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Mapping Poverty in Gotham: Visualizing New York City's Almshouse Ledgers from 1822 to 1835

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Abstract
This paper maps and spatializes the Almshouse Ledger records for the children of unmarried parents in New York City in the 1820 and 1830s. Mapping the distribution of poverty and the provision of forms of welfare in the city, this paper illustrates specific areas of the city which were attracting the very poor as early as the second decade of the nineteenth century. This paper argues that migrants from countries with similar welfare systems to those established in New York may be overrepresented in the record due to familiarity with the system. This interdisciplinary paper combines archaeological approaches to GIS with archival research to illustrate the distribution of welfare provision.

Keywords Poverty · Migration · GIS · Institutions

Introduction

In 1829, the infant Ann Morris was delivered to the New York City Almshouse by her mother. Neither of her parents' names were recorded. Ann's anonymous parentage was unusual, as the names of the parents at the very least were usually recorded, even if the children were subsequently boarded out to be nursed by another woman. The city of New York was typically fastidious in accounting for the children in their charge, as part of the bureaucratic process of state support that was in effect at the time. This is a process of state bureaucracy that provides us with a window into otherwise shadowy spaces, into the private and domestic lives of the very poor.

This article is about using welfare records to inform on the personal economies and hardships of the poor in fast-growing cities in the early nineteenth century. An archaeological approach to mapping empirical data is applied here to illustrate how people are distributed throughout the city. Building on archaeological approaches

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to urban development, and the potential for archaeological perspectives to inform on these processes (Rothschild and Wall 2014: 3), this study applies a desk-based research approach to the material and spatial development of the city of New York. The aim of this study is to map welfare provision for one discrete group – the poor parents and carers of mostly illegitimate children – across New York City at a time when the city was expanding exponentially both spatially and demographically. This microstudy makes intensive use of one of the Almshouse Ledgers for New York City and maps the distribution of this aspect of welfare management between 1822 and 1835. The Almshouse Ledger collection represents a significant corpus of primary source material accounting for the poor in New York City, which demographics are broad and extensive in this period. One of the ledgers from this collection is considered here as a means of demonstrating the potential for this collection to inform on the spatial demographics of poverty in the city in the nineteenth century.

This spatial microstudy illuminates three aspects of life in poverty in New York City, in the 1820 and 1830s. These are the early settlement of areas which would become synonymous with poverty later in the century, the suggestion that specific demographics availed themselves of this form of welfare provision, and the incorporation of one group's welfare provision - the nursing of children - into another group's means of "getting by." That the areas in question here were *already* slums or emerging as such within ten years of their construction suggests that the landscape of poverty that comprises much of the discourse on the urban poor of New York in the 1860 and 1870s has been a much longer feature of urban living in the modern metropolis. In this way, this article presents the potential for this kind of urban microstudy in wider research on the social archaeology of poverty and the historical archaeology of welfare provision.

Background

The following microstudy is based on an empirical examination of the Child Accounts and Receipts Ledger from 1829 to 1832. This is one ledger in the Almshouse Ledger Collection for New York City and consists of a representative sample of poverty management practice from the period before welfare management was institutionalised at Blackwell's Island. This is an interesting period in poverty history because it predates the influential English and Irish New Poor Laws, which impact is seen in the poverty legislation of many Anglophone countries in the nineteenth century including the United States. This period was concurrent with the end of a more fluid, less centralised era of poor relief in the British Isles, broadly similar to that contemporaneously in place in New York City. New York City's Poor Laws in the 1820 and 1830s offered a mixture of out-relief (payments, sometimes called outdoor relief in records) and institutional stays in a Poor House or Almshouse, making the system early in the century far less rigid than later decades.

New York City, in common with many cities in North America, reformed its welfare provision in the 1870s to discourage welfare reliance and encourage the poor to manage their own poverty (Kauffman and Kiesling 1997: 440). The application of the "workhouse test," which is the creation of an institutional environment intolerable to all but the most desperate in order to discourage indigency, or the creation of insti-

tutional environments intolerable to all but the most desperate had become popular among thinkers in social reform like Jeremy Bentham from the end of the eighteenth century in England (Brundage, 2003: 34–35). The idea began to gain ground in the 1850s across the Atlantic. The "scientific philanthropy" which drove reform in the 1870s sought to encourage the poor toward private charities rather than reliance on the state and led to the abolition of outdoor relief in New York City (Kaplan 1978: 205–207). These conversations and reforms were long in the making, however, and private charity had a much longer history in New York City, especially with regards to morality and the family in poverty, as I will outline later in this paper. It is significant that the early poor laws of the city sought to treat all immigrants to the city as the "poor of the state" and the appointment of commissioners to manage poor relief centralised the management of poverty by the end of the eighteenth century (Burrows and Wallace 1998: 364).

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an "economy of makeshifts" (Hufton, 1974) – the ways in which people got by in this period – were many and varied, and not limited to one source. Rather than relying solely on one form of welfare or relief, the poor drew on private charity, on their neighbors, and on religious organizations, as well as on the state. For unmarried mothers, this pool of charitable sources was small, given the moral dimension to their circumstances. Their situations necessitated a reliance on the city for help. Even so, the relief provided by or facilitated by city (in the form of bastardy bonds or settlements which named the father of a child born out of wedlock) likely provided just one source of income. Other non-work-based sources of income, including begging, were an option but participating in any morally questionable activities such as begging excluded women from availing themselves of some charitable services in the city. This meant that the most desperate were reliant on the municipal authorities when seeking help. While the middle-class arbiters of welfare in New York City have been the subject of considerable study, the women who fell outside of their stringent criteria are less well-researched.

State or municipal support for women who had no other recourse was directed largely at the wellbeing of the children rather than their mothers. A wider moral concern over the number of notable cases of infanticide and child abandonment toward the end of the eighteenth century alongside an emerging sentimentality over the role of the mother in post-Revolution America put the onus on authorities to prevent these tragedies from occurring (Gilje 1983: 581–583). This was concurrent with a period of intense economic hardship and depression, brought on by the Panic of 1819, a series of crises precipitated by a post-war slump, a drop in the sale price of cotton to England, a property crash, and a banking crisis (Browning 2019: 3–5). The New York State Assembly's Poor Laws legislated for the establishment of more designated facilities to house the state's poor, albeit those who the city felt were worthy of support (Beisaw et al. 2021).

It is important to point out at this stage that most people in the nineteenth century were, in fact, poor. The city of New York expanded so rapidly in the early nineteenth century, from ca. 33,000 in 1790 to 166,000 in 1825 (Mohl 1971, 6), so that problems such as unemployment, overcrowding, displacement, and homelessness were common. By 1814, it was estimated that ca. 19,000 people, one fifth of the population, were receiving charitable aid (Becker 1987: 323). In his polemic treatise on poverty

in the Lower East Side in 1890, *How the Other Half Lives*, social reformer Jacob Riis used his literary flourish to expose for the world at large the deplorable conditions under which people in the Lower East Side lived (see deNoyelles, 2020 for an in-depth study on Riis and his efforts). The area that became the Lower East Side had much more salubrious origins, retained in the street names which formed a core part of the empirical research in this article. Built on land once occupied by a line of wealthy estates owned by the Rutgers, the De Lancey's, and the Stuyvesant's, streets like Division Street and Orchard Street have their origins in the boundaries between these estates and the features thereupon (Burrows and Wallace 1998: 178).

The expansion of the city was foreseen and planned from the start of the nineteenth century, when municipal authorities took control of urban sprawl and set out plans for development (Burrows and Wallace 1998: 364). The "Commissioner's Plan" of 1811 was adopted for the expansion of the city of New York up through the island of Manhattan. The plan was rather scathingly assessed by a recent historian on the subject as simply the "the easiest" solution to planning decades of settlement after a lengthy surveying process (Koeppel 2015: 121). The plan overtook the old estates with grids of streets. The uniformity of the mass construction that was planned for, block after block of buildings in the Federal style, belied the reality within; a middle-class family may have occupied a building that was identical in style to a boarding house (Burrows and Wallace 1998: 375). Street widths were one of the few concessions to hierarchy in the new grid layout, to which building heights were related (Ballon 2012: 87). Even so, the historic architectural record, this obscures more material class differences in architectural styles that were more evident in cities across the Atlantic and indeed the United States in the same period. As such, archival sources (such as those considered in this study) are invaluable in spatially situating the poor.

Studies on New York City's expansion in the early nineteenth century have examined class and the separation of home from workplace and have employed a transdisciplinary methodology to spatialize class identity in the rapidly expanding metropolis (Cantwell and diZerega Wall 2001). In their forward to *Tales of Gotham*, Janowitz and Dallal (2013: vii) talk about the purposeful combination of multiple datasets to tell stories about New York. Indeed, New York is a storied city, whose vast, multiple material and archival layers represent an opportunity to the historical archaeologist to explore the boundaries of our discipline. As such, historical archaeologies of the city frequently read as experimental. This paper contributes to this scholarship by drawing on one of those experimental approaches, a microhistory approach. Focusing on a discrete dataset – the Almshouse records – I spatialize an archival source to evidence the potential in this approach. I consider how poor women managed in times of personal crisis during a period of rapid expansion. Archaeological studies of New York's almshouse system have previously looked at the institutional conditions of the almhouse itself. The New York City almshouse system has a long history (for detailed context on the New York City almshouse from an archaeological perspective, see Baugher 2001: 175–202). This paper builds on that scholarship to consider "out-relief" (or "outdoor" relief in some sources). Out-relief is poor relief that was not focused on institutional residency or confinement and in the case of unmarried mothers, usually involved the intervention of the city in holding the father to monetary account. Out-relief is less straightforward than institutional relief, generally

involving multiple forms of support. As such, it is less discrete in the archival record. The practice was itself unpopular among poverty reformers in the nineteenth century and indeed in 1827 New York State introduced a statute limiting the practice to only those deemed in need of temporary relief (Hannon 1984: 818); the support of infants in their first years of life likely fell into this category. These children, as infants in their first months of life, likely fell outside of the catch-all category of "bastard children" (applied to older children), whose admission into the city almshouse was called for as early as 1736 (Baugher 2001: 184). This article is concerned with how an archaeological approach – spatializing this form of support – to some out-relief records contributes to the story of poverty in the city; the continuation of the practice in the city beyond 1827 is a valuable area of potential further study. It is enough to state here that for the very poor, out-relief (official or otherwise) formed an element of the ways in which they "got by" and negotiated the expanding city. The focus of this paper is women and children, the destitute, the desperate, and those lacking in support networks, whose only recourse was city intervention and support.

The women who appealed to the state were among the poorest women in the city, and occupied spaces that were then and are still largely inaccessible to outsiders. Black markets and shady alleyway solutions to financial and medical woes were very much a feature of life in nineteenth-century New York. Desperate women who sought help for abortions, for instance, could avail themselves of the services of the notoriously unregulated trade in black-market medicine that led to notable campaigns, as well as a series of high-profile investigations by undercover policewomen to expose these practices at the start of the following century (Evens 2021: 49–66). Yet, even in the 1820s, the moral panic surrounding illegitimate children was gaining ground. Women frequently turned to the state for support when they had no other option. In three notable cases of child abandonment in New York City in this period, where children were left by their mothers with the almshouse or with representatives of the local church, women cited their inability to make a living to support their children and lack of support from the children's fathers as their reasons for giving up their children (Gilje 1983: 584). Interestingly, this may indicate a degree of reliance on institutions to support children who could not be cared for by their parents. Even so, it was not in the interests of the city to take on the expensive burden of raising children. By the time he wrote *How the Other Half Lives*, the problem of orphaned children drove Riis (1971:222) to refer to the 15,000 children then under institutional care in New York City as a "standing army." That the city would therefore advocate for fathers to financially support mothers in the care of their children even from this early stage is unsurprising, though given the relatively small number of children recorded in this receipts' ledger – just 116 over a three-year period – there are indications that this kind of support was not widely used. So, what does this tell us about urbanization in the nineteenth century or the poor of New York in the 1820s? The very poor are among the population groups who most intensively engage with municipal authorities. How a city responds to the problem of poverty during periods of rapid growth can foreshadow the long-term approach to poverty in that city. The lengthy discourse on urban poverty surrounding a city like New York, that centers around the 1860 and 1870s, has its roots in the settlement patterns and municipal attitudes of the 1810 and 1820s.

Many of the individuals who sought the help of the city to get by in the nineteenth century were migrants to the city or the children of recent migrants, whether from across the Atlantic Ocean or from other parts of the new United States. These people found themselves without immediate family or communities on whom to rely. Scholarship on migration to New York in the nineteenth century is well-established across the humanities and social sciences. Irish migrants have received particular attention, especially in historical archaeology where the remains of neighborhoods and streets in areas like Five Points have turned up domestic assemblages pointing to material markers of identity (Yamin 2001). Recent research in the history of medicine has tackled the issue of over-representation of Irish migrants in lunatic asylums and other institutions. As a discrete migrant group, the Irish were particularly represented in institutions for welfare not least due to their tendency to make use of them as a means of economic survival (Cox and Marland 2015: 264–265). From a health perspective, a predisposition to mental illness which accounts for overrepresentation considering environmental and economic conditions in Ireland in the 1840s has gone some way toward explaining why Irish people found themselves in need of state welfare services in countries to which they migrated. The trauma of the circumstances of emigration such as hunger, social conditions, political oppression (Linn 2008: 53) as well as the physiological legacy of the Great Famine and living conditions (see Grimsley-Smith 2011: 307–323) may all have contributed to the condition of Irish migrants and their reliance on the state for support in the second half of the nineteenth century. Much notable scholarship on Irish migration has focused on this mid-to-late nineteenth-century period, concurrent with mass migration to North America from Europe, and economic and political conditions in Ireland making out-migration from the island (after the 1840s especially) an increasing feature of life and Irish culture both at home and abroad. The period before this, the late-eighteenth century and early-nineteenth century when Irish migration to North America was beginning to pick up pace, is less extensively studied.

In the early nineteenth century, state-sponsored institutions for welfare, poverty management, and health were becoming formalized and codified in law in the British Isles. Increasing industrialization and a population boom at the end of the eighteenth century exposed the deficiencies in a parish-based poverty-management system in Britain and Ireland (Brundage 2002: 24–25). Institutional solutions and frameworks for poverty management were a means of addressing the unsavoury or uncomfortable elements of society not provided for by their own communities (Tarlow 2007: 138); urbanization exacerbated this. The state began to take the place of the family in supporting the poor, the sick, and the insane (Foucault 2001: 241). The manager of an institution replaced the patriarch of a family, as institutions took on the social hierarchy of the family with the manager as a father figure and the matron, often the manager's wife, as house mother (Fennelly, forthcoming). Similarly, American institutions in the same period operated on a "family" model, forgoing strict classification to mix paupers of all classes (Spencer-Wood 2001: 118), though splitting them by gender or age or degree of "deservingness." While not all poverty management was institutionally based, the principles which underpinned these systems were similarly framed on both sides of the Atlantic – these include ideas of deserving and undeserving poor, the distribution of out relief, and ideas like the "workhouse test."

These structures and underpinning ideas dominate much of the rhetoric on poverty management in the 1830s, but in the day-to-day management of the very poor, ideology is not always borne out. In the British Poor Law institutions, the measure of "deservingness" of poor relief varied from urban to rural institutions, and according to the means of those institutions to provide for that inmate class (children, elderly, women, etc.) (Newman and Fennelly, forthcoming). Women who have children out of wedlock may on principle be considered "undeserving" of state support (Baugher 2001: 184); however, the almshouse ledgers suggest that the needs of their children in the earliest part of their lives at least were addressed.

Over the course of the first three decades of the nineteenth century, poverty became increasingly institutionalised in urban settings, as workhouses of the type that would come to typify the architectural form were constructed, while other buildings – almshouses, former residences – were converted for use. Institutional management of the poor was not homogenous. Indeed, some institutions in Britain held onto older systems of poverty management and spatial organization as their catchment area required, with an increasing focus on the sick and infirm from the middle of the nineteenth century (Fennelly and Newman 2017: 185). Classification of the poor in these spaces, separating the productive from the unproductive, became an increasing concern as the nineteenth century progressed (Lucas 1999: 135–136). The influences of developments in welfare or poor house, asylum, and prison design in the British Isles can be seen in the emerging United States at this time (Yanni 2007). The parish-based poor law system, established and developed in Britain since the sixteenth century, was transplanted to Britain's American colonies where it formed the basis of poverty-management frameworks and immigration practices there (Hirota 2017). As such, new migrants to the United States from the British Isles and other European countries with similar systems of poverty management would recognize the system at work. If, as Charles Orser (2007: 87) has pointed out in the case of the Irish, new migrants arrived in the United States with clear ideas of their place in the social hierarchies they had left behind, then seeking help through the channels most familiar to them would be expected behavior. Though the focus of this study is not explicitly migrants or migration, this study is situated within a broader context in which British and Irish names are frequently recorded in the records of public institutions. Rootless migrants were not the only people in need of aid in the expanding city, but they or their descendants certainly comprise a considerable number of poor people.

Methodology

This paper is the result of archival study, and the scope of the study has gone through several iterations in light of the limitations of the archival data. Historical archaeology has the potential to expose and tell subaltern stories. "Triangulation" of archival sources and maps, and material assemblages where they are accessible can inform on the living conditions of the very poor (Svensson et al. 2020: 171). This paper, taking a spatial and archives-based approach, contributes an example of how an archaeological approach to spatializing records can repopulate city streets with their former inhabitants. Repopulating the past with those who have previously occupied the margins of the historical record, increasing the visibility of "nonelite and disenfranchised

groups" in archaeology can contribute to a more inclusive discipline and disciplinary practice (Scott 1994: 13).

The initial aim of this study was to track city welfare provision for unmarried migrant mothers and their children in the city of New York. The initial research was carried out with the intention of spatializing migration across the city in the 1820s and determining the extent to which communities which built up around areas of *entrepot* may have caused women to seek help from the city rather than their own families or neighbors. However, the records of the women seeking city intervention in the support of their children in the 1820s did not record much detail about the women themselves beyond their name (and sometimes not even this). In only a few rare instances, other details about the woman such as her race were recorded. Unlike the admission records for the New York City Almshouse, their "port of entry" or "place of origin" was not recorded. Surnames can be telling of origins but they are not definitive and there is no guarantee that the women recorded were first generation migrants. As such, the aim of the study shifted to looking at the neighborhoods where the women lived, and the economies that surrounded illegitimacy, and motherhood in the early nineteenth century.

The results of this study were plotted on a map of New York City, compiled by overlaying maps of the city from the 1810s to the 1850s in GIS. The historic base maps were the 1817 "Plan of the city of New York" (Poppleton 1817), and the 1833 "Map of the city of New York" (Burr 1833). These maps were chosen as representative of the rapid expansion of the city over the two decades under study. These maps were cross-referenced with the 1850s "Maps of the City of New York" (Perris 1857–62). Cross-referencing with a later map was necessary where street names were not legible or readily identifiable, and to compensate for street-name changes between the earliest maps and names that may have been used in common parlance but were not written down until later in the century. The maps were accessed digitally through the archives of the New York Public Library Digital Collections. A new map of the city in the 1820s was constructed from layering the three maps, and the results of the archival study were plotted on this new map. The Child Accounts and Receipts Ledger (1829–32) which forms the focus of this study is part of the Almshouse Ledger Collection at the New York City Department of Records and Information Service and was accessed digitally. There are 116 entries in this account ledger, and the data has been discussed (below) as exact figures due to the limited number of individuals in the dataset. Rendering the data in this manner is also intended to humanize and individualize the people represented in the historical record, whom institutional frameworks dehumanize by homogenizing into collective data. The 116 entries have (where possible) been plotted on a map. Mapping the distribution of welfare provision across the city highlights clusters around neighborhoods like the Lower East Side, and streets like North Street in the east and Duane Street in the west.

Some street names have changed since the 1830s, meaning that additional sources had to be consulted to identify older or unofficial street names. For example, lengthy North Street, which appears in three of the ledger entries, refers to East Hudson Street. Misreads of the early nineteenth-century handwriting led me on several fruitless searches; "Miller Street" for instance turned out to be Willet Street. It is worth pointing out these stumbling blocks in palaeography, as reading handwriting and

becoming used to the pen of a single or couple of clerks is an essential methodological point to manage when conducting archival research on sources that are not indexed or printed. Researchers become familiar with individual and often unnamed clerks, our relationship with these individuals far more intimate across the chronological gap than our relationship with the historical personages or individuals whose names and deeds they recall (Fennelly 2019: 94). As such, I acknowledge the challenging relationship I had with this ledger's particular clerk and their handwriting when I first commenced this research. Approximations of the street numbers were made where the street pattern had changed. Approximations were made by cross-referencing multiple map sources from the nineteenth century available through the New York Public Library online collections, and the three primary maps which were used to create the map used here (Fig. 1). The "site," in the archaeological sense, is the City of New York, and this study reflects how class was spatialized in the early city from the time of its expansion.

Results

The Child Accounts and Receipts Ledger visualised in Fig. 1 officially contains records of support for children dating from 1829 to 1832. Despite this official date range under which this ledger is catalogued, the dates of the records go up to children born in 1836. This likely accounts for overlap with the next accounts ledger. There are 116 children recorded in this ledger whose mothers, nurses, or the city received compensation for their support. 69 children were recorded as at nurse with their mothers, of which 43 had recorded addresses and 41 of these addresses are in Manhattan. twenty children were recorded as at nurse with a nurse, and 15 of these had recorded addresses in Manhattan; there were no nurses without an address. In the case of 27 children, it is not specified if they are with nurse or with their mother and sometimes multiple names (a nurse or mother's name) were recorded underneath theirs suggesting a mix of the two solutions. Twelve of these had addresses, nine of them in Manhattan. The map in Fig. 1 illustrates approximations of all known recorded addresses and is coded according to who the children were nursed by.

The 65 children in the records with addresses in Manhattan are spread across the city. Some of the children were distinguished in the accounts by the circumstances surrounding either their birth or their abandonment. One woman eloped directly from the lying-in hospital, leaving her child at the almshouse to be nursed by somebody else. Another mother was sent to the lunatic asylum from the almshouse with no explanation surrounding her confinement there. The child's father was not recorded in this instance (the father's name was recorded in most cases), so it may be assumed that the care of the child fell to the city. One woman was recorded as dying in childbirth. This is no reflection of childbirth mortality rates, but rather a reflection of the low sample size. Institutional support for childbirth may also have played a role; indeed, childbirth mortality was recorded as relatively low in New York compared to the national average 30 years later in 1860, at just 2% (Statistics of the United States 1866).

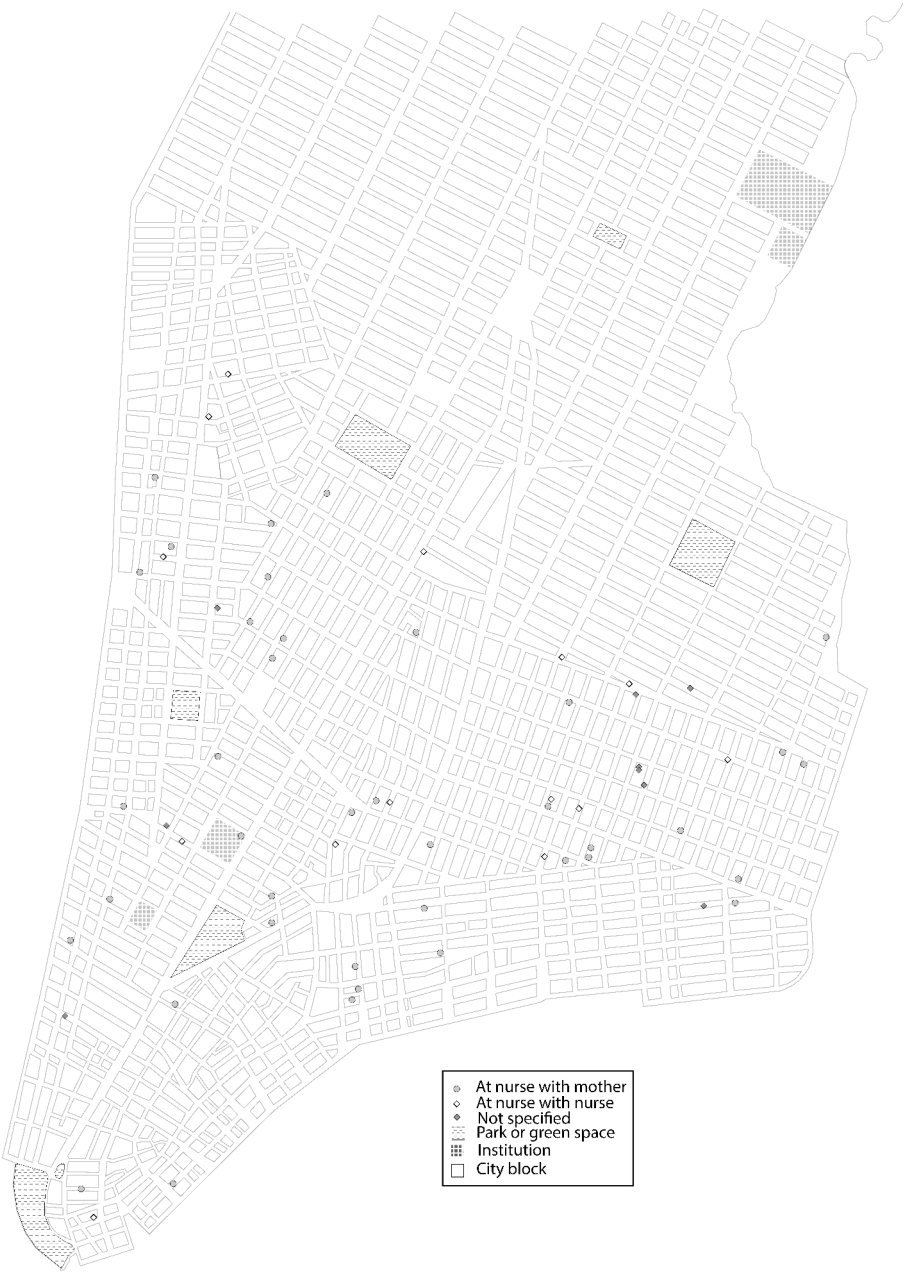

Fig. 1 Map of lower Manhattan ca. 1830s, showing distribution of addresses recorded in Child Accounts and Receipts ledger. Drawn by author

There is no area of concentration in children being nursed by their mothers. Six of the 15 children at nurse with a nurse – a woman paid to look after them – were in the Lower East Side. All three categories – children at nurse with their mothers, with

a nurse, or unspecified – are distributed around the city, but the area with the highest density of dots is the grid of streets on the Lower East Side bounded by North Street to the north, Bowery to the west, Division Street to the south and the river to the east. Twenty of the 65 children with addresses in Manhattan had addresses in this area. Other areas of concentration were Lewis Street, Sullivan Street (both running north to south), and the long east-west running North Street, which each had three cases. The women on Sullivan Street all nursed their own children, while one of the entries on Lewis Street was with nurse. It is worth noting that Sullivan Street was in the neighborhood of the nearby Northern Dispensary, established in 1827 and likely convenient for any healthcare requirements in the nursing of children. As noted in analysis of excavations at Sullivan Street in the 1980s, New Yorkers were aware of and utilized their access to physicians and medicines at dispensaries like this (Howson 1993: 148). North Street had one woman nursing her own child, one with a nurse, and one unrecorded. Duane Street in the west also had three cases, two women nursing their own child and one with nurse. By the middle of the 1830s, Duane Street was known as a key center for prostitution in the city (Wood Hill 1993: 111). Other areas of concentration were the streets between Chatham Square leading to Division Street, and the shipyards and docks on the East River. Seven of the recorded addresses were in this area, two of them on tiny Batavia Lane. A final area of concentration was the grid-pattern of streets between Hammersley Street and Hudson Street to the north, Broadway to the east, Canal Street to the south, and the river to the west. There were nine cases in this area. Unlike the broader grids immediately to the east, this area of the city had small alleys and its proximity to the slips on the river may have leant a transience to how people moved through the space.

For some children and mothers, there is no exact address. As such, they are not recorded on Fig. 1. Some addresses are recorded as approximations, usually identifying the nearest intersections, or care-of addresses with individuals or churches. Where women had no address at all, in some cases their accounts were short and only list for their fees at the Lying-In Hospital or payments immediately after the birth of their child. As the Lying-In ward at New York Hospital (also on Duane Street) was closed in 1827, this place only accounts for the early records. When it was in operation, the hospital was within easy reach of women living downtown.

In almost all cases, children took their father's names. The few instances where the child had their mother's name, their father's name was not recorded, the child was "left" at a residence, at an institution, or the care of a church. Of the 116 records in this book, 104 children were born to parents with different names, indicating that they were illegitimate. Two of the records were for sibling brothers who were born at different times to the same two parents. Only two children were born to parents with the same surname. However, neither of these circumstances rules out illegitimacy though it is less likely. The remaining ten children's parents' names were either unrecorded or only one parents, or guardians' name was recorded.

Discussion

The demographics of support and provision, plotted across the city, suggest that the areas which would later become synonymous with poverty toward the middle and end of the nineteenth century – the Lower East Side, Soho, Five Points – had already attracted a population for whom city intervention was their only hope. Destitution was already a feature of life in these areas, even just scant decades after their construction. Among the mothers, there are a few points which distinguish them as individuals. One mother is recorded as having been sent to a lunatic asylum, and this note likely accounts for the reason why the child fell to the care of the city. One mother was said to have eloped from the almshouse, and several others died. Indeed, there is very little information on the background or ethnicity of any of the children or their parents in the record, and all occasional extra information regarding the background of the mother or child or the circumstance of their birth is recorded as an extra note. Just one mother from the sample, for instance, is recorded as being Black. One child was recorded as having been "born in the house of a Black woman," though it is not clear if this means that the child and their mother were also Black. The fact that this information is recorded as an extra note at the top of the page or under the names suggests that it was information germane to the care of the child in the immediate instance, and not a classification or a general means of recording detail about a receiver of aid.

As Folks (1902: 3) stated in his 1902 account of childcare, the English Poor Law system was adopted and established in the post-Revolution United States, albeit managed differently and less centrally than the similar systems in place in Britain and Ireland. Therefore, immigrants who were already familiar with the system (broadly similar in operation across the British Isles) would have found help easier than women from countries where these systems of support were different. Though it is not possible to do more than speculate on the places of origin of the women recorded in this study, the names suggest there was an over-representation of women of Irish or British origins (if not direct origin) seeking city support in the early nineteenth century. It is likely that some of these Irish, English, Scottish, and Welsh names may be of women who were American born. Actual information on the women is scant. It was noteworthy to the keepers of these records to record one child as "emigrant," suggesting that at least one of the child's parents was emigrant too. This child, born in August 1829, was recorded to have died by November 1829. The inclusion of their emigrant status may have been a shorthand for having no further kin beyond the two parents whose names were listed in the ledger. *Their* mortal status is not recorded. Combining these records with the vast quantity of material culture that has been recovered from domestic sites in the Lower East Side may be a potential avenue towards materialising the groups (if not the individuals) who occupied the addresses. The domestic assemblages recovered in the Five Points excavations point to immigrant origins in the food they consumed or the goods they purchased, such as pipes decorated with symbols of their home countries (O'Keeffe and Yamin 2006: 98). If any of the women whose names were recorded *were* immigrants, their names indicate that they were coming from countries with already established systems for welfare provision of this kind, where the Poor Laws (before the 1830s) intervened

on a woman's behalf to seek support from the men who conceived a child with them. In the excavation of a predominantly Irish-occupied mid-nineteenth-century tenement at 472 Pearl Street in 1991 and 1992, a considerable quantity of medical material culture including medicine bottles was recovered by archaeologists (Orser 2007: 116). While this quantity of material culture relating to healthcare and medicine may have been unexpected on a site known to represent not just the very poor but migrant too (Orser 2007:117), the presence of this material culture suggests that Irish people knew how to access healthcare when they needed it. As the post-1830s Poor Laws emphasized the centrality of healthcare in the new system, a workhouse hospital in Ireland or Britain was not difficult to access for the very poor. This ease with which medical care was accessed may have influenced some migrant's views on the system in the United States. There are a large number of Irish surnames among the mothers in this sample; names like Farrell, Crellin, Ward, and O'Mar indicate that these women may have been from Ireland or have some origins within the Irish community. This is not to say that there are more illegitimate children in these community groups. Rather, I suggest that where these women were immigrants or in immigrant communities, they were more likely to already understand the bureaucratic processes of city support and thus access it.

Nursing children was part of the economy of makeshifts in the early nineteenth century. For women, doing what one could do to get by in an economy policed along moral as well as gendered lines meant that nursing the children of others on behalf of the city was one avenue open to women to earn income. In New York during this period, there was no noticeable difference in addresses for the women who nursed children for payment from the city and the women who look to the city to support their own children. The small sums they were offered to do this work also suggests that this was not a lucrative activity. As such, the women who were seeking help from the city in supporting their child and the women employed by the city to nurse children seem to be from the same socioeconomic backgrounds. There was some oversight into the kinds of women who could nurse children, however. As early as 1800, the city almshouse council stated that the nurses to whom infants were boarded out (for the meagre sum of $1 per week) should be healthy and "proper" (Folks 1902). This is not a living wage, but rather incentive to support for those whom the addition of $1 to their weekly income made a difference. It is unclear what the criteria for "propriety" was in this case, but it was likely far less stringent than the criteria for support put forward by some of the private societies who were also concerned with childcare in the city at this time, given that those institutions criteria for support excluded children born out of wedlock entirely. There is a curious dearth of children in this record sent directly to known institutions. There are no records in this particular dataset for children sent to the Orphan Asylum near the intersection of Bank Street and Greenwich to the northwest, for example. The religious nature of this institution and others in the city may have been a barrier to care. The Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children (SRPW) had strict rules regarding the respectability of the women they helped. Women had to be resident in the city for at least 12 months which excluded recent emigrants without support networks, and even then the characters of applicants were highly scrutinized by the managers of the SRPW (Mohl 1971: 148–149). The Protestant faith of the founder of the society,

Isabella Graham and her allies, including her daughter Joanna Bethune who founded the Orphan Asylum, may have discouraged many women of Catholic or other faiths applying for aid (Becker 1987: 325). Meanwhile the mission of the Orphan Asylum was to educate children in religious instruction, and children had to be the orphans of married parents (Becker 1987: 330). Given that 104 of the children recorded in the Almshouse Ledger were born to parents with different names, support from either Graham's Society or Bethune's Asylum was not possible in their case.

On the subject of the children's legitimacy, the reason for women to seek support from the city in the first place is tied to their lack of support from other avenues. For women, this includes the father of their child. In all cases, the accounts are made under the child's name from the outset, and thus these children are recorded for posterity as illegitimate. This raises interesting questions about the attitude toward illegitimate children themselves, who would be forever recorded as the result of a union between unmarried parents. The names of mothers and fathers are also recorded in these ledgers, though in a few cases the name of the mother or the father is recorded as only an initial or not at all. Furthermore, each of these records are recorded in the same hand by a single clerk, who was privy to the intimate details of the lives of these individuals. The clerk is a somewhat shadowy figure in the history of public institutions. At once highly visible as the composer of surviving records, the name of a clerk may not even appear on most of the records they were responsible for, so they are somewhat anonymous. As the center of the bureaucratic process, the unnamed clerk who was likely unknown to either the mother or the father (or, indeed the child), managed the material process of record keeping, and was thus one of the most informed people in the institution. The child, unlike the clerk or in some cases their parents, is not afforded the same anonymity in posterity.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the distribution of individuals seeking or in receipt of support or payment from the city almshouse were largely from areas that, later in the nineteenth century, became synonymous with poverty and migration. This microstudy of one of the ledgers of receipts on infants and children from New York City's Almhouse Ledger Collection accounts for just a few short years within a period of intense in-migration to the city of New York, evidencing the potential of these sources to inform on the distribution of almshouse support and welfare provision in the growing city. Mapping the distribution of support indicates that the warren of streets in the Lower East Side were, from their early years, an area of intense poverty. To the west, streets like Duane Street, host to a number of brothels in this period, were also home to women for whom support was provided. This accounts for the support of those women and children who fell outside of the respectable class of widows and orphans supported by private charitable bodies in this period, and the limitations of that kind of support especially for immigrant mothers. This point, the study of immigration and the numbers of immigrants availing themselves of civic welfare in the early nineteenth century, bears further study, as would an investigation into how these children supported by the state from their early years – the children

at nurse – got by as adults under the same system later on. Additionally, further comparative study on the material culture of domestic life in these streets may inform further on the backgrounds of the people who lived there.

Massive urban population surges like that experienced in New York in the 1820s, fuelled by waves of immigration from Europe, represent an interesting past case study for determining the impact of migration on civic systems, the origins of those systems and how they were adapted for the situations they faced, and the role familiarity plays in applications for civic or state support. This microstudy suggests that immigrants who were already familiar with the frameworks from the systems they left behind at home were more likely to avail themselves of support. Finally, there is potential here to consider: how can migrants who fall *outside* of those groups be provided for in our consideration of the past, and how can we learn from the past to inform the provision of a better state infrastructure to support multinational urban populations in the present and future?

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