

∞ The Ward M. Canaday Center ∞
for Special Collections
The University of Toledo

Finding Aid

➤ **Sunset House Records, 1871-1988** ◀

MSS-125

Size: 4.25 linear feet

Provenance: Received from Sunset House administrator, Vicky Bartlett

Access: open

Collection Summary: Collection contains administrative records, financial records, ephemera, and memorabilia; including annual reports, treasurers reports, membership and admission committee reports, a visitor's register, board minutes, correspondence, cash books, financial ledgers, accountants reports, financial statements, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, photographs, and secondary and primary source histories of the institution and residents, proclamations, and slides.

Subjects: [Civic Interests](#), [Social Welfare](#)

Related Collections: YWCA Papers, Toledo-Lucas County Public Library

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Completed by: Janice Colwell, December 1997; last updated: July 2014

**Sunset House
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Historical Sketch

The early history of Sunset House is closely correlated with that of Toledo's Women's Christian Association (WCA), founded in 1870 and incorporated in 1891 as a branch of the national YWCA. The Toledo Women's Christian Association expanded rapidly, attracting over 200 women members in its first year. According to the WCA's first president, Harriet M. Barlow's own account, during the organization's initial meetings, three homeless elderly women "with sorrowful stories" approached her asking assistance. After attempts to place one woman in her own home, and two in boarding homes Barlow, the wife of a prosperous Toledo merchant, together with the Association determined that "something must be done." After visiting and inquiring into boarding homes in Cleveland and Cincinnati, progressive-minded Toledo women under the auspices of the WCA, founded the organization successively named The Home for Friendless Women, The Old Ladies Home, then Sunset House.

Press reports of the newly formed organization expressed sentimentality toward the elderly similar to that revealed in Victorian reform efforts directed toward mothers and orphans. *Blade* newspaper accounts, such as that depicting a picture of grim homeless elderly women and asking, "Where will these woman go when twilight falls?", produced a large amount of public sympathy and support. The Home for Friendless Women began in five rooms on Locust Street rented with funds from the WCA, one ill lady and a matron. As the Home consumed an inordinate share of its energies and resources, the WCA soon decided that it should become a separate entity. Incorporated in 1872, Harriet Barlow, so instrumental in Sunset House's formation, also became the organization's first president.

The early organization gained funds through membership subscriptions, providing plays and various community entertainments, bequests and, in particular, an annual party that became a major event in Toledo's social season. Soon outgrowing its facilities, the organization repaid its debt to the WCA and brought the Bissell Home on Woodruff Avenue, near LaGrange Street.

The late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century history of the Home provides insights into Toledo's rapid growth and the desire to create new community structures within an urban setting. In its early years, the organization took in "friendless" women of all types--young and old, sick and well, unwed mothers and children, transients as well as permanent residents. However, with increasing applications and the formation of City Hospital and The Retreat--a home for unwed mothers, by the late 1880's the Home began to concentrate on the relatively healthy elderly woman, seen to be most in keeping with its original mission.

In 1888, by means of a large bequest by Toledo brewer W.J. Findlay, the organization acquired and renovated the expansive home at the corner of Collingwood and Central Avenues that would be its home for the next forty years. The location, now the site of the Kent Branch of the Toledo-Lucas County Library, was believed to be just far away from the central city to provide residents a pure and serene environment. With many of Toledo's wealthiest citizens on its Board of Directors and all-male advisory board, the building bore more resemblance to a sprawling mansion than a charitable institution. In keeping with its new focus on elderly women, the organization formally

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changed its name to “The Old Ladies Home” in 1889. Advertised as a place of “rest for the weary,” by the 1890’s the Home had also gained a reputation for gentility.

By 1928, growth of the Old Ladies Home and the deterioration of existing facilities, again forced consideration of a new building. Ten acres of land were purchased at 4020 Indian Rd., an expanding residential portion of the city bordering the village of Ottawa Hills. By the 1930’s the Home operated almost entirely upon its long-sought after endowment fund achieved in 1920 as the result of bequests and donations, as well as moneys received from the Community Chest. Contributions from a generous public, including substantial funds from the late manufacturer and industrialist Edward Libbey, Mrs. Clarence Brown and Arthur Secor, enabled completion of a four-story manor-style building on the Indian Road site as home for fifty women.

During the 1970’s the organization’s name was formally changed to “Sunset House,” the name by which it had been informally known by residents for some time. Modern expansion of its facilities by a one-story annex built in 1965 and several other additions has enabled the institution to house more residents. Increased nursing staff has likewise enabled accommodation of sick as well as healthy women. Presently there are no entrance requirements for the Home’s women residents.

Sunset House extended its influence beyond its walls in 1988, when its active auxiliary organization initiated “Project Keep,” a program which delivers meals to homebound elderly within a three-mile radius. Throughout its history, the Home has profited from the volunteer contributions of numerous lay individuals and many professionals. In 1971 Sunset House celebrated its 100th anniversary, and in 1996 its 125th. In the 1990’s the institution continues to provide an intimate, spacious environment to approximately 100 women residents. The non-profit organization continues to reflect its unique history and evolution as an unusual experiment in women’s urban reform.

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Scope and Content Note

The records of Sunset House, Toledo, Ohio, 1871-1996, are comprised of administrative records, financial records, ephemera and memorabilia, including annual reports, treasurers reports, membership and admission committee reports, a visitor's register, board minutes, correspondence, cash books, financial ledgers, accountants reports, financial statements, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, photographs, secondary and primary source histories of the institution and residents, proclamations and slides. The first twenty-five years of the organization are well documented; subsequent periods to a lesser extent.

The collection is divided into three primary series and arranged alphabetically, then chronologically. (S1) Administrative Records, pertains to the general matters of running the Home as taken up by its chief administrator, board of directors, and various administrative committees. It contains numerous general administrative and committee reports, board minutes, statements of policy, by-laws, constitutions, and correspondence related to administrative matters, as well as two annual reports of the Women's Christian Association (WCA). (S2) Financial Records, contains more specific information related to financial matters including resident ("inmate") accounts, bank records of the home, bequests and donations, bills, lists of donors, and miscellaneous receipts, and contains its own correspondence section on finance-related issues. (S3) Ephemera/Memorabilia contains photographs, slides, scrapbooks, invitations, newspaper clippings, and proclamations, which reflect the more definable, material aspects of the institution's history.

Within each series, the collection is divided into three sub-series, arranged alphabetically, then chronologically. "The Home for Friendless Women" sub-series represents the span of years 1871-1888; "The Old Ladies Home," 1889-1929; and "Sunset House," 1930-1996. These name changes reflect, although somewhat imperfectly, the physical location of the organization, as well as alterations in its services and mission. Consequently, this arrangement appears most useful and appropriate. Documents that span years overlapping the chronology of the sub-series arrangement are placed according to their beginning dates.

**Sunset House
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Series List

- S1 Administrative Records**
1871-1996, .8 linear feet
Arranged chronologically and alphabetically
Included in this series are various administrative reports, including annual reports, treasurers' reports, and reports of the membership and admissions committees. Two annual reports of the Women's Christian Organization (WCA), the institution's formative precursor organization, are also included. A visitor's register, correspondence related to administrative matters, statements of admission policy, by-laws, and constitutions are also represented in this series.
- S2 Financial Records**
ca. 1870's-1962, 1.3 linear feet
Arranged chronologically and alphabetically.
Materials in this series include cash books, cash ledgers, journals, accountant's reports, financial statements, bills, donor lists, inmate account and bank records, bequest and finance-related correspondence.
- S3 Ephemera/Memorabilia**
ca. 1870's-1996, 2.6 linear feet
Arranged chronologically and alphabetically.
The Ephemera/Memorabilia series consists of newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, party invitations, various primary and secondary source histories of residents and the Home itself, proclamations, photographs and slides of the three principal buildings of the institution, and of the staff, its volunteers and residents.

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Folder List

Box Folder Item Description

S1. Administrative Records

Home for Friendless Women

1	1	1st Annual Report, 1873
	2	2nd Annual Report, 1874
	3	3rd Annual Report, 1875
	4	4th Annual Report, 1876
	5	5th Annual Report, 1877
	6	6th Annual Report, 1878
	7	7th Annual Report, 1879
	8	8th Annual Report, 1880
	9	9th Annual Report, 1881
	10	10th Annual Report, 1882
	11	11th Annual Report, 1883
	12	12th Annual Report, 1884
	13	13th Annual Report, 1885
	14	14th Annual Report, 1886
	15	15th Annual Report, 1887
	16	Board Minutes, May 1871-December 1903
	17	Board Minutes, April 1882-March 1893
	18	Correspondence, 1870's
	19	Correspondence, 1880's
	20	Donations to the Building Fund, 1873-1874
	21	"No. of Persons in the Home," 1876
	22	"Persons Admitted to the Home," 1875
	23	Secretary's Annual Report, (ca. 1874)
	24	Visitor's Register, June 1878-June 1897
	25	Women's Christian Association, 1st Annual Report, 1871
	26	Women's Christian Association, 2nd Annual Report, 1872

Old Ladies Home

	27	16th Annual Report, 1889
	28	17th Annual Report, 1890
	29	18th Annual Report, 1891
	30	19th Annual Report, 1892
	31	23rd Annual Report, 1896
	32	26th Annual Report, 1899
	33	27th Annual Report, 1900
	34	29th Annual Report, 1902
	35	37th Annual Report, 1910
	36	47th Annual Report, 1920

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- 37 Constitution and By-Laws, (n.d.)
- 38 Constitution, Toledo Council of Social Agencies (ca. 1920)
- 39 Correspondence, 1903
- 40 Correspondence, The Toledo Community Chest, 1920
- 41 Correspondence, Toledo War Chest, 1918
- 42 Pay Roll, Old Ladies Home, December 1, 1935
- 43 Register for the Inmates of the Home, 1887-1943
- 44 Rules for Admission (n.d.)
- 45 Publication, "A Happy Day," (n.d.)
- 46 Summary of the Board of Managers Meeting, October, 1929
- 47 Treasurer's Annual Reports, 1893-1924

Sunset House

- 48 58th Annual Report, 1931
- 49 94th Annual Presidents Report
- 50 Centennial Report, 1971
- 51 Correspondence, 1930's
- 52 Correspondence, 1950's
- 53 Correspondence, 1970's
- 54 Correspondence, 1996
- 55 Fee Information, 1984
- 56 Newsletters, "Sunset Scenes," 1986-1988
- 57 Publications, Brochures, (n.d.)
- 58 Treasurer's Annual Report, 1931

S2. Financial Records

Home For Friendless Women

- 59 Bank Accounts with Toledo Savings, Ketchum, and Union Savings
- 60 Ledger, January 1800-January 1889
- 61 Miscellaneous Receipts, 1870's
- 62 Tax Statements and Receipts, 1873-1888

Old Ladies Home

- 63 Accountants' Reports, 1919-1927
- 64 Building Fund, List of Contributors, November 1928
- 65 Building Fund, Receipts, Disbursements & List of Contributors,
1929
- 66 Cash Accounts Ledger, December 1902-June 1909
- 67 Cash Accounts Ledger, June 1908-June 1909

- 2 1 Cash Book, January 1891-August 1893
- 2 Cash Book, May 1891-May 1897
- 3 Cash Book, December 1895-December 1899
- 4 Cash Book, March 1888-July 1893
- 5 Cash Book, August 1893-May 1902
- 6 Cash Book, June 1896-January 1901

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- 7 Cash Book, December 1899-June 1902
- 8 Cash Book, February 1901-December 1907
- 9 Cash Book, January 1908-May 1915
Cash Journal, 1923-1934-OVERSIZED addition to Box 5
- 10 Financial Statements of the Old Ladies Home, 1926-1930
(OVERSIZED- Removed to Box 5, Folder 1)
- 11 Furnishing Fund, Receipts & Disbursements, Contributors List,
1929
- 12 Inmate Account Book, 1902-1908
- 13 Miscellaneous Receipts, 1890's
- 14 Miscellaneous Receipts, 1920's
- 15 Journal, 1928-1937
- 16 Ledger, 1928-1950's
- 17 Real Estate, Financial Bequests, 1902-1927
- 18 Report of the Building Fund, 1929-1931
- 19 Tax Statements and Receipts, 1889-1927

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- Cash Journal, 1935-1962-OVERSIZED addition to Box 5
- 20 Correspondence, ca. 1940's-1970's
- 21 Journal of Bills, August 1937-June 1945
- 22 Journal of Bills, July 1945-August 1961
- 23 Miscellaneous Receipts, 1930's
- 24 Real Estate Bequests, 1940's-1960's

S3. Ephemera/Memorabilia

Home For Friendless Women

- 3 1 Annual Party Invitations, 1886
- 2 Newspaper Clippings, 1870's
- 3 Newspaper Clippings, 1880's
- 4 Photographs, Harriet Barlow, Founder (n.d.)
- 5 Photographs, Home on Woodruff Ave., near LaGrange (n.d.)
- 6 Photographs, Residents, 1909

Old Ladies Home

- 7 Newspaper Clippings, 1890's
- 8 Newspaper Clippings, 1910's
- 9 Newspaper Clippings, 1920's
- 10 Newspaper Clippings, Building Fund, 1929
- 11 Photographs, Home on Collingwood near Central Ave. (n.d.)

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- 12 Newspaper Clippings, 1930's
- 13 Newspaper Clippings, 1940's
- 14 Newspaper Clippings, 1950's
- 15 Newspaper Clippings, 1960's
- 16 Newspaper Clippings, 1970's

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- 17 "Project Keep"--Newspaper Clippings and Brochure
- 18 Photographs, Buildings and Grounds, (n.d.)
(1 OVERSIZED photo moved to Box 5, Folder 2)
- 19 Photographs of Residents
- 20 Photographs of Staff and Volunteers
- 21 Photographs of Unknown Persons
- 22 Previous Histories/Chronicles of Events
Proclamations from Government Officials
(OVERSIZED, moved to Box 5, Folder 3)
- 23 Programs from Residents' Annual Tea, October 1976

- 4 1 Scrapbook, Vol. 1, 1930-1953
- 2 Scrapbook, Vol. 2, 1951-1958
- 3 Slides (3 boxes)
- 4 Slides (3 boxes)

- 5 *Contains oversized materials as described above.*