

Evansville as a Case Study of Women's Reform in Victorian America

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Abstract

The nineteenth century was an era of social reform, particularly in regards to women of the lower and middle class. Religious middle to upper-class women joined forces in an effort to end prostitution and immoral crimes. In an attempt to "heal" prostitutes and other delinquents, reformers founded institutions including maternity homes. The Evansville Home for the Friendless was a maternity home established in 1870 and it operated for almost 100 years. It housed unmarried mothers as well as other women judged to be morally felonious. Evansville's Home for the Friendless, as well as similar institutions, played a part in the larger picture of reform in nineteenth century America that has not yet been explored. In this article, I explain why a maternity home came to exist in Evansville considering these institutions were more common, and could typically only be supported by, larger cities. Eleanor Johnson, the founder of the Home for the Friendless, initiates a butterfly effect of women's reform in the Midwest beginning with Evansville, making Evansville a unique case study in the grand scheme of women's reform.

Keywords: Maternity Home, Evansville, Reform

1. Introduction

The journey of reform can be traveled by a myriad of contradictory routes. Reformers are not always on the same side of the issue that they are aiming to change. In regards to women, efforts of reformation have most often been linked to sexuality. Thus, a woman's worth could be decided by her sexuality. One would assume that women reformers would opt to take the focus away from sexuality. This article proves that this is not the case. Women reformers in general opened institutions to house and protect unmarried mothers and other girls and women in need. From a distance, their objective is entirely positive and beneficial for society. However, a large number of these institutions used their role as a means to shame girls and women for their sexuality. The women reformers whom I reference in this article claimed their goal was to house unfortunate women and heal them with the teachings of Christianity. Nonetheless, these reformers hid sexually deviant girls and women from the scrutiny of the streets in order to be criticized within the confinement of a maternity home. This article is intended to highlight the work of reformers as well as accentuate the evident flaws in their methods.

In this article, I use Evansville's Home for the Friendless as a case study to explore the effects of the women's reform movement. The institution opened March 18, 1870 through the combined efforts of Eleanor Johnson and Willard Carpenter. The Home was a maternity home, which was an institution intended to house misfortunate women who were most commonly unmarried mothers. Most maternity homes and similar reform institutions approached women through the Christian influence, which complemented the conservative nature of the Victorian Era. The Home for the Friendless is a prime example of a reform home in the Victorian Era that endeavored to transform delinquent girls and women into more acceptable versions of themselves to play a proper role in society. Although maternity homes typically existed in larger cities, Evansville is exceptional because it was a medium-sized city with the resources to sustain a reform institution. Evansville, in particular, plays a unique role in that it was a successful breeding ground for the reform movement.

I utilize the logbook records from the Vanderburgh County Christian Home to illustrate points throughout this article. The logbooks left behind from the Home of the Friendless contain the information of all inmates in the home between its opening in 1870 and 1908, with the exception of several gaps. Details including the inmates' names, ages, marital circumstances as well as adoption records are listed in the logbooks as well as additional genealogical information, which make these records of particular interest for living descendants. However, the most telling, and punitive, piece of the puzzle is the descriptions of the inmates. Logbook entries were the duty of the Matron, and therefore the Matron would write down her impression of the girls as well as her version of the girl's story. They reveal information about individual women as well as the societal atmosphere surrounding them. For example, the reasons for which they are scorned reveal societal values regarding domestic life and gender roles. Women's historian Elizabeth Pleck argues the effect of the "family ideal," which she defined as upholding an appearance of familial harmony on the outside even if problems existed behind closed doors.¹ I offer this article to expand on Pleck's hypothesis by demonstrating the effect of the "family ideal" in the name of societal harmony instead of solely harmony within the domestic sphere.

Historian Regina Kunzel argues in *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* that records kept by Matrons regarding inmates reveal more about the reformers than the women they are recounting.² Through reading between the lines of logbook entries, I am beginning a new chapter in American history that can be addressed by future historians. Finally, I will bring the information together to analyze the overall effect of sexuality shaming in women as a result of women. Coloring the protagonists in a story of reform as perpetrators of moral crimes against women is a hefty accusation to make, but my research indisputably proves that there is another side to their story that has been covered up under an umbrella of reform.

Women's reform developed within the nineteenth century, and conservative Victorian society subdued its radicalism. The women's reform movement was partially propagated out of a female religious movement in the Revolutionary Era. This movement consisted of charitable deeds such as mending men's uniforms and caring for children. The Temperance Movement began progressing in the beginning of the nineteenth century to help abused women. Temperance reformers primarily focused on the "Drunkard's Wife," and they subsequently tried to empower women, or at least remove women from under the tyranny of their husband's alcohol-induced rage. However, women's reform did not entirely survive the radical attack on men. Consequently, reform halted in its progress due to the increasingly conservative nature of the mid-nineteenth century. The women's movement made progress in the beginning of the nineteenth century, but lost their steam, or more likely, did not have the support to go on until women reformers revived the movement to assist women in need.

Eleanor Johnson was a prominent women's reformer who revived women's reform and got the Home for the Friendless up on its feet. She was born in 1830 in Southborough, Massachusetts to a religious family. As a civil rights activist, Johnson taught at a school for African American children Boston for a majority of her adult life.³ Christian virtue also played an important role in Johnson's life. The American Missionary Association employed Johnson as a missionary in Massachusetts. The AMA was a protestant based missionary group consisting of abolitionists advocating institutions such as anti-racist schools and churches.⁴ Of course, religion played a large role in the AMA's mission, and Johnson performed dutifully for the AMA for the remainder of her life.⁵ Johnson soon became quite ill, but she wanted to spend the rest of her days spreading Christianity to anyone who would listen, most specifically to those whom she deemed "unfortunate." Her sidewalk sermons reached people living in the slums of Boston as well as other "wretched" districts.⁶ As Johnson sought to fulfill her Christian duty, which was essentially to direct God's wayward sons and daughters down the path of righteousness. Throughout her life, Johnson broadened her definition of "unfortunate" to include sexual delinquents, and thus grew her inspiration to begin the Home for the Friendless.

Johnson's time in Boston was cut short because her illness grew stronger, and she took her doctor's advice to move to a Midwestern climate to improve her health.⁷ Thus, Johnson arrived in Evansville in 1859 during Victorian conservatism and quickly laid patterns for several controversial institutions, including, but not limited to, the Home for the Friendless. Immediately following her arrival, Johnson opened a school for African American children connected to a Methodist church. Although the school was objected at first, it became part of the public school system in 1866.⁸ Johnson continued her missionary work through association with several churches in Evansville, and she also was the head of the Orphan Asylum for just short of a year.⁹ Of course, the Home got off to a rocky start without an abundance of support from the people of Evansville. Originally, the Home was criticized as immoral itself simply because Johnson advertised the home as a refuge for these women. However, the unwritten nature of the home included more than assistance.

Most maternity homes sprung up on the east coast in the nineteenth century, and the Vanderburgh County Christian Home joined the trend in 1869. Johnson's partner in opening the Home for the Friendless was Willard Carpenter, without whom the Home would not have had the funds to open its doors. Born and raised in Evansville, Carpenter cared a great deal about the city and his people. He was concerned with his social and civic responsibility, and further

contributed to churches and education institutions to offer his support.¹⁰ He wanted the people of Evansville to have equal access to educational resources, and for that reason, he founded Willard Library, which is one of the oldest archive libraries in Indiana.¹¹ Johnson sought out Carpenter after hearing about his concern with civic duties and pitched her idea of a maternity home. Carpenter supported her endeavor and donated two and a half acres on which the Home for the Friendless occupied until the property moved in 1882.¹² Support in the beginning of the Home of the Friendless' lifespan was few and far between, but with the help of Carpenter, Johnson got the home up on its feet.

Many did not understand Carpenter's support for the Home for the Friendless at first, and his popularity undoubtedly suffered as a result.¹³ The Home finally gained popularity within the following years once the public joined the effort to aid problem girls. The people of Evansville suddenly decided that taking problem girls off of the streets was to their best interest. The most significant evidence of their shift in attitude is a drastic amount of financial support. During the first several years acting as the Home's Matron, Johnson made \$250 a year, and that was supposed to allow for Home expenses as well as her own livelihood.¹⁴ Financial support was necessary in order for the Home to continue. Thankfully, donors began to appear about three years after Johnson opened the institution, and the Home quickly rose out of debt and was able to sustain itself.¹⁵ The Home was eventually able to expand, and opened a farm for inmates to work in order to gain skills to prepare them for their release. Subsequently, the Home for the Friendless intended to become similar to a rehabilitation center more than a prison. During this time, a group of supporters who made up the executive board, employees and financial donors joined Johnson in her endeavor.¹⁶ Johnson remained at the Home of the Friendless, acting as its superintendent after hiring a new matron, until she moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan ten months before her death in 1876.¹⁷

Although maternity homes had only been successful in large cities at this point in the nineteenth century, the Home of the Friendless thrived in Evansville to the extent that it was able to survive for almost one hundred years. The available resources and atmosphere of Evansville made the city a prime location for Johnson to introduce a maternity home. Evansville had the space, "immoral" downtown district and small town character needed for a maternity home to be seen as necessary. However, Evansville also had Willard Carpenter, whose personal beliefs in the importance of education blended perfectly with Johnson's ideals to teach unfortunate women to become better versions of themselves. Atmosphere and resources provide the ability to fund a maternity home, but the true key to the Evansville Home for the Friendless was Eleanor Johnson. Boston was a fertile city for reform, and maternity homes and similar institutions were already thriving before 1870 although they were yet to catch on in popularity in the Mid-West. When Johnson came to Evansville, she brought the east coast idea of a maternity home with her and henceforth spearheaded a reform movement. A phenomenon as simple as one person moving from Boston to Evansville enormously contributed to an evolution of women's reform.

Many historians tend to associate the women's movement of Victorian America and women's reform with positive connotations that denote its progressive nature. In efforts to help misfortunate women, activists founded maternity homes where unmarried, pregnant mothers could go for assistance. Similar institutions came into existence due to feminist progress in the Temperance Movement prior to 1870, and also as a result of development in larger cities. Urban expansion in the nineteenth century as well as attitudes of the Victorian Era also led to drastic changes in how the public dealt with sin and female behavior. Most maternity homes and similar institutions thrived in larger cities such as Philadelphia and Boston. In her book, *And Sin No More: Social Policy and Unwed Mothers in Cleveland 1855-1990*, Marian Morton references similar institutions aimed towards the same sexually promiscuous girls and women. Cleveland is the one of the only cities comparable to Evansville that could have maintained maternity homes in this time period. Typically, social movements need the numbers and financial assistance of a large city to sustain such institutions. Similarly to Cleveland, Evansville, Indiana is an exception in that it was not a large city compared to other metropolitan centers, but its residents were able, and sought to, assist in the success of a maternity home. Evansville had the resources of a metropolitan city with a small town mentality, which consequently created the perfect venue for a maternity home and women's reform.

Evansville's Home for the Friendless serves as a case study to explore the spread of maternity homes as a social reform institution. The institution opened March 18, 1870 through the combined efforts of Eleanor Johnson and Willard Carpenter. The Home for the Friendless was a maternity home, which was an institution intended to house misfortunate women who were most commonly unmarried mothers. Most maternity homes and similar reform institutions approached women through the Christian influence, which complemented the conservative nature of the Victorian Era. The Home for the Friendless is a prime example of a reform home in the Victorian Era that endeavored to transform delinquent girls and women into more acceptable versions of themselves to play a proper role in society. Although maternity homes typically existed in larger cities, Evansville is exceptional because it was a medium-sized city with the resources to sustain a reform institution. Evansville, in particular, plays a unique role in that it was a successful setting for the reform movement.

Size and demographic in cities contributed to the founding and success of maternity homes. The end of the nineteenth century through the beginning of the twentieth century was a time of urban expansion in America, and towns were quickly transforming into industrial cities. St. Louis and Indianapolis had the man power to run social institutions with populations ranked 4th and 27th respectively in 1890. Evansville's population was ranked 56th in 1890, but its size was relatively similar to St. Louis¹⁸. Large cities took part in a movement to help the less fortunate. For example, institutions for orphans, abused children and animals quickly arose in large cities in the 19th century, interestingly before a popular effort to aid women began.¹⁹ Resources and a large enough population to support an institution financially and socially were crucial in a successful institution during urban expansion. With that said, female institutions were not as common in small towns because they simply did not have the means to stay afloat.²⁰ Evansville was a prime location, although unexpected, for a maternity home due to its unique combination of large size with a small town mentality.

The Victorian Era was an exceedingly conservative time period, to say the least, and female purity was in the public eye more than ever.²¹ Evansville's upper class residents were interested in the city's scandal and delinquency to the point that some personal stories of the inmates of maternity homes appeared in publications such as the *Evansville Courier*²². Evansville had the size to welcome a maternity home, and it also had the intrusive and judgmental citizens to fuel the conversion and detainment of female delinquents in the area. When paired with population growth in larger cities, the Victorian Era propagated substantial controversy. Particularly in large cities, population quickly grew and leisure activities became more common outside of the home. Thus, more young people were mingling outside supervision and supposedly taking part in promiscuous acts.²³ Leisure activities such as going to the movies became popular and lured young girls out of their homes to socialize with men who were apparently helpless to female seduction. As a direct result of men and women interacting with each other and having pre-marital relations, a hyper-sexualized youth culture quickly became the prominent worry of conservative Evansville citizens.

Larger cities typically had red light districts separated from the center of the city where "immoral" actions occurred. Centralized "immorality" in red light districts were made up of "problem girls" and lustful men. These districts had nicknames meant to specifically target the types of women who resided in the area. For example, areas in Boston nicknamed "Satan's Throne," "Sink of Inequity," or most unflattering, "Mount Whoredom" brings truth to the classification of prostitutes as sinful.²⁴ Evansville could sustain a separate, red light district close, but separate from the downtown area. One of the most prominent features of Evansville's red light district was Mollie Brown's House of Shame, which was a brothel named after its owner. Mollie Brown was the infamous Madame of Evansville, and her name rolled off the tongues of women reformers with bitter disgust. The worst of the worst women in Evansville presumably went to or came from Mollie Brown's House of Shame, and they were regarded as the most worthless kind of woman. As far as sins go in the Victorian Era, selling sex was one of the most deplorable.²⁵ In a group effort to stop and punish prostitution, the women's movement progressed, especially in the 1870s.²⁶ Subsequently, Mollie Brown's House of Shame was often criticized as well as the inmates who came from or left for the brothel. Brown's brothel was consequently used as a way to describe a particular, hopeless inmate. Local women reformers would respond to "immoral" women by assuming "they went to Mollie Brown's, no doubt."²⁷ Sexuality in the Victorian Era was primarily supposed to be private, and brothels were the most blatant disregard of sexual privacy. For that reason, women reformers scouted red light districts to recruit women to be "cured." Given Evansville's flourishing red light district, women's reform had potential to prosper to the same extent as a large metropolitan city, if not more so.

Two categories of women typically arrived to maternity homes: women who voluntarily sought assistance and women forcibly detained in institutions as punishment. The Evansville Home for the Friendless did not only welcome unmarried mothers, but also "delinquent" girls and women. The actions that made maternity home inmates "delinquent" expose what was taboo during the Victorian Era. Both physical and sexual abuse led girls and women to seek admittance into maternity homes. Courts saw a substantial number of abuse cases during the nineteenth century. By 1860, only two states had passed laws prohibiting wife beating, so protection of women from abuse was particularly limited. Victims of sexual abuse typically did not search for help in order to uphold what historian, Elizabeth Pleck, called the "Family Ideal." Pleck, defined the "Family Ideal" as maintaining an outward image of a loving, functioning family even, and especially, if that is not the case.²⁸ Pleck adds, "To Aristotle, the private sphere of women, children, and slaves was inferior to the *polis*, where men pursued the common good."²⁹ Society encouraged women and children to remain silent regarding abuse to offer a false reality of harmony within the household. Following that train of thought, a young girl who confessed that her father raped her was inherently sinful because she broke an unwritten code of domestic privacy.³⁰ However, men could easily escape persecution of domestic crimes unless they committed murder.³¹ Incidentally, government officials did not persecute any husbands for rape in the nineteenth century, and the law specifically exempted husbands from rape laws in the twentieth century. Even in cases in which a non-husband raped a woman and was subsequently prosecuted, the law required the woman in question to

refrain from speaking of her abuse. Victorian society clearly emphasized domestic privacy over effectively punish domestic disputes, and the values of reformers were equally conservative.³²

The key to understanding women reformers is to differentiate their actions versus their motivations. The women's reform movement, in part, initiated as an effort to protect women from violent men, or more specifically, defending female virginity. Reformers focused on preserving female chastity, but they did not ignore the importance of female safety. The Temperance Crusade beginning in the 1840s involved female activists acting to care for the "Drunkard's wife" from abuse. Famous reformers such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony opened their homes to abused women, similarly to the open doors of maternity homes. The institution of marriage enveloped spouses in a dome of domesticity that protected men from the consequences of harming women. Nevertheless, the nineteenth century rose in conservatism, and reformers aimed their efforts at sexual deviants at the expense of abuse victims.³³ Historian, Barbara Welter, describes in her article, "The Cult of True Womanhood," the common reformer's goal of defending female chastity, and to do so, reformers must control female contact with men. Men faced blame because they supposedly held the only power to take away a woman's virtue, leaving her irreversibly contaminated. For example, historian Regina Kunzel states that, "[A] prostitute [is] a victim of male lust forced to live a life of shame."³⁴ A woman's virtue was the most sacred thing worth defending, and women reformers sought to remove women from those who "infected" them.³⁵ Johnson recorded accounts of women entering the home on account of male sin. A substantial number of inmates fled to the home from abusive men or as a result of abandonment. For example, Johnson recorded Lizzie Ruitz's story in which Ruitz had already been abandoned with another man's child. She was engaged a second time to marry a different Evansville man, and thus moved in with him and became pregnant. He promised to marry her, but did not have the money to arrange a ceremony, and he disappeared and married another woman who he had been secretly involved with after taking Ruitz's money.³⁶ Although the Matron's harsh criticism is most evident in the logbook records, not all Matrons were without sympathy for the situations in which women entered the home. Matrons did commiserate women who suffered at the hands of men, if only by resenting any man who prematurely ruins perfect female innocence. Providing a safe place for women would, in theory, protect women from toxic men. However, protection was not provided only via a physical shelter, but also through religious caretaking.

Mollie Brown's House of Shame undoubtedly housed the women with the worst reputations in Evansville because selling sex was a special, and unforgiveable type of sin. Police in Evansville started to arrest prostitutes and bring them to the Home for the Friendless, but many of them immediately ran away. One example from the Home for the Friendless is that of Jennie Jenkins (or Russell) who left for Mollie Brown's House of Shame only two days after her arrival.³⁷ However, prostitution was one of the few ways for a single woman to earn a living on her own, and in many situations of single motherhood, selling sex was the only option. Thus, these wayward women were connected by being cast out of morality. They created a separate sisterhood of women from the Christian sisterhood, and worked together to make a living. Considering the majority of captured Evansville prostitutes immediately ran away, one must consider the roots of their preference. Why else would women flee from a safe, Christian house to return to a brothel if they did not prefer their lives prior to their arrest? The Matron relevantly noted in the logbooks that many of the inmates in the Home at the time of Mollie Brown's death were devastated and inconsolable.³⁸ Perhaps prostitution was not a last resort, but was the lesser of two evils in a time where one sexual encounter could brand women for the remainder of their lives. Prostitutes were the primary target for reformers, but they were also the least successful cases in maternity homes.

Christian values against prostitution and sexuality directly relate to the reasons for which reformers judged inmates. Given that both religious philanthropists and reformers valued chastity, they correspondingly targeted eliminating pre-marital sexual activity. Welter's use of "sisterhood" is particularly relevant to the organizations of women spearheading reform. In connecting women's reform with religious philanthropy, those involved in the "sisterhood" acted in an effort to "save" their unfortunate sisters. However, "salvation" is debatable. Given the fundamentally religious core of the movement, the women involved imposed their values onto "fallen women."³⁹ From Johnson's first logbook entry in June of 1870, she regarded inmates with a sense of hopelessness. Innocent victims of misfortune quickly transform into vile harlots by the end of the Matron's descriptions. Johnson's very first logbook account harshly summarizes Jennie Pape's story. Johnson begins:

"A very unprepossessing girl who came from the south about the close of the war... Since her Father's death, when she was quite young her mother has kept lewd houses and has brought up her daughters to such a life. Jennie also drinks, sometimes to excess... had she been differently brought up might have been a true and worthy woman... She is now living a most wretched and degrading life with her Mother."

Stark judgment was a regular occurrence in the logbook entries. In Johnson's next entry, she moves on to Alex Leuff and writes, "A half sister of Jennie Pape. Thoroughly mistrusted in vice, and actually vile although only eight. Will

become a desperate woman, if left to herself.”⁴⁰ One is left to wonder how much a person can mistrust an eight-year-old girl in vice. Johnson’s judgment is noticeably severe due to her preconceived conclusions about the morality of non-Christian or “impure” women.⁴¹ The nature of the Christian Duty is left up for question, and the true implication of the “sisterhood of women” is also debatable.

“Sisterhood” seems to be a flexible term to comprise the spectrum of women meant to benefit from maternity homes. Although many reformers, such as Johnson, took part in anti-slavery organizations in combination with female organizations, each Matron possessed unique biases. For example, the Salvation Army’s women’s social secretary in 1919 openly claimed that Salvation Army homes welcomed unmarried mothers, “independent of creed or color, except where the national prejudice prevents... in the South, we have had to confine our work entirely to the white girls.”⁴² Racist remarks in logbook entries suggest that maternity homes were racially homogenous.⁴³ Although Evansville’s Home for the Friendless typically did not discriminate inmates to the extent of similar institutions, the Matron was certainly prone to racist tendencies. The Matron explained the circumstances of Annie Woodson applying for entrance into the home in 1872. She wrote, “[Annie] sank down and at length married a colored man. Lived happily with him till her friend interfered... But we could not take such a case. She seemed deranged.”⁴⁴ The Matron’s voice reveals the true attitudes towards the inmates as well as discrimination, and Evansville’s Matron undoubtedly thought less of this woman’s sanity due to her marriage to an African-American man. Women reformers were also wary of sexual orientation other than heterosexuality. Lesbians encompassed everything “unnatural” about womanhood because they could not naturally reproduce. As a result, the fear of a lesbian epidemic spread through women reformers. In many cases, Matrons would not allow dancing due to a connection to Hell as well as a possible gateway activity to homosexuality.⁴⁵ By “controlling impulses,” Matrons could transform inmates into ideal women.

The main goal of moral reform was to abolish prostitution and analogous sexual deviance, and reformers therefore targeted female delinquents.⁴⁶ Similarly to how Eleanor Johnson scoured the red light district of Evansville searching for “desperate” women, women reformers sought out “fallen” women to cure them of their “wretchedness.” Reformers’ values are evident in the characteristics of women they attempted to “cure.”⁴⁷ The Matron of the Evansville Home for the Friendless briefly mentions Annie Keinwater’s story. She begins, “A man wished to ruin her and secured the position of the proprietress of a fancy house to aid him. Succeeded in seducing her from the path of virtue, and in less than a year she was sunken into the lowest state, diseased in body and corrupted in soul.”⁴⁸ Being sexually active before marriage was perhaps the most disgraceful crime a woman could commit in the nineteenth century. Reformers typically viewed inmates as sexual criminals because losing purity was a crime against God. The religious women spearheading reform and philanthropy wanted to “cure” “fallen” women, which suggests that the inmates were diseased to begin with. Different types of sexual delinquents labeled by reformers were “diseased prostitutes,” “unnatural women” and “psychotic murderesses.”⁴⁹ Matrons and reformers regarded these women as dangerous mostly because, as one label suggests, these women acted “unnaturally.” Consistently with the attitudes of the Victorian Era, “unnatural” behavior for women was acting outside traditional female gender roles. Women were expected to be pure and silent, and any actions otherwise were unwomanly. With that said, the “problem women” were those who committed sexual crimes. Similarly to Victorian values, the Matrons of maternity homes usually regarded the inmates with harsh judgment in relation to their worth as a woman.

The application process for a maternity home was an emotional feat that broke down the applicants, and Matrons often did not offer the sisterly sympathy they promised. Maternity homes and similar institutions required emotionally and physically invasive questioning to warrant acceptance as an inmate. The process began with forcibly acquiring a sexual history of the applicant. Questions include a detailed explanation of their sexual encounters as well as the circumstances under which they lost their “purity.” Most of the women in question were pregnant or “diseased,” so the interviews explained how they got pregnant including who was the father and if he had promised marriage beforehand.⁵⁰ Sexual interviews were fairly standard, and logbook entries from similar institutions include the same information from the Matron’s perspective. For example, the Matron of Evansville’s Home of the Friendless includes the case of Esther Middleton who had been brought to the Home as a result of prostitution.

The Matron wrote:

“Took in as she had no shelter, her step father having closed his door against her. She had been in fancy houses, and was the most repulsive and worthless creature to be found. Remained many months, was given to falsehood and theft. Improved in general appearance, although the prospect of her ever being of any worth or character is very poor.”⁵¹

Johnson noticeably does not appear to have hope for Middleton. Matrons often looked down upon inmates as hopeless, “feeble minded” sinners.⁵² Sexual interviews began the process of “curing,” and combined with religious teachings,

reformers used a scientific approach to investigation as if they could cure the innate physical characteristics of impurity.⁵³

Although women reformers claimed their efforts were meant to aid “fallen” women back onto a track of righteousness, they hindered the progress of accepting female sexuality. Victorian era limitations of women were directly linked to their sexuality; society viewed pious and chaste women in the highest regard. With that said, many reformers believed the path to “curing” “fallen” women was through stripping them of their sin as much as possible. However, through labeling women as “fallen” solely due to sexual activity, they contributed in shaming girls and women for what they chose to do with their bodies. Women understandably kept their sexual activity quiet after realizing their reputation would be disgraced otherwise. If matrons and reformers saw a young incest victim as guilty, there was no hope for “reformation” for any potential inmate. Reformers were supposed to instill hope and strength into women of the nineteenth century, but instead they primarily sought to encourage a conservative, shameful society.

Evansville’s Home for the Friendless serves as an incredibly valuable case study of Victorian America in regards to women’s reform as well as the power of a seemingly insignificant individual. The Home for the Friendless as an institution was able to succeed because of the specific qualities of Evansville. Evansville’s assets combined with the leadership of Eleanor Johnson and the support of Willard Carpenter produce a perfect equation for a reform institution. Without the influence Johnson brought from Boston, the ideal of reform institution likely would not have made it to Evansville as early as it did in the nineteenth century. Johnson was a catalyst for reform in Evansville, and Carpenter supported her. Evansville evidently had the capability to harness a morality transformation effort within the larger women’s reform movement due to its size and financial capabilities. Several of the elements together may have led to the Home for the Friendless in Evansville, but the combination of all parts led to the unique, ultimate success of the maternity home. Johnson spearheaded the movement in Indiana, which subsequently caused the advancing of reform movements in the Midwest. One unknown figure in history initiated a butterfly effect of reform in Victorian America, which emphasizes the importance of expanding histories from what we already know.

2. Endnotes

1 Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy against family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 7.

2 Pleck, 7.

3 “Vanderburgh County Institutions.” Genealogy Trails History, accessed September 16, 2013, <<http://genealogytrails.com/ind/vanderburgh/misc~hist.html>>

4 “History of the Amistad Research Center.” Amistad Research Center, accessed September 16, 2013, <http://www.amistadresearchcenter.org/index.php/about-us>.

5 The Author Entry Catalog Amistad Research Center for the AMA lists letters going back and forth with Johnson during her time in Massachusetts and also her time in Evansville. This entry is the only reference to Johnson’s activity with the AMA once she left Massachusetts, but her actions in Evansville as well as communication with the AMA suggests she continued to work with the association.

6 Couch, Mrs. Clifton E.: *The Vanderburgh Christian Home, 1870-1970* (Evansville: Vanderburgh County Christian Home Press, 1970), 3.

7 Couch, 5.

8 Johnson’s work was highly controversial, especially in the context of the Civil War.

9 *The Journal*. 1876. Obituary, 5 December.

10 Selma Schaperjohn, Ed., *Where There’s a Willard: The First 100 Years of the Willard Library of Evansville, Indiana* (Evansville: The Friends of Willard, Library Press, 1986), 10.

11 Schaperjohn, 32.

12 “Vanderburgh County Institutions.” Genealogy Trails History, accessed September 16, 2013, <http://genealogytrails.com/ind/vanderburgh/misc~hist.html>.

13 Carpenter was known as the “eccentric philanthropist” as the chapter is suitably titled in Willard Library’s Centennial publication, *Where There’s a Willard*.

14 “Vanderburgh County Institutions.” Genealogy Trails History, accessed September 16, 2013, <http://genealogytrails.com/ind/vanderburgh/misc~hist.html>.

15 Couch, 9.

16 VCH, v. 2, 2.

17 Johnson's family moved to Kalamazoo during her time in Evansville, so she left Evansville to be with her family as she died.

18 "United States Census Bureau." Accessed September 4, 2013. < <http://www.census.gov/#>>

19 Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy against family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 79.

20 Although most small towns did not have the resources to support Christian homes or similar institutions, the Christian homes in small towns were most successful in "catching" immoral women because word got around so quickly. Since they could not hide, they were quickly encouraged to get "cured" in a Christian home.

21 Robert M Ireland. Winter 1992. Frenzied and Fallen Females: Women and Sexual Dishonor in the Nineteenth-Century United States. *Journal of Women's History* 3: 95-117, 96.

22 Home for the Friendless Logbook Records, 1870-1908. Vanderburgh Christian Home Collection, Willard Library, Evansville, Indiana, Volume 2, 11.

23 Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 48.

24 Barbara Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 15.

25 Hobson, 11.

26 Odem, 11.

27 VCH vol. 2, 7.

28 Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 7.

29 Ibid., 8.

30 Ibid., 11.

31 Sexual assault was typically at the hands of fathers or older brothers, but women made up a very small percentage of the aggressors.

32 Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 95-96.

33 Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy Against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 57, 60, 61, 65.

34 Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 5, 10, 20.

35 The True Womanhood labeled these seductive men as an enemy of God, and thus reformers focused their energy on shielding women from men. Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151, 152, 155.

36 VCH, Vol. 2: 24.

37 VCH, Vol. 1: 17-20, 34.

38 VCH, Vol. 1: 42.

39 The Curse of Eve theory is pertinent in understanding why sexuality is directly linked with sin in Christianity.

40 VCH, Vol. 1: 1.

41 Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 135.

42 Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 71.

43 In contrast, Evansville's Home for the Friendless welcomed a variety of races and ethnicities. VCH, Vol. 2: 67.

44 VCH, Vol. 1: 34.

45 Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 83.

46 Keith Melder, "Ladies Bountiful: Organized Women's Benevolence in Early Nineteenth Century America," *New York History* 48 (July 1967): 244.

47 Laura Briggs, "The Race of Hysteria: 'Overcivilization' and the 'Savage' Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology," *American Quarterly* 52.2 (2000): 255.

48 VCH, Vol. 1: 23.

49 Ciani, "Problem Girls," 205.

50 This shows that Matrons placed importance on the circumstances in which a woman became pregnant, but in regards to purity instead of sympathy. Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University, 1993), 7.

51 Vanderburgh Christian Home Collection, Willard Library, Evansville, Indiana, Volume 1, 5.

52 Ibid., 79.

53 Some reformers believed they could truly link physical traits in "diseased" women with feeble mindedness through these tests. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, 64.