**Orphans of the Foundling Hospital**

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### 1879-1881

The years 1879-1881 were the years where some families were breaking apart while others were coming together. Some may look back at these years and think this is around the time that the light bulb was invented, but what they fail to realize is that there was a lot more that was happening which goes beyond technology. It had to do with feelings, and sacrifices that families had to make in an attempt for survival.

Throughout these years, the immigration rate increased rapidly, right around the time that the United States was going through major economic issues. Some families had less members working, with too many mouths to feed, so eventually children were driven out on the streets in hopes of being able to earn for themselves as well as their families. They lived in unsanitary conditions, tenements, which Jacob Riis was able to capture clearly through his photography from those years.

It isn’t easy for any parent to let go of their child, but circumstances drove these parents to desperate measures. Immigrants came to the United States with dreams of better lives in their eyes, but instead the economy not only increased rapidly, right around the time that the United States was going through major economic issues. Some families had less members working, with too many mouths to feed, so eventually children were driven out on the streets in hopes of being able to earn for themselves as well as their families. They lived in unsanitary conditions, tenements, which Jacob Riis was able to capture clearly through his photography from those years.

### Institutional History

The Foundling Hospital was started in a small rented house called “The Foundling Asylum” at 17 East 12th Street in Greenwich Village. This was so that unwanted children or children who could not be taken care of by their parents could be cared for. Throughout the years the Foundling Hospital was at that location, more than 2,500 kids had been placed there. The children were left with notes with their names on it, or with a note explaining why the child was there. The financial, sanitary, and moral status of the institution was satisfying and gratifying. The East Wing of the institution was developed on account of private donations. The health condition of the inmates, nurses, and the infants were unusually good for the time. A medical program was established in 1880 at St. Ann’s Hospital. This program provided the unmarried mothers with medical treatment and the care that they could not otherwise afford. St John’s Hospital for sick children opened up in 1881 to develop some pediatric practices. The children at the Foundling Hospital were trained morally to understand the principles and necessities of truth, virtue, and obedience. There were two kindergarten classes in the hospital to give the children a cultivation of a home feeling. It was to improve their health in ways that normal hospitals wouldn’t do. There were a total of 50 kids who were supervised and exercised upon by outdoor nurses so the children wouldn’t get hurt.

### The New York Foundling Hospital provided a sense of stability for parents and children struggling with poverty in 1879-1881.

**Photo Gallery**

This is one of the buildings where orphans stayed. It was here in New York, on Bloomingdale road, near West Seventy-third street. This is one of the few buildings that is in New York for the orphans to stay.

You can see that these women breast feeding the children. Some of these women are breast feeding more than one child and these children aren’t their own.

**Identities of the children in the New York Foundling Hospital**

### A Mother’s Story

On March 31, 1880, I had to leave a new born life I knew I was never going to see ever again. A few weeks earlier, I gave birth to my first and probably last child. My husband and I mourned for a long period of time because we knew our love for the baby was not going to last long. I had told my closest friend who shares a home with me to give my new born child to the sisters of the New York Foundling Hospital to seek care for the child. I have been tremendously ill for the past few years and thought I would be strong enough to take care of the child in my arms, but my health did not fail to disappoint me. It was heartbreaking to say my last farewell to the soul that I would not recognize in the future. I have heard other mothers whom abandoned their child left some type of remembrance with them, but there was nothing for me to leave with the baby. I’m unable to provide care for myself which meant I was definitely incapable to provide care for my child. Every day when I get home from work, I cannot help but to draw a picture of my child in my mind. My dear child who I am no longer able to possess, I hope you grow to be nothing like your parents and live a trouble-free life. Stay healthy and loving.

### Sara’s Story

My name is Sara, and I am eighteen years old. I grew up in an orphanage not knowing who my mother or father was, or even how I came to be there. The sisters at my orphanage, which was the New York Foundling Hospital, never shared much information with me about how I got there or even the names of my parents. How I long to know who they were and why they never came back for me. My time at the Foundling Hospital was very hard. I never got to celebrate a proper Christmas or Thanksgiving. I never had the love and care from a family because I never had one. I had one friend named Amy. She was one year younger than I was, but we were close, like sisters. We always looked out for each other, but all of that ended when I was sixteen years old, when Amy got adopted. I was very sad because she was the only friend I had and the only sense of family I had. I never really had a lot of education, but I always find myself reading books or even newspapers. This eventually became my hobby. Now that am eighteen years old, it means that I can no longer stay at the Foundling Hospital. I searched and got a job as a news editor. It does not pay much, but it supports me. I got a small apartment not far from my job, and I try my best to get by everyday. I do hope that I could be eventually reunited with my parents and finally get a chance to meet them.