

The St. Andrews Poor House

AFTER THE END of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 hundreds of thousands of poor Irish hit the sea lanes for Canada and the United States, almost half a million landing of the shores of each country between that time and the great potato famine of 1846. An early wave hit St. Andrews sometime in 1817. In January of 1818 the Commissioners of the Poor for this town notified the House of Assembly that since the previous year,

this parish has been encumbered with the maintenance of a number of aged, feeble, and diseased persons, and in some instances whole families, in a most wretched and distressed situation. Your petitioners from motives of duty and humanity have exerted themselves to the utmost to relieve or at all events to mitigate the sufferings of those unfortunate persons, by procuring them shelter in and about the town of St. Andrews, with food, raiment and medical attendance, notwithstanding which several of them died of fever contracted on the passage, and communicated the distemper to those with whom they were boarded, to such a degree, as rendered them equally the objects of public charity.

The Overseers of the Poor humbly requested compensation for the 190 pounds that had had to be raised both publicly and privately to support these new poor, and also the “passing an act to prevent in future the indiscriminate admission of emigrants from the Mother Country to this province without some security given to indemnify the Parish.” It is unclear to what extent these requests were granted, but several weeks later, on January 27, 1818, an Act was drawn up “To Convey Commons Land for the Erection of a Poor House.” “Whereas,” it reads,

from the late great influx of poor and disabled persons into the County of Charlotte it is found necessary to erect a Poor House and Work House in the town of St. Andrews, Be it therefore enacted . . . that the Justices of the Peace for the County of Charlotte . . . are hereby authorized and empowered to agree to the erecting and finishing of a proper building for a Poor House and Work House

in the town or Parish of Saint Andrews, and to fix upon a certain sum of money towards defraying the expense thereof, which sum of money shall be raised by an assessment upon the inhabitants of the said County.

What happened in St. Andrews in 1818 was entirely typical of the time. In response to the Irish crisis, Poor Houses were springing up all over the Province. Between 1819 and 1824 bills were passed authorizing the creation of Poor Houses and Workhouses in Carleton County, York County, Northumberland County and Saint John County, and out of these Counties in the years following issued a steady stream of requests to the Assembly for compensation for extraordinary expenses incurred in the care of these paupers. An article in the *St. Andrews Herald* for April 1821 indicates that the Poor House was under construction at the time. In 1823 there appears a bill “to incorporate sundry persons by the name of Trustees of the Poor for the Parish of St. Andrews,” and this is also the year in which the actual Poor House Accounts begin.

There were two Poor Houses. The first was located on Carleton Street close to Harriet. There is a notice in the *St. Andrews Standard* for 1847 that the building known as Old Poor House had been fitted up as an orphan asylum for children of emigrants. Perhaps this was an interim structure, preliminary to the creation of the second Poor House, which was located just behind the old golf club house at the corner of Reed Avenue and Mowat Drive. Like most Poor Houses of the day, it was perhaps not very institutional looking - probably just a large two-storey frame house. This Poor House was also a working farm. The whole operation encompassed 42 acres - roughly the area between the old golf club house and Cedar Lane, and perhaps down somewhat farther towards the shore than the present golf links.

The Poor House accounts for the first decade are almost non-existent, but in 1838 they suddenly become quite detailed, and some of the first receipts are for an addition to the main building. It's impossible to pronounce the word “Poor House” or “Workhouse” without conjuring up Dickensian images from the dark days of 19th-century London. Somehow, even to have had a Poor House at all

seems slightly shameful. And certainly, if we take the Act to create our Poor House as a prophecy of future living conditions there, it prepares us for the worst. "Be it enacted," commanded the Assembly,

that the said Commissioners to be appointed as aforesaid shall have power and authority . . . to compel such idle or poor people begging or seeking relief, as do not betake themselves to some lawful employment, or who do or shall hereafter seek and receive alms of any of the Parishes within the said County, or may stand in need of relief from any of the said Parishes, to work in the said Poor House and Work House, and to do all such work as they shall think them able and fit for, and shall have the same powers to bind out poor children apprentices as are by the laws of this province given to the Overseers of the Poor in the several Towns or Parishes; And be it further enacted that the said Commissioners . . . shall have power to make such rules, orders, and regulations for the good government and management of the said Poor House and Work House, as they shall find necessary, . . . and to inflict such correction and punishment by solitary confinement from time to time, as to them shall seem reasonable on any person or persons within the said Poor House or Work House who shall be so set to work and shall not conform to such rules, orders and regulations to be made or aforesaid, or shall misbehave in the same.

That was the theory, at least. Populated largely by the most destitute of society - the old, blind, widowed and sick - it must have been a dreary enough place to live and die. That said, the Poor House and the care of the poor generally in the Parish of St. Andrews was perhaps a little more humane, or human, than we might assume from literary stereotypes.

A few words here about who the poor were and who paid for their support in nineteenth-century St. Andrews. The word "poor" is almost a misnomer, for the poor included not just the old and infirm of the Poor House. It also included widows and widowers with their own homes and families; orphans and unwed mothers; an out-of-County railway worker injured on the job; an out-of-pocket German with the fever; a tramp just passing through; a corpse washed up on the shore. Care for these "poor" was provided both in the Poor House and also in private homes. The latter was called "Outdoor Relief" in those days. There was no clear distinction between the

Poor House poor and the outdoor poor. The sick German was cared for in a private home, but it could just as well have been in the Poor House. There were widows and widowers in both Poor House and on Outdoor Relief. About the only difference was where the care was supplied. As expenses, the Poor House and Outdoor Relief were roughly equal in cost.

The poor were a Parish charge. Revenue came mainly from sales and rental of farmland on the Western Commons, 800 hundred acres of land on either side of Cedar Lane. Prior to 1903, when the town was incorporated and took over maintenance of the poor, the whole Parish paid \$8.70 on every \$100 as monies allocated to the Poor House. Other sources of revenue included fines paid by deadbeat fathers, a tiny amount from the dog tax, and whatever the Poor House farm itself was able to raise by sale of crops, meat and milk. At its height - if height is the right word - the farm had a barn, half a dozen cows, a few pigs, and the aforesaid 42 acres of farmland. By 1880 farm produce had been beefed up to almost a fifth of the total poor expenses. Sales for 1879, for example, included 15 tons of hay, 5 tons of straw, 130 bushels of oats, 48 bushels of wheat, 300 bushels of potatoes, 400 bushels of turnips, 17 bushels of carrots, 6 bushels of beets and parsnips, 12 bushels of buckwheat, 460 pounds of butter, and 845 pounds of pork. Basically, whatever was left over after serving the needs of the Poor House inmates, went up for sale. In 1866 Henry O'Neill paid 110 dollars to the Farm for 1 calf, 1 hog, 1 bull, 1 heifer, and 170 bushels of turnips. Mr. O'Neill's cheque reduced the burden on the taxpayer by the same amount. Finally, in emergencies, the Parish could petition the House of Assembly for compensation for extraordinary expenses that went over and beyond what could be raised locally.

Were the poor well provided for in the Poor House and in the Parish of St. Andrews? This may seem like an evasive answer but it just depended. It depended on the condition of the poor, the state of the local economy, the generosity of the ratepayers, the Board of Health, and the management of the Poor House operations. The general condition of the poor went up and down in response to these many variables. Certainly, in the early years their situation was often critical. The Irish immigrants were in terrible condition, and

Please pay the
bearer for five
cows to the Bull.
One only has
been to Bull since
I have been here
but I understand
from Anthony
that four had
the Bull before I
came.

- W. Wheaton

To Mr. T. Sime,
Commissioner
Commissioners
of Poor to Moses
Stewart for use
of Bull to 5 Cows
at 2. 6
£12.6

St. Andrews 28
Nov. 1840.

Received payment
Moses (X his
mark) Stewart
Witness T. Sime

Please to pay the bearer for
five cows, to the Bull
One only has been to Bull
since I have been here but
I understand from Anthony
that four had the Bull
before I came
Wheaton
To Mr. T. Sime
Commissioner
Commissioners of Poor
To Moses Stewart
For use of Bull to 5 Cows at 2/6
£12.6
St. Andrews 28 Nov. 1840
Received payment
Witness Moses Stewart
T. Sime mark

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the taxpayers both locally and provincially were being pushed to the limit to keep up with the cost. The *St. Andrews Standard* for 1842 sums up the fiscal and political problems facing the Overseers of the Poor at that time:

We are informed that since the arrival of the late passenger vessels, our Poor House is nearly filled with poor emigrants, many of whom we are told, have had their passage paid by some charitable individual at home;

and many of them on their landing here, had not as much money as would purchase a meal of victuals. What is to be done in such circumstances? We are told that the Parish is in debt to the full amount of the advances made for the support of the Emigrant last year. The Banks, we are told, will not make advances on the Government warrants. The Treasury debentures will not be received in payment of duties. . . . How then are these poor people to be supported - they are chiefly women and children whose fathers and husbands have left them in search of employment, and this we fear, in the depressed state of things, is a vain pursuit. Who, we would ask, will, in the present state of business, make advances for an indefinite period? It has been said that the Commissioners are obliged to support them, and the poor emigrant is told this on his arrival, and in many cases they demand it as a right; and in a majority of cases the husband leaves his family under this impression: then we would ask, what are the Commissioners to do? We know of no law to compel a public officer to advance money for public purposes. . . . We are told that under the late Board of Health law, they were empowered to draw, to the amount of two hundred pounds for each county in any one year, even in anticipation of their wants; but the Commissioners of the Poor House it appears, must first make the advances, render their account on oath - petition, and run the risk of having the amount refused, as was once partially the case, after laying out of it one year. Such a state of things appears to us inexplicable. Are the Commissioners or Overseers entrusted with the management of the Poor less to be trusted with the expenditure of public money, than the gentlemen composing the Board of Health?

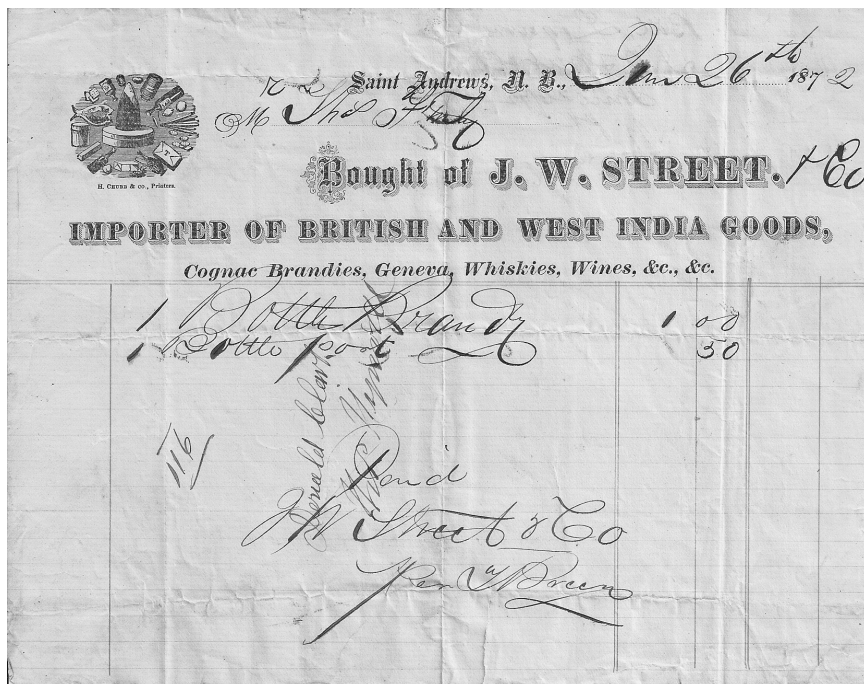
Almost four decades later, the condition of the poor was remarkably improved. In 1879 Editor Smith of the *Standard* visited the Poor House along with the Commissioners of the Poor and reported that: "The rooms were neat and clean, the house warm, and the aged men and women expressed themselves well satisfied with the attention paid them by the keeper and his wife and their rations. The house is regularly visited by the clergymen of all denominations and service is regularly held by the Rector. The stock is kept in good order, and produce of the farm carefully husbanded. The surplus produce is sold and account kept of the proceeds, which serve materially to reduce taxation for support of the poor. The number of inmates at present are six women and six men, all over 70 years of age,

and a small boy. These are so infirm that they are unable to perform any kind of labor. Many of them have been residents of the house for several years. The 'outdoor relief' given by the Commissioners is largely owing to the depressed time and lack of employment."

Its hard to know how much credit the Parish can take for this sea-change. The condition of the emigrants varied hugely from boat to boat. Of course by this time the immigration crisis had largely passed, and so the economy was not being strained quite so hard as it had been in the famine years. Also, the Poor House seems to have been under especially good management at this particular time. Quality of management went up and down. The keepers seem always to have been a husband and wife team. It may not have been a great job; they seem to have come and gone quite frequently. There are odd reports in the local newspaper of problems with Poor House management. At the time of the above article, Mr. Finley and his wife seemed to know what they were about. Also, the farm operations had been ramped up significantly since the early years, lessening the burden on the taxpayer. That said, all was not completely well with the Poor House. Even under the Finleys, the Overseers report for this year notes that in spite of higher farm profits, there was still a shortfall from local assessments, and there was some thought that since the Tufts farm next door was up for sale, it might be purchased if the price was right.

It would be interesting to know to what extent the poor were required to work on the Farm. Editor Smith's remark indicates that it wasn't compulsory but that the inmates did do some work. Unfortunately, there is no reference to this in the Poor House accounts. These are just a pile of receipts, but there are plenty of bills for hired help on the farm. The Poor House had no staff, per se, except the keeper and his wife. Everything was contracted out, and a regular expense involved labour on the farm - ploughing, carting, and unspecified jobs. No inmates are identified as such. Incidentally, the term "workhouse" is never used locally. It is always the Poor House or Alms House, usually the latter.

No doubt anyone in the Poor House or on outdoor relief lived a meager enough life, but aside from the usual rations such as bread, meal, molasses, herring, crackers and the like, Poor House inmates as



well as those on outdoor relief received a weekly allowance and money was also regularly disbursed for certain amenities such tobacco and alcohol. A steady amount of brandy, port wine and rum found its way to the Poor House. In one two-week period in October of 1857, seven gallons of rum were purchased from J. W. Street and Co. by the Commissioners of the Poor. No doubt this was for medicinal purposes, but somehow it doesn't sound quite like the kind of care the Assembly had in mind when it created the Poor House in the first place. For example, when widow Burns decided to remove to Saint John, she had her expenses paid in full by the Commissioners of the Poor. As with paying passage for transient poor to the United States, however, there was a certain self-serving motive here. Passage out of the Parish was cheaper than support within it.

**Receipt of
payment to
J. W. Street
and Co. from
Commissioners
of the Poor for
brandy and
port, Jan. 26,
1872.**

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ALBION HOUSE, WATER ST., HEAD MARKET WHARF.



St. Andrews, N. B., Jan'y 1870

Commissioner of the Poor

Bought of JOHN S. MAGEE,

IMPORTER OF

MILLINERY, HABERDASHERY, COTTONS, WOOLLENS, SILKS, LINENS, COTTON WARPS, &c., &c.

NO SECOND PRICE.

5 yds Ornambury 25	125
June 7 20 - Shirting 16 ³²⁰ 6 1/2 Navy Blue 22 ¹⁴³ 4 print 12 ⁴⁸	511
4 Rib 7 ²⁸ 6 2/2 Navy 8 ¹⁸ 9 print 12 ¹¹⁸ 6 Ornambury 16 ⁷⁸ 11 1/4 4 Buttons 3	262
1 1/2 Navy 90 3 1/2 Navy flue 45 ¹⁵⁵ 6 print 12 ⁷⁸ 1 yds Navy 16 3 1/2 Navy 14 1/2 15 ²¹⁰	567
9 1 Vest 22 1/2 1 Coat 62 1/2 1 Pants 27 1/2 1 Hat 15	1140
12 2 Hats 25	50
25 1 Cap 50	50
July 14 1 yd Navy Blue 12 1 Navy Blue 22 2 Coat 12 ²⁴	58
	\$ 27.63
	John S. Magee

Receipt of
payment
to Albion
House from
Commissioners
of the Poor for
clothing and
sundries. Aside
from his dry
goods business,
Mr. Magee was
also editor of
the St. Andrews
Bay Pilot
newspaper.
PANB RS 148

The *Standard* might complain about Eastport shipping its paupers here, but no doubt we were equally glad to reverse the charges.

There is a certain familiarity in the Poor House accounts which perhaps is to be expected from a small operation in which people knew each other. "One coat for blind Pat," for example, "one shirt for blind Bill." "Cash paid Clara at sundry times." Clara was Clarissay Richardson, an elderly black woman who along with her daughter Margaret and her daughter's child were long-term inmates of the Poor House. Sometimes she is referred to as Clary, sometimes "black Clara." It just depended on who was doing the accounts. Though there was a lot of anonymity in the Poor House, with

MANCHESTER HOUSE

St. Andrews, 8 June 1886

Commissioners of Poor Saint Andrews

Care of Kate White's child

T. T. ODELL,

IMPORTER OF

CLOTHS, FLANNELS, BLANKETS, CARPETS, SHAWLS, SILKS, DAMASKS, LINENS, COTTONS,

READY-MADE CLOTHING, HOSIERY, GLOVES, PARASOLS,

HATS, BONNETS, AND EVERY DESCRIPTION OF MILLINERY GOODS, Wholesale and Retail.

3	baghouse	1.80	2 1/2	do	1.50	3	30		
7	Swiss	70	1	do	18	10	98		
1	do	23	6	do	47		32	5 00	
	do							5 00	
								10 00	

Said Andrews

11 June 1886

Delivered to Mrs McGowan who accepted the child

paid 10 00

short-term residents dying or passing through, there must also have been some friendships and familiarity among the keepers and their charges.

Probably the quality of care varied a great deal from one time to another. It seems clear, though, that the poor money was spread as widely as possible. The Poor House, for example, was used for many different, if related, purposes. It provided free room and board for transients. In 1904, for example, the *St. Andrews Beacon* reported that "A tramp by the name of Moran, who has started on a walking tour somewhat early in the season, struck St. Andrews on Monday, having 'hit the sleepers' all the way from Saint John. He put up at the Alms House for the night and being fortified with a hearty breakfast, headed for St. Stephen next morning at a pace that would have turned a Shore Line train sick with envy."

Receipt of payment to Manchester House from Commissioners of the Poor for clothing for Kate White's child, adopted by Mrs. McGowan. The Poor House was frequently in receipt of unwanted infants.

PANB RS 148

\$9.75
 Received from Commis of Poor
 Parish of West Isles & Polleys Bay
 Comm of Poor Parish of Saint Andrews -
 Nine 75/100 Dollars for allowance for care and
 board of my child from Feb. 1st 1879 to
 May 31/79 13 Weeks @ 75¢.
 Charlotte Bounds
 320
 277-1/2

St. Andrews
 May 6, 1879
 \$9.75
 Received from
 Commissioners
 of Poor Parish of
 West Isles from
 E. S. Polleys,
 Secretary,
 Commissioners
 Poor Parish of St.
 Andrews, nine
 dollars seventy-
 five cents for
 allowance for care
 and support of my
 child from Feb.
 1st 1879 to May
 3rd, 79 - 13 weeks
 at 75 cents per
 week. - Charlottie
 Bounds

PANB RS 148

It did a fair bit of traffic in caring for children. As mentioned, the old Poor House was fitted up as an "orphan asylum" for the children of immigrants. There was a kind of school run in connection with the Poor House. Many foundlings were discovered on the Alms House doorstep, or made their way there from other doorsteps. In what was an all-too-common occurrence, the *St. Andrews Bay Pilot* for July 9, 1885 reported that "About 10 o'clock of the evening of Tuesday the 30th, a newly born female child was left on the step outside the door of the house on Sophia Street in this town occupied by Mr. Joseph Handy and Mr. Brad Boone. The infant, whose parentage is unknown, was cared for during the night by Mrs. Boone, and rather than allow the little waif to be sent to the Alms House, it was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Dolby, whom it is to be hoped, will be amply repaid for this kind act."

This little individual got off lucky. Others were less fortunate. According to the *Beacon* for October 24, 1889: "The three able-bodied men who compose the Alms House Commission for the Parish of St. Andrews are in a stew just

now, and all in consequence of a little blue-eyed babe that some cold-hearted mother cast upon the tender mercies of a cruel world. The little tot was found on a doorstep a few weeks ago. The Alms House Commissioners were requested to become guardians of the waif, but they made haste so slowly that the finder waxed impatient, and it was passed over to the childless pair, who expressed an anxiety to get it. The foster parents had their child christened in the Presbyterian Church, and for a time were delighted with their charge. They soon tired of it however and then the child was cast upon the Commissioners. There being no nurse at the Alms House, the child was farmed out to a party in town, who were given \$1.25 a week for its keeping. The Commissioners fear this modest sum is going to prove too serious a drain upon their resources, and now they advertise the child 'for adoption.' We hope some kind-hearted person will be found willing to become parent to this poor little foundling."

There was enough traffic in foundlings that what the *Beacon* described as a "baby farm" kept in connection with the Alms was in operation in the year 1894. It was run by the aforesaid Clarissay Richardson, an elderly black lady. In that year a number of children wearing remarkably similar clothing were deposited upon the doorsteps of the local residents. It would seem, noted Editor Armstrong of the *Beacon*, "that someone has accepted the contract to keep up the infantile population of St. Andrews alms house."

The Alms House was sometimes a maternity ward for unwed mothers. In December of 1897 a young woman from Fredericton applied to the Alms House for admission. She had been living in Milltown with her sister but got into trouble and concluded, the *Beacon* reported, "that St. Andrews would furnish a safe retreat 'until the clouds rolled by.' She travelled on the train as far as Watt Junction. At the Junction she told the agent that she had only 30 cents in change. He contributed sufficient to purchase a ticket to St. Andrews. On her arrival here she walked to the Alms House and, telling her story, asked to be taken in. The caretaker gave her shelter until he had consulted the Commissioners. They promptly informed the young woman that she would have to return from whence she came. She produced a roll of bills, intimating that she would pay her

board if necessary. This the Commissioners would not consent to, and on Monday she returned upriver." After the child was born, she returned one night to deposit it on the doorstep, but unfortunately for her, its swaddling clothes somehow identified the mother, and she agreed to reclaim it."

The Poor House was also used as a make-shift hospital. There was the terrible case of George Stewart, a black farmer who lived just next door on Cedar Lane. An epileptic, he fell into his fireplace while repairing a harness and was nearly burned to death. When help arrived, reported the *St. Croix Courier* for May 1877, "they found Stewart lying on the fire, head close to the back of the chimney and clothes burning. They speedily removed him and tore the burning shirt off him. Young Dougherty went at once into town for medical aid. Dr. Samuel T. Gove, and Dr. Harry Gove promptly repaired to the scene of the accident and administered what remedies were necessary at the moment. The house in which Stewart lived in was described as "a mere hovel, presenting a scene of squalid misery," and was not a proper place in which to take care of the man. The Doctor ordered his removal to the Poor House, on reaching which a thorough examination was made and all that could be done to alleviate the suffering of the patient was attended to.

Stewart died the next day.

The Poor House served additionally as a final stopping place for those whose life, for less common reasons, had simply come to an end. There was the case of George Lane, a British naval engineer of some wealth who drank it all away and was moved from his last refuge, a derelict schooner at the head of the town, probably the *Mary Ellen* or *H. V. Crandall*, [see p. 137] to the Poor House and soon after a pauper's grave. Then there was the case in 1903 of Neil Lochary, a schoolteacher whose mental illness put him on the road to destitution and finally the Poor House. According to *Beacon* article, "The deceased has a brother and sister in comfortable circumstances in St. Stephen. They would have cared for him but he would not permit them. His funeral took place on Tuesday afternoon."

The Poor House accounts can make rather depressing reading, peppered as they are with receipts for funeral expenses, sometimes for anonymous individuals, coffins and burial clothes, carting bodies

for Making Betsy Ross
a dress 40 cts
Annie Miller
Donald Clark
Thomas Hipwell
Annie Miller
110

Aug. 1, 1872

For making Betsy Ross dress 40 cents

Annie Miller.

Donald Clark [merchant]

Thomas Hipwell [Commissioner of the Poor]

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[Betsy Ross was the daughter of David Ross, black barber. Betsy suffered brain damage in the fire that destroyed the Church Block in 1859, where Ross and Theodore Bounds had barbershops. She would have been 38 at the time. The father and daughter lived the last part of their lives in the Poor House and died there in 1872. The dress would have been Betsy's funeral dress. The father was 89 and Betsy was 51.]

to graves, digging graves, usually at the Roman Catholic cemetery, paying for Rectors, clerks, sextons and tolling bells. The Poor House had its own cemetery, probably nearby, though its location has been lost. There are records for eight persons buried in that ground between 1822 and 1858 and there may have been many more. The Rural Cemetery opened in 1865; thereafter the Poor House cemetery would have stopped receiving bodies.

Eventually it was time to lay the Poor House itself to rest. In 1911 the Town purchased the property from the Municipality for \$700 and sold part of it to the Algonquin Golf Club, which built a clubhouse in 1912 and began renting out the remainder for supplementary golf links. In 1918 the Algonquin successfully petitioned the town to exchange the Poor House and its outbuildings for the Inn property at Indian Point, the old Henry Osburn property, which it had been using as an annex to the hotel. With alterations, said Allerton, manager of the Hotel, the house might be made useful as an adjunct to the clubhouse, but at any rate the building was something of an obstruction. Very likely the Poor House cemetery was ploughed over around this time, if in the interval since the last burial 50 years earlier it had not disappeared anyway.

By 1908 the Poor House had been euphemistically renamed the "Town Home," suggesting that a certain stigma had become attached to it. Today, that we ever had a Poor House seems slightly shameful, and certainly no one laments its passing. But crude instrument that it was, it had a hard row to hoe in some very troubled times. In a way it was a sort of multi-purpose institution that today is broken down into special care homes, foster care, group homes, adoption programs, home support, social assistance and disability pensions. Without meaning to be ungrateful, perhaps we give the Poor House sufficient due if we recognize that it helped create conditions that led to its own demise. It's been said that if we see farther than those who came before us, it's because we stand on their shoulders. Perhaps we remember the Poor House best in this way. ~