Williamsport girls: The wayward, delinquent and incorrigible

The January “Williamsport Women” article looked at the lives of young, wayward and delinquent girls in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Some of these girls were placed in institutions such as the House for the Friendless, the Girls’ Training School and the Industrial Home, sent there by relatives or “sentenced” by the courts.

If a girl disturbed institutional rules, stole from the institution’s cash or caused internal strife, she risked being sent to the House of Refuge. The girls’ parents were not able to “correct” her; she needed to be sent away somewhere. This was a way to keep the girl safe, but it was not always easy.

Jennie Newton was one of these girls. Jennie Newton’s parents went to court on Jan. 8, 1975, to have her placed in the House of Refuge. Jennie Newton was 12 years old and was sent to the House of Refuge.

The House of Refuge required that all girls be kept in a separate building, but the building was not large enough to accommodate all the girls. The building was divided into separate rooms, dining rooms, school rooms and workshops. In 1880, a separate section of the House of Refuge was opened for African American children.

Children as young as 5 were committed by local courts to the facility, although the reasons were more likely to be in their parents’ influence. The children were institutionalized or infirm in their years of adolescence. After their release, a few minutes returned to their families, but most were committed or indentured to employers. The children were treated as home mothers’ helpers.

Glass Club

Belle Hoyt, writing in the Gazette and Bulletin in 1873, titled the article “preventive reform” and noted that five members of the club were appointed probation officers. The article was published on June 8, 1873, after the team completed the Glass Club.

The Glass Club consisted of five members, appointed by the public. The purpose of the group was to enforce the rules of the House of Refuge for boys and return to Williamsport’s jail, where they encountered success.

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Lifestyle

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Seymour was a retired librarian and manager of the Library of Congress’s National Collection History. Her columns are published every two years, and each column is published at the beginning of each month.