

Indiana's Magdalene Laundry

By Christina Kovats

The Indiana Women's Prison (IWP), formerly known as the Indiana Reformatory Institution for Women and Girls, is considered by historians to be the first separate state prison for women in the United States.¹ However, during a research project that incarcerated scholars at the prison started five years ago,² we were astonished to discover that there was already an existing prison in Indianapolis when the Reformatory opened. This paper takes an in-depth look at that earlier institution.

In my research, I have been concerned with three questions. First, how did a private Catholic prison for women get started in a state and time known for anti-Catholicism? Second, how was the institution run and what did life look like for the women inside? Third, why have these institutions been ignored by historians for so long?

Background

We started our project with interest in researching and writing the story of our prisons' establishment and early years. During this research one of my colleagues, Michelle Jones,

¹ See, for example, Freedman, Estelle. *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830 – 1930*. Ann Arbor: University Press, 2000, and Nicole Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control*. 2nd Edition. New Brunswick: Northeastern University Press, 1990, 1997.

²For highlights of incarcerated scholars working on the Indiana Women's Prison History Project, see: Michelle Jones, "Women's Prison History: The Undiscovered Country." *Perspectives on History*, Magazine of the American Historical Association, February, 2015. <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/february-2015/womens-prison-history>; Kimberly Baldwin, "Counterfeit Decency: Charity as exploitation in the Creation of Women's Reformatories." Presented at the annual conference of the American Historical Association, January 7, 2016; Anastazia Schmid, "Sexual Conquest and 19th Century Women's Prisons." Presented at the annual conference of the American Historical Association, January 7, 2016; Michelle Jones, "Failing the Fallen: Sexual and Gendered Violence on Incarcerated Women in the Gilded Age," presented at the annual conference of the American Historical Association, Atlanta, Georgia: January 7, 2016.

realized that no women were incarcerated for prostitution or sex offenses during the prison's first quarter century. Using the institution's original registries, she had begun to do a breakdown of the crimes for which the women had been convicted. She could not understand how there were no women at the Reformatory during its first years that had been charged with the all-too-common crime of prostitution. Through our research we had learned of the substantial problem of prostitution and sex offenses in Indianapolis during the 1860s. W. R. Holloway, a contemporary chronicler of the city, provides a vivid description of the "inundation of prostitutes" throughout that period:

They flaunted their gay shame in every public place. They crowded decency, in its own defense, out of sight. Their bagnios polluted every street. The military camps were not always, with all the vigilance of sentries and rigidity of discipline, safe from their noisome intrusion. The jail was nightly filled with them and their drunken victims. And the remuneration of their vice was so ample and constant that a fine was a trifle. Even if it could not be paid, the alternative of a few days' confinement only restored them in better health, with stronger allurements and appetites to their occupation.³

Our first major clue came from a 1967 *Terre Haute Tribune* article, provided by our ever-helpful friends from the Indiana State Library. The article mentioned that the Sisters of the Good Shepherd were leaving Indiana after coming to "Indianapolis in 1873 to operate a correctional institution for women prisoners."⁴ Yet, we knew from the institution's annual reports⁵ that there were no Catholic nuns working in the facility during the 19th century. In fact, we had reason to believe that Catholics were not welcome as employees at all. Further searching led to the discovery of a second prison for women in Indianapolis known as the

³ William Robeson Holloway, *Indianapolis: A Historical and Statistical Sketch of the Railroad City, A Chronicle of Its Social, Municipal, Commercial and Manufacturing Progress, with Full Statistical Tables*. Indianapolis Journal Print; 1870, p. 125.

⁴ "Sisters to Close Home for Girls, *Terre Haute Tribune*, July 19, 1967 p 12.

⁵ Annual Reports of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory Institution for Women and Girls.

House of the Good Shepherd, popularly known as “Magdalene Laundries.”⁶ Moreover, this “correctional institution for women prisoners” opened *before* the Reformatory.⁷ Perhaps this was where our missing prostitutes were being held.

Michelle Jones and another incarcerated scholar, Lori Record, went on to write an award-winning article contradicting the idea that our prison was the first women’s prison in the United States and arguing that Houses of the Good Shepherd were indeed prisons masked as convents.⁸ Furthermore, they argued that they were much more numerous and important than state prisons for women in the 19th century.⁹

The Founding of the House of the Good Shepherd

The origin of the House of the Good Shepherd in Indianapolis tells us not only about women’s prisons, but also provides interesting insights into Catholic and Protestant relationships in post-bellum Indiana. The antebellum era saw growing antagonism towards

⁶ James M. Smith, *Ireland’s Magdalen Laundries and the Nation’s Architecture of Containment*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. p. 25. “The name adopted by the institutions was no accident, even if it proved curiously ironic. Influenced by the biblical figure of the prostitute, the name appropriates Mary Magdalene as a role model for repentance and spiritual regeneration. Mary Magdalene repented her sins in time to wash Christ’s feet and dry them with her hair before his crucifixion.”

⁷ The first Magdalene Laundry in the United States opened in Louisville Kentucky in 1843. The Magdalene Laundry in Indianapolis was the 15th established in the US, five months earlier than the Reformatory. United States Bureau of the Census. 1905: *Benevolent Institutions, 1904*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.

⁸ Michelle Jones and Lori Record. "Magdalene Laundries: The First Prisons for Women in the United States." *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences*. Vol. 17. 2014.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0WaPggKV2mkWXZY0JEUS1HQWc/view>. The article, which was awarded the George C. Roberts Award for best article published in the JIASS in 2014, argues that US Houses of the Good Shepherd, a.k.a. Magdalene Laundries, should be considered prisons because: 1) inmates were sentenced to them by courts, 2) they were stripped of identity including name and clothing, 3) they were involuntarily confined “often for years and sometimes for life,” 4) they were isolated from the outside world including mail and visitation; 5) the institutions were constructed like prisons with tall stone walls, barred windows, and cells, 6) used solitary confinement, 7) used the equivalent of prison trustees, 8) had “extreme regimentation and infantilization,” 9) used severe punishments; and 10) prisoners were stigmatized upon release.

⁹ By 1900 there were only three state prisons for women: Indiana, Massachusetts, and New York, whereas we have evidence that there were already 39 existing Magdalene Laundries in the United States, making these prisons very much overlooked and forgotten about. United States Bureau of the Census, 1905.

Catholics that manifested strongly in politics and social reform. The newly immigrated minority group settled into a predominately Protestant territory, which created an atmosphere of avoidance, hostility and resistance towards Catholics, especially Irish Catholics.¹⁰ Religion was a central part of life for many Hoosiers, not only spiritually but in a political sense as well, which created another field for polemics. The number of Catholics in Indiana surged during the mid-1800s, primarily Irish and German, but their overall numbers remained small, and they were often met by strong anti-Catholic sentiment. In the 1850 census, only sixty-three of the 2,032 churches in Indiana were those of Catholics.¹¹ Yet, by the 1860s there were already several orders of nuns in Indianapolis that were dedicated to the reform of women, especially fallen women.¹² Prominent among these orders were the Sisters of the Good Shepherd who, in addition to vows of chastity, charity and poverty, also vowed to “binding themselves to the labor for the conversion of fallen women and girls needing refuge from the temptations of the world.”¹³

The story of how Catholics and Protestants in Indianapolis competed and eventually cooperated to address the scourge of prostitution and a host of other problems begins with the smallpox epidemic of 1855. The panic resulting from the epidemic led to a demand for a city hospital. (See map 1 for the approximate location of each of the institutions discussed below.)¹⁴

The council “took a decisive stand for it, and lots were purchased and plans made for a building

¹⁰ James H. Madison, *The Indiana Way: A State History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. p. 185. Vincent N. Parrillo, *Strangers to These Shores*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997.

¹¹ James H. Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014, p 97.

¹² Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana In Transition: 1880 – 1920*, Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Historical Society, 1968, p. 466.

¹³ Cardinal, Elizabeth V. 2006. Untitled email written to unknown recipient, July 18. Retrieved June 14, 2014 (<http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/GOOD-SHEPHERD-HOMES/2006-07/113260852>).

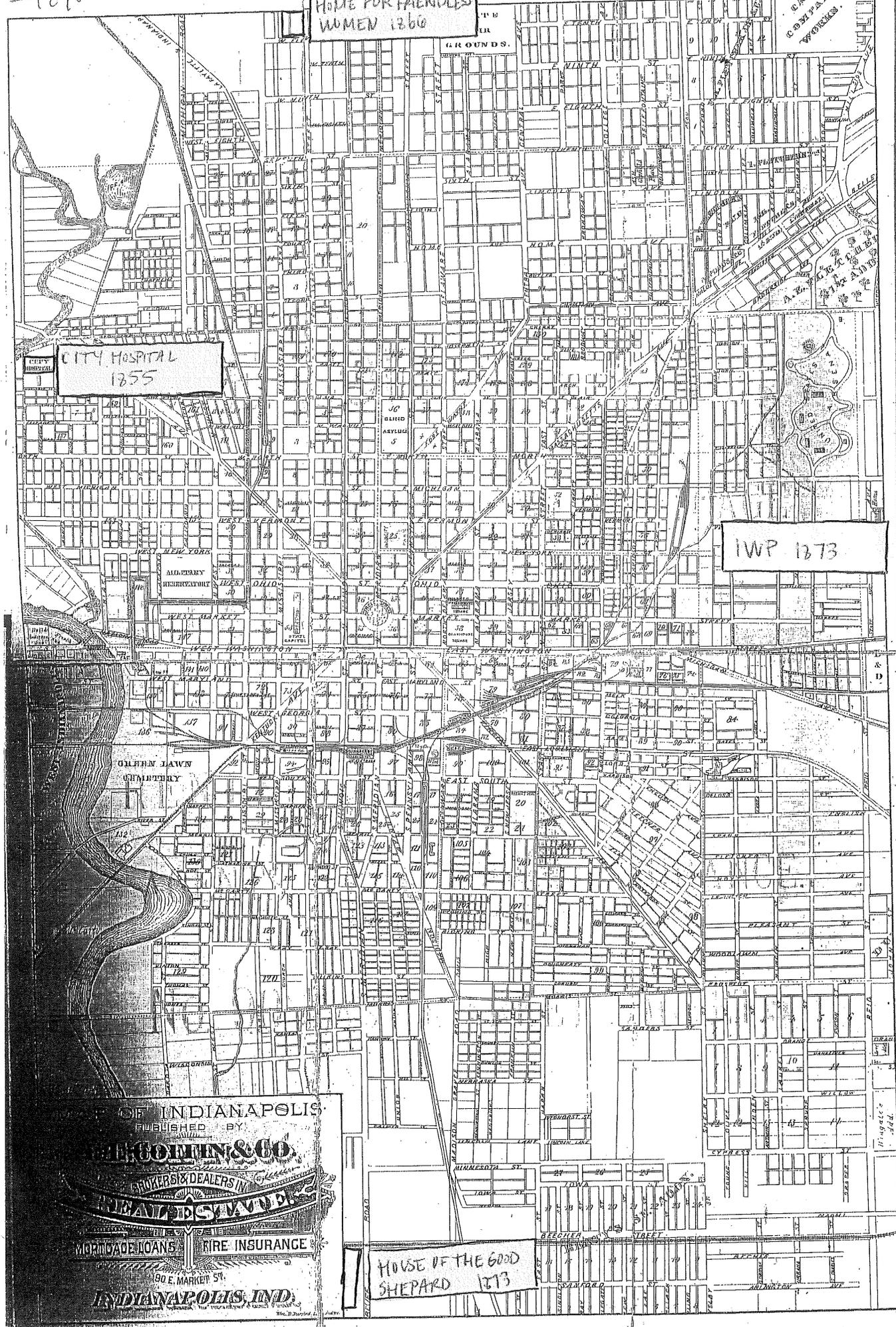
¹⁴ The map used was an insert in the front cover of W.R. Holloway’s history of Indianapolis referenced above. It is undated but presumably was made not long before the book was published in 1870.

HOME FOR FRIENDLESS WOMEN 1860

CITY HOSPITAL 1855

IWP 1873

HOUSE OF THE GOOD SHEPARD 1873



OF INDIANAPOLIS
 PUBLISHED BY
W. C. COMPTON & CO.
 BROKERS & DEALERS IN
REAL ESTATE
 MORTGAGE LOANS FIRE INSURANCE
 190 E. MARKET ST.
 INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

. . . . The hospital was begun, but with the subsidence of the alarm came indifference.” While the partially constructed hospital lay idle, “it had been occupied by prostitutes and thieves.”¹⁵ Thus the smallpox epidemic ironically fueled a second epidemic --prostitution – that had begun to run rampant within the city. Numerous ideas were floated about what to do with the abandoned building, including “a proposition from the Catholic Church to conduct it as a hospital [which] was defeated *because of denominational objections.*” (*emphasis added*)¹⁶

The hospital was completed on the eve of the Civil War “when the necessities of the troops compelled its restoration to its proper use.”¹⁷ Meanwhile, the growing problem of lewd women could no longer be ignored. In 1862, Mayor John Caven insisted this be addressed.¹⁸ His recommendation was a House of Refuge where prostitutes and “abandoned women could be confined alone and subjected to a discipline impossible to provide in a common jail.”¹⁹

Nothing happened until the following year when a wealthy businessman named Stoughton A. Fletcher Jr. proposed to donate seven acres of land to the city “if suitable buildings for a House of Refuge were put upon it.”²⁰ Fletcher, a member of one of Indianapolis’s leading families, contributed to the betterment of the city in a number of ways including promoting “the welfare and reformation of the unfortunate and criminal.”²¹ Although Fletcher was a Protestant, plans were made by an architect in “an effort to entrust the establishment to

¹⁵ Holloway, p. 104. The hospital was “in the extreme northwestern corner of the city, near the point where the Crawfordsville road crosses Fall Creek. There was then a vast, open, empty common between this location and the city, now almost entirely built up.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ David J Bodenhamer and Robert G Barrows, *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 1994, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 579-80.

¹⁹ Holloway, p.126.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Jacob Platt Dunn. *Greater Indianapolis: The History, the Industries, and the People of a City of Homes*. Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co.: 1910. Volume II: 648. Dunn notes that Fletcher later served as president of the Board of Trustees of the Indiana Reformatory Institution for women and Girls.

the Sisters of the Good Shepherd."²² There is some ambiguity whether Fletcher initially wanted the property to go to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd or to Protestants. Holloway suggests that the deed was given to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd initially whereas later articles state that the deed was given to the city for the Protestants to build the Home for Friendless Women.²³ In any case, the property and money donated were "to be used both as a refuge and reformatory school, and as a city prison for women."²⁴ Construction got as far as the basement being built when the contractor "broke down under the great advance in the cost of labor and materials, and abandoned it."²⁵

Catholic efforts to find suitable property for their proposed asylums quickly resumed after the end of the war. Reverend Aug. Bessonies, who was affiliated with both St. Peter and St. John's Catholic churches, played a leading role in Indianapolis advocating for various Catholic organizations and orders, including the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. In February 3, 1866, Rev. Bessonies approached the City Council and asked that the once-again abandoned City Hospital be given to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd so they could open a prison and that the House of Refuge, which remained unfinished on the old Stoughton Fletcher property, would be given to them after it was completed to be used as a reformatory school for prostitutes.²⁶

In Feb. 1866, Councilman Julius Grosvenor presented a petition from Fr. Bessonies, praying the City Council to place the city hospital building, at present unoccupied, in charge of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd to be used as a home of refuge, or female city prison, until a

²² Holloway, 126.

²³ See for example, "Council Proceedings," *Indianapolis Journal*, 3 August 1869.

²⁴ Holloway, 126.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 240.

building may be erected for that purpose.²⁷ Two months later, another member of the Council, Dr. P.H. Jameson, presented in favor of Fr. Bessonies' proposal, and encouraged others to support the "House for Abandoned Females."²⁸ The Sisters of the Good Shepherd pledged to finish construction by December of that year and have the building in full operation.

Councilman Dr. W. Clinton Thompson strongly opposed the idea and insisted that the Home should be used by the city. "If put to a vote of the city, it would be voted down by ten to one. The Home should be completed and used by the city, and not have our city prisoners farmed out to private corporations." To which Dr. Jameson retorted, "It matters little by whom the bad population of the city is taken care of, whether under the name of St. John, the Good Shepherd, John Wesley or John Knox."²⁹

One journalist coyly implied more by placing in brackets "[Here a very unpleasant passage took place between Doctors Thompson and Jameson, in which personalities were freely used]"³⁰ A following account was more explicit about the "most disgraceful occurrence that took place . . . immediately after the adjournment of the Council, which calls for the severest reprehension, for the honor of the city is compromised." According to this account:

Dr. Thompson walked to where Dr. Jameson was standing talking with the City Attorney, and addressed him. Dr. J supposed he was approaching to have the difficulty amicably adjusted, and such was our opinion, while standing within a yard of both gentlemen.

²⁷ "Council Proceedings," *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, Feb 3, 1866. The article goes on to mention that the proposal was referred to the Committee on Benevolence." It is unclear whether the Committee was a subset of the Council or whether it was a privately established committee created by the Indiana Quaker Yearly Meeting of Friends organized to devise, "a system for the reformation of Juvenile offenders and the improvement of prison discipline." Government officials named the committee members "trustees" and gave them permission to inspect prisons as requested. Charles Coffin was president of this committee for a time. However, the Quaker Committee on Benevolence was not formally constituted until 1867 (see Charles Richmond Henderson papers, folder 10, special collections research center, U. of Chicago library). [With thanks to Michelle Jones for this information.]

²⁸ "City Council," *Indianapolis Journal*, 17 April 1866.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Without any premonition, Dr. Thompson struck Dr. Jameson on the forehead, and both clinched. Jameson, although taken at a disadvantage, soon got his antagonist upon the knee, but they were soon separated by the City Marshal and his assistant. Both gentlemen indulged in the grossest abuse, and Dr. Jameson threw an inkstand at Dr. T., who attempted to retaliate by hurling one of the heavy arm chairs, but was prevented.³¹

In any case, Thompson was right about what citizens would think about the request. As Holloway dryly observed, the proposal “was a rather ‘strong pull’ in the opinion of the citizens and they subscribed \$6,000 to complete the House of Refuge and defeat the project of Mr. Bessonies.”³²

Catholics, of course, were not the only ones in Indiana eager to establish asylums in response to societal problems. During the 1840s and 1850s, asylums for the Deaf, Dumb, Blind, and Insane had been erected. In the 1860s, two prominent Quaker women, Sarah Smith and Rhoda Coffin, spearheaded the opening of two Homes for Friendless Women (one in Indianapolis headed by Sarah Smith; the other in Richmond under the influence of Rhoda Coffin), while Rhoda’s husband, Charles Coffin, successfully lobbied the state to open the House of Refuge for Boys in Plainfield (later known as the Indiana Boys School). Before the decade ended, the three of them succeeded in pressing the governor and legislature to open the new Reformatory Institution for Women and Girls, which Sarah and Rhoda led for its first decade.

Still, reasons for such opposition to the Catholic efforts are a bit hard to understand. The City wanted a prison and the Catholics were willing to provide just that. Was it all transpiring from religious differences? A few years later we get a clearer understanding of other reasons why resistance may have been so strong.

³¹ “The Council Difficulty,” *Indianapolis Journal*, 17 April 1866.

³² (Holloway, p104). Although Holloway does not make it clear, the House of Refugee to which he is referring was probably the institution in Plainfield, opened in 1866, that was later known as the Indiana Boys School.

The City Council once again took up the idea of a city prison in August of 1869.

Councilman John S. Newman noted that the city had donated money for the Protestant Home for Friendless women—an institution similar to the one being proposed by the Catholics.³³ Yet he further expressed his concern that “all Catholic institutions had refused the right of visitation to officials of the law.” Councilman Henry Gimber contested this by stating that if the city were to send prisoners to the House of the Good Shepherd that “they would have the right to visit and see how they were treated.”³⁴

Father Bessonies was asked to address the Council on this matter. His response was surprising to us. He stated that Sarah Smith, the aforementioned Quaker leader of the Home for Friendless Women and soon-to-be first superintendent of IWP had “applied to him to send these women to [the Houses of the Good Shepherd in] Cincinnati and Louisville, and that he had done so; but that he had been imposing on the institutions there.³⁵ Eventually, the following resolution was introduced:

Resolved, That the Mayor of the city of Indianapolis be directed to make a deed of conveyance to Stoughton A. Fletcher (the donor of the ground) of the seven acres of land of ground heretofore donated to the city for a Home for the Friendless, lying south of the city, on condition that he make a conveyance of the same to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, with the understanding that they construct, within five years, a building on the present location to be used as a home for friendless females, and that such deed of conveyance shall include all improvements made on such land.³⁶

A week later, Councilman Erie Locke asked if he could record his vote on the donation because he did not the week prior. He was permitted to do so and initially went against the Catholics. However, “he then moved a reconsideration of the vote, but was ruled out of order by the

³³ “Council Proceedings,” *Indianapolis Journal*, August 10, 1869

³⁴ “Council Proceedings,” *Indianapolis Journal* 3 Aug 1869.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

chair.”³⁷ Mr. William Weaver suggested reconsideration of the resolution to donate the old House to the Sisters. Initially the Chair decided that Mr. Weaver’s motion was out of order “until his name was called under the call of members.”³⁸

A re-vote did indeed take place that day. In several of the explanations, comments were made pertaining to their stance regarding Catholics. Councilman Thomas Cottrell explained his vote, proclaiming that “he did not care whether the Catholics or Protestants got it, he desired that the public should be benefitted.”³⁹ Mr. Gimber, who was in favor, referred to it as a “sectional” affair and pointed out that “certain members had been anxious to get rid of the lewd women who infested the city, but now that the Sisters had offered to take them and keep them in prison, they were opposed to it.”⁴⁰ Mr. Newman kept his vote the same as the week prior but included a statement about his concerns that no officers or Council would have access to enter the facility and therefore, would not know if “those who were there were kept by authority of law or against their will.”⁴¹ The vote to reconsider won; yet the concerns about visiting the prison proved prophetic.

The record goes oddly silent for the next three years. It was in February of 1873 when Rev. Bessonies wrote a letter to the *Indianapolis News* announcing that the Sisters of the Good Shepherd would be opening the prison that was built on the land donated by Stoughton Fletcher back in 1862.⁴² Six months later, Sarah Smith opened the Indiana Reformatory Institution for Women and Girls.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² Aug. Bessonies, V.G., Letter to the Editor, *Evening News*. February 25, 1873, p. 4

Rev. Bessonies' testimony that he had been called upon by Sarah Smith to send women to the Magdalene Laundries in other states before their respective prisons opened suggests at least a level of cooperation if not collaboration between them. Moreover, we know of at least one case, that of 9 year old Mary McColleff, in which the Reformatory released one of its charges to Fr. Bessonies to be taken to a Catholic institution.⁴³ Clearly the Catholics and Quakers shared a mission to "reform the fallen ones of their sex, and to protect the young from danger."⁴⁴ They may even have made an agreement between them pertaining to who got which prisoners, but that does not mean that the relationship between the Catholics and Protestant was one of high mutual regard.

Perhaps the best example of this was contained in a letter written in the 1890s by the third Superintendent of the Reformatory, Sarah F. Keely, to Ernest Bicknell, Secretary of the Indiana Board of State Charities, trying to explain and justify blatant discrimination against Catholics. A Mrs. Nora Gavin, had applied for a position of employment at the facility. During her interview, Supt. Keely asked what church Mrs. Gavin attended. Upon answering St. John's, Supt. Keely told her that she "feared she would not do at all meaning that being of that faith and form of worship she might not be willing to fall into our regular line of work, as we did not have enough Catholic girls to have separate classes for them." The would-be applicant "took great offense" and immediately went to the Sentinel (the opposition newspaper) and "reported us as A.P.A.s."⁴⁵

⁴³ Annual Report of 1874 of the Board of Managers of the Indiana Reformatory Institution for Women and Girls.

⁴⁴ Aug. Bessonies, V.G., Letter to the Editor, *Evening News*, February 25, 1873, p. 4

⁴⁵ Letter from Sarah F. Keely, superintendent, Indiana Reform School for Girls and Woman's Prison, to Ernest Bicknell, Secretary, Board of State Charities, Indianapolis, August 28 (no year given although by the respective positions held by Keely and Bicknell the letter was likely written in the mid-1890s). "A.P.A." no doubt refers to the American Protective Association, an anti-Catholic successor to the Know-Nothing Party.

Sisters, Inmates and Prisoners

Thus far I have provided a history of the founding of Indianapolis's House of the Good Shepherd, ways in which it is intertwined with that of the Reformatory, and what their histories tell us about relations between Catholics and Protestants in Indiana. Yet, we are not able to fully understand any prison—and that is what the House of the Good Shepherd was—unless we are able to understand the people in it. Fortunately, we were able to gain access to important documents that allow us to take a more in depth look: the US census from 1880 and 1900, personal stories, and accounts of Magdalene Laundry survivors.

Unlike the Indiana Reformatory Institution for Women and Girls, we did not have access to the registries of the House of the Good Shepherd.⁴⁶ However, we were able to obtain scans of the U.S. census of 1880 and 1900, which we digitized.

The 1880 census contained limited information, yet we were able to draw a few interesting details from the data. At the time the census was complete, the prison had been opened for seven years and the population was rather small. There were only 52 people documented in the institution and they were separated into three categories: sisters, prisoners, and inmates.

The Sisters were all named after saints. A majority of the twelve Sisters were not born in America. Seven of them were native to Ireland with one from England, another from Bavaria. Only three of the twelve sisters were born in the United States: one in Indiana and the others in Maryland (the latter a majority Catholic state). The Mother Superior, Mother Mary Saint

⁴⁶ Requests to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and the Catholic Diocese in Indianapolis have gone unanswered.

Anslom, was a relatively young 39 years of age and was the one sister who came from England. The sisters' ages varied from 26-47 with the average age of 37.

The women labeled as "inmates" make up half of the population. A majority of them were born in Indiana; however, of those fifteen, twelve had parents that were Irish or German. The remaining nine were native to Ireland and Germany. The average inmate was just over 22, but ranged in age from as young as 12 to as old as 60.

As for the "prisoners," we found even less information on them. All of them were born in Indiana but there was no information provided on their parents. The column that asks for the prisoner's place of birth has different handwriting (see accompanying photocopy of census). There is a suspicious difference in the way that their information was documented. I suspect that the individual required to take the census count was not able to have direct access to the women and girls who were "prisoners" and therefore had to rely on the Sisters to provide information. Their ages ranged from 17-32 with the average age of 23. One woman was said to be divorced, another one widowed, while the rest of the women were single.

The distinction between "inmates" and "prisoners" is not used in the 1900 census. So what do we make of the distinction here? In 1880 the prisoners were slightly older than the "inmates," and they were all young adult women. As noted, they were all from Indiana, yet there was no information provided on their parents. We are inclined to believe that the women and girls classified as prisoners were sentenced to the institution by the court system. The people classified as "inmates" were perhaps sent by their families, social services, or by priests. They are younger and their parents were born in predominately Catholic countries whereas the

Page No. 19
Supervisor's Dist. No. 3
Enumeration Dist. No. 106

Note A.—The Census Year begins June 1, 1879, and ends May 31, 1880.
Note B.—All persons will be included in the Enumeration who were living on the 1st day of June, 1880. No others will. Children BORN SINCE June 1, 1880, will be OMITTED. Members of Families who have DIED SINCE June 1, 1880, will be INCLUDED.
Note C.—Questions Nos. 13, 14, 22 and 23 are not to be asked in respect to persons under 10 years of age.

SCHEDULE I.—Inhabitants in South of Centar Township, in the County of Marion, State of Indiana, enumerated by me on the 11th day of June, 1880.

1000 100 100 100 100

In Cities	Name of Person	Sex	Age	The Name of each Person whose place of abode on 1st day of June, 1880, was in this family	Personal Description	Relationship of each person to the head of this family—whether wife, son, daughter, servant, boarder, or other	Date of Birth	Profession, Occupation or Trade of each person, male or female	Health	Education	Ability		
											Read	Write	Speak
	1900	Male	40	Wm. H. Hays	White	Head of family	1859	Farmer	Well	None	None	None	
		Female	35	Mary Hays	White	Wife	1845	None	Well	None	None	None	
		Male	11	John Hays	White	Son	1869	None	Well	None	None	None	
		Female	8	Mary Hays	White	Daughter	1872	None	Well	None	None	None	
		Male	7	John Hays	White	Son	1873	None	Well	None	None	None	
		Female	6	Mary Hays	White	Daughter	1874	None	Well	None	None	None	
		Male	5	John Hays	White	Son	1875	None	Well	None	None	None	
		Female	4	Mary Hays	White	Daughter	1876	None	Well	None	None	None	
		Male	3	John Hays	White	Son	1877	None	Well	None	None	None	
		Female	2	Mary Hays	White	Daughter	1878	None	Well	None	None	None	
		Male	1	John Hays	White	Son	1879	None	Well	None	None	None	
		Female	0	Mary Hays	White	Daughter	1880	None	Well	None	None	None	

Note D.—In making entries in columns 9, 10, 11, 12, 16 to 21, an affirmative mark only will be used—thus /, except in the case of divorced persons, column 11, when the letter "D" is to be used.
Note E.—Question No. 12 will only be asked in cases where an affirmative answer has been given either to question 10 or to question 11.
Note F.—Question No. 14 will only be asked in cases where a gainful occupation has been reported in column 13.
Note G.—In column 7 an abbreviation in the name of the month may be used, as Jan., Apr., Dec.

Page No. 20.
 Supervisor's Dist. No. 3.
 Enumeration Dist. No. 106.

Note A.—The Census Year begins June 1, 1876, and ends May 31, 1880.
 Note B.—All persons will be included in the Enumeration who were living on the 1st day of June, 1880. No others will. Children BORN SINCE June 1, 1880, will be OMITTED. Members of Families who have DIED SINCE June 1, 1880, will be INCLUDED.
 Note C.—Questions Nos. 13, 14, 22 and 23 are not to be asked in respect to persons under 10 years of age.

SCHEDULE I.—Inhabitants in South 1/2 Centre Township, in the County of Maricopa, State of Arizona, enumerated by me on the 12th day of June, 1880.

W. C. W. Wright
 Enumerator.

In Cities.	Name.	Sex.	Age.	Personal Description.	Color.	Cult. Qualified.	Profession, Occupation or Trade of such person, male or female.	Health.	Education.			Nativity.			
									Illiterate.	Can read and write.	Can write only.	Place of Birth of this person, whether State or Territory of U.S. or of foreign birth.	Place of Birth of the father, whether State or Territory of U.S. or of foreign birth.	Place of Birth of the mother, whether State or Territory of U.S. or of foreign birth.	
	168	Harrold	Olava	W. 2	12	Female	Miner of Lead & Tin						Minnesota	Minnesota	Minnesota
		Kennedy	Mary	W. 2	11	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		De la Cruz	Mary	W. 2	19	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin
		Callahan	Margaret	W. 2	23	Female							Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin

Note D.—In making entries in columns 10, 11, 14, 16 to 21, an affirmative mark only will be used—this /, except in the case of divorced persons, column 11, when the letter "D" is to be used.
 Note E.—Question No. 12 will only be asked in cases where an affirmative answer has been given either to question 10 or to question 11.
 Note F.—Question No. 14 will only be asked in cases where a painful occupation has been reported in column 13.
 Note G.—In column 7 an abbreviation, in the name of the month may be used, as Jan., Apr., Dec.

prisoners were not. Moreover, “inmate” is used as a term to refer to other residents of asylums.⁴⁷

By 1900, there were 115 inmates in the institution ranging from ages 2-57. Since the 1880 census, we notice a huge increase in the number of child inmates. A staggering 70% of the population was under 20 years old and the majority of them were born in Indiana. Below is a breakdown of the inmates by age:

<u>AGES</u>	<u>PERCENT OF POPULATION</u>
2 - 9	12%
10 – 19	58%
20 – 29	19%
30s	8%
50s	3%

We also see a marked decrease in the number of sisters that resided in the institution. Of the five listed, there was not a designated Mother Superior, which leads me to believe that there was another residence where the remaining nuns stayed. In fact, the five listed here might be Magdalene Sisters rather than the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.⁴⁸ They ranged from ages 28-67 and averaged age 52. None of the sisters listed in 1880 remained on the census for 1900. All were born in Ireland or Germany and came to the United States in earlier years.

⁴⁷ According to Websters Unabridged Dictionary, “inmate” is defined as: 1. A person living with others in the same building 2. A person lodged with others, often confined to an institution, asylum, etc. 3. An inhabitant.

⁴⁸ Magdalene Sisters were graduate penitents who decided to remain in the institution. They weren’t able to be actual Sister’s but could work and live separately in the institution.

While the census gives us some insight into who was held at the Indianapolis House of Good Shepherd, we know little about the individual women and their stories. We only found personal accounts of two, Mamie Smith and Minnie Morrison, both of whom claimed to have been held against their will and treated very harshly.

In May of 1910, Mrs. Mamie Smith, formerly known as Mamie Sullivan, filed a lawsuit against the Convent of the Good Shepherd for “alleged false imprisonment” during the six-and-a-half years she was held there. Testimony was given by Father Gavisk, vice president of the Society of the Good Shepherd and the rector of St. John’s Catholic Church, in great detail regarding how the prison was structured.⁴⁹ In his testimony, he admitted to some of the details of Minnie’s story that we initially found a bit farfetched and difficult to believe.

Reverend Gavisk admitted that upon the girls entering the doors of the convent they lost their individual identity. The nuns stripped all inmates of their original names and replaced them with pseudo-names. The girls lost their freedom and all movement was highly restricted being “kept under constant guard day and night by the sisters.”⁵⁰ The inmates’ communication with the outside world was very limited. Leaving the premises was not permitted under any circumstances nor were they authorized to have visitors from the outside. They were able to correspond through mail but the Reverend testified that “both outgoing and incoming, is subject to the strictest supervision.”⁵¹

Rev. Gavisk provided a breakdown of the population, which consisted primarily of young girls between 12-16 years of age. The small girls were required to attend school, the older girls

⁴⁹“Convent Defends Suit,” *Indianapolis Star*, May 11, 1910.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

and women, also known as Penitents, worked in the laundry and shop, and the Magdalenes were graduate Penitents who were able to remain in the convent, providing guidance, if they desired to do so.⁵² The women and girls were separated into three divisions and under no circumstances were they permitted to interact with one another. The Sisters ensured that the different ages remained separated by walls, even when in church. Mamie claimed that the

surroundings at the home was unsanitary and that she was made to suffer unnecessary hardships while in prison there. . . . Methods of punishing her . . . were to make her wear a dunce cap, to eat on the floor, to stand at the table while eating, to kiss the floor and to close her mouth by tying a cloth over it.⁵³

Eventually, she escaped, but was “taken back to the institution by two policemen,” before her father came to take her away. A sympathetic jury awarded Mrs. Smith \$4,000. “The case was remarkable in many ways, but chiefly so on account of the bitter feelings displayed on both sides on account of attacks made by attorneys for Mrs. Smith which the defense took to be insults to the Catholic religion and customs.”⁵⁴

The first vivid personal account of life in the Indianapolis Magdalene Laundry--and the most accessible we had when we began our research--was of a Protestant girl, Minnie Morrison, whose story was so horrific that it was difficult to believe.⁵⁵ Minnie states that a Juvenile Court guardian had taken her to the Magdalene Laundry at the age of 10 in the dead of the night where she was handed over to a black-robed Sister. She was ordered to dress in clothes that were far too big for her size and then led to the Refectory where she was served distasteful food that contained roaches. When supper was through, she was summoned into

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ “Denies She Wrote Letter Expressing Her Pleasure.” *Indianapolis News*, 5/12/1910, p. 8.

⁵⁴ “Verdict of \$4,000 in Favor of Mrs. Smith,” *Indianapolis News*, 4/24/1910 p. 19.

⁵⁵ Morrison, Minnie, *Life Story of Mrs. Minnie Morrison: Awful Revelations of Life in Convent of Good Shepherd (a True Story)*, publisher unknown, 1925.

an office where she was stripped of her name and told that she was to go by Teresa Shepherd from that point on. When she asked them why they were changing her name, she was told it was necessary because there were so many girls and they had to ensure they all had different names. In truth, this allowed the Sisters to deny having any woman or girl at the Home with the name that the parents or relatives came looking for.

Minnie described an experience that consisted of cruel tortures that she suffered at the hands of the nuns. She stated that they were required to follow extremely strict instructions such as speaking only when they heard the clap of hands that granted them permission, forced to kiss the dirty floor, praying for extended periods of time, and kneeling on the hard floor with her arms extended out. The jobs consisted of working in the laundry, where they washed and ironed for various businesses in the city, or in the sewing room where they made overalls and jackets for a nearby factory. Minnie was assigned to iron, a job that required her to stand on a wooden box because she was too small to see over the ironing board. The work was described to be laborious and relentless and the girls' day was not complete until their assignment was done. During her stay at the institution, she stated that her hand was burned so badly with a hot poker that her fingers had to be amputated, she was drugged with chloroform, and her mail was restricted from being sent out. Once again, stories so gruesome they were hard to believe as reality.

How do we evaluate the accounts of these women? We know that there was a strong anti-Catholic sentiment in Indiana in the 1910s and 1920s, along with a long history in the US of

false memoirs about time spent in convents.⁵⁶ I was able to believe several elements of the story of Mamie due to the House of the Good Shepherd being forced to rebut charges.

Reverend Gasvik gave detailed testimony about how the institution was run, which corroborated much of what Minnie stated in her story. Although he did not admit to the abuses of the inmates, which we would not expect him to do even if he was aware of them taking place, his testimony provided some validation to what Minnie and Mamie had said.

Further evidence comes from a letter to the editor in the *Indianapolis News* where a laundry owner was defending his business practices that were being criticized. There were complaints about how he treated his workers and the low wages he was paying them. He responded by asking how he could be expected to do otherwise when his competition was the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. He went on, "They canvass from house to house for laundry work, have a large number of girls to whom they pay nothing whatever, whom they compel to do men's work, and keep them at it all hours."⁵⁷ This supports the charges that the amount of labor the women and girls were required to do under conditions from which they could not escape was a form of slave labor.

Surprisingly we were able to locate two survivors of US Magdalene Laundries who were willing to speak about their experiences: Patricia Noel, who was held in the Baltimore Magdalene Laundry in the late 1940s, and Diana O'Hara, who was in two New York Magdalene Laundries in the 1960s. Pat Noel spoke with one of our professors, Dr. Kelsey Kauffman, at

⁵⁶ E.g., *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk, or, The Hidden Secrets of a Nun's Life in a Convent Exposed*. New York: Howe and Bates, 1837.

⁵⁷ "A Laundry mans defense," *Indianapolis News*, 30 Aug 1899

length about her experience at the Magdalene Laundry in Baltimore Maryland⁵⁸ and Dr. Kauffman shared her notes with me. I was able to personally conduct an interview from the prison via videoconferencing with Diana O'Hara speaking from her home in Tennessee.⁵⁹

Ms. O'Hara was sent to two different Magdalene Laundry locations during her teenage years and had a remarkably vivid recollection of her horrific time there. I began by asking Ms. O'Hara to share her experience with me and she replied, "The Magdalene Laundry was America's best kept secret out in the open."

Ms. O'Hara entered into the foster care system when she was just four months old. Like most young children, Ms. O'Hara was caught in the vicious cycle of being moved to several different homes until she was eventually placed back into her alcoholic mother's care at the age of ten. Although she was a young girl, her mother often left her home alone when she went to work. A man that lived nearby began to take notice and started to force his way into the apartment where he had taken advantage of her. When she was courageous enough to turn to her family for help, "her grandmother punished her for having sex by hanging her out of a second story window by her ankles." Not long after that she was returned to the foster care system, and ultimately sent to the Good Shepherd Laundry in Buffalo, New York.

Here, her story began to sound much like the account that Minnie Morrison had told. The structure of the building was described like a medieval castle, including stones and tunnels. Ms. O'Hara shared, "I could feel the evil as it descended and began to wrap its arms around me as the scraping sound of the steel gates opening shook the very core of my soul." Upon entering the laundry, a nun was there to greet her and escorted her to the doctor. Diana recalls the

⁵⁸ Phone interview with Patricia Noel by Kelsey Kauffman, April 12, 2017.

⁵⁹ Interview with Diana O'Hara by the author, via videoconferencing, April 17, 2017.

doctor asking, "Well, what do you think, is she a virgin?" The nun just laughed and walked out, leaving her with the doctor who then raped her.

The girls in this institution ranged from ages fourteen to eighteen. The work was much of the same: laundry, ironing, and scrubbing floors with a toothbrush and rag. If they finished with their assignment for the day, they were required to sit in a room in silence with nothing to do. Ms. O'Hara informed us, that the reason nuns wanted to keep talking to a minimum was to prevent sharing information amongst one another.

Ms. O'Hara told of some of the horrific abuses that had taken place when they misbehaved. Committing an infraction resulted in punishment, such as being locked inside of a closet for extended periods of time or being sent to the "Dungeon Room." The closet was very small but if you were little enough, "you could pull your knees into your chest, place your back up against the wall and sit down and maybe even sleep but you were in severe pain when you finally stood up." The "Dungeon Room" was total darkness and as the girls sat there in silence, they could hear the high pitch squeal of the rats. "Then your body would shake in fear as you felt the rats begin to crawl over your body."

I wondered if she had received anything positive from this experience at all. She replied, "There is nothing beneficial about these prisons. In no way can anyone say that this was a positive experience. Teaches them (inmates) they aren't worthy, they are there (in the prison) for a reason, they are trash." If every inmate incarcerated at a Magdalene Laundry shared in the same opinion, then this suggests that such institutions have provided little more than instilling in them a lifetime of fear.

Ms. O'Hara and Ms. Noel said that they had never heard of the story of Minnie Morrison. Yet, in the interviews that they have conducted with us, as well as others, they reported similar details about the institutions and their experiences there.⁶⁰ Women in Ireland have talked for years about related traumatizing conditions. They were not believed until 155 unaccounted graves were uncovered on a former location of a Magdalene Laundry.⁶¹ Any lingering doubts were dispelled last month when the remains of 800 babies--offspring of women held at the facility--were found in an underground septic tank.⁶² Such exposure had been a long time coming.

There are many stories of these institutions that are atrocious. I continue to maintain a healthy skepticism of all accounts until they are corroborated. However, my fellow incarcerated scholars and I know all too well how it feels to not have our stories believed. It is time for historians to start paying attention to our own Magdalene Laundries and start listening to the voices that have been silenced for so long.

⁶⁰ "American Survivor of Magdalene Laundries in the United States speaks out," *Irish Central*, February 11, 2013. <http://www.irishcentral.com/news/american-survivor-of-magdalene-laundries-in-the-united-states-speaks-out-190655121-237564601> (Diana O'Hara) and Jerome Elam, "A Magdalene Survivor Speaks Out," *Washington Times*, March 23, 2013 (Patricia Noel).

⁶¹ Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalene Laundries; <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/MagdalenRpt2013>

⁶² Brigit Katz, "Mass grave found at former home for 'fallen women' in Ireland," *New York Times*, March 6, 2017.

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