**Economic History**

- The Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum Association received funding from a number of churches and religious entities as well as social groups and elite members of society, e.g. the Emerald Association of Brooklyn. Rarely did one find members of the working class making great donations, but some still gave what little they could.

- The funds procured were said to have been used to build and maintain the orphanages and their guests.

- The government, though heavily vested in child survival, maintenance and reform at the time, made no monetary contributions to the association.

- Spanish merchant Peter Harmony donated 25,000 dollars to the orphanage on 51st street and Madison Avenue. In 1875, the charity collected 6,000 dollars to help the orphanages.

**Political History**

- The Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum Society was headed by the Archdiocese of Brooklyn. Each orphanage that fell under this association’s umbrella was headed by a religious order, be they the Sisters of Charity, the Sisters of St. Joseph or the Franciscan Brothers. Each orphanage in turn had their own hierarchy.

- The orphanages and the association were strictly religious-based and had no notable affiliation with the government.

- The members of the society and most of its donors were from the social elites. They were Commissioners, such as Commissioner John J. Lynch, bank owners and well-to-do lawyers and doctors, as well as persons who simply had very “deep pockets.”

- As a result of recurring tragic fires within the orphanages, laws and codes were passed that required that orphanages be built to somewhat withstand fires.

**Social History**

- Archbishop John Hughes, of Irish nationality, who was the head of the Archdiocese of Brooklyn at the time of the formation of the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum Society, was the founder of the St. John’s Orphan Asylum.

- The nickname Daggar John was given to him in part for his aggressive nature and for his following the tradition wherein a bishop precedes his signature with a cross. His aggression spilled over into his rule of the orphanage in that the boys were reared and educated in a military-type fashion.

- The children were separated by gender and only made contact when attending events such as fundraisers, graduations, and social events, such as trips to Steeplechase Park.

- The children were educated based on gender. Females were taught to sew while males were taught to plough the land, and control and follow orders.

**General History**

The Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum Society of Brooklyn, incorporated in 1834, was founded to house and educate impoverished children and orphans in the then-village of Brooklyn, N.Y. Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Society operated two institutions in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn—St. Joseph’s Female Orphan Asylum on Willoughby Avenue and St. John’s Home on St. Mark’s Avenue—as well as St. Paul’s Industrial School on Congress and Clinton Streets in Cobble Hill and two extension sites of the St. John’s Home at Coney Island and Hicksville, N.Y.

Care of children was financed by society members and Catholic church donations; the homes and school were run by members of Catholic religious orders, such as the Sisters of Charity, the Sisters of St. Joseph, and the Franciscan Brothers. While the Society fell under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Brooklyn, established in 1853, it appears to have operated independently of other Diocesan charities until the mid-20th century.


**Material Culture & Cultural History Cont’d**

- 27 of an innumerable amount of, often lengthy, articles published by the New York Times were gathered. They feature orphans, tragedies and successes within the orphanages, and events held to honor and aid the orphanages headed by the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum Association. The public was kept abreast of all the happenings within the orphanages from the accounts of the Annual Emerald Balls to the hard luck stories of three little girls who found themselves abandoned within the walls of St. Joseph’s Female Orphan Asylum by a father who had promised, but failed to return. This avid interest in the lives of lowly orphans by the newspaper and in turn the public was a play to respectively inform and keep informed of the “who’s who” of the elites within the Catholic Society.

- Donors and heads within the association were also upstanding members [commissioners, notable lawyers and doctors] as well as the saints the newspapers portrayed them to be. Their implied “sainthood” only added to their ranks within a social-stratification based society.

- A census found gave proof of the numbers as well as the varieties of ethnicities/nationalities within the orphanages. Each would contain hundreds of children at a time, the majority of whom were of Irish birth or descent.

- Pictures of happy, well-dressed and relatively “round” children were published in newspapers and magazines, showcasing the good works of the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum Association and their generous donors. These pictured showed, however, only the surface. Accounts given by the children themselves showed that they were mistreated and made to lead strict army-like lives.

- The orphan asylums, once built, inadvertently altered the face of communities in with they were constructed. The pictures gathered show mansions built around and grand carriages and buggies being pulled past the elegantly built structures of the orphanages.