

“This pauper palace”:

The Almshouse of Baltimore City and County, 1773-1866

On February 2, 1844, the *Baltimore Sun* reported an unusual observation. An anonymous group noticed the placement of a new fountain in front of Calverton, the mansion that banker Dennis A. Smith commissioned for his estate almost thirty years prior.¹ The observers described this “ornament” as “a swan . . . sitting in a shell of water; from its mouth is ejected upwards, a jet of water some ten or twelve feet in height.”² This new feature was noteworthy because Smith no longer inhabited Calverton; it was the site of the Baltimore City and County Almshouse since 1820. The writers noted that “The design [of the fountain] is simple,” and that “With a cost not worth mentioning this beautiful ornament has been added to the grounds.” Whether the writer intended the tone to be sardonic or admiring, the cost was hardly justified in supporting the poor.

Whereas in the eighteenth century, citizens saw poverty as commonplace and natural, the nineteenth century’s reformers shifted the perception of welfare and its associated institutions toward being a social problem. The physical evolution of the Baltimore Almshouse mirrored these shifts. Between 1773 and 1866, the Almshouse (also known at various times as the Poor House or Poor Farm) occupied two separate sites, and examination of the built environment for

¹ Dr. Jackson Piper later corroborated the presence of a fountain with goldfish, in a reminiscence of living at the almshouse as one of the resident medical fellows. “On one occasion, we divested ourselves of our clothes, made seines of our night gowns, hauled the fountain and enjoyed a quiet fry in the back kitchen.” If there were any doubters in his audience, he also noted that “I assure you they tasted good.” (Dr. Jackson Piper, “The Baltimore City and County Alms House in 1854: A Paper Read Before the Baltimore County Medical Association,” N.D., PAM 13205, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore).

² “An Ornament,” *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), February 2, 1844, accessed April 11, 2015. America’s Historical Newspapers.

each illustrates the different theories behind administering relief and how the resident paupers (interchangeably called ‘inmates’ or ‘the poor’) were able to conduct their everyday lives.³

Historiography

The eighteenth and nineteenth century almshouse is one of a family of institutions that developed in the early Republic and antebellum years. Though the almshouse became distinct from the penitentiary, hospital, insane asylum, and orphanage, it evolved from the same origins of social thought and organization, and spawned the creation of these new institutions. In the formative 1971 work, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, David J. Rothman describes how poor relief in the eighteenth century largely took place in the home. If a person in need was not able to stay with their family, or had no family, they boarded in another local household. Only when this was not possible were they sent to the almshouse, which aimed to maintain the physical appearance and as much similarity as possible to the family and ordinary household.⁴ The poor were an accepted part of society, not dangerous or particularly problematic.⁵ Population increases throughout the nation lent greater fluidity—and instability—to the social order.⁶ At the end of the eighteenth century and early in the nineteenth century, enlightenment ideals influenced the shift to a less-deterministic perception of criminals, the poor; they became a suspicious threat rather than a normal part of the social order.⁷ Intellectuals became engrossed in a mission to identify the source of deviancy so that they could

³ In an effort to reduce confusion, I use ‘almshouse’ (with a lowercase ‘a’) when referring to the almshouse as an institution or almshouses in a general sense. I use ‘Almshouse’ (with an uppercase ‘A’) when referring specifically to the Baltimore Almshouse.

⁴ David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1971), 42.

⁵ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 35.

⁶ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 57.

⁷ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 156.

apply the most effective measures to combat it.⁸ One of the primary tactics was the construction of “moral architecture,” that organized the space for optimal success at reform.⁹

Institutionalization became a method to remove the ill effects of deviancy from the larger society, but also sheltered the inmates from temptation. Almshouse officials also hoped that the structure and regulation of inmates’ lives would deter them from entering the institution in the first place. In tracing the history of related institutions—the prison, the almshouse, and the insane asylum—*The Discovery of the Asylum* was a foundational work for multiple subfields of research, and continues to remain in dialogue with modern research.

Monique Bourque applied ideas suggested by Rothman in her research on poor relief and almshouses in the greater Philadelphia area. She argued that localities did not always match up to state legislation, and that the construction of almshouses “suggested the possibility of increased involvement of entire communities in poor relief,” while holding to the belief that inmates could be rehabilitated into full members of society.¹⁰ She also suggested that the terms ‘households’ and ‘families’ were often used in reference to poorhouses and their inmates, fitting in with the organizational model in which the communities-at-large comprehended the institutions. Examination of Bourque’s research further contextualizes the Baltimore Almshouse in the wider patterns and practices of the mid-Atlantic.

The citizens of Baltimore feature prominently in a few compelling works, such as Camilla Townsend’s examination of the economic culture of Baltimore through a comparative perspective. In *Tales of Two Cities: Race and Economic Culture in Early Republican North and*

⁸ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 65.

⁹ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 84.

¹⁰ Monique Bourque, “The Creation of the Almshouse: Solutions to the Problem of Poverty,” *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 102 (2000): 56–81.

South America, she paired a study of the distinctive upper, middle, and lower classes of Baltimore with that of Guayaquil, Ecuador. While the two cities were similar in their economic structure, functions as mercantile ports, and experienced parallel patterns of prosperity and decline, they differed notably in their trajectories during the 1820s and 1830s.¹¹ She emphasized that cultural elements, not structural ones, led to these differences.¹² The composition of race and ethnicity, for example, affected “people’s envisioning of themselves and each other,” which affected legislation and economic demand.¹³ In Baltimore, increases in immigrants, freedmen, and wage labor affected the poor population, but they were perceived as a part of society and had an inherent right to work and keep their families from starvation.¹⁴

In addition to Townsend, Seth Rockman’s *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*, provides the most recent and most complete examination of the poor in Baltimore, including, but not exclusively, those who sought refuge in the almshouse. Where Townsend illustrated the Baltimore experience as driven by culture, Rockman examined it through an economic lens. Looking largely at the reports for the trustees, along with almshouse admission and discharge books, he analyzed the demographics of poor common laborers, and how this coerced class linked intimately to the prosperity that is commonly associated with the early republic.¹⁵ Rockman argued that coercion positioned members of the working class in a “material condition” of poverty.¹⁶ Like Rothman, Rockman acknowledged the shifts in policy and attitudes concerning the poor, but ultimately argued that “a richer

¹¹ Camilla Townsend, *Tales of Two Cities: Race and Economic Culture in Early Republican North and South America: Guayaquil, Ecuador, and Baltimore, Maryland* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 234.

¹² Townsend, *Tales of Two Cities*, 235.

¹³ Townsend, *Tales of Two Cities*, 236.

¹⁴ Townsend, *Tales of Two Cities*, 229-32.

¹⁵ Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 3.

¹⁶ Rockman, *Scraping By*, 11.

interpretative model emerges at the intersection of elite benevolence, social discipline, and pauper agency,” and that those who entered it were resentful, deviant, and individualistically-minded.¹⁷ The institution became charitable and punitive at the same time.¹⁸

The critical idea of pauper agency continued in David Wagner’s *The Poorhouse*, where he examined the institution primarily in late-nineteenth and twentieth century New England. After providing contextualization in a broader chronological and geographic scope, he hypothesized the possible experiences and agency of the poor from the 1890s up through the 1970s.¹⁹ He possessed a view similar to Rockman that “each institution blended a variety of motives—repression, compassion, rehabilitation, and maintenance of a low-wage labor force—with local traditions and economies.”²⁰ Ignoring Rothman and Bourque’s claims of family-like poor relief prior to the emergence of regularity, order, and specialization in the 19th century, he disregards the existence of poorhouses prior to 1820.²¹ Wagner also rejected Rothman’s argument that poor farms “reflected the hope for a glorious utopian order.”²² He attributed four goals to the poorhouse: minimum necessities to live, separating the “deserving” from “unworthy” poor, enforcing work ethic, and enforce morality.²³ He argued that the ability of poorhouse residents to enter and exit as they wished negated their inclusion in the group of “total institutions” that forced inmates into a strict system of confinement and often isolation.²⁴ Wagner elucidated ideas where Townsend briefly touched, connecting the history of the poorhouse to the modern-day concerns of welfare and social reform. Though the core of his

¹⁷ Rockman, *Scraping By*, 197.

¹⁸ Rockman, *Scraping By*, 229.

¹⁹ David Wagner, *The Poorhouse: America's Forgotten Institution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 13.

²⁰ Wagner, *The Poorhouse*, 39.

²¹ Wagner, *The Poorhouse*, 41.

²² Wagner, *The Poorhouse*, 46.

²³ Wagner, *The Poorhouse*, 48-9.

²⁴ Wagner, *The Poorhouse*, 147-8.

examination did not begin until after the Civil War, *The Poorhouse* links the early development of the institution—as described by Rothman, Bourque, and Townsend—with the modern forms of welfare, grounding it in the larger historiography of relief and social reform.

Scholars have examined the institution of the almshouse from political, social, and economic perspectives, but minimized the materiality. In *The Archaeology of Institutional Confinement*, Eleanor Conlin Casella drew theory from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, criminology, history, and psychology, and combined their established theoretical perspectives with the materiality.²⁵ Focused primarily on penal institutions, she acknowledged their origins and close relationships with other institutional forms, such as almshouses, asylums, war prisoner camps, and twentieth-century Japanese internment camps. Casella grounded her material examination in the established developments set out by historians such as Rothman, and examined the theoretical underpinnings of incarceration as a form of power, as Rockman and Wagner did, reflecting the shift from a mild and rehabilitative environment to one that was more brutal through material culture. This material shift was examined through several archaeological case studies—subdivided into categories of “punishment,” “asylum,” and “exile”—where artifact patterns shed light on the dialogues of power relationships, the concept of unfree labor, and subversive cultures. Artifact assemblages suggested that there was a more domestic and humane (albeit, frugal) element in the early history of asylums, and later architectural and skeletal evidence illustrated that institutions were increasingly brutal and disciplinary. Despite a forced stripping of identities, separation, and

²⁵ Eleanor Conlin Casella, *The Archaeology of Institutional Confinement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).

increased surveillance, inmates turned to creative uses of material culture and other surrounding resources to produce their own material records and identities.

In addition to the function of almshouses in the historiography of welfare, they are also prominent in the historical study of medicine and medical training. For much of the institution's early history, the care of the sick was inextricable from the care of the impoverished. Low social regard for the inmates gave practitioners the leeway to use the Baltimore almshouse as a testing ground for new medical treatments, such as the experimental smallpox vaccine in 1801. In 1840, Dr. William Power introduced "the scientific method" of medical care, taking careful and detailed notes, progress reports, and autopsies.²⁶ Much of the research of Almshouse physicians contributed enormously to the medical literature of the day, shared with other physicians across the nation.²⁷ Additionally, the Almshouse served as an early source of training and anatomical specimens for medical students at the University of Maryland, providing valuable practical training.²⁸ Historians, too, can find much of value in the archaeological and medical records of almshouses.

The "Old" Almshouse

In pre-Revolutionary Maryland, the most common method of caring for the poor was in-house. Only those who deemed mentally insane or sick were dependent on public assistance. Though the poor largely resided in private residences, the county government levied taxes on

²⁶ Toba Schwaber Kerson, "Almshouse to Municipal Hospital: The Baltimore Experience," *The Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 55 (1981): 211.

²⁷ Katherine A. Harvey, "Practicing Medicine at the Baltimore Almshouse, 1828-1850," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 74 (1979): 233.

²⁸ Harvey. "Practicing Medicine," 223-37.

tobacco to provide monetary assistance.²⁹ The Trustees for the Poor of Baltimore County founded the first almshouse in Baltimore shortly after their incorporation in 1773. Five white men of prominence in the City (or rather, a town at that point) and two from the county comprised the inaugural group of Trustees.³⁰ Despite the charitable intention of the institution, public funding and ownership meant that it inevitably became intertwined with the bureaucracy and politics of the city.³¹ The corporate power of the Board of Trustees allowed them to choose their successive members if a vacancy opened, otherwise replacing one per year.³² They were responsible for all aspects of the Almshouse's management, such as the selection of an overseer and other staff members who managed the day-to-day affairs of the almshouse. Additionally, the Trustees were the deciding voices for who was allowed to enter the institution.³³ Growing expenditures caused the Trustees to relinquish control of the almshouse to the Justices of the Levy Court in 1805; however, the power returned to a group of Trustees in 1817.³⁴ By 1818, the Trustees and staff members included a "President, Treasurer, Secretary (chosen annually), Overseer, Physician, Purveyor, Matron, Agent, Porter (chosen every year), 7 visiting physicians and Surgeons."³⁵ Ward managers—12 wealthy white men in each neighborhood of the city and

²⁹ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House* (1819/20), in "The Baltimore Almshouse: An Early History," ed. Douglas G. Carroll, Jr. and Blanche D. Coll. *Maryland Historical Magazine* 66 (1971): 138. This is an edited and reprinted version of the manuscript located in the vertical file at the Maryland Historical Society. The manuscript is unsigned, but Carroll and Coll attribute it to Thomas W. Griffith—a Baltimore historian appointed to the Levy Court in 1817—as they found it among his files and in his handwriting. However, this account is not printed in Griffith's 1824 publication of *The Annals of Baltimore*. Whether it was a chapter that Griffith wrote but decided not to include in his book is unclear, but portions of this account are printed, word-for-word, in J. Thomas Scharf, ed., *The Chronicles of Baltimore: Being a Complete History of "Baltimore Town" and Baltimore City from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Baltimore: Turnbull Brothers, 1874), 72-6.

³⁰ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 138.

³¹ Rockman, *Scraping By*, 194.

³² *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House* 138.

³³ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 139-41. Also see: *By-Laws of the Trustees, and Rules for the Government of the Poor-House of Baltimore County* (1818), PAM 422, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

³⁴ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 144.

³⁵ *By-Laws of the Trustees*.

7 in the county, appointed by the Trustees—doled out recommendations for supplicants wishing to enter the almshouse.³⁶ Though the poor depended on others for access to relief, the various ways in which they petitioned were entirely their own construction. If a pauper was in doubt whether his request would be granted, he could concoct a pitiable narrative, behave erratically, or hound the ward manager until they acquiesced; often, paupers fled the institution, avoiding the work or pay consequences of their entrance.³⁷

The Trustees acquired a loan, funded by the public tobacco tax, for the purposes of purchasing land for both an alms house and a work house, and to construct “good, strong, sufficient and convenient houses, habitations and dwellings.”³⁸ Established on twenty acres purchased from William Lux (one of the original Trustees), in the northwest corner of the city limits, intending to separate the paupers from the rest of society, but close enough to be convenient. The Trustees maintained the first Almshouse property for approximately 47 years before moving the institution to a new location in 1820.³⁹

After the main building was constructed, the Trustees “laid out the grounds and planted them in the most advantageous and agreeable manner,” including two 70-foot deep wells.⁴⁰ Three years after the construction (1776), flax stored in the attic caught fire, and the wooden construction of the center section and northeast wing were incinerated. The center section was almost immediately rebuilt, but the wing had to wait some time before funds were available.⁴¹ Almost 20 years later, Lux sold an additional 10 acres to join the almshouse property, creating a

³⁶ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House* 148.

³⁷ Rockman, *Scraping By*, 196.

³⁸ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 138.

³⁹ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 141.

⁴⁰ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 141.

⁴¹ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 142.

pasture. Later, this pasture would become the location of a burial ground, moved from another part of the property.

The architecture was humble, and did not stray far from that of an ordinary house. An 1801 map of the city shows the “Poor House” situated on a rectangular lot near the center of the map, with four gardens framed by raised earth. Though it was on the outskirts of the dense area of the city, it was in closer proximity than many properties owned by wealthy individuals. Aside from the text label and size of the building on the map, this depiction is indistinguishable from the other residential estates illustrated.⁴² Oriented southeast, there were three segments, a center building and two wings. The center section of the building was 44 feet square, had a stone basement foundation, with three stories of brick construction above, and served primarily as administrative space. Each of the first and second floors divided into four equal rooms; offices for the Trustees and Overseer occupied the first floor, with other staff members (such as doctors, the matron) on the second. The third floor featured two rooms that served as a female hospital. The basement contained the kitchen and storerooms. The wings functioned as the primary dormitories, and were mirror images 60 by 36 feet, with one less story than the center building. The addition of the wings give the entire complex a front 167 feet long, and while all depictions show the poor house as one long structure, it is described as three separate spaces.

Within the wings, the Trustees mandated that “the different sexes and colours shall be and remain separate,” and that “they shall occupy the wards and courts appropriated for them respectively, and shall not absent themselves there from, without leave, either by day or by

⁴² Francis Shallus, “Warner & Hanna’s Plan of the City and Environs of Baltimore,” (1801). Enoch Pratt Free Library, electronic version housed at Digital Maryland.
<http://collections.digitalmaryland.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/cator/id/186/rec/1>.

night.”⁴³ The east wing housed women, and the west wing housed men. The above-ground wards were reserved for the white paupers, while those of color were relegated to the basements.⁴⁴ However, these rules were not strictly enforced.⁴⁵ The by-laws stipulated that “Every grown person shall have a separate bedstead of iron or wood, and children shall not be laid more than two in one bed . . . and every bedstead shall be furnished with one bed and pillow, and two sheets at least, and with one blanket in summer and three in winter.”⁴⁶ The Overseer and Matron would choose a rotation of “the most orderly poor in each apartment” to supervise the other inmates and monitor the care of their areas. The Trustees expected that the inmates and staff to maintain the facilities, cleaning the walls twice-yearly with boiling water and a quicklime wash, weekly scrubbing of the stairs and hallways, and daily sweeping.⁴⁷ In addition to clean facilities, the inmates of the Almshouse were also adequately fed. The menu included molasses-sweetened coffee, brown-sugar sweetened tea, fresh or salted meat or fish daily, and corn or rye bread. The property also housed cows to provide fresh milk, and the physicians could prescribe alcohol as part of the care of the infirm.⁴⁸

The Almshouse housed not only by the “deserving” adult poor, but by children as well. In 1793, to the Trustees began to bind out children as indentured apprentices to residents of the city, in order to remove them from the Almshouse.⁴⁹ Those that resided in the institution, however, were placed into their own living quarters, monitored by a nurse and teacher under

⁴³ *By-Laws of the Trustees.*

⁴⁴ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 150.

⁴⁵ *By-Laws of the Trustees.* Also see: *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 150, and Rockman, *Scraping By*, 198-200.

⁴⁶ *By-Laws of the Trustees.*

⁴⁷ *By-Laws of the Trustees.*

⁴⁸ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 151

⁴⁹ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 142.

supervision by the Matron, and readily supplied with common schoolbooks.⁵⁰ Also within the complex was a distinct sub-institution called the “work house.” Legal acts in place by 1811 allowed officials appointed by the court to take into custody those considered vagrants or beggars, depositing them at the work house.⁵¹ The by-laws mandated that the “unfit” poor work at hard labor from sun-up to sun-down.⁵²

The almshouse complex also featured a variety of other buildings found on many other estates. The buildings constructed of wood included privies, a carpentry shop, porters lodge, bath house, and barn. Brick was used to construct a stable, smoke house, dairy, bake house, work house, and an unnamed building that functioned as a sort of morgue. Cultivated gardens decorated the front of the property, and separate courtyards with trees for men and women were provided in the rear of the building for exercise and pleasure.⁵³ At the time of one 1820 account, the Almshouse property included a “quantity of about 15 acres, in courts, gardens, and pasture grounds.”⁵⁴ Though the institution moved to a new property, the Trustees continued to own the Old Almshouse property into the next decade. It was not until July 16th, 1832 that an auction was scheduled, dividing the property into forty four lots. By the time of this auction, there were only five buildings of note left on the property, all of which were to be demolished within two months of the auction: the almshouse itself (center section and wings), two outbuildings (“A Work Shop” and “A Work House,” west and east respectively), and two stables.⁵⁵ Evidence suggests that one stable was described as “frame,” the other as brick (west and east,

⁵⁰ *By-Laws of the Trustees.*

⁵¹ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 140.

⁵² *By-Laws of the Trustees.*

⁵³ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 150.

⁵⁴ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 148.

⁵⁵ “VALUABLE BUILDING LOTS AT AUCTION” (1832), M0536-37, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore.

respectively), and that there was “A Small Brick House” off the northeast corner of the “Work House”⁵⁶

In 1805, city commissioners extended Howard Street through the middle of the grounds, dividing the garden in half. The section that was separated from the buildings was authorized to be leased out.⁵⁷ This extension marked the start of increased urban expansion around the almshouse, which eventually factored into the city officials’ decision to relocate “the undesirables” further away.⁵⁸ Despite attempts to control the size of the Almshouse population by funding “out-pensioners” who stayed in private residences, crowding was a problem.⁵⁹ By 1816, the almshouse population had outgrown the facilities, and commissioners planned to once again remove the almshouse.⁶⁰

At least one city official believed the Almshouse was founded as a refuge rather than a place of confinement, “happily fixed within that moderate distance from the population and markets,” and where “the unfortunate incumbents can more readily receive the visits and comfort of pity and friendship.”⁶¹ His account reflected the moral perspective on poor relief, implicating broad societal influences in the distress of the paupers. He notes that to take in people of all genders, races, ages, and religions “is commended by heaven and imposed on our feelings by

⁵⁶ “Plat of That Valuable Property Conveyed by The Trustees of the Poor House of Baltimore County to the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore,” (n.d), M0912, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore.

⁵⁷ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 143.

⁵⁸ Kerson, “Almshouse to Municipal Hospital,” 209.

⁵⁹ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 148.

⁶⁰ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 143. Also see: Rockman, *Scraping By*, 200.

⁶¹ *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 141-2.

nature,” but suggests that the stability of the social order depends on it as well, providing an immense benefit to self-supported citizens.⁶²

Calverton

Habitation of the original alms house property lasted into the 1820s, when the city and county jointly purchased the 300-acre Calverton estate.⁶³ At the time of purchase, the estate was located two and a half miles outside of the city; by 1851, development of the city had grown, cutting that distance to a mile and a half.⁶⁴ At \$44,000, the administrators were pleased that they secured “a very cheap and suitable site.”⁶⁵ Further, the Trustees hoped to use the farm to offset much of the high cost of supporting an ever-growing poor population, a common theme for Baltimore’s citizens in printed media.⁶⁶ However, examination of the property finally deemed suitable after several years of searching can also speak greatly about the overarching social perceptions of the paupers. The grand country seat was never intended to be a refuge for the poor, but it had the added benefit of employing the inmates, fending off the temptations of idleness.

The original owner of Calverton was the wealthy merchant Dennis A. Smith, who handled many land transactions as Cashier of the Mechanics’ Bank of Baltimore.⁶⁷ Smith purchased the property in 1815, and immediately set out to find a designer for a grand country

⁶² *History of Baltimore Alms and Work House*, 149.

⁶³ Piper, “The Baltimore City and County Alms House in 1854.”

⁶⁴ Thomas Hepburn Buckler, *A History of Epidemic Cholera, as It Appeared at the Baltimore City and County Alms-House, in the Summer of 1849, with Some Remarks on the Medical Topography and Diseases of this Region* (Baltimore: James Lucas, 1851), MRA643.C3B8, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

⁶⁵ “Baltimore, January 15, 1823,” *Baltimore Patriot* (published as *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*), January 15, 1823, 2. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁶⁶ “Baltimore, January 15, 1823,” *Baltimore Patriot* (published as *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*), January 15, 1823, 2. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁶⁷ Paul F. Norton, “The Architect of Calverton,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 76 (1981): 113–23.

estate. He found what he was looking for in Joseph Jacques Ramée, a French architect, who traveled to America at the urging of New York developer David Parish. Parish introduced the architect to Smith, who commissioned the design and invited Ramée to stay with him until it was completed. Ramée returned to Europe in 1816, shortly after receiving a \$1,500 payment on behalf of Smith.⁶⁸

It is unlikely that the construction of the mansion took place in less than a year, under the supervision of Ramée. As such, the public attributed the building to Robert Cary Long, Sr.⁶⁹ Art and architectural historian, Paul F. Norton argued that despite this credit, the house featured too elegant a French design and architectural details to be his creation.⁷⁰ Indeed, the *Baltimore Directory and Register, for the Year 1816* lists Robert C. Long with the humble occupation of “carpenter.”⁷¹ It was several years later that Long took on the title of architect, and was responsible for several commissions in Baltimore.⁷² One of these commissions was for the Mechanic’s Bank of Baltimore, and Norton suggests that this connection may have led Smith to hire Long to construct the house from the plans after Ramée left the country.⁷³

Further bolstering the attribution of the Calverton estate to Ramée was the 1836 publication of a book that included his original landscape design.⁷⁴ It showed an oddly-shaped

⁶⁸ Paul V. Turner, *Joseph Ramée* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 224.

⁶⁹ Thomas H. Poppleton, “Plan of the City of Baltimore,” (1818, revised 1851), Map 1852, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore. Also see: Thomas W. Griffith. *Annals of Baltimore* (Baltimore: William Wooddy, 1824), 238. <https://archive.org/details/annalsofbaltimor00ingrif>.

⁷⁰ Norton, “The Architect of Calverton,” 116.

⁷¹ Edward Matchett. *The Baltimore Directory and Register, for the Year 1816* (Baltimore: The Wanderer Office, 1816), 105. <https://archive.org/details/balimoredirecto1816matc>. Also, see: Charles Keenan. *The Baltimore Directory for 1822 & 1823* (Baltimore: R.J. Matchett, 1822), 172. <https://archive.org/details/balimoredirecto1822keen>.

⁷² *Matchett’s Baltimore Director* (Baltimore: R.J. Matchett, 1831), 232. <https://archive.org/details/matchettsbaltimo1831balt>.

⁷³ Norton, “The Architect of Calverton,” 119.

⁷⁴ Ramée, *Parcs & Jardins*, pl. I.

house with a porch that curves inward, and flanked by two detached circular wings.⁷⁵ Another illustration of Ramée's depicted Calverton from the front; the center portion of the house is square with bays on either side, accounting for the form seen from a bird's eye perspective. At the top of the front stairs is a large, two-storied porch with a pediment, an arched ceiling, and large columns; a large cupola sits on the roof. The one visible circular wing appears to connect to the main portion of the house by a covered walkway.⁷⁶ Together, the designs of the house and the estate display a "type of romanticism nearly unknown in America at this time, integrating picturesque architectural forms and plantings in a manner that was decades ahead of its time."⁷⁷

The relocation of the Baltimore Almshouse and subsequent additions to the Calverton estate paralleled the wider changes in social theory. When the Trustees of the Poor purchased the property, a large gateway and porter's lodge marked the entrance to the property, and a long drive led to the flower gardens that surrounded the mansion.⁷⁸ The holdings included "a commodious farm house, a large barn, with extensive stabling, and other improvements."⁷⁹ The administrators repurposed the existing structures and made modifications to suit their needs, gradually adding buildings and structures to create a sizable complex. An 1818 map produced by Thomas Poppleton included an engraving of the Almshouse, showing the main building as Ramée depicted, with two stories of tall, rectangular windows. The third story and the basement levels had small, square windows. S. Smith shows the same buildings from a front perspective,

⁷⁵ Joseph Ramée. "No. 1: Calvestoron [i.e. Calverton] Pres Baltimore." In *Parcs & Jardins Composés et Executés Dans Différentes Contrees de l'Europe et Des Etats Unis d'Amerique Par Joseph Ramee Architecte* (Paris: Rittner et Goupil, 1836).

⁷⁶ Joseph Ramée, *Recueil de Cottages et Maisons de Campagne* (Paris: Cliché Bibliothèque Nationale, 1837). Reprinted in Turner, *Joseph Ramée*, 226.

⁷⁷ Turner, *Joseph Ramée*, 226.

⁷⁸ Piper, "The Baltimore City and County Alms House in 1854."

⁷⁹ "Baltimore, January 15, 1823," *Baltimore Patriot* (published as *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*), January 15, 1823, 2. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

depicting the front stairs a little larger, and there appears to be a sculpture in the upper portion of the portico. Also visible is a wall extending off the end of the wings, and two-story, columned, covered walkways connecting the center building with the wings.⁸⁰ The interior of the center building was composed of four rooms on each of the two and a half stories. The Trustees maintained a meeting room, while the overseer and resident medical students occupied the rest.⁸¹

In place of the circular wings in Ramée's design were two large, identical rectangular ones, each three stories high, with dormer windows in the attic, four chimneys in the center, and one on each end.⁸² The Trustees estimated that the wings could accommodate 800-900 of the poor.⁸³ On the ground floor, each was divided into twenty cells, with a long central hallway and a short cross-hall in the center, with stairs leading to the rear yard, on the north side of the house. The basement levels contained kitchens, dining areas, work rooms, and cells for the "maniacs." The west wing was the women's wing; the second story housed a single medical/surgical hospital, separate quarters for women who were considered prostitutes, and a "lying-in" ward. Within the attic was a "chronic hospital for aged colored women," and additional sleeping quarters. The east wing was a dormitory for men; the second floor divided between a hospital and surgical ward, while the third-story attic area contained additional sleeping rooms. The "Col^d Female" inmates were contained in a small, square addition to the end of the west wing,

⁸⁰ S. Smith, "Almshouse. Engraving, Hand Colored," (Baltimore: Printed by J. Cone, ca. 1824). Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

<http://mdhistoryonline.net/mdmedicine/index.cfm?action=search&type=hospitals&id=12>.

⁸¹ Buckler, *A History of Epidemic Cholera*, 6.

⁸² Poppleton, "Plan of the City of Baltimore."

⁸³ "Baltimore, January 15, 1823," *Baltimore Patriot* (published as *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*), January 15, 1823, 2. America's Historical Newspapers.

with separate entrances a full wall in between. Appended to the end of the east wing was an even smaller addition, designated for children, and included a school.⁸⁴

The mansion itself projected in front of the rest of the buildings, with the large wings set slightly back and off to the sides. By 1832, the complex included the wings, and a bath house, wash house, and bake house.⁸⁵ Ten years later, in 1842, inmates constructed a mill dam and a half-mile long mill race.⁸⁶ The majority of the structures were behind the three main buildings, on the north side, enclosed in a yard roughly four acres in size by a stone wall ten or twelve feet high. The yard eventually contained numerous buildings, each designated for a specialized purpose, as well as many pathways arranged in a grid-like manner. North of and oriented perpendicular to the east wing was a large stone building, the same layout as the primary wings, but approximately two-thirds the size. The basement level and first floor housed lunatics. Above them was a ward dedicated to orphan children and their nurses, while the top floor contained the chronic hospital for elderly women.⁸⁷

On the opposite side of the complex, abutting the east wall was the “Col^d Man” hospital. This building had a single open space on each floor, a surgical room on the first, a medical ward for African-American men above. The “Work House” was placed adjacently on the north side. Other labeled buildings scattered within the walls of the complex included: a spinning house, bake house, reception house, two wash houses, an ice house, dead house, coffin house, men’s

⁸⁴ Buckler, *A History of Epidemic Cholera*, 7.

⁸⁵ Fielding Lucas, Jr., *Picture of Baltimore: Containing a Description of All Objects of Interest in the City; and Embellished with Views of the Principle Public Buildings* (Baltimore: F. Lucas, Jr., 1832), 150. The British Library. <http://books.google.com/books?id=eGZZAAAACAAJ>.

⁸⁶ “The Almshouse,” *Sun* (published as *The Sun*); March 10, 1849, 1 (Baltimore). America’s Historical Newspapers. Within this opinion refers to the 1843 Report of the Trustees, which concerned the administration of the Almshouse for the prior year.

⁸⁷ Buckler, *A History of Epidemic Cholera*, 8-9.

privy, an un-specified privy, and a smith shop. Placed outside the walls were pig pens, a barn, a mill, and a corn crib. The yard also contained many trees, including apple, willow, poplar, and elms.⁸⁸ The three primary buildings served as part of the wall on the south side, spanning a total of 600 feet, such that the only structures visible from the road would impart a grand appearance.⁸⁹ Health concerns led to the construction in 1850 of a hospital for infectious diseases, outside of the Almshouse wall.⁹⁰

The architecture of the Calverton complex reflected the wider intellectual values of order and regularity, and unlike at the old almshouse, inmate classifications were not limited to only sex and gender; these groups were also subdivided into “the lunatics,” children, orphans, the elderly, pregnant women, prostitutes, and the chronically ill.⁹¹ Despite the dramatically increased division and separation, the medical staff advocated measures that are more drastic. Prior to the 1820 relocation, physicians rallied support to separate a “House of Industry,” from an “Infirmery.”⁹² The “House of Industry” would accept the able-bodied poor, who had the physical ability to support themselves with labor; in contrast, the “Infirmery” would house the sick and injured. Physician and Dean of the university medical faculty, Granville Sharp Pattison, argued that the mingling of these two sets of the needy in the same institution undermined the

⁸⁸ Buckler, “A History of Epidemic Cholera,” 8-9.

⁸⁹ Buckler, “A History of Epidemic Cholera,” 6.

⁹⁰ “Report of the Trustees of the Poor,” *Sun* (published as *The Sun*), February 6, 1851, 1 (Baltimore). America’s Historical Newspapers.

⁹¹ Buckler, “A History of Epidemic Cholera,” 7-9.

⁹² Granville Sharp Pattison, “The Memorial of the Professors of the Medical Faculty of the University of Maryland,” *Baltimore Patriot* (published as *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*), March 20, 1822, 2. America’s Historical Newspapers.

system of discipline required for moral reform as well as the expediency of recovery.⁹³ He never saw this vision realized, despite the physicians' efforts and support from the Trustees.⁹⁴

Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, the Trustees and physicians also advocated specialized care of "the lunatic poor." Uncomfortable living conditions prevented them from being "cured."⁹⁵ By the 1840s, the physicians requested the passage of legislation for a new independent facility to house this segment of the Almshouse population.⁹⁶ Though the Trustees intended to fund this building, other imminent concerns, such as the cholera epidemic, overshadowed the project, and reluctant County administrators stalled their support.⁹⁷ The living conditions continued to degrade, and the confined inmates were often chained to the floor within the dark and damp basement of the establishment.⁹⁸ In the 1850s, the conditions of the property as a whole declined, and in 1856, the Trustees recommended that the Almshouse be relocated, citing unsuitability, decaying structures, and encroaching urbanization.⁹⁹ By the end of 1864, "the almost untenable condition of the institution" incited haste in the construction of the third

⁹³ Pattison, "The Memorial of the Professors."

⁹⁴ "More of the Municipal Documents;" *Sun* (published as *The Sun*), January 25, 1845, 1 (Baltimore). America's Historical Newspapers.

⁹⁵ "More of the Municipal Documents."

⁹⁶ "The Almshouse," *Sun* (published as *The Sun*), March 10, 1849, 1 (Baltimore). America's Historical Newspapers. Also see: "More of the Municipal Documents."

⁹⁷ "The Almshouse," *Sun* (published as *The Sun*), March 12, 1849, 1 (Baltimore). America's Historical Newspapers. See also: "Report of the Trustees of the Poor," *Sun* (published as *The Sun*); February 6, 1851, 1 (Baltimore). America's Historical Newspapers;

"Condition of the Baltimore Almshouse," *Sun* (published as *The Sun*), August 11, 1854, 2 (Baltimore). America's Historical Newspapers.

⁹⁸ "The Lunatic Departments of the Baltimore Almshouse," *Sun* (published as *The Sun*), November 20, 1854, 2 (Baltimore). America's Historical Newspapers.

⁹⁹ "Report of the Trustees for the Poor of Baltimore City and County [for the year ending 1855]," (1856), MHV 4030 B.3, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

almshouse.¹⁰⁰ On March 20h, 1866, the mentally ill finally moved to more humane accommodations, and the last pauper exited the Calverton estate.¹⁰¹

City officials lamented the inability of institutions to deter and cure paupers from the evils of society, which multiplied instead. Though public officials tried to deter people from entering the early Calverton Almshouse, the living conditions were often superior to what they could obtain on their own. The newspapers printed “querulous” commentary from the public concerning the funds spent on items such as medicine, alcohol, and coffee, which administrators defended as medical expenses.¹⁰² They supplied the inmates with new clothing, a bed, regular meals, and medical care.¹⁰³ The Almshouse provided the children with a regular education, and held religious services weekly.¹⁰⁴ An analysis of seasonal usage patterns show that admittances peaked and departures plummeted during the colder months, while departures skyrocketed in March, following the availability of work for laborers.¹⁰⁵ Many also abused the system, entering the institution when their needs compelled them too, but fleeing before they earned their keep. Though this predicament frustrated administrators immensely, the impulse to ease suffering outweighed the possibility of abuse. The Trustees endeavored to extract the root causes of depravity, and attributed much of it to “drunkenness.” They invoked morality in imploring the

¹⁰⁰ “Report of the Trustees for the Poor of Baltimore City and County [for the year ending December 31st, 1864],” (1865), MHV 4030 B.3, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

¹⁰¹ “Report of the Trustees for the Poor of Baltimore City and County [for the year ending December 31st, 1866],” (1867), MHV 4030 B.3, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

¹⁰² “Baltimore, January 15, 1823”

¹⁰³ Rockman, *Scraping By*, 201.

¹⁰⁴ “Extract from the Report of the Trustees of the Alms House, for Baltimore City and County,” *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, February 3, 1827, 2 (Baltimore). America’s Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰⁵ Rockman, *Scraping By*, 203.

city council to take action.¹⁰⁶ Thus, they instituted the practice of charging the poor for their care, which could be paid off through a variety of work on the estate.¹⁰⁷

Artistic Depictions of Calverton

Despite the discontented commentary in printed media, the Almshouse remained an important part of Baltimore's image. There are three surviving artist renditions of Calverton as the Almshouse. Thomas Poppleton included an engraving of it along the border of his 1822 map, alongside other prominent buildings and institutions that were largely "places of culture, society, commerce, and charity."¹⁰⁸ This depiction shows the central building and two wings from a perspective angle. Surrounding the building is an open lawn and a sky with puffy white clouds, bordering the edge of the depiction is a garland of flowers and leaves.¹⁰⁹

The second image, a very similar line engraving in Fielding Lucas, Jr.'s book *Picture of Baltimore*, features the same structures and perspective, but in an alternate landscape. In the background of the buildings are large stately trees and within the yard are groups of people. The only hints to the building's purpose is one pair that appears to be infirm and another working on the grounds; they contrast with the pair of strolling women and the woman with a playing child, which gives a more serene impression. There is even a well-dressed couple, the woman holding a parasol, gazing admiringly at the Almshouse.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ "Extract from the Report of the Trustees."

¹⁰⁷ "Baltimore, January 15, 1823."

¹⁰⁸ Jeremy Kargon, "Thomas Poppleton's Map: Vignettes of a City's Self Image." *Maryland Historical Magazine* 104 (2009): 193.

¹⁰⁹ Poppleton, "Plan of the City of Baltimore."

¹¹⁰ John H.BI. Latrobe, "Alms House – Calverton," in Lucas, *Picture of Baltimore*, 150.

Finally, S. Smith's engraving is beautifully hand-colored, depicting the Almshouse from a frontal perspective, separated from the road by a large lawn dotted with trees and shrubs. Two tiny figures, perhaps an elderly man and woman, are strolling along the road, in the direction of a small structure that may be a gazebo. The wall containing the yard and the other structures is visible extending from the wings, but gives an impression of a garden fence rather than a stone wall over ten feet high. Above the building is a clouded sky, colored in calming shades of blue and gray.¹¹¹ All of the scenes are quite idyllic.

The fountain noted in the February 1844 issue of the *Baltimore Sun* would have fit in well with the landscapes portrayed in the engravings. A contradiction between the admirable qualities of the Baltimore Almshouse and some of the tones in printed media reflect the contentious nature of the institution. Guided by a sense of duty and benevolence, almshouse administrators lived in a society where perceptions of the poor shifted perceptions from acceptance as an ever-present class to poverty as a social illness that they could eradicate through reform and order. In the establishment of the revolutionary-era Baltimore Almshouse, city administrators attempted to mask it as a substitute familial environment, modeling the architectural style after other nearby estates. As time passed, emerging theories of social order influenced the organization of the built environment. By the time the Trustees finished relocating the institution in 1822, ideas of classification, organization, regimented days, and employment as a method of reform permeated intellectual and public opinion. With the ability to erect buildings as they saw fit, city officials used the architecture of the Baltimore Almshouse as an attempt to mitigate the negative impact of social problems in the wider community. At the same time however, those dependent on public assistance retained their agency, and the

¹¹¹ S. Smith, "Almshouse. Engraving, Hand Colored."

Almshouse functioned as a place where they conducted their everyday lives, using and abusing the institution to their own advantage. Though documentation pertaining to the perspective of the lower classes is extremely limited, comparison of the Baltimore Almshouse with others in the region may enable future analyses to tease out the materiality of ordinary lives.

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