

[Genealogical Guide to Monroe County, New York](#)

Adoption Records

The New York State government is not yet friendly about adoptions. Adoption records are normally closed forever. If ordering a birth record of an adoptee from the New York State Department of Health, they will send an "amended" birth certificate showing the adopted parents, not the original certificate.

New York State does offer an [adoption registry](#) and adoptees can get "non-identifying information about your birth parents even if they do not register with the Adoption Registry or consent to sharing." If the adoptee and the birth parents are both registered, they can get current names and addresses. Otherwise, getting information from the State Department of Health is currently impossible.

New York State didn't pass a law dealing with adoptions until 1873. Before then adoptions were often more casual. If a parent could not longer take care of a child they would give the child to a relative or neighbor. If no provisions were made for a child, the child became the responsibility of the Overseer of the Poor for the Town that they lived in. He was to make sure that the child was not a public charge so it was important to place a child with a family even if temporarily.

An important part of the 1873 law is that both adopting spouses must agree to adopt the child. If a birth parent is living, they must agree to the adoption. If the child is over age 12 then the child must agree to be adopted. Also, the adopted child did NOT have the right to inherit from their adopted parents in the 1873 law. The adopted child did get the right to inherit in another law enacted in 1887.

In a law enacted in 1924 a Judge could seal adoption records at his discretion. Then in 1935 New York State began to seal all adoption records. It was also at that time that amended birth certificates began being issued. So for children adopted before 1935 it is probable that the original birth certificate has not been amended.

Rochester grew rapidly in the early days. As the number of orphaned children increased, it became more difficult to place all the children. At a meeting of women in Rochester on 28 February 1837 (the same day Rochester became a City) they formed "The Rochester Female Association for the Relief of Orphan and Destitute Children." They decided to incorporate and settled on calling the organization the "Rochester Orphan Asylum." When the Asylum opened on April 2, 1837, it housed nine children in a small two-story cottage with a garden, on South Sophia Street. They must not have kept very good records at first as they later reconstructed the names of children in the [Asylum from 1837 to 1839](#). The Asylum moved to a new building in Hubbell Park in 1844. The number of children in the Asylum grew rapidly and by 1850 the federal census shows about 75 children in residence.

The old records of the Asylum have been given to the University of Rochester. They are in their Rare Books and Manuscripts Department of the Rush Rhees Library (see a [description of the collection](#)). These include admission records (up to 1945), indentures (early adoptions up to 1914), burials (up to 1905), board of directors records (up to 1949) and more.

The early Admission Records show many children being left at the Asylum and being picked up at a later time by a parent. Those records also indicate that whoever left the child at the Asylum was expected to pay board. After a time when no board had been paid the Asylum could place out the child. Also some parents when leaving their children would sign them over to the Asylum. Those children could be placed out immediately.

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There are some Admission Records stating that the Overseer of the Poor had brought a child to the Asylum, but they are rare. None of the admissions show the names of the birth parents until after 1900.

The Asylum would place out children as either an adopted child or as a servant (or later as an apprentice). Some children were placed out on trial and returned later and then placed out again. The Asylum and the new parents (or Master) would enter into an Indenture of the child. The Indenture said that the child was expected to be honest, obedient and behave. In return, the parent had to give the child, room, board and clothing. The child was also supposed to be given an education and also some training if indentured as a servant. There are a few records of children being returned to the Asylum for being mistreated. When the child was of age, which was normally 18 for girls and 21 for boys, they were to receive a Bible and sometimes a new set of clothing. Also at that age they could freely leave and set out on their own.

*This Indenture, Made the Twentry First day of March —
in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and Sixty One between the
DIRECTORS OF THE ROCHESTER ORPHAN ASYLUM,
of the one part, and Samuel Myers and Shira Parkhurst Jr.
of the West-Mendon Monroe Co. N.Y. of the other part, Witnesseth, that the said The Di-
rectors of the Rochester Orphan Asylum, have put, placed and Bound, and by these pres-
ents do put, place and bind Samuel Myers — who has been surrendered to the
charge and direction of the Directors of the Rochester Orphan Asylum, of the age of
Ten years March 8th 1861 to be maintained with him the said —
Shira Parkhurst Jr — and as an adopted child with him the said
Shira Parkhurst Jr — to dwell, from the date of these presents until the said
Samuel Myers — shall come to the age of Twentry one — years*

Portion of Indenture of Samuel Myers - March 21, 1861

Restrictions from the University of Rochester (the current holder of the records) won't allow the records to be republished but online there is an [index of the indentures \(1837 to 1906\)](#). You can send an email if you find a name of interest and a transcription will be sent back to you. Remember that those records for that time do NOT include the names of the birth parents.

Another web page has the entire records of [burials from the Asylum \(1838 to 1905\)](#). After that time, it is not known what happened to burials of children from the Asylum.

The Asylum moved to their present site on Monroe Avenue in the early 1900s and they changed the name of the organization to Hillside Home for Children in 1921 and [Hillside Children's Center](#) in 1940. They have the records for the period after the records at the University of Rochester, but they can only share non-identifying information.

The Roman Catholics of Monroe County had three small orphanages. St. Patrick's Orphan Girls Asylum was organized about 1842; St. Mary's Boys' Orphan Asylum was formed in 1864 and had a home near St.

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Mary's Hospital and St. Joseph's German Orphan Asylum, near St. Joseph's Church, was formed in 1863. All three merged in 1942 to form St. Joseph's Villa, which is located at 3300 Dewey Avenue in the Town of Greece. In 2013 the name of that organization was changed to Villa of Hope.

In the past few years the records of all three of the old Catholic orphanages were transferred to the [Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph](#) (150 French Road, Rochester, NY 14618). They have an [online request form](#) that you can fill out and they will send you information on the child. They say that they do share birth parents' names for these old records.



St. Patrick's Asylum

For more recent Catholic adoptions through the current [Villa of Hope](#), they will only give out some non-identifying information.

For Jewish orphans there were two orphanages. The Jewish Orphan Asylum of Western NY was organized in 1877 and located on North St. Paul Street in Rochester. It closed in 1928. It is not known what happen to the records of this organization. The second Jewish orphanage was the Jewish Children's Home. It opened its doors in 1914 for Orthodox Jewish children. It closed in 1947. The admission records are at the Rare Books, Manuscripts and Archives Department of the Rush-Rhees Library at the University of Rochester (see a [collection description](#)). Supposedly for the entire existence of the organization there were only 341 admissions.

There is a famous organization in New York City called the Children's Aid Society. They are famous as the organization that had "Orphan Trains" that sent orphans from New York City on trains to the west. There was a similar Children's Aid Society of Rochester that was organized in 1895. This organization didn't maintain a home but placed children in foster homes until they could be placed in a permanent home. The organization existed until at least 1930 when it faded out of existence. No known records of this organization are known to exist.

African-American children were at the Rochester Orphan Asylum at an early time. Then in 1911 Isabella Dorsey formed her Dorsey Home for Dependent Colored Children. It never had more than twenty children as residents. It faded away after 1925 and no records are known to exist.

This [index of some Rochester adoptions \(1860 – 1917\)](#) came from a legal source that must remain private at this time. If you find a name that you are interested in, then you can email for more information. A majority of these records contain names of birth parents. These



From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, N.Y.

Children at Dorsey Home - 1918

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approximately 1000 records show that there were other small organizations in the Rochester area that placed out children. The records also include some out-of-town organizations that had children adopted in Monroe County.

Child labor laws in the early 1900s finally put an end to the indenturing children and placing them as apprentices. In the early 1920s New York State passed laws stating that organizations doing adoptions had to be licensed. That put an end to many smaller organizations doing adoptions.

Finding adoption records for your family can be challenging. It is also possible that an adoption may not have been recorded. Sometimes a child was sent to live with a relative or another family without the benefit of a legal adoption.

