



Board of Children's Guardians for the District of Columbia, 1893–1917

In the 1890s, the reform-minded Progressive era led to many Federally mandated changes in social institutions, including a more centralized administration of the charitable and reformatory institutions in the District of Columbia. An act of July 26, 1892 (27 Stat. 268), established the Board of Children's Guardians to provide for the care of dependent children in the District. Composed of nine members appointed for a three-year term by the judges of the police and criminal courts, the Board acted as legal guardians for the neglected, abused, abandoned, or destitute children committed to them by those courts. They also cared for children committed to them by the Board of Trustees of both the Reform School for Boys and the Reform School for Girls, as well as children temporarily placed in their custody pending court investigation and judgment. The Board of Guardians held the power to place children with private families or in appropriate institutions, apprentice them, or place them for adoption. The Superintendent of Charities, established by Congress in 1890, supervised the work of the Board as well as the institutions in which it placed its wards. An act on March 16, 1926 (44 Stat. 208), replaced the Board of Children's Guardians with the Board of Public Welfare.

Textual Records

Textual records relating to the Board of Children's Guardians are in the **Records of the Government of the District of Columbia (Record Group 351)**, which are located at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC. The records are described in Preliminary Inventory 186, *Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Government of the District of Columbia*.

The following record series contain information about individual children:

___ **History of Committed Feeble-minded Children, 1884–1907** (PI 186, Entry 151). The Board of Children's Guardians inherited this series of records after it assumed responsibility from the Secretary of the Interior of caring for indigent, feeble-minded children and placing them in out-of-state educational institutions. The records consist of bound volumes containing the personal and family histories of children committed to the Pennsylvania Training School for Feeble-minded Children in Elwyn, PA (1884–1907), and the Virginia Home and Training School for Feeble-minded Children in Falls Church, VA (1894–1907). They are arranged chronologically by volume for each institution. Volume entries contain each child's name, age, race, date and place of birth, date taken into custody, remarks concerning physical and mental condition, information about parents and other family, and financial condition of the family.

___ **Record of Children Received, July 4, 1893–January 5, 1912** (PI 186, Entry 152). Arranged chronologically and numbered 1–3042. The records include a list of children placed in the custody of the board, giving date taken in charge; name of child; race; from whom received; basis for the commitment; religion of the parents; and information about the parents' birthplaces, character, and whether living or dead. There is no index for this series.

___ **Children's History, 1893, 1897–1906, 1909–13** (PI 186, Entry 153). Arranged chronologically by the date of commitment with an alphabetical index to names in the volumes for July 23, 1909–September 27, 1911, and October 2, 1911–May 5, 1913. The records include background and progress reports on children placed in the custody of the board. Entries for each child provide date taken in charge; name; age; race; name and last known address of parents; date and place of birth; remarks about physical, mental, and moral condition; and a general history of the ward and family, including circumstances that led to the commitment. Also included is a record of visits by the Board of Children's Guardians to each child.

___ **Directory of Placed-Out Children, July 7, 1893–July 31, 1908** (PI 186, Entry 154). Arranged chronologically, the records include a list of placed-out children and the terms of their placement. General information includes the names and address of the families with whom the child was placed, as well as information about each family's financial status, occupation, religion, education, and race or nationality. Information about each child includes birth date, physical condition, character, education, religion, parents, and terms of placement.

___ **Record of Children in Temporary Custody, November 9, 1897–July 19, 1909** (PI 186, Entry 155). Arranged chronologically, with an alphabetical index in each volume. The records contain the date each child was placed in the custody of the board; name; age; race; name and last known address of parents; place and date of birth; physical, mental, and moral condition; from whom received; cause of placement; where temporarily placed, length of stay, and financial charges; and final disposition of the case, including remarks elaborating on the reasons for commitment.

___ **Histories of Children Committed to the Industrial Home School for White Children, 1896–1917** (PI 186, Entry 157). Numbered entries are arranged chronologically by date the child was received. The Board of Children's Guardians assumed control of the Industrial Home School for White Children, located in Georgetown, by act of Congress on February 23, 1923 (42 Stat. 1361). The records include background and progress reports on children committed to the school, giving date received; name; place and date of birth; age; health; physical description; type of employment; habits; information about the parents including nationality, employment, education, habits, and religion; names of relatives; home associations; present home; date discharged and to whom; and remarks on the child's progress.

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