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Helping Hand Society Records

1841-1876
8 boxes (7.11 linear feet)
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Read collection overview

Formed in 1887, the Helping Hand Society began as a missionary society for young girls who learned about the world (foreign missions) while also learning how to sew, developed by Emily Graves Williston. Within that same year, the Emily Mission Circle transformed into The Young Ladies' Missionary Society, a society which became devoted to charitable work in Easthampton. The Society's name was changed to the Helping Hand Society in 1894, and the group was incorporated in 1913. In 1919, the Society started operating out of a house purchased and endowed by Franklin W. Pitcher. The Society went on to establish a Visiting Nurse program, providing room for the nurse in the house, as well as an apartment rented out to caretakers, and at one time the Society operated a Benefit Shop. Membership in the Society has fluctuated over the years, and while specific projects may have been discontinued over time, the Society continues forward with its mission to provide help to those in need by donating time and resources to Easthampton and the surrounding communities. The collection documents the history of the Helping Hand Society from its inception to around 2017. This includes minutes and annual reports, by-laws, and ledger books. There are also scrapbooks and photo albums, the framed incorporation document, and the original sign that adorned the Helping Hand House.

Background on Helping Hand Society

"The purpose of this corporation shall be to engage in all forms of charity and to lend a helping hand to the residents of Easthampton and surrounding communities with preference given to Easthampton residents, irrespective of race, color or creed" from By-Laws of The Helping Hand Society, March 1922

The Helping Hand Society's origins trace back to the 1870s when Emily Graves Williston founded a missionary society of little girls called the Emily Mission Circle. The Emily Mission circle, which met biweekly on Saturdays at the Payson Church, aimed to teach girls how to sew while also providing support to various missions, both foreign and domestic.

In 1887, two years after Emily Graves Williston's passing, five women from the Emily Mission Circle—Ella Taintor, Olive Farrar, Georgia Manchester, Alice Harris, and Mary Rust—sat together on a Saturday in November after an Emily Mission Circle meeting and discussed forming their own organization. In that same month, the five women met at the home of Susie Bosworth to discuss their plan to establish a new society. The next month on December 5th, 1887 "The Young Ladies Missionary Society" was organized at the house

of Alice Alvord. The society's first officers were: President Ella Taintor, Vice-President Belle Dewar, Secretary and Treasurer Lucy Sutherland, and directresses Lucy Sutherland, Ella Searle, and Hattie Parsons. Upon inception, a constitution was quickly adopted and meetings were held biweekly on Monday evenings at the various homes of the members. The initial membership capacity was set at 20 members.

The organization initially sought to have outreach efforts that were not entirely local. Their first project was outfitting a young Black child in a Southern school and they donated money to organizations in other states. However, it was soon decided that the organization's efforts would be focused exclusively on Easthampton.

In 1892, the Helping Hand Society gained significant recognition for its efforts during a time of great hardship for the town. In the winter, the Easthampton Spinning Company closed, leaving many out of work and this was compounded with epidemics of Diphtheria and Scarlet Fever epidemics. As a result there was a heightened demand for assistance with food, fuel, and warm clothing. In response to increased requests for aid the Helping Hand Society members made twelve layettes for local infants and spent \$397 on relief efforts.

Early initiatives of the society included donating funds directly to families in need and distributing clothes. Fundraising efforts to finance this work included food sales, lawn parties, plays, musical comedies, dances, card parties, and selling cookbooks.

The first committees of The Helping Hand Society were the Relief Committee, the directresses, and the Visiting Nurse Committee. The relief committee took resources to those in need like food and clothing, the directresses would prepare sewing for the meetings and the nurse committee was to direct and assist in the nurse's duties.

In 1904 the Young Ladies Missionary Society changed its name to the one we know now "The Helping Hand Society", in order to more aptly describe the broad nature of their work.

In May 1906, a Helping Hand Society member Mrs. Frank A. Leach, brought up the idea of employing a visiting nurse. It was an ambitious project because it would mean more expenses for the society, requiring more fundraising efforts. After consulting local doctors as well as the townspeople the society decided to start the visiting nurses association, Miss Eden being their first nurse. Patients would pay just ten or fifteen cents a visit and those in need and for those truly in need there was no charge at all. The program quickly expanded, receiving 2,000 calls in its second year. The Visiting Nurses Association became a staple in the community and demands for the nurse increased to the point where the nurse was receiving 5,000 or more calls a year. To accommodate the requests the number of nurses was increased to two, and eventually, two cars were purchased to aid in transportation.

As the society grew, especially with the implementation of the Visiting Nurses Society, fundraising efforts expanded to include door-to-door collections. Their first collector was Miss Evelyn Taintor who filled the role for several years. Miss Evelyn Taintor additionally served 2 two year terms as president. Her sister was Ella Taintor Miller who was the first president of the society.

In October of 1913, the society was incorporated. This is due in part to the help of Judge Edward, who originally inhabited the Helping Hand House. After that momentous moment for the society just a few years later another one would occur when in 1919 Mr. Franklin F. Pitcher bought the Helping Hand House and gifted it to the society. Mr. Pitcher, who in records is lovingly referred to as, "Easthamptons Mr. Great Heart", also gifted the society 20 shares of the Glendale Elastic and Co.'s stock as an endowment to help with the upkeep of the house. Mrs Mary Pitcher Lewis was the daughter of Mr. Pitcher and a member of the society. Franklin Pitcher passed away in 1923 and he and his two sons left money to the Helping Hand Society in their wills. The Helping Hand House had a large meeting room, a second-floor room for the Visiting Nurse, and an apartment that would be rented out. The house served as the society's headquarters for nearly 90 years.

During the late 1910's and into the late 1920's the Helping Hand Society would aid the community during global times of economic duress like World War I and especially during the Great Depression. During these times of economic strife the Helping Hand Society aimed to provide support for families whose income would not cover necessary expenses. In 1924 a benefit shop opened in the town and was run by the members of the Helping Hand Society until 1938. In 1942 the Community Chest opened in Easthampton and after the Helping Hand Society joined they received aid for the Visiting Nurses Society which allowed them to stop door-to-door fundraising efforts.

In 1968 the Helping Hand Society made the decision to end the Visiting Nurse Program because the society felt they could not properly follow the regulations that came with payments under Medicare. Upon their departure the society gave the organization \$7,000 in funds and supplies and would continue to aid in the Visiting Nurses Association's efforts. This worried some members of the society who thought the society may lose part of its identity and drive but this proved to be a false concern as there are always people who are in need.

Some of the Society's work after the end of the Visiting Nurse Society included giving financial support to

organizations such as local sports teams, camps and educational institutions- including the Williston-Northampton School founded by Emily Graves Willistons' father-in-law. In 1971 newly formed Cheer Committee would perform outreach, such as writing cards or calling those who found themselves confined and isolated from others in Easthampton. In 1974 the 'Meals on Wheels' program was added to the Helping Hand Society and twice a week hot meals were delivered to those who were housebound. The relief committee of the society was especially engaged during this time and were often busy with their twice yearly cheer and food baskets. These were the roughly 2000 baskets that were delivered to members of the community who were on the welfare list at Easter and Christmas time. Fundraising events during this time included in 1978 The Ways and Means Committee sponsoring several theater parties at the Williston-Northampton school which made a profit of \$1,218 and in 1981 monthly card parties were held monthly at the Helping Hand House.

From the early 70's into the late 80's the organization generally found they had reduced membership because of how many wives were entering the workforce. Despite this, they still found ways to complete their projects and provide for the community. As the years progressed the service committee would become an increasingly large part of the Helping Hand Society. Their biggest undertaking was during Christmas time. They would send out the previously mentioned Christmas baskets and would deliver toys to the children in the community along with winter gear and coupons for treats.

1982 the Visiting Nurses Association asked the Helping Hand Society if they could buy the house from the society because of their increased need for space. There was a meeting held between the association and advisors of the society Ary Brewer, Roy Ekengren and an attorney Roy Ekengren. Roy Ekengren felt that the society would seriously consider selling the house because of how much energy and resources went into repairing the house. Eventually the Visiting Nurses Association put their offer and hold and decided to relocate their headquarters entirely.

Two particularly popular projects in the society were the "May Day" baskets and Valentines Day baskets. In 1988, 387 Valentine Baskets were delivered to the elderly in Easthampton and in 1989 the Valentines day baskets became May Day Baskets. Since then over 600 gift bags with fruit or baskets with plants have been delivered to Elders in their homes or at nursing facilities. For many years the society held a big dinner for the elderly in September which eventually turned into a Valentine's day brunch where gift baskets are given out that include Valentines from local children are included.

In 2002 the society began to assist the Easthampton library with the books for babies project where books and bibs were delivered to new mothers in Easthampton. Eventually the program transitioned to sending postcards to mothers inviting them to the library to receive the gifts and visit the library. In 2006 the society started collecting gifts for retired soldiers in the Holyoke Soldiers home. Gifts are given along with a check to support Easthampton soldiers.

In 2007 the Helping Hand Society decided to sell the house after dealing with extensive maintenance costs for years. In 2007 the Williston Northampton School, which was founded by Samuel Williston, expressed a desire to buy the house for \$485,000 and while the society had contemplated and decided against it in years past, the cost of upkeep was becoming unreasonable. The membership voted 3:1 to sell the house and the sale was completed on December 21st, 2007. The contents of the house are given to the Kimball Auction House. Immediately after the house was sold the Society started meeting in the Williston Northampton Dodge School room.

In 2008 the Society re-organized the Service and Outreach Committees into three committees based on population served: Children and schools, Elderly, and community. In 2008 the society also started a winter coat drive. In 2010 after the Easthampton After-School program had their budget cut by \$3,000 the Helping Hand Society covered the loss of these funds.

Throughout the 2010s the Helping Hand Society worked on projects like Books for Babies, the Holiday project in collaboration with Easthampton, Veterans Day Gifts, May Day fruit and flower baskets. Community dinners, school snacks, and valentines Brunches

In May 2020 the group started meeting over Zoom because of the COVID-19 Pandemic and with this, they often discussed changes in plans and finances that were a result of this global event and what they can do to aid the community during this time. From 2020 into 2021 the group met over Zoom and tried to think of ways to continue aiding their community, as many of their previous projects required in-person interaction. The Society began meeting in person again in June 2021.

There is email correspondence regarding the donation of this collection started in 2022 until the materials were eventually collected in 2024.

The work of the Helping Hand Society consists of regularly scheduled community outreach efforts as well as spontaneous assistance to individuals in need. While the membership numbers and committees have changed over the years the core message of the society remains: They are here to lend a helping hand to the residents of Easthampton in whatever manner they can.

Scope of collection

The Helping Hand Society Records documents the history of the society through a variety of material that includes administrative reports, meeting minutes, and iterations of the society's by-laws over the years, as well as early material made by the society in the 1880s and 1890s. Reports and minutes cover such topics as the society's achievements and goals, the responsibilities of the committees, and act as a resource for seeing how the Helping Hand Society has changed over the years. Historical documents include the old sign from the Helping Hand House, documents of incorporation, and correspondence and wills pertaining to benefactors to the society. There are also scrapbooks, photographs, and negatives which focus on the more modern era of the society.

Series descriptions

[Series 1. Administrative](#)

1898-2024

1.5 boxes

This series contains documents that pertain to the general management of The Helping Hand Society. This includes Meeting Minutes (1904-2024) for the Helping Hand Society which detail the reports of the society's activities at each meeting. Normally they consist of report-outs from each committee, the type and size of which vary over the years, and discussion of upcoming or important Helping Hand Society projects and events. In some cases, documents on the meeting's contents are included in the minutes. Correspondence is interfiled with the minutes between 1999-2011.

Annual Reports (1912-2024) include separately submitted report-outs from each committee as well as the treasurer and president that describe their achievements from the past year and goals for the upcoming year. Annual Report Pamphlets (1910-1934) include a brief history of the society and summarize each annual report—they were created to distribute to the public to raise awareness for the society. Annual Reports and Meeting Minutes from 1914 to 1999 were organized together though the same documents were not in other portions of the collection.

This series additionally includes materials relating to the internal rules and regulations of the Helping Hand Society, including By-Laws, Constitutions, and Amendments (1898-2008). The by-laws include information about the society throughout the years like qualifications for membership, maximum member number, meeting locations and times, membership fees, voting procedures, administrative duties, and committee duties.

Correspondence between 1955 and 2024 is in this series and mostly includes typed letters and printed-out emails, including Correspondence: Emails (2022-2024) which contains the communication for the donation of the collection itself.

Other items in this series include important documents relating the charitable standing through Foundation Status (1913, 1926, 1970), Helping Hand Society Program, WHMP (1987, 1994) which contain interviews about the society's history and upcoming events—both including Gloria Schmitter a member who received several accolades—and various instructional material such as policies, guidelines and agreements of differing types.

[Series 2.](#)

1888-2012

6.5 boxes

This series contains materials that incorporate historical information that is about or has historical importance to the Helping Hand Society. Historical Documents (1912-1987) are a compilation of various historical ephemera including photographs, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, paper hand-outs, and materials of that sort produced by or related to the Helping Hand Society throughout the 20th century. The Historical Documents are fashioned similarly to the Scrapbooks (1984-2001) which are collections of different papers from the society though the scrapbooks are slightly more modern and contain a higher volume of the poems that the society would create for gift baskets that they would distribute during various holidays.

There are various ranges in genre and types of written informatory documents on the Helping Hand Society. Brochures, Booklets, and Pamphlets (1973-1999, 2008) are created by the society to advertise the various services they provide the community. Newspaper Articles (1998-2001), usually from the Hampshire Gazette, cover public charity events enacted by the Helping Hand Society. History of the Helping Hand Society (1987, 2012) contains succinct yet informative narratives of the History of the society from just before its formation in 1887 until 1987 and 2012 respectively.

The series also contains materials regarding the house and its acquisition through Land and Property Documents (1917-1990). These include the documents that belonged to the original judge who owned the house, Judge Edwards (who also helped the society become incorporated), the purchasing documents from

William F. Pitcher, and the eventual transfer of the house to the Helping Hand Society. It also includes later property line dispute documents and information regarding the later tenants. A physical part of the house itself is included through the Helping Hand Society House Sign (1919).

There are quite a few journals that record the financial ins and outs of society throughout the late 1800s up to the late 1960s including Collections Journal (1923-1925), Expense Tracking Journals (1923-1925), (1917-1925), (1942-1952), (1953-1959) and Treasurers books (1886-1909). There is deterioration in Expense Tracking Journal (1917-1925) as well as Treasurer Book Y.L.M.S (1896-1904) and Treasurer's Book (1909-1914) as the hardcover is starting to crumble. They are stored separately from other materials and should be handled independently from other papers to avoid staining.

There are photo albums (1987-2011) that contain mostly pictures of the Helping Hand Society members at gatherings and special events, as well as loose Photographs (1912-2018) which includes a photo of William F. Pitcher, the man who bought and endowed the Helping Hand House.

The series also includes Records (1888-1904) which are early accounts from the society and their meeting notes and project plans and the original copy of the incorporation document: framed (05-24-1913.)

Inventory

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Annual reports
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undated

Box 6

The beans were used generally for the voting process of the society— White: Yes, Black: No. More recently it was used in the voting process when the society was deciding weather or not to sell The Helping Hand House.

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Gift of Helping Hand Society, 2024.

Processing Information

Processed by Elena Greco, 2024.

Language:

English

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Search terms

Subjects

- Charities--Massachusetts--Easthampton--History--Sources
- Social service--Massachusetts--Easthampton
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Contributors

- Helping Hand Society [main entry]
- Helping Hand Society (Easthampton, Mass.)

Genres and formats

- Annual reports
- Minutes (administrative records)
- Photographs
- Scrapbooks

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