worthy" and "unworthy" and employing derogatory language to describe them, administrators in Montgomery County still referred to the poor by name. Furthermore, as policy makers began to argue for the use of poorhouses as a means to reform and punish the "unworthy" poor, Montgomery County instead used theirs as a solution of last resort for the "worthy" poor: the elderly, infirm, and women with small children. This relatively more benign treatment of the poor continued throughout the Civil War years, even as administrators greatly expanded the base of recipients of relief. Montgomery County was not alone in its expansion of aid during the war years, as attitudes towards poverty generally softened in both the Union and the Confederacy as a result of the widespread devastation wrought by conflict. The postbellum years, however, witnessed a re-hardening of attitudes in the North, Midwest, and urban South. In rural Montgomery County, on the other hand, administrators continued to operate primarily under the neighbors-in-need mentality. They began to adopt some of the language used nationally, especially language associated with the "worthiness" of the poor, but they most often used this language to *support*, not deny, the provision of aid. Furthermore, administrators continued to provide outdoor relief to such a significant degree that they developed a bureaucratic organization to manage its distribution.

In addition to supporting the prevailing theory on the link between industrialization and hardening beliefs about poverty, this research complicates the scholarship on the impact of race on poor relief. Whereas the historiography generally argues that black Americans were denied poor relief, this was not the case in Montgomery County. The poorhouse stood as an integrated institution throughout the century, and black residents also received outdoor relief, medical care, and burial. Again, this is not to say that Montgomery County administrators were particularly magnanimous; they were not. Nor is to say that black residents did not experience endemic racism, because they surely did. Rather, it simply stands as another anomaly between how poor relief was administered in a rural, Southern locality as opposed to other regions.²²⁰

In summary, despite the hardening of attitudes towards the poor in the rest of the country throughout the nineteenth century, the less-negative, pre-industrial mentality of poverty persisted in Montgomery County as a result of its economy and demography. The county did not share in the rapid industrialization experienced by other localities, allowing for the retention of less critical attitudes towards poverty. Rather than blaming the impoverished for their own condition, they maintained the pre-industrial belief that poverty was a natural part of society and that local governments bore an obligation to provide for the destitute in their midst. Additionally, the county's relatively small population and lack of foreign immigration contributed to a strong sense of community, one in which individuals were connected to one another through multiple avenues of acquaintance. As a result of this interconnectedness, county administrators were less likely to depersonalize the poor as simply "paupers," and more likely to view them as neighbors whose personal circumstances had plunged them into poverty.

²²⁰ In Avidit Acharya, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen, *Deep Roots: How Slavery Still Shapes Southern Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), the authors argue that political opinions in the South are closely tied to the historic prevalence of slavery in each locality, maintaining that in areas which relied predominantly on slavery, current political beliefs skew away from policies that would benefit African-Americans. This raises an interesting possibility that, due to its (relatively) lower reliance on slavery, county administrators maintained less antagonistic attitudes towards their black neighbors.

This research focused narrowly on the connection between industrialization and the administration of poor relief, but the impact of nineteenth-century, Southern culture should not be overlooked. Embedded beliefs about gender, race, and patriarchy within Southern society surely informed government officials' beliefs about poverty and their subsequent administration of relief. Their provision of relief to their struggling neighbors would have reinforced their self-image as benevolent patriarchs, fulfilling their duty to their perceived subordinates. As explicated by historian Eugene Genovese, the institution of slavery led to the development of a hierarchical society modeled around the structure of a nuclear family; the white, male slaveholder assumed the paternal role for those under his care: slaves, women, and children. Assuming the role of a societal patriarch required that he both maintain control over his "family," and be seen as honoring his responsibility to provide and care for them.²²¹ The administration of poor relief likely reinforced the county administrators' sense of this patriarchal responsibility, as they maintained order within the community by granting support to those whose material desperation could potentially cause social disruption.

Much as the culture of patriarchy underlaid the administrators' sense of responsibility to poor relief, cultural gender norms likely also contributed to subconscious motivations behind their commitment to administering relief. In Southern culture, white manhood was defined, in part, by "the ability to control white women and children and the black population in their midst, access to political power, and dedication to a code of honor that held a man responsible for preserving his personal reputation and that of his family and community."²²² Determining whether and what kind of poor relief women and other men, especially black men, should receive would have validated government officials' sense of manhood. This may have been

²²¹ Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974).

²²² Sylvia D. Hoffert, *A History of Gender in America: Essays, Documents, and Articles* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003), 179.

especially true after 1860, when epic societal shifts began to threaten these conventions of gender. White men's sense of power became increasingly compromised as women began to assert greater political and economic independence during the war years and black Americans gained their freedom with the abolition of slavery.²²³ In this context, the increasing trend toward the bureaucratization of poor relief in Montgomery County during the postbellum era takes on a deeper significance beyond simply an effort to efficiently fulfill the county's duties. Indeed, it could be interpreted as a mechanism through which white, male administrators sought to wrest back control over women, poor white men, and black residents.

As an in-depth study of one particular locality, this research cannot definitively answer questions about how and why historical communities provided relief to their most economically disadvantaged neighbors. It does, however, open a window onto a previously under-studied aspect of the history of social welfare: the implementation of poor relief in a rural, Southern community. As such, it not only fills out the history of poor relief, but also underscores the myriad forces at work influencing how government officials view the poor, how those views are expressed through policy, and how that policy affects those receiving relief. This research illustrates how the economic structure of a community merges with geography and cultural notions of gender and race to determine whether that community considers poor relief to be a governmental obligation, or instead believes that the poor should be left to fend for themselves.

Largely as a result of living in a rural, preindustrial locality, officials in nineteenth-century Montgomery County considered poor relief to be an obligation to their community. The provision of relief – in many, though not all – cases, allowed the poor to physically survive, but in many aspects the larger community actually received a greater benefit from the administration of relief than the recipients. The granting of relief reinforced officials' conception of themselves

²²³ Hoffert, *A History of Gender in America: Essays, Documents, and Articles*, 167-179, 217-223.

as benevolent patriarchs, maintaining order and providing for their subordinates. It also allowed them to exert control over their female and black neighbors, which became especially important during the war and postbellum years when their sense of absolute control began to erode. The administration of relief also benefited the county economically. Local merchants and doctors profited from their contractual relationships with the county, receiving payment for providing goods and services to the poor. Similarly, individuals within the community – some of them near poverty themselves – also benefited, as they were paid for housing the poor and could further benefit from the labor of their boarders. This is all to say that, while governmental attitudes towards the poor were certainly more benign in Montgomery County than in other localities, this resulted not from magnanimity, but from intertwining social, cultural, and economic factors, and that the local community benefited just as much – if not more – than the recipients of relief.

To return to the inspiration behind this project – a desire to elevate the experiences of the poor throughout our history – let us revisit Andy from the opening vignette, the gentleman who was “removed [to the] poor house” in 1867. Although much has changed in the last 150 years, and poorhouses were shuttered a century ago, Andy’s experience would not be entirely foreign to modern Americans living in poverty. Then, as now, the poor received only enough assistance to allow for physical survival. Then, as now, race and gender influenced the quantity and quality of relief. And then, as now, societal conceptions about the poor fundamentally shaped how governments legislated relief and how that legislation impacted not only the poor, but also the larger community. A greater understanding of these dynamics in a historical context can inform efforts to reform modern societal conceptions about poverty, which have become increasingly negative since Andy’s time. Perhaps bringing to light the lives of the historical poor will allow us to recognize the humanity of the modern poor, and reverse the negative trajectory of the discourse on poverty.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

LV	Library of Virginia, Richmond
MCCC	Montgomery County Clerk of Court, Christiansburg, Virginia
SPEC	Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic and State University, Blacksburg, VA

Primary Sources

Montgomery County Archival Sources

Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va
Montgomery County Personal Property Tax Records
Overseer of the Poor Reports

Montgomery County Courthouse, Clerk of the Circuit Court's Office, Christiansburg, Va.
County School Claims
Order Books
Overseer of the Poor Reports
Poor Claims
Supervisor Books

Virginia Tech, Newman Library, Special Collections, Blacksburg, Va.
John Nicolay Papers

Government Documents

1840 Code of Virginia

1850 U.S. Census

1860 U.S. Census

1870 U.S. Census

1880 U.S. Census

1890 U.S. Census

James, Arthur W. *Disappearance of the County Almshouse in Virginia: Back From "Over the Hill."* Richmond: The State Board of Public Welfare, 1926.

Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Virginia. Series Number: M324, Roll 955, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.

New York State Board of Charities. *Annual Report for the Year 1900*, vol. 1, "Report of the Secretary of State in 1824 on the Relief and Settlement of the Poor." James B. Lyons, State Printer, Albany, New York: 1901.

Quincy, Josiah. "Report of the Committee on the Pauper Laws of this Commonwealth." Boston: Shaw and Shoemaker, 1821.

Virginia Select Marriages

Newspapers and Periodicals

"Causes, Consequences, and Cure of Pauperism." *Hampshire Gazette*. March 31, 1830, sec. Volume XLIV, No. 2274.

Cooper, Susan Fenimore. "The County Poor-House Facts." *Harper's Bazaar (1867-1912)*; *New York*, July 20, 1872.

Correspondence of the New-York Times. "From the South: Southern Journeyings and Jottings." *New York Times*. April 15, 1866.

"The Honorable the Delegates to the General Assembly of Maryland, from Baltimore City and County." *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*. January 15, 1823, Volume XXI, No. 41 edition.

"Pauperism." *Independent Chronicle and Boston Patriot*. March 1, 1823, Volume XXI, Issue 11 edition.

"Why the Poor Are Poor." *New York Observer and Chronicle (1833-1912)*; *New York*, October 30, 1856.

Secondary Sources

Abramovitz, Mimi. *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present*. Boston: South End Press, 1996.

- Acharya, Avidit, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen. *Deep Roots: How Slavery Still Shapes Southern Politics*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018.
- Alexander, John K. *Render Them Submissive: Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760-1800*. Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.
- Altschuler, Glenn C., and Jan M. Saltzgaber. "Clearinghouse for Paupers: The Poorfarm of Seneca County, New York, 1830-1860." *Journal of Social History* 17, no. 4 (1984): 573–600.
- Axinn, June, and Mark J. Stern. *Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001.
- Bourque, Monique. "Women and Work in the Philadelphia Almshouse, 1790—1840." *Journal of the Early Republic* 32, no. 3 (2012): 383–413.
- Buck, Paul H. "The Poor Whites of the Ante-Bellum South." *The American Historical Review* 31, no. 1 (1925): 41–54.
- Catlaw, Thomas J., and Margaret Stout. "Governing Small-Town America Today: The Promise and Dilemma of Dense Networks." *Public Administration Review* 76, no. 2 (2016): 225–29.
- Cooke, Michael A. "Race Relations in Montgomery County, Virginia 1870-1990." *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association* 4 (1992): 94–104.
- Dorsey, Bruce. *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Esbeck, Carl H. "Protestant Dissent and the Virginia Disestablishment, 1776-1786." *Public Policy* 7 (2009): 55.
- Franklin, John Hope. "Public Welfare in the South during the Reconstruction Era, 1865-80." *Social Service Review* 44, no. 4 (1970): 379–92.
- Fuentes, Marisa J. *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
- Genovese, Eugene. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.
- Gordon, Linda. *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935*. New York: Free Press, 1994.

- Green, Elna C. *Before the New Deal: Social Welfare in the South, 1830-1930*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999.
- . *This Business of Relief: Confronting Poverty in a Southern City, 1740-1940*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003.
- Harrington, Michael. *The Other America*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1962.
- Hoffert, Sylvia D. *A History of Gender in America: Essays, Documents, and Articles*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003.
- Isenberg, Nancy. *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*. New York: Viking, 2016.
- Katz, Michael B. *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986.
- . *Poverty and Policy in American History*. New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1983.
- . *The Undeserving Poor*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1989.
- Lindon, Mary Elizabeth, ed. *Virginia's Montgomery County*. Christiansburg, Virginia: Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Regional Art Center, 2009.
- Lockley, Timothy James. *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007.
- McCurry, Stephanie. *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Nicolay, John. "Virginia Poverty: Paupers and the Almshouse: An Examination of Montgomery County's Response to Poverty, 1790-1860.," 1984.
- Pimpare, Stephen. *A People's History of Poverty in America*. New York: The New Press, 2008.
- Rockman, Seth. *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.
- Rothman, David J., ed. *The Jacksonians on the Poor: Collected Pamphlets*. New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1971.
- Shifflett, Crandall A. *Patronage and Poverty in the Tobacco South: Louisa County, Virginia, 1860-1900*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982.

- Simpson, E. "Pica during Pregnancy in Low-income Women Born in Mexico," *Western Journal of Medicine*, 173, no. 1 (2000): 20-24.
- Thomas, Emory M. *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971.
- Thorp, Daniel B. *Facing Freedom: An African American Community in Virginia from Reconstruction to Jim Crow*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017.
- Trattner, Walter I. *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*. New York: The Free Press, 1999.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- Wagner, David. *The Poorhouse: America's Forgotten Institution*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.
- Wisner, Elizabeth. *Social Welfare in the South: From Colonial Times to WWI*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970.
- Ziliak, Stephen T. "Pauper Fiction in Economic Science: 'Paupers in Almshouses' and the Odd Fit of *Oliver Twist*." *Review of Social Economy* 60, no. 2 (June 2002): 159–81.