Scottish immigrant Isabella Marshall Graham established a successful school in 1794. It was a society for poor widows and their small children. Her daughter and son-in-law joined her cause for supporting the children. Many of the mothers died and the children were left alone in the care of the orphanage. Orphans in similar situations on the streets would join ragged packs to survive, they would steal or beg, as a sense of belonging and acceptance. The Asylum was open for 3 decades. 765 children had passed through the doors. The Asylum eventually became too small and was relocated. The new Asylum, after it was rebuilt, cared up to 200 children at a time.

The Orphan Asylum Society was extremely religious. There was an alliance with the St. Thomas Episcopal Church. Much of the income came from the St. Thomas Church. Elizabeth Hamilton was widowed of Alexander Hamilton. Thus the Hamilton Family worked within the asylum. The Board of Trustees contained members such as J.P Van Horne, Theodore Roosevelt, and Theodore Kane. There was a lot of care for the asylum especially in its last decades of existence.

The American Civil war began in 1861. Many of the boys in the Orphanage left to serve in the army. Fathers would leave their families to serve their country in the Civil War. Many men died in the Civil War leaving their family widowed leading to homelessness and poverty. After the Civil War, April 1st 1865, more orphans entered the orphanage. Most children entering the orphanage showed the negative impact of the war.