

Boston Overseers of the Poor Records, 1733-1925

*Guide to the Scholarly Resources
Microfilm Edition*

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1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes the need for transparency and accountability in financial reporting.

2. The second part of the document outlines the various methods and techniques used to collect and analyze data. It includes a detailed description of the experimental procedures and the statistical tools employed.

3. The third part of the document presents the results of the study, including a comparison of the different methods and a discussion of the implications of the findings.

4. The final part of the document provides a conclusion and a list of references. It also includes a section on the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

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Introduction

The Boston Overseers of the Poor were established by a colonial act in 1692 and incorporated in 1772. Under the provisions of the first city charter in 1822, one person was elected in each ward to be an Overseer of the Poor, totaling twelve Overseers. In 1864 it was voted that four Overseers be elected by the City Council in April of each year to serve for three years. By 1886 four Overseers were appointed by the mayor in February or March of each year for three-year terms, to be confirmed by the Board of Aldermen.

The Overseers provided relief in the form of food, fuel, medicines, and sometimes money to “deserving” persons, provided that they were “settled” in Boston. The Overseers also provided relief at the expense of towns where needy people resided until the town took charge of them, and relief to nonstate residents for short periods until they were removed to state almshouses.

By 1871 the Overseers of the Poor were in charge of the Charity Building (corner of Chardon and Hawkins streets), a headquarters for numerous charitable organizations in Boston and the Temporary Home for Women and Children. By 1881 they ran the Wayfarer’s Lodge for destitute men. The Overseers also served as trustees for various charitable trusts. While at one time the Overseers were responsible for all types of relief, in 1823 their responsibilities were limited to “outdoor relief,” or relief given outside of public institutions. The Commissioners of Public Institutions were in charge of “indoor relief,” which primarily consisted of the state almshouses.

The records of the Overseers of the Poor include administrative records, almshouse records, temporary home records, and some miscellaneous and unidentified materials. These are scattered, early records with large gaps in chronology.

Scope and Content

Boxes 1-8 contain the administrative records of the Overseers, including financial records, warning out books, memoranda, letterbooks, correspondence, lists of persons receiving various types of charity, and casebooks, 1738-1916.

Boxes 9-15 contain almshouse records consisting of admissions and discharge registers, lists of inmates, death records, indenture records, accounts, memoranda, 1735-1911.

Boxes 16-18 hold temporary home records such as admissions registers, children and foundlings records, and register of adoptions, 1862-1925.

Box 19 contains miscellaneous and unidentified materials, including City of Boston accounts of payments to various charities, lists of Boston residents, and miscellaneous legal material, 1733-1901.

Roll Contents

Roll No.	Box/ Folder	Description
1	1.1	Lists of Overseers, 8 March 1742-1858 Includes ward for each overseer.
	1.2	Record of money granted at monthly meetings, 4 April 1738-March 1769 Also includes lists of overseers and blank forms and certificates on end leaves. Cash accounts include both charitable disbursements and business accounts.
	1.3	“Warning (Out) Book from January 4, 1745 to 1770” Lists persons warned, date when warned, by whom warned, towns or country from and time they have been in Boston. Lists contain, in some instances, names of family members, race, etc. Arranged by date under the first letter of name.
	1.4	Warning Out Book from 1771 to 1773 (and after an eighteen-year break) from 1791 to 1792 Lists persons warned, date when warned, by whom warned, towns or country they came from and time they have been in Boston. Lists contain, in some instances, names of family members, race, etc. Arranged by date under the first letter of name. Letter “A” and part of “B”? are missing.

Roll Box/ Description**No. Folder**

- | | | |
|------|-----|--|
| 1 | 1.5 | <p>“Monthly Memorandums to the Board of Overseers from 3d January 1816 to [6 April 1825]”</p> <p>Lists of persons in the lockroom; Bridewell; the Maniac House; and the [Alms] house. Also includes memoranda on appointments by the Board of Overseers and statistical information.</p> |
|
 | | |
| 2 | 2.1 | <p>Letterbook of the Overseers, 9 November 1801-21 July 1810</p> <p>Letters to the Overseers of the Poor of various towns concerning inhabitants of those towns in the Boston Almshouse and accounts for maintenance.
Partial index of towns.</p> |
| | 2.2 | <p>Letterbook of the Overseers, 18 December 1816-19 July 1820</p> <p>Copies of letters to the Overseers of the Poor of various towns concerning the accounts of inhabitants of those towns in the Boston Almshouse.
Some letters annotated to indicate the disposition of claims.</p> |
| | 2.3 | <p>Letterbook of the Overseers, 19 July 1820-16 January 1824</p> <p>Copies of letters to the Overseers of the Poor of various towns concerning the accounts of</p> |

Roll No.	Box/ Folder	Description
2	2.3	inhabitants of those towns in the Boston Almshouse. Some letters annotated to indicate the disposition of claims. Partial index of towns.
	2.4	Letterbook of the Overseers, 12 October 1825-18 January 1827 Copies of letters to the Overseers of the Poor of various towns concerning the accounts of inhabitants of those towns in the Boston Almshouse. Some letters annotated to indicate the disposition of claims. Index of towns.
3	3.1	Letterbook of the Overseers, 23 January 1827-22 September 1828 Copies of letters to the Overseers of the Poor of various towns concerning the accounts of inhabitants of those towns in the Boston Almshouse. Some letters annotated to indicate the disposition of claims. Index of towns.
	3.2	Letterbook of the Overseers, 23 December 1836-14 September 1842 Copies of letters to the Overseers of the Poor

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- 3 3.2 of various towns concerning the accounts of inhabitants of those towns in the Boston Almshouse.
Some letters annotated to indicate the disposition of claims.
371 letters with index of towns.
- 3.3 **Records of the notification of the Overseers of the Poor of various towns of the expenses incurred by their inhabitants in the Boston Almshouse, 26 January 1820-21 November 1822**
Annotated with notes of actions taken and expenses paid.
Alphabetical index of persons discussed in the notifications.
- 3.4 **Records of the notification of the Overseers of the Poor of various towns of the expenses incurred by their inhabitants in the Boston Almshouse, 23 November 1822-21 March 1825**
Annotated with notes of actions taken and expenses paid.
Alphabetical index of persons discussed in the notifications.

Roll No.	Box/ Folder	Description
4	4	<p>Correspondence of the Boston Overseers of the Poor (1803-1805) with the Overseers of the Poor of various Massachusetts towns concerning inhabitants of other towns in the Boston Almshouse and the inhabitants of Boston in the almshouses of other towns. There are letters and documents sent and received by the Overseers in an attempt to settle claims.</p> <p>The correspondence is arranged alphabetically by town in separate files for Boston inhabitants and the inhabitants of other towns.</p>
5.1		<p>Cash accounts, 3 February 1814-3 March 1824, of the Overseers of the Poor</p> <p>Accounts for funds disbursed for employee salaries, food, clothing and sundries, including supplies for the Almshouse.</p>
5.2		<p>Cash accounts, 7 April 1824-25 September 1827, of the Overseers of the Poor</p> <p>Accounts for funds disbursed for employee salaries, food, clothing and sundries, including supplies for the Almshouse.</p>
5.3		<p>Cash accounts, 20 January 1832-24 September 1839, of the Overseers of the Poor</p> <p>Accounts for funds disbursed for employee salaries, food, clothing and sundries, including supplies for the Almshouse.</p>

Roll Box/ Description**No. Folder**

- 4 5.4 **Cash accounts, 1 October 1839-31 December 1844, of the Overseers of the Poor**
Accounts for funds disbursed for employee salaries, food, clothing and sundries, including supplies for the Almshouse.
- 5 6.1 **Accounts of the Overseers of the Poor and quarterly lists of [pensioners?], [1821]-17 November 1852**
Lists of persons, amounts paid, and persons who received funds on behalf of others.
- 6.2 **Accounts of the Overseers of the Poor, 16 May 1820-18 April 1825**
Accounts for charges to various towns and the State for the support of non-residents in the Boston Almshouse and other money granted to non-residents.
Separate Index of towns and businesses.
- 6.3 **Accounts of the Overseers of the Poor, [1829]-[1832]**
Accounts for charges to various towns and the State for the support of non-residents in the Boston Almshouse and other money granted to non-residents.
Also includes cash accounts with towns and monies paid to individuals on behalf of persons receiving relief.
Index of towns.

Roll No.	Box/ Folder	Description
6	7.1	<p>“State Paupers in Gaol from January 1816 to [26 November 1824]</p> <p>Also contains account of drafts on the Boston City Treasury, 28 April 1828-March 1852. There are estimates of appropriations for the Overseers of the Poor, 1 May 1852-30 April 1866. Copies of letters and documents including newspaper clippings have been tipped into the volume.</p>
	7.2	<p>Accounts of the Overseers of the Poor [1846-1864] with various towns for the support of non-resident paupers receiving outdoor relief in Boston</p> <p>Accounts arranged by town, <u>not</u> in alphabetical order. Many pages are missing or blank.</p>
	7.3	<p>Account with the City of Boston, 1 May 1864-31 January 1916, of the Overseers of the Poor</p> <p>Includes receipts for disbursements from the City and bills and drafts drawn on the City.</p>
7	8.1	<p>Records of names of persons receiving clothing and sundries, items, and (in some instances) cost, 13 November 1806-30 December 1808</p> <p>Also contains note of charges to town or state.</p>

Roll Box/ Description**No. Folder**

- 7 8.2 **List of persons receiving payments by ward, 1839**
Includes payments by month and total sum paid and days chargeable.
- 8.3 **List of persons receiving relief, alphabetically arranged, [1839]-[1845]**
Includes information on the status of their residence (and place of residence, if other than Boston), age, occupation, and period during which they received payment.
- 8.4 **List of persons receiving outdoor relief by ward, 1842**
Includes information on money and wood received each month, place of settlement if other than Boston, and status (“aged,” “lame,” number of children, etc.)
Also includes receipts for supplies and payments and manuscript additions and notes, signed by the overseer for each ward.
- 8.5 **“Casebook” of persons receiving outdoor relief, [1849]-ca. 1852**
Entries include biographical information and status of settlement.
Also includes other information on disbursements and status of persons through 1860.

Roll No.	Box/ Folder	Description
8	9.1	<p>Records of admissions and discharges, 9 November 1758-27 April 1774</p> <p>Contains age, by whom sent in, and date of death if appropriate.</p> <p>With list of children bound out of the Almshouse, 21 April 1756-20 January 1790, of what town, names of to whom bound, and when free.</p> <p>Indexes to each part.</p>
	9.2	<p>Records of Admissions to Almshouse, 14 February 1763-10 May 1771</p> <p>Contains name, date of admission, age, by whom sent in, and date of discharge or death. Some entries out of chronological order.</p> <p>Also contains manuscript notes of financial matters and supplies for the Almshouse on end leaves.</p>
	9.3	<p>Register of Admissions to the Almshouse, 12 December 1768-30 September 1788</p> <p>Contains name, age, by whom sent in, city or town charge, and date of discharge or death.</p>
	9.4	<p>Register of Admissions to the Almshouse, 1 October 1788-30 July 1795</p> <p>Contains name, date of admission, age, by whom sent in, and date of discharge or death. Some entries out of chronological order.</p>

Roll No.	Box/ Folder	Description
8	9.4	Bound with list of persons warned out of Boston, May 1770-31 July 1773. A true copy attested by Ezekial Goldthwait, Boston, September 20, 1773. 39 pages.
	9.5	Record of daily admittance and discharge of paupers, 1 April 1811-12 July 1812 Contains name, date sent in, "where born or belong," by whom sent in, date bound out, discharged, or died.
	9.6	Record of daily admittance and discharge of paupers, 18 July 1812-31 March 1814 Contains name, date sent in, "where born or belong," by whom sent in, date bound out, discharged, or died.
9	10.1	Record of daily admittance and discharge of paupers, 1 April 1814-4 October 1816 Contains name, date sent in, "where born or belong," by whom sent in, date bound out, discharged, or died.
	10.2	Record of daily admittance and discharge of paupers, 1 November 1818-30 June 1820 Contains name, date sent in, "where born or belong," by whom sent in, date bound out, discharged, or died.

Roll No.	Box/ Folder	Description
9	10.3	Record of daily admittance and discharge of paupers, 1 July 1820-30 October 1822 Contains name, date sent in, "where born or belong," by whom sent in, date bound out, discharged, or died.
	10.4	Record of daily admittance and discharge of paupers, 1 November 1822-31 March 1825 Contains name, date sent in, "where born or belong," by whom sent in, date bound out, discharged, or died.
	10.5	List of "Names of Persons in the Almshouse." 17 August-27 September 1846 Chronological list: includes date of admission, age, status, and date of death or discharge (incomplete). Interleaved with list of deaths in the Almshouse, 2 April 1828-2 January 1842 (pp. 30-32).
10	11.1	Alphabetical list of admissions, 1795-1817 Includes date of admission; charge on the state or [Boston]; "towns they belong to;" by what overseer entered; when discharged, died, bound out or run away; "time they have been here." End leaves contain list of persons for whom notifications were sent to various Massachusetts towns to which they "belonged," together with a list of charges on those towns, 2 August 1797-24 December 1801.

Roll Box/ Description**No. Folder**

- 10 11.2 **Alphabetical list of admissions, 1824-1873**
- 10 11.3 **Alphabetical list of admissions (selected?) and discharges from the Almshouse, [1815-1840]**
Also contains information on transient paupers. Bound with alphabetical list of state paupers, 1 January 1822-20 February 1841. Includes where born and articles of clothing issued.
- 10 11.4 **Statistical information on admissions and discharges from the Almshouse, June 1819-21 September 1821**
Daily accounts of charges of the State and City of Boston (total number); number of children and total number in the Almshouse.
- 11 12.1 **Alphabetical lists of men, and women inmates, bound dos-a-dos, [n.d]**
Contains notation of charge on State or town.
- 12.2 **Alphabetical index of inmates, 27 November 1809**
Several separate alphabets.
Also contains list of boys in the Almshouse with dates of birth, status (on unnumbered interior leaves following preliminary alphabetical list), [1810]-1814.

Roll No.	Box/ Folder	Description
11	12.3	<p>List of inmates by room, [1816] Separate list for Bridewell, Afro-American inmates, "school" rooms and hospital rooms.</p>
	12.4	<p>Register of deaths in the Almshouse, 5 January 1820-12 April 1825 Includes age at death and "diseases of which they died." Bound with a daily log of deaths, 2 April 1838-13 October 1846. Includes age, "where belong," and status of charge.</p>
	12.5	<p>Record of indentures of inmates bound out, 1822-1837 Lists master, address and terms of the indenture. Printed forms completed in manuscript. These contracts apparently were not completed for various reasons.</p>
12	13.1	<p>Rules and orders for the Management of the workhouse..., 28 May 1735. Bound with list of Overseers of the Poor, 1742-1764; copies of laws, rules and orders enacted for the employment of the poor, and accounts of the overseers of the workhouse, 1739-1771. Also contains copy of act of incorporation of the Trustees of John Boylston's charitable donations, February 1803.</p>

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- 12 13.2 **Record of cash paid to inmates of the workhouse, 29 May 1794-20 December 1794**
- 13.3 **Same as previous, 23 May 1796-5 November 1796**
- 12 14.1 **Daily Account of Expenses, 2 January 1809-11 September 1811**
(Incorrectly identified on microfilm as 1909-1911)
Includes staff payroll.
- 14.2 **Cashbook, 1 January 1811-8 February 1817**
Payments for services and accounts for supplies, by date.
- 14.3 **Cashbook, 21 December 1821-29 November 1823**
Payments for services and accounts for supplies, by date.
- 14.4 **Cashbook, 1 June 1796-5 February 1817**
Accounts with the Town of Boston and the State. 55 numbered leaves with summary of account on unnumbered preliminary leaves.
- 14.5 **Daily Memorandum Book, 1 January 1816-31 December 1834**
Contains lists of accounts examined; letters of application, etc. Applicants listed by date,

Roll No.	Box/ Folder	Description
12	14.5	with information on ward and amount applied for. Also contains notes and memoranda for various dates on end leaves.
	14.6	Accounts with the State for support of State Paupers in the Almshouse, 30 November 1808-1 June 1809; 30 November 1809-1 June 1810; November 1812-1 December 1816; 1 December 1822-30 November 1824 Includes name, where born, when/where came from, period in Almshouse, rate charged, clothing furnished, and burial expenses.
13	15.1	Boston Asylum Ledger, 1795-1806 Accounts with the State and various towns for the support of inmates. Also includes accounts for supplies and service.
	15.2	Boston Asylum Ledger, 1805-1812 Accounts with the State and various towns for the support of inmates. Also includes accounts for supplies and service.
	15.3	Boston Asylum Ledger, [1815-1823] Cash accounts with individuals and towns for the support of inmates.

Roll Box/ Description**No. Folder**

- 13 16.1 **Daily Admissions Records, 1 May-11 December 1862; 18 January-6 July 1863;**
9 August 1863-4 March 1864
Contain biographical information; marriage and health status; and disposition of the case.
- 14 17.1 **Children and Foundlings Records, 1 May 1862-30 September 1868**
Forms giving "biographical" and statistical information about foundlings and disposition of cases including the names and addresses of adoptive parents.
- 17.2 **Children and Foundlings Records, 9 October-18 December 1868**
- 17.3 **Children and Foundlings Records, 23 December 1868-24 April 1878**
- 17.4 **Continuation of previous, 21 May 1878-7 March 1883**
- 15 18.1 **Children and Foundlings Records (Continuation of 17.4), 7 March 1883-9 July 1886**
- 18.2 **Children and Foundlings Records, 24 November 1894-4 September 1925**

Roll No.	Box/ Folder	Description
15	18.3	Register of Adoptions, 9 January 1868-16 August 1886 Name of adoptive parents, references, status of child. Printed forms completed in manuscript.
	18.4	Register of Adoptions, 9 January 1868-1 May 1878 <u>Duplicate of part of 18.3.</u>
15	19.1	City of Boston Accounts for payments to various relief and educational funds, 16 March 1803-April 1854
	19.2	Alphabetical list of [Boston?] residents, [1850-1880], A-K only Each entry consists of a name, address, occupation and date. Most individuals are tradesmen; most dates given fall late in the year (incomplete).
	19.3	Alphabetical list of names with ward, n.d. Includes various cryptic marginal notations (incomplete).
	19.4	Miscellaneous legal documents, 1733-1815 Includes printed forms completed in manuscript. Subjects: Adams, Henry (1752 Jan.); Thacher, Peter (1805 Aug. 9); Ruggles, Samuel vs. Baldwin, Aaron (1815).

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15 19.5 **Miscellaneous fragments from throughout
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