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The Worthington
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An Article on "Dependent Children Aid" Written by Louis Ashland Brown
Published in the Newspaper on January 28, 1959

"The following is a copy of an indenture taken from the historical files of Miss Elsie V. Bartlett of Worthington:

This Indenture Witnesseth that Jonathan Brewster, Jonathan Woodbridge and Nathan Hazen, selectmen and overseers of the poor of the town of Worthington in the County of Hampshire by virtue of a law of the Commonwealth in such cases made and provided--and with the assent of two of the Justices of the Peace for said County have placed--and by these presents do place and bind out as an apprentice a poor child named Terza Jones, daughter of Cyrus Jones late resident in Worthington who is not able to support or maintain her--with Thoram Billings of Partridgefield (Peru) in the County of Hampshire (now in Berkshire County), yeoman, the said Terza, after the manner of an apprentice, to dwell with and serve the said Thoram and his wife from the day of the date hereof until the tenth day of October which will be in the year of our Lord One thousand eight hundred and sixteen when if the said apprentice should be living she will be eighteen years of age--during all which time or term the said apprentice, her said master and mistress well and faithfully shall serve, their trusts keep, and their lawful commands everywhere readily obey.

She shall do no damage to her said master or mistress nor willingly suffer any to be done by others, and if any to her knowledge be intended, she shall give her said master reasonable notice thereof. She shall not waste the goods of her said master at cards, dice, or any unlawful games she shall not play. Fornication she shall not commit, nor matrimony contract during the said term. Taverns, ale houses or places of gaming she shall not haunt or frequent.

From the service of her said master and mistress she shall not absent herself, but in all things and at all times she shall carry and behave herself as a good and faithful apprentice ought during the whole term.

And the said Thoram Billings on his part--doth promise and agree to teach and instruct the said apprentice or cause her to be taught and instructed in the art or business of housekeeping, spinning, sewing, knitting and common weaving, by the best way and means he can--and also to teach and instruct the said apprentice or cause her to be taught and instructed to read and write unless the said apprentice is unable to learn. And shall well and truly find and provide for the said apprentice good and sufficient meat, drink, clothing, lodging, and other articles fir and convenient for such an apprentice during the term--and at the expiration thereof shall give unto the said apprentice two suits of wearing apparel, one suitable for Lord's Days and the other suitable for working days.

In testimony whereof the said parties have hereunto interchangeably puts their hands and seals this sixth day of January in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and four."

Signed by the three aforementioned selectmen who were also the overseers of the poor and by Thoram Billings, who made his mark since he could not write his name.

This type of aid to dependent children was deemed wise and proper and was common practice in the early days of this town as well as many others. Later in the 19th century in this town, reports like the following were made in the annual town reports:

"Our paupers remain the same as last year with some little addition. Fordyce Patch who is supported at the insane hospital at Northampton, Ben Jacobs at Mr. J. M. Clapp's; and Halibut Peacham and wife

who have been boarded in town, will all have to be supported by the town as long as they live, and likewise Betty Custis who is boarded at the home of her brother, John Custis. The wife of Flag Bernard, whom it is rendered necessary to provide for is improving and we hope she may some time be able to take care of herself. We have reduced her expenses during the past year by 25% and hope for a still further reduction soon.

A new pauper whom we have had to look after this winter is the wife of Lorenzo Potts, son of John B. Potts who formerly lived at Worthington Corners. She was taken to the Danvers hospital by the board of State Charities who kindly asked us to pay the bill which we could find no way to get rid of. We have the correspondence in this case and can make it public if desired. Her insanity was caused by the demon of this world--Rum. The last we heard early this month she was nearly ready to go home but we may expect further trouble from that family as there are four children under twelve and they are very poor.

Mr. L. J. Power was taken to the insane hospital at Northampton under a law for the relief of poor soldiers. Whether it will be necessary for him to remain in the hospital is a matter to be decided. We are of the opinion that could the right man be persuaded to take the appointment of guardian over him and what little property he has, he might be supported at less expense to the town."

These cases were reported on in the town report of 1879 when the town appropriation for "paupers" was \$700. Forty years later, in the town report of 1919, a degree of refinement had been reached and the report of the Overseers of the Poor simply stated expenditures of \$86.43 used out of an appropriation of \$100. This appears to have been a period of postwar prosperity.

Still 40 years later, in the year, 1959, a figure of approximately \$10,000 will be appropriated to cover the expenses of old age assistance, public welfare, and aid to dependent children in the town of Worthington, with every penny of it spent in strict confidence. Persons who benefit will be receiving only what is justly theirs, according to modern day thinking.