



ORPHANS & WAIFS IN EARLY MADISON COUNTY

Beginning in the 1840s, these children were turned over to the County which sometimes paid local residents a stipend to provide a home for the homeless waifs. The County did the same for the poor until construction of the Madison County Poor Farm in the 1860s.

The Madison County Poor Farm, which was located on what is today South Main Street in Edwardsville (site of the new Edwardsville Public Services building) became a large complex of buildings that included a hospital, insane ward, residences (men's and women's) and more for the poor. The complex did not include an orphanage, so the County tried to find family homes for orphans as soon as possible.

The "family system," as it was called, worked similarly to the foster care system used today, although without supervision. The children



Madison County Poor House Edwardsville Illinois
Above is a depiction of the Madison County Poor Farm as shown in the 1873 Atlas of Madison County. (MCHS)

were given to whoever was willing to take them. The County recognize the family system over the institutional system. A county poor house, however well kept, is a totally unfit place for man or woman; and much (less so) for the children, idiots, and foreign orphans.