



Enduring Families Project:
Children's Stories

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ARCHIVAL LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT

By Mary Westerhold, Archival Research Manager

Have you ever wondered what our ancestors did when they were "down on their luck"? What happened to mothers with small children when their husbands died leaving them with no income and no way to earn

one? And where did the elderly go when they could no longer care for themselves and they had no one to care for them? Even workers who lived alone and were injured in the coal mines or on the railroad and needed assistance

were without anyone to care for them. Many of these people would be found at the County Poor Farm.

The first mention of care for the poor of Madison County is during the first court session held in the county on April 6, 1813,

when six men were appointed as "overseers of the poor in Madison County." From that time until the first permanent buildings were built on the property at South Main Street in Edwardsville, the care of the poor was in the

hands of individuals who were then reimbursed for their expenses from the coffers of the county.

By the early 1860s, the first buildings were completed on the Poor Farm property. The property was a working farm and residents

were expected to work on the farm if their physical condition permitted it. As time went on, additional buildings were added until the complex included the superintendent's residence, the residents building, an insane



Postcard view of the Madison County Poor Farm

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department, a blind department, a hospital, a surgery, a bake house, a laundry, and various outbuildings.

While all of the buildings are gone, some of the records remain. At the Archival Library, we have the known existing records of the Madison County Poor Farm beginning in 1880 until the last admission date of May 26, 1958.

Several volunteers and staff members have been working to compile an index of these records so they are useful to family history researchers. The records were maintained by date. Several books exist covering various years. Since there is no overall index, finding a name requires going through every page in the book.

The index will include the name, source and page number, date of birth or age, date admitted, date of death or discharge, and place of burial. Sometimes there are additional comments and when that existed in the books, we merely note "See Comments."

The amount of information varies considerably, with the earliest records containing the least information while the later records may include information on the resident, their parents, children, and siblings. While not every record will provide the missing information a family historian may be seeking, hopefully it will help locate someone who may have been lost from the records.

