

THE FAITHFUL AND THE FALLEN: MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES AND THE WORK OF
THE SISTERS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD IN ALBANY AND TROY, NEW YORK, 1880-
1920

by

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ERIN DEL GIUDICE. *The Faithful and The Fallen: Magdalene Laundries and The Work of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Albany and Troy, New York, 1885 to 1920* (Under the direction of DR. KAREN COX)

Catholic nuns have worked within the United States in a myriad of ways for decades. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd are an order of Catholic sisters whose ministry focused on “wayward” women in the late eighteenth century. As an order predominantly made up of Irish Catholic women, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd (SGS) in America attempted to alleviate cultural tensions by caring for—and confining—women and girls who disrupted sexual norms. These women were placed into SGS homes commonly known as Magdalene laundries. Inside the homes, ‘penitents’ or inmates performed industrial laundry labor as part of their overall spiritual transformation. In Albany and Troy, New York, the SGS operated two laundries for decades beginning in 1884 and into the twentieth century. This study examines the work of the SGS in Albany and Troy from 1884 to 1920 and explores the two SGS homes through intersecting questions about class, gender, and faith in American society. As well, the paper examines two SGS homes as forms of carceral spaces. Through physical separation and moral control, the SGS managed to support charitable work while also reinforcing societal views surrounding femininity deemed degenerate and deviant. Four historiographical fields inform this paper: discipline and punishment, moral reform and welfare work, religious life and Catholicism, and Progressive Era views on gender and sexuality. This research thus understands Catholic women’s work as playing a more substantive role in projects of social reform than previously understood. This paper also expands on our critical understanding of the vital role American Catholic nuns played in the formation and embodiment of modern gender roles and cultural norms as well as the intersection of Catholic charities with prison histories in the United States.

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Introduction

The Sisters of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd are a semi-cloistered Catholic religious order originally founded near Angers, France in 1829. Led by Sister Mary Euphrasia, this congregation ministered to “fallen” women who wished to “redeem themselves.”¹ The order was formalized a few years later in 1835 and began to establish convents in other cities and towns in France including in Tours and Poitiers.² Originally and formally titled the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, the Motherhouse is in Angers. Mary Euphrasia established two divisions within the order: apostolic and contemplative sisters. The Contemplatives of the Good Shepherd, first called the Magdalenes, were penitent women who lived a cloistered life of prayer.³ In contrast, apostolic sisters actively worked within the community to minister to women and girls in need of prayer and assistance.

Catholic sisters have and continue to minister within the United States in a myriad of ways, including the service performed by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. In the U.S. since 1727, Catholic nuns have worked in a multitude of institutions from parochial schools to hospitals to orphanages, as well as ministered to homeless, sick, and poor populations. With often strictly regimented lifestyles, nuns were “often the visible manifestation of Catholicism for Americans of all religious beliefs.”⁴ In France, the Ursulines were the first order of Catholic

¹ Suellen Hoy, “Caring for Chicago’s Women and Girls: The Sisters of the Good Shepherd, 1859-1911,” *Journal of Urban History* 23, no. 3 (March 1997), 263.

² A.M. Clarke, *Life of Reverend Mother Mary of St. Euphrasia Pelletier: First Superior General of the Congregation of Our Lady Of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers* (London: Burns and Oates, 1895), 96-99. Internet Archive accessed March 23, 2021.
<https://archive.org/details/lifereverendmot00clargoog/page/n11/mode/2up>

³ “Saint Mary Euphrasia,” Sisters of the Good Shepherd, accessed March 23, 2021.

<https://sistersofthegoodshepherd.com/mary-euphrasia/>. Cloistered life refers to religious lifestyles where sisters do not leave the convent after professing their vows as nuns.

⁴ Margaret M. McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 2.

religious sisters to minister outside of the convent—a cloistered environment—beginning in 1544, and by the seventeenth-century variations emerged in the types of recognized nuns. Recognized Catholic nuns took “solemn” vows (remaining inside convent walls) while “secular sisters” took simple vows, living as nuns but not required to be enclosed.⁵ This dynamic had been papally approved since approximately the start of the fourteenth century and provided the foreground for the two lifestyles practiced by the SGS.⁶

While the Ursulines were the first order of Catholic religious women to work in the United States in 1727, other European religious communities rapidly followed. These groups were joined by American Catholic women looking to build upon both the need to proselytize and to assist Catholic immigrants.⁷ The SGS was not as widely known as other Catholic orders primarily because they were a cloistered community. Few nuns left the convent and instead the sisters ministered to “wayward, abandoned and unfortunate girls” from inside convent walls.⁸

Women taken in by the SGS were grouped into two sections: penitents—delinquent women and girls—and the second group of orphans and abandoned children. The penitent or delinquent group often included women inspired to enter a semireligious state of penance with the SGS after time served, creating the group of inmates known as “Magdalenes.” Converting former prostitutes to religious life signaled successful rehabilitation by the SGS. Most notably, the SGS in the United States professed a mission not to change a society where women became

⁵ McGuinness, *Called to Serve*, 6.

⁶ Papal cloister was established by Boniface VII in 1298 in his celebrated Constitution “Periculoso.” “Cloister,” New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, accessed November 8, 2022, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04060a.htm#:~:text=In%201298%20Boniface%20VIII%20promulgated,the%20cloister%20on%20all%20nuns.>

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

prostitutes, but rather simply to “bandage” or repair damage to women who were already in prostitution.⁹

The first apostolic sisters of the SGS arrived in the United States in December 1842 in St. Louis, establishing convents across the country by the end of the century. The Good Shepherds took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, along with a fourth vow of “zeal” for charitable work.¹⁰ This religious congregation appealed to women who sought to obtain a “real vocation” in life by helping destitute women and the poor. By 1895, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd had spread out across Europe and the United States, with up to 185 convents mainly in Ireland, Britain, and America.¹¹ As an order predominantly made up of Irish Catholic women, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd (SGS) in America attempted to mitigate fears of social decay by caring for and containing women who disrupted sexual norms. Those who did not conform to the traditional role of motherhood—prostitutes, single and sexually active, unmarried with children—all threatened the dominant societal view of an “ideal” woman: married, heterosexual and procreative. Catering to fallen women on the fringes of society, the SGS acted as moderators of female punishment and alleviated social anxieties over the changing status of women, immigrants, and community morals.

The SGS existed in Albany and Troy, and more broadly in New York State, under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Albany. Clerical approval from the archbishop was often required for various matters. As a cloistered or semi-cloistered community, the SGS followed papal enclosure as outlined in canon law, requiring that sisters ordered to a contemplative life are required to observe “cloister according to the Apostolic See” (papal decree) or by cloister

⁹ Ibid., 119.

¹⁰ Suellen Hoy, *Good Hearts: Catholic Sisters in Chicago's Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 48.

¹¹ Hoy, *Good Hearts*, 48.

adapted to their “proper character.”¹² The diocesan bishop has “the faculty of entering the cloister” for a just cause or for permitting others to be admitted to the cloister, maintaining a distant but final leadership over the order.¹³ Inside the convent, both apostolic and contemplative sisters followed the direction of an abbess or prioress—known as Mother Superior—who directed the daily life and routines of both sisters and inmates. Novitiates—women who wished to become nuns beginning their period of formative life within the convent—and postulants, women who had professed temporary (or initial) vows to the order also lived under the direction and care of the Mother Superior.

Most sisters within the order were Irish or of Irish descent. Irish Catholics as a group acknowledged the reality and existence of female sexuality but were also more likely to blame women and children for sexual activity. Women who worked in prostitution were scorned and were “not to be acknowledged as human, much less Irish.”¹⁴ However, as shown by the work of the SGS, Catholic sisters worked to rehabilitate the image of the scandalous Irish woman by acting as a remediating space for such individuals. This work was seen to improve both the reputation of women considered deviant as well as that of the Catholic Church, seen as a socially beneficial actor. Scholars have, in more recent decades, acknowledged the role of Irish Americans in propagating the Catholic Church in the United States.¹⁵ SGS sisters not only aided desperate women but converted some to Catholicism, as inmates of SGS homes could become

¹² Code of Canon Law, c. 667, §3, in *The Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition*. Vatican Archives. Accessed August 10, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib2-cann607-709_en.html#CHAPTER_III.

¹³ Code of Canon Law, c. 667, §7, in *The Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition*. Vatican Archives. Accessed August 10, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib2-cann607-709_en.html#CHAPTER_III.

¹⁴ Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 73.

¹⁵ Hoy, *Good Hearts*, 49. For more scholarship on Catholic sisters since the 1970s, consider Carol K. Coburn, “An Overview of the Historiography of Women Religious: A Twenty-Five Year Retrospective,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22 (Winter 2004): 1-26.

“consecrates” or “Magdalens,” both groups which purportedly enjoyed “an environment in which order replaced disorder, routine offset bedlam, and civility supplemented abuse.”¹⁶ The work of nuns such as the Sisters of the Good Shepherd exemplifies the intersection between Catholic charitable work and Irish-American society.

The SGS’s social work involved creating institutions for women deemed by the state or by the public to be in need of moral and physical care. Commonly known as Magdalene Laundries in veneration of Mary Magdalene, these institutions were intended to be “places of reform where women could wash away their sins” through labor.¹⁷ Mary Magdalene represented a historic female victim of social shaming who was protected, redeemed, and respected by Christ, offering an identity of refuge for women who were accused of prostitution or sexual impropriety.¹⁸ While Magdalene laundries or comparable institutions globally were not always administered by religious orders, in the United States it was the Sisters of the Good Shepherd who primarily created and administered these institutions. Labor performed inside these homes also provided economic benefits for the Church. The first SGS home specifically for care of wayward females (as opposed to strictly a convent) was opened in Louisville, Kentucky in 1843. By 1900, the SGS had opened thirty-nine homes across twenty states and the District of Columbia.¹⁹ This included two institutions founded in 1884 in Albany and Troy, New York: the House of the Good Shepherd and the Mt. Magdalen Reformatory of the Good Shepherd.²⁰

¹⁶ Suellen Hoy, “Caring for Chicago’s Women and Girls,” 268. Consecrates did not take vows or were strictly bound to the cloister. Each year consecrates rededicated themselves to Our Lady of Sorrows and lived in a semireligious state. Magdalens, on the other hand, professed solemn religious vows and formed a separate contemplative, cloistered community of nuns. These women lived with the SGS but were a distinct group “removed forever from the outside world.”

¹⁷ Michelle Jones and Lori Record, “Magdalene Laundries: The First Prisons for Women in the United States,” *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences* 17, no. 1 (2014), 170.

¹⁸ Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion*, 74.

¹⁹ Michelle Jones and Lori Record, “Magdalene Laundries: The First Prisons for Women in the United States,” *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences* 17, no. 1 (2014), 167, 171.

²⁰ Jones and Record, “Magdalene Laundries,” 172.

Women could voluntarily enter these homes but were more commonly sent there by priests, families, and local courts. Moral reform was promoted through the idea of returning to an innocence seen as having been lost by prostitution or sexual deviance.²¹ Houses of the Good Shepherd were often distanced from the public eye and primarily known for industrial laundry work.

In this thesis, I explore the two SGS homes founded in Albany and Troy, particularly from the date of each institutions' founding leading into the early twentieth century. I examine how they functioned between 1880 and 1920 and place these homes in the context of Progressive Era reform. While greater attention has been paid to the social work of laypeople and Catholic sisters through institutions like orphanages and hospitals, few scholars have examined the role of nuns and the SGS in attending to prostitutes and women labeled as deviant by society. The homes in Albany and Troy are cases through which to explore intersecting questions about class, gender, race, and faith in American society at the time. How were these homes perceived by Catholic and non-Catholic society in these two cities and what reputation did the SGS develop through their charitable work for "fallen" women? How did mechanisms of power and control influence the experience and perception of both nuns and women in the homes? Do these homes reflect Progressive-era reform efforts that sought to improve women's incarceration? How did these homes act as forms of carceral institutions?

In this paper, I use the terms "institution," "home," and "laundry" interchangeably to describe the SGS homes, as each word references aspects of labor or living conditions found within. These two homes serve as excellent representatives of the overall work of the SGS because of their location within urban environments. In 1880, Albany was not only the capital of

²¹ Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion*, 74.

New York State but a large transportation and industry hub. Troy, Albany's sister city, also experienced booming industrialization. Both cities attracted large immigrant populations. Lastly, Albany continues to serve as the center of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, which covers fourteen counties in eastern New York. Because of these characteristics, the institutions of the SGS in these two cities are well-positioned to offer insights into urban life, urban reform movements, and community interactions between the sisters and the larger population.

Albany and Troy also have been home to Catholics for two centuries. The first Catholic parish in Albany was formed in 1797 with the construction of St. Mary's Church.²² In 1828, the first Catholic religious women, the Sisters of Charity, reached the Albany area, opening an orphan asylum adjoining St. Mary's.²³ On April 23, 1847, Pope Pius IX established the Diocese of Albany, and numerous Catholic parishes opened in the region. Under male clerical leadership, the Diocese continued to grow. From 1884 to 1920, the SGS in Albany and Troy were under the domain of Bishops Francis J. McNierney, Thomas Martin Aloysius Burke, Thomas Cusack, and Edmund F. Gibbons.²⁴ Today, the Diocese of Albany contains approximately 306,500 parishioners, 126 parishes, and 460 religious sisters. Within the diocese today there are three Catholic hospitals, twelve social service agencies, eighteen religious communities of women, and four motherhouses for religious sisters, demonstrating the deep history of Catholicism in the area.²⁵

²² "First Parish Established," Diocese of Albany History, Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, accessed August 10, 2022, <https://www.rcda.org/history>.

²³ "First Sunday School Established," Diocese of Albany History, Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, accessed August 10, 2022, <https://www.rcda.org/history>.

²⁴ "Past Bishops," The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, accessed August 10, 2022, <http://cathedralic.com/past-bishops/>.

²⁵ "Current Statistics," Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, 2022, Accessed August 10, 2022, <https://www.rcda.org/about-us/current-statistics>.

Historians have examined social reform movements in the late nineteenth century extensively, paying attention to various aspects of American life. However, they have paid little attention to the work by orders of nuns in reform efforts. In this thesis, I examine the work of the SGS through four historical frameworks: about discipline and punishment (particularly within the prison reform movement); moral reform and welfare work; religious life and Catholicism; and Progressive Era views on gender and sexuality. Terminology describing these SGS homes also reflects aspects of these historical questions: “institution” indicates the use of discipline to achieve labor goals or enact punishment, either moral or physical; “home” reflects the SGS’s intent to form communities of women somehow bonded by their shared experience of moral regeneration; “laundry” directly highlights the type of forced labor these women completed. Use of the term “inmate” throughout the paper is also important as the word denotes both the internal (by the nuns themselves) and external (by the press) criminal characterization of women sent to the SGS homes. Drawing on relevant aspects of the historiography of each of these, I will highlight how the institutions founded by and work completed by the SGS show us how social tensions around changing gender norms and sexuality intersected with forms of charitable work, urban improvement, and contemporary views of Catholicism.

Most immediately, in forming these laundries, the SGS’s work intersects with scholarly analyses of the prison reform movement and theories of discipline. Ideas of containment and inability to access the outside world qualify these homes as spaces of imprisonment. Michel Foucault’s *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* analyzed shifting forms of incarceration. Foucault concludes that by the eighteenth century, the theoretical side of imprisonment—which is expressed as a mode of punishment—was no longer concerned with the physical body but with the soul. He argues that control of space became essential in modern culture for discipline and

surveillance, especially of individuals regarded as deviant from society. Eighteenth-century penal reform created a lasting “economy of the power to punish” that turned from physical torture to physical and mental imprisonment.²⁶ The punishment, he wrote, enters the realm of abstract consciousness, leaving the public eye and becoming an economy of “suspended rights.”²⁷ This idea that “docile bodies” are manipulated in a specific space such as prisons, asylums, or mental hospitals can be used to interpret Magdalene laundries as carceral spaces. Foucault also suggests punishment in this era intertwines with religious and moral reform. Erving Goffman’s text *Asylums* (1961) also offers insights into what he calls “total institutions.” These institutions were identifiable by the barriers constructed to prevent “social intercourse with the outside and to departure.”²⁸ While some institutions promoted humanitarian reform, all—from asylums, orphanages, and prisons to women’s homes—were attempts to maintain social order and reform disorder.

Other scholars have also analyzed efforts to reform prisons at the end of the nineteenth century through spatial understandings of control and punishment. Michael B. Katz and Estelle Freedman have written on prison reform and the institutional state to connect development of benevolent institutions to those enforcing discipline and punishment. Katz draws parallels between asylums and prisons as well as public schools and the YMCA to outline how the timing, theory and shape of structures containing and policing deviants or dependents all developed to respond to social problems.²⁹ He integrates Foucault’s analysis of forms of control in penal work

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* 2nd trans. ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 8-9.

²⁷ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 11.

²⁸ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), 15.

²⁹ Michael B. Katz, “Origins of the Institutional State,” *Marxist Perspectives* 1 (Winter 1978), 15.

as models for other nineteenth century structures by equating prisons with other kinds of institutions.

Freedman looks similarly at theories of discipline and punishment, in prison settings, to conclude that the desire for sexual purity—an idea of rescuing “fallen women”—transformed the method of administration and establishment of separate women’s prisons in the late nineteenth century. Women reformers sought public and professional roles while still limiting the power of female inmates, adopting a “separate but equal” ideology that transformed their roles into prison reinforcers.³⁰ Like the Houses of the Good Shepherd, the institutionalization of women labeled as criminals, often for sexual offenses, permeated a system in which some women were identified as being beneath other women morally and socially. Class, racial and ethnic differences also began to play a role in dividing higher and lower status women.³¹ Women’s institutions promoted the retraining of women through religious care and moral therapy but often continued to assert control through disciplinary method more common to traditional prisons.

³⁰ Estelle Freedman, *Their Sisters’ Keepers: Women’s Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981), 2.

³¹ Ideas about institutionalization of problematic women and the segregation of lower- and middle-class women not only by economic status but also by moral status can be found in broader contexts. Women’s roles as wives or, for poor or immigrant families, as workers, helped to define class and moral differences. Working women were often seen to be morally “less” as they were obligated to leave the domestic setting to provide for their families. For some historiographical samples on the domestic roles of women in the 19th century and the development of the middle class, consider Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *Journal of American History* 75 (1988): 9-39; Mary Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1789-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Hendrik Hartog, *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Nancy Hewitt, *Women’s Activism and Social Change, Rochester, New York 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018). Racial differentiation in prison history is a fairly well-studied topic in United States history, as scholars have paid greater attention to the differences in treatment of inmates of different race particularly in the American South. Some historical work that focuses on Catholic treatment of race includes Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 1990) or John McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), among others. Treatment of racial disparities within the American penal system is more widely studied. For some examples of this historiographical field, consider Jeannine Marie DeLombard, *In the Shadow of the Gallows: Race, Crime and American Civic Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) or Michael Markowitz and Delores D. Jones-Brown, *The System in Black and White: Exploring the Connections between Race, Crime, and Justice* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2000).

Michelle Jones and Lori Record (2014) present the strongest case that the SGS intended the Magdalene laundries as penal institutions, arguing that Catholic Magdalene Laundries should “bear the distinction as the first separate prisons for women” in the United States.³² The authors discuss Catholic laundries as private prisons where state and city courts sentenced women and girls for sex-related crimes. The spaces within these institutions where women performed labor and experienced “cruel and sustained punishment” within reform attempts qualifies them as spaces of punishment.³³ Similarly, James Smith in *Ireland’s Magdalene Laundries* (2007) argues that the Irish iteration of religious-based homes for women created an “architecture of containment” that locked away sexually immoral women and functioned as reminders of appropriate social mores.³⁴ Church and state acted together in Ireland to create spaces of punishment for women deemed outside of societal standards. The enforcement of punishment for deviant moral behavior suggests that discipline formed the backbone of penal work but also reform. My thesis will explore this connection by linking historical understandings of discipline and punishment to the historiography of moral reform work, and how female reformers enacted codes of behavior on society through benevolent action.

Several scholars have written on moral reform efforts initiated in the late nineteenth century, particularly the work of white, Protestant women in improving society. Typically, these historians link late nineteenth century reform with efforts to improve a society increasingly considered sexually immoral and deviant. Sherill Cohen, Mary Odem, and Lori Ginzberg specifically examine reform efforts directed at the care of women and girls in need of moral

³² Michelle Jones and Lori Record. “Magdalene Laundries: The First Prisons for Women in the United States.” *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences* 17, no. 1 (2014): 166.

³³ Jones and Record, “Magdalene Laundries,” 167.

³⁴ James M. Smith, *Ireland’s Magdalen Laundries and the Nation’s Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), xiii-xiv.

improvement. Cohen in *The Evolution of Women's Asylums since 1500* (1992) takes an extended look at the long history of women's reform and efforts to convert "unholy prostitutes" into godly women. This perpetuated a gender system which contributed to embedded attitudes towards women and the creation of a system in which women's subordination shaped ideas of women's needs.³⁵ She argues that women's institutions in early modern Europe pioneered the development of other key social institutions, an analog for the American system of welfare that likely grew out of such efforts as the SGS's homes for fallen women. Scholars have overlooked the role of the SGS and Catholic nuns at large in this system. By examining the work of the SGS, I seek to expand this historiography by understanding how these women both perpetuated gender norms by subordinating wayward women but also defied cultural standards by creating a female-driven reform space.

Mary Odem in *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States* (1995) looks more specifically at attempts by female reformers to reframe the identity of the "fallen woman" in an effort to control adolescent sexuality. Odem argues that the sexual and social autonomy of working-class daughters from 1885 to 1920 challenged parental and generational authority, adding to societal unease about shifting gender roles at the turn of the century. She identifies reformatory institutions as participants in a larger process of policing women's new sexual autonomy.³⁶ White, often middle-class women attempted to reform working-class girls who did not conform to traditional marital roles. The work of religious orders like the SGS reflected attitudes which Odem argues drove calls for

³⁵ Sherrill Cohen, *The Evolution of Women's Asylums Since 1500: From Refuges for Ex-Prostitutes to Shelters for Battered Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3. Sherrill Cohen uses the term "Judeo-Christian" to describe this gendered system, which indicates a social structure influenced and informed by Jewish and Christian faith alongside other forces.

³⁶ Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 2-5.

greater state intervention and control of young women through detention centers and reformatories. In the final chapter of this thesis, I explore evidence from local city newspapers in Albany and Troy that supports the argument that the SGS reflected attitudes towards gender by creating a space in which to segregate problematic women from society.

Lori Ginzberg in *Women and the Work of Benevolence* (1990) provides another perspective on how women in the nineteenth century used the ideology of benevolence and reform work to access personal and class authority. Postbellum reformers moved from moral regeneration to social control in their charitable work. Middle-class women promoted rhetoric of gender and morality and used social activism to enter formerly male-dominated spaces.³⁷ The ideology of female benevolence obscured the hidden power some women were able to access in institutional work. As part of this, the work of Catholic nuns exemplifies a group of women who accessed social power through reform. Nuns represent a sector of women who were able to obtain power over other women or children in the creation and maintenance of institutions like the SGS homes. As such, aspects of religious life that involve this work link not only to the historiography of women's reform but also with studies on power hierarchies in spaces of discipline.

Thus, the third category of historiography on which my thesis draws includes discussion of Catholicism and religious life, both studies of Catholic culture in the United States and the history of nuns specifically. Deirdre Moloney, Elizabeth McKeown and Dorothy Brown have all looked at ties between Catholic charitable work, welfare and social reform. Moloney's work *American Catholic Lay Groups and Transatlantic Social Reform* (2002) looks at Catholic reform work during the Progressive Era. She argues that the emerging Catholic middle class, especially

³⁷ Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 7-8.

in urban settings, attempted to address a range of “social ills” and allow Catholic women a voice while situating them still largely in what were considered appropriate female roles. She highlights the intersections of class, gender and ethnicity in the motivations of American Catholic women who joined a wide variety of reform efforts—many of which focused on immigrant aid and aid to poor women.³⁸ Despite examining Catholic laity, Moloney’s text details underlying tensions between ethnicity, class and gender that were a key measure of societal conflict between Catholic women (including nuns) and urban populations.

Brown and McKeown also explore the role of Catholics, and their rising political power in the late 1800s, in developing and advancing systems of welfare reform catering to Catholic needs. In *The Poor Belong to Us* (1997), they argue that by the early twentieth century, Catholics were positioned to impact social legislation surrounding welfare for children and families. By exploring legislation in tandem with the development of Catholic institutions and charities, Brown and McKeown highlight hidden conflicts between lay Catholic social workers and diocesan leadership, between religious sisters and lay Catholic women reformers, and between Protestants and Catholics.³⁹ The authors also highlight the work of the SGS in caring for wayward Catholic girls. Laywomen attempted to intervene in homes run by the SGS to improve on methods of administration, driving conflict between the nuns and ordinary Catholic women.⁴⁰ The labor of religious communities of women, however, still remained a critical piece of Catholic welfare work.

³⁸ Diedre Moloney, *American Catholic Lay Groups and Transatlantic Social Reform in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1-3.

³⁹ Dorothy M. Brown and Elizabeth McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2-3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

A second aspect of the historiography of Catholic culture in the United States is scholarly work on communities of religious women. Several historians have looked at the work of nuns in Catholic culture, especially in connection to social work and reform. Carol Coburn and Martha Smith argue in *Spirited Lives* (1999) that nuns heavily influenced the formation of Catholic identity in the nineteenth century. Coburn and Smith use a specific order of nuns to argue that convent culture allowed women to create communities, networks and institutions that resisted male secular and clerical authority. They write that the “expansion of American Catholic culture and identity could not have occurred without the activities and labor of these women.”⁴¹ To understand this influence, both historians argue, it is necessary to examine gender, religion and power within the convent culture. Nuns created institutions to care for lay peers but also to obtain sources of power outside of the male sphere. Similarly, Maureen Fitzgerald looks at Irish Catholic nuns and the development of New York’s welfare system from 1830 to 1920. She argues that convents became primary means through which working-class Irish Catholic women gained power and articulated political and social agendas.⁴² Irish religious women commanded a moral public authority that competed with Protestant reformers in efforts to control issues of policy for child poverty, childcare, and the developing welfare system in New York city. As these women worked in a northern urban environment, Fitzgerald’s study illuminates aspects of work by the SGS as a construction of Irish Catholic power. Through the work of Catholic sisters, a nondominant culture (Irish working class) was able to access social and political power.

Few scholars have paid specific attention to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. Suellen Hoy’s work on Chicago nuns (2006) contains a revised essay in which she discusses the work of

⁴¹ Carol Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 2.

⁴² Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York’s Welfare System, 1830-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 3.

the SGS in caring for Chicago's women and girls. Hoy gives a brief history of the SGS in the United States and describes the order's history of activism in the city of Chicago. She also analyzes how the sisters "looked at the world through a hierarchical lens," dividing inmates in Chicago's House of the Good Shepherd into two groups: delinquents and dependents.⁴³ The Chicago SGS also took on the role of reformatory rather than refuge with the passing of the 1899 Illinois Juvenile Court Act which directed delinquents to the care of the SGS. This spurred public controversies over the mission and methods of the sisters in administering homes for women.⁴⁴ Hoy's work here illuminates social issues faced by and created by the SGS in an environment that parallels that of the cities of Albany and Troy.

Each of these themes—discipline and punishment, moral reform and welfare work, religious life and Catholicism—interacts with wider scholarly discussion of Progressive era views on gender and sexuality. The proper place of women in the Progressive era serve as a backdrop for issues of moral reform and institutionalization of the "fallen". This chapter draws on this historiography from 1880 into the early twentieth century. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's volume *Disorderly Conduct* (1985) presents an important approach to understanding the transformation of women from domestic to public life, as well as discourse surrounding evolving views on the female body and sexuality in Victorian America. She argues that as some women transcended traditional gender roles to attain greater social positions, the sexuality of those women who threatened order and structure—like prostitutes—was regulated and controlled through various mechanisms. Women turned from domestic roles to the growing needs of "the new cities" and became the "conscience and the housekeepers of America."⁴⁵ They repeatedly

⁴³ Suellen Hoy, *Good Hearts: Catholic Sisters in Chicago's Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 53.

⁴⁴ Hoy, *Good Hearts*, 65-67.

⁴⁵ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1985), 173.

“transformed the physical body into metaphors and images” that began to upend Victorian ideas of gender complementarity and male dominance, signaling a new era for American women.⁴⁶

Rosenberg’s essays on the connections between shifting gender dynamics and power structures illuminate contemporary thoughts on the proper placement of women in society, and challenges faced by those who acted outside of accepted roles, whether prostitutes or nuns.

In somewhat wider scope, several historians have studied the Progressive Era in American history as one of radically shifting ideals among class and gender norms. As well, immigration as a social issue characterized both Progressive Era thought and reform work.⁴⁷ Michael McGerr, in *A Fierce Discontent* (2003) details the upheaval of the Progressive movement, which he notes is typically acknowledged to begin in the late 1890s and carry on until World War I. Progressives were typically white, middle-class, often native-born men and women who sought to reform society to align with their beliefs. Progressives sought to “end class conflict and create a safe society for themselves and their children” in the middle-class image, as evident in reform work of the era.⁴⁸ Fears of changing gender roles often intermingled with fears of immigrant populations overtaking traditional white America. McGerr’s work heavily emphasizes class conflict as a motivator for reform work and progressive thought. As part of this, women’s work and views on gender played a role in defining the new “middle-class woman” who was able to be socially active while still retaining feminine virtue. The SGS

⁴⁶ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁷ An example of the intersection between societal tensions on immigration and on gender issues like prostitution appear in the 1875 Page Act, which barred prostitutes from entering the United States. Preventing those immigrants involved in “lewd and immoral purposes,” the Page Act demonstrated nativist sentiment and immigration fears by preventing Chinese women from coming into the country. For more, see Kerry Abrams, “Polygamy, Prostitution, and the Federalization of Immigration Law,” *Columbia Law Review* 105, no. 3 (April 2005): 641-716. For more on immigration as a social issue, consider Peter Schrag, *Not Fit for Our Society: Immigration and Nativism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) or John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955).

⁴⁸ Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 64.

supported Progressive goals by taking in wayward women and ostensibly helping create a “safer society” for the middle class.⁴⁹

It is also important to consider the historical discussion of nativism in America for this thesis, as the SGS’s work of reforming women meant they dealt primarily with the Irish Catholic population of New York state. Also, many sisters were Irish or of Irish descent themselves, creating an ethnic boundary that separated them from the larger masses of urban populations, who were largely Protestant.⁵⁰ The SGS’ interaction with destitute Irish Catholic women poses interesting questions about ethnicity and nativist sentiment at the time. Scholars have looked at nativism in the Progressive Era and early twentieth century, more recently opening up the topic to new perspectives. Beginning with John Higham’s *Strangers in the Land* (1955), the historiography of nativism has moved from basic ethnic conflict to more nuanced examinations of social and political motivations behind racism and ethnic hate. Higham, who looked at the post-Civil War period, argued that nativism was a “distortion of American nationalism” which regarded people of foreign origin as sources of disloyalty and threats to American identity.⁵¹ Higham later argued that nativism was an essential aspect of American politics and social life, with cultural conflicts forming a central tenet of American ideologies.⁵²

Other historians after Higham expanded upon his arguments, moving nativism from the periphery of American identity to the core. Nathan Glazer, Daniel Moynihan, Milton Gordon,

⁴⁹ McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 64.

⁵⁰ Much nativist sentiment also arose in reaction to large influx of southern and eastern European Catholics, and Jews. This reaction is less relevant to this thesis but offers potential areas for further research into the relationships between Catholic nuns and non-Catholic American society, and the charitable work performed by Catholic sisters. For one more recent study that looks broadly at Catholicism in America and nativism, see Luke Ritter, *Inventing America’s First Immigration Crisis: Political Nativism in the Antebellum West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020).

⁵¹ James M. Bergquist, “The Concept of Nativism in Historical Study Since *Strangers in the Land*,” *American Jewish History* 76, No. 2 (December 1986), 126; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: 1955).

⁵² John Higham, “Another Look at Nativism,” *Catholic Historical Review* 44 (1958), 147-158.

and Richard Hofstadter emphasized psychological analysis of nativism in the 1960s, connecting “intolerant nationalism” to threats to the social status of elites.⁵³ Later scholarly analysis of nineteenth-century reform began to link reform efforts more closely with nativist sentiment and the goals of mainstreaming foreign-born people into American life, particularly within religious or evangelistic frameworks.⁵⁴ Ethnocultural historians also strongly linked nativism with the Know-Nothing party, as one of the party’s central tenets and clear depiction of “nativist as reformer.”⁵⁵ Most recently, new studies of nativist ideology connect nativism to cultural and class conflict, problematizing the link between class and ethnicity. Nativism appears to be no longer simply an economic disparity but an “evolving and dynamic” instrument for both resistance and adaptation. Scholars like Clifford Geertz or John Bodnar link ethnic transformation to industrialization as well, bringing nativism into new areas where ethnic cultures are continually evolving and holding more complexity than previously thought.⁵⁶ Contemporary historians have also discussed nativism in various regions in the United States from east to Midwest and within a discussion of “the American dream” ideology.⁵⁷ For example, Erika Lee in *America For Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* (2019)

⁵³ Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, *Beyond The Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1963); Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origin* (New York: 1964); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: 1960).

⁵⁴ Bergquist, “The Concept of Nativism,” 9. For more, see Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York: 1970); Barbara M. Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.,: 1956); Ralph E. Luken, “Religion and Social Control in the Nineteenth Century American City,” *Journal of Urban History* 2 (1976): 363-368; Lois W. Banner, “Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation,” *Journal of American History* 60 (1973), 23-41.

⁵⁵ Bergquist, “The Concept of Nativism,” 12. For more consider Jean H. Baker, *Ambivalent Americans: The Know-Nothing Party in Maryland* (Baltimore: 1977).

⁵⁶ Bergquist, “The Concept of Nativism,” 16-18. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973); John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, 1985).

⁵⁷ For more consider Luke J. Ritter, *Inventing America’s First Immigration Crisis: Political Nativism in the Antebellum West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021); Brian N. Fry, *Nativism and Immigration: Regulating the American Dream* (LFB Scholarly Pub., 2007); Peter Schrag, *Not Fit for Our Society: Nativism and Immigration* (University of California Press, 2007).

asserts that xenophobia or the “fear of foreigners rooted in racism, white supremacy and nationalism” is a “defining feature of American life.”⁵⁸ The concept of a dynamic nativism that impacted class and religious differences as well informs this chapter as the SGS occupied a space at the crux of various cultural identities.

Finally, this thesis is also informed by the historiography of women’s sexuality during the Progressive era. Using the work of historians like Regina Kunzel, Christine Stansell, and Sharon E. Wood, this thesis builds upon a discussion of the changing views on women’s sexuality and how the public perceived gender and sexuality in urban environments. Regina Kunzel, in *Fallen Women, Problem Girls* (1993) discusses unmarried mothers and social work alongside the development of maternal homes. While focused mainly on the early Salvation Army, her study provides a good analysis of the effort to found homes to “redeem” or “reclaim” unmarried mothers and rehabilitate “erring daughters in need of salvation.”⁵⁹ Christine Stansell’s *City of Women* (1987) provides a wider view of changing women’s roles in an urban setting. She examines gender divisions within the working class as well as the growing latitude for sexual exploration by young women, challenging the idea of the family as a cooperative unit and bringing forward conflicts between men and women, children and parents.⁶⁰ Each of these conflicts can also be seen in the work of the SGS as inmates frequently clashed with family members, guardians, or public caretakers such as the city courts. Even more relevant to this chapter, Sharon E. Wood provides the narrowest analysis of SGS work in cities in her book *The Freedom of the Streets* (2005). While she focuses her work on the city of Davenport, Iowa, her

⁵⁸ Shull, Kristina K. Review of *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States*, by Erika Lee. *Journal of Arizona History* 62, no. 3 (2021): 431-434. muse.jhu.edu/article/831634 and Erika Lee, *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

⁵⁹ Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 1-3.

⁶⁰ Susan E. Hirsch, review of Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, in *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 2 (April 1988): 500.

discussion of the Good Shepherd homes in chapter eight provides relevant information for this thesis. She argues that the choice by parents or city officials to use SGS homes reflects the view that girls became prostitutes because their homes were vicious, not because of public policy or cultural norms making prostitution legitimate work.⁶¹ SGS homes became an extralegal tool that operated to remove and hide problem girls from public view, protecting men instead of women.

My research unites analyses of the work of Catholic reformers with examination of greater trends of social change in late nineteenth-century America. The SGS provided a defined example of how Catholic women actively sought to change social values by containing and controlling female sexuality and operated within spaces that negotiated relationships between immigrant and cultural groups. By looking specifically at the Sisters of the Good Shepherd's women's homes in two urban settings, we can understand them as visible, alternative carceral spaces. Through physical separation and moral control, the SGS managed to support charitable work while also reinforcing societal views surrounding degenerate and deviant femininity. The thesis covers the initial decades of operation, beginning in 1880, examining the numbers of women taken in and shifting views on their work into the early twentieth century. I conclude in 1920 or just slightly before as this is widely acknowledged to be the end of the Progressive Era.

This research thus understands Catholic women's work as playing a more substantive role in projects of social reform than previously understood. It also expands on our critical understanding of the vital role American Catholic nuns played in the formation and embodiment of modern gender roles and cultural norms. Nuns have traditionally been overlooked in discussions of gender and sexuality and Progressive Era society. As such, these two particular

⁶¹ Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 187.

SGS homes continue to offer insights into the lasting impact and contributions of Catholic nuns to nineteenth and early twentieth century urban America.

The paper is structured into three chapters organized thematically. The first chapter examines the structure of the SGS homes in Albany and Troy as models of the order's homes for women. This chapter focuses on the two homes as spaces of control, including methods of physical containment as well as isolation from society at large. This chapter also describes the homes as "institutions" and "laundries" using terms that denote discipline and punishment. Chapter one provides information on the physical structures built by the SGS in Albany and Troy as part of a larger, systematic "architecture of containment"⁶². Within this chapter, I examine the social boundaries created by the sisters to protect and contain "fallen" women from outside society. Here I refer to Foucault's theories on carceral spaces to understand how the construction of these group homes relied on a "modality of docility." Foucault argues that as a discipline evolved over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to focus on "meticulous control of the operations of the body," creating subjected, docile bodies within modes of containment.⁶³ Discipline processes—patterns of which seem evident in the work of the SGS homes—dissociated power from the body, transforming contained bodies into obedient forces of utility that produce coerced forms of labor.⁶⁴ My argument aligns with both Foucault's ideas in identifying the houses of the SGS as forms of carceral space and Michelle Jones and Lori Record's understanding of SGS houses as Magdalene laundries. As both the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and their female inmates were limited in public voice and hidden from the public

⁶² Here I use James Smith's terminology that he applies to Irish Magdalene Laundries as they were designated, segregated spaces of control to contain deviant women. The phrasing "architecture of containment" suggests that these homes were created to enforce physical boundaries between moral and immoral people within urban spaces. James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

⁶³ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 137-138.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

presence, they experienced a kind of social death—a complete separation from individual personality, lifestyle, and family. Under this structure, women contained inside SGS homes were invisible to the public and relegated to the “unspeakable.”⁶⁵ This chapter utilizes sources such as local newspapers and photographs of the SGS homes to examine physical space.

The second chapter investigates aspects of hierarchy and moral power which the sisters of the SGS wielded over inmates of each home. Again, the label “laundry” is used in this chapter to understand the physical and spiritual labor completed by inmates. This chapter focuses on how the SGS wielded moral power over women sent to these homes and the methods through which the sisters promoted labor as a tool of self-improvement. Here, I discuss questions such as what relationships did the sisters maintain with the women working in these homes as laundresses, and how did mechanisms of power and moral control influence the experience and perception of these women? A specific source relevant to this chapter is personal memoirs written by women sent to SGS homes.⁶⁶ Memoirs and writings by both inmates and sisters leading life inside the laundries provides insight into not only daily life but peer relationships between these different groups of women.

The third chapter investigates the reception of the SGS homes as facets of larger reform efforts within the cities of Albany and Troy. Registers of New York state charities, held by the New York State Archives, offer clues as to whether SGS homes were considered to be part of moral reform work or separate from other efforts. This includes contrasts between Protestant organizations, or other forms of charitable homes that catered to the poor urban population, such as orphanages or asylums. By examining other forms of homes for women and children, namely

⁶⁵ Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion*, 75.

⁶⁶ One example of this type of memoir is the writing of Minnie Morrison, a woman sent to the Indianapolis House of the Good Shepherd. See Minnie Morrison, *Life Story of Mrs. Minnie Morrison: Awful Revelations of Life in the Convent of the Good Shepherd, Indianapolis, Indiana. A true Story* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1925).

young girls, I address whether labor disguised as moral reform distinguished these institutions from others.

The third chapter also looks closely at community perceptions of the two homes to understand the wider view of the SGS in Albany and Troy. This chapter analyzes both Catholic and non-Catholic perceptions of the “homes” (here, understanding the idea of the SGS as a place for unwelcome members of society to potentially form acceptable social bonds) and reputations developed by both the sisters and inmates. This chapter analyzes community responses and views on the SGS institutions in Albany and Troy. It includes an analysis of both Catholic and non-Catholic perceptions of the work of the SGS and homes for women. Whereas middle-class Protestant women’s reform work was often publicly acknowledged and supported, the work of these Catholic sisters was less often highlighted in non-Catholic circles. The reputation of the SGS was conveyed and maintained through their reform work among both Catholic and non-Catholic populations. The public perspective of these homes was conveyed in the press and newspapers in Albany and Troy reported frequently on the SGS institutions and religious community. Despite the group being entirely made up of women, public opinion remained favorable because the SGS were removing problematic females from local view. In this regard, male opinions of the SGS and their mission consistently appeared to be mostly positive, identifying the sisters as a somewhat independent but still submissive force for good in the community. The dynamics of the SGS about male leadership and the masculine public domain indicated interesting ways in which the SGS navigated power dynamics in Albany and Troy. The attention devoted to both homes and the sisters themselves signaled the positive reception of the order in both cities and a view that the SGS acted as a moderator of social order and cleanliness.

Taken as a whole, each aspect of the SGS' work in Albany and Troy reflects the changing status of women in both public and private spheres at the turn of the century. Supported by their religious identification, these women were able to obtain independence and social status in catering to poorer, more denigrated females. By ministering to "fallen women," the SGS dampened social anxieties over the changing status of women, immigrants, and community morals. Through this social work, the SGS obtained power and recognition in a male-dominated community. The SGS played a critical role in the history of Albany and Troy, both within and outside of the Catholic community, and as such provide a valuable source through which to understand changing social norms, identities, and gender dynamics in early twentieth-century America.

Chapter 1: “A Retreat for Females”: The SGS’ Use of Space in Homes for Women

On April 4, 1889, the local newspaper *The Argus* in Albany, New York, printed a brief notice of a young woman named Annie Amoe who claimed to have been “forcibly detained” at the House of the Good Shepherd in Troy. “Not permitted to communicate with outside friends,” she was “causing something of a sensation” in local conversation. Despite her story, the journalist seemed ambivalent as to its truth—reporting only that Amoe had brought an action against the SGS institution, seeking damages up to ten thousand dollars.⁶⁷ No results were reported, indicating that perhaps Miss Annie Amoe lost the case.

What exactly were these institutions constructed by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, and what view did the SGS present to the public? The 1890 Sadliers’ Catholic Directory described the House of the Good Shepherd as “a retreat to those females who have had the misfortune to fall into crime.”⁶⁸ Clues appear earlier in other editions of Albany newspapers as to the character of the institutions in Albany and Troy sued by Annie Amoe. An 1897 article cited lawmakers in the introduction of a state bill to transfer women out of the two SGS homes. Of “considerable local interest,” the bill signaled to the public that female inmates cared for by the SGS were equal to female prisoners of the state. This bill allowed for transfer of women from the SGS’ care to “any reformatory prison for women in the State.”⁶⁹ The introduction of this bill was a strong signal that the people of Albany and Troy viewed the SGS homes akin to prisons, and the women inside them as prison wardens and inmates, respectively. Treatment of the SGS as an order

⁶⁷*The Argus*, “Claims She Was a Prisoner,” April 14, 1889, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 1. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed August 10, 2022).

⁶⁸ *Sadlier’s Catholic Directory, Almanac and Ordo, 1890* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1890), 158, Internet Archive, accessed August 2022 <https://archive.org/details/SadliersCatholicDirectory1890/page/158/mode/2up>.

⁶⁹ *The Argus*, “Trust Bills Delayed,” March 30, 1897, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 1. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022).

which meted punishment through containment to problematic women in the cities highlights how the SGS linked discipline and reform with Catholic theology and mission work. Inferable from the language of this bill was the idea that females sent to the SGS homes were labeled inmates because of their seemingly criminal nature. By maintaining control over households of inmates hidden from public view, the SGS implicitly elevated the morals of the local community. Later press would support this implicit claim by publicly applauding the improving nature of the SGS' work in both cities.⁷⁰ SGS laundries were in essence penal institutions through which the female sisters obtained power over inmates. The SGS controlled every aspect of physical space inmates inhabited, using this control to enforce dominance over disorderly women, thus creating a reputation for good in the greater community around them.

The structure of the SGS homes in Albany and Troy were model examples of the order's homes for women found across the United States. Each home represented a space of control and concrete power structures within. As part of a larger system of Catholic institutions opened in the nineteenth century that catered to women and children, the SGS homes exemplified an "architecture of containment" that hid the allegedly degraded and degenerate parts of society from view.⁷¹ As such, studying the SGS' homes necessitates a comparison and understanding of contemporary prison formation and nineteenth century forms of punishment. The enforcement of punishment for deviant moral behavior suggests that discipline formed the backbone of penal work but also reform. This chapter explores this connection by linking historical understandings

⁷⁰ For further analysis of this implicit description of the SGS, see chapter 3 of this paper.

⁷¹ Here I use James Smith's terminology that he applies to Irish Magdalene Laundries as they were designated, segregated spaces of control to contain deviant women. The phrasing "architecture of containment" suggests that these homes were created to enforce physical boundaries between moral and immoral people within urban spaces. James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

of discipline and punishment to the historiography of moral reform work, and how female reformers enacted codes of behavior upon society through benevolent action.

From their foundation, the two SGS institutions in Albany and Troy functioned to separate women from public view in several ways. To start, the sisters themselves resided inside convent walls, and later inside the walls of both laundries formed to serve “fallen” women. Sisters who professed religious vows lived a consecrated life away from public view, remaining inside convents and married to their faith. SGS convents and reform institutions reflected architecturally the mission of separation and seclusion, typically with large brick walls, orderly windows, and often a fence. In Albany, the SGS building underwent several renovations, including the laying of a new cornerstone for an expanded building in 1886.⁷² Examining the exterior and physical buildings constructed by the SGS in Albany and Troy reveals that the institutions were built to have both style and function common to other spaces of containment, such as orphanages, asylums, and prisons.

Michel Foucault argued that the “self-evident” characteristic of a prison is based first and foremost on the deprivation of liberty.⁷³ The prison is “like a rather disciplined barracks,” inside which not only is the physical body constrained but also improved by corrective techniques—what he identifies as the “solidity” and effectiveness of civilized penal imprisonment. Prisons, he wrote, covered “both deprivation of liberty and the technical transformation of individuals.”⁷⁴ In this regard, descriptions and imagery of the SGS institutions in Albany and Troy clearly embody Foucault’s idea of a prison—spaces that contained women, depriving them of former liberty in entering public spaces and living outside the convent walls and transformed them through labor.

⁷² *The Argus*, “West Troy Happenings” May 8, 1886, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 1. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed August 10, 2022).

⁷³ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 232.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 233.

It is valuable to examine the construction of these group homes as photographs of the buildings demonstrate the effort to segregate women—both religious and lay—from the public. Additionally, examining other parallel Catholic institutions in both cities such as orphanages, schools and hospitals offers insight into the construction of many Catholic charitable organizations which served to, most basically, segregate a specific subset of the population from everyone else.

Albany and Troy were home to several Catholic churches, hospitals, orphanages and asylums. In 1886, Albany and Troy both had one male orphan asylum administered by Brothers of the Christian Schools, and ten homes for women or girls. These homes were run by various orders of nuns, for example, the Sisters of Charity ran the St. Vincent's Female Orphan Asylum, St. Francis De Sales home, and St. Joseph's Industrial School in Albany. In Troy, the Sisters of St. Joseph ran both an orphan asylum and another home called the House of Loretto.⁷⁵ The Sisters of Mercy ran St. Peter's Hospital in Albany while the Sisters of Charity founded and managed the Troy Hospital.⁷⁶ What the number of Catholic organizations founded and managed by female orders showed is that Catholic religious women were a dynamic and active force in society, starting and maintaining various charitable homes and groups that helped to serve the public through providing healthcare, refuge, or rehabilitation. While some orders interacted with the public more frequently—as in the Sisters of Mercy through nursing and hospital work—the SGS acted through less visible means. By creating Houses of the Good Shepherd, the SGS became publicly known for reforming “degraded” women of the two cities first and foremost by removing them from public view. As well, by having inmates do laundry, the SGS integrated

⁷⁵ *The Official Catholic Directory and Clergy List for the Year of Our Lord 1906* (New York: P.J. Kenedy, 1906), 200, Boston Public Library, Retrieve from Internet Archive website: <https://archive.org/details/officialcatholic1906unse/>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

aspects of standard prison administration. Even the Indiana Women’s Prison took the advice of experts from Troy, New York, in mandating laundry work for female prisoners.⁷⁷ Laundry, as women’s work, was an identical characteristic of both women’s penitentiaries and of SGS institutions.

An 1895 image of the SGS home in Albany (Figure 1) shows that in the early years of the building’s construction, great attention was paid to details that indicate clear efforts to create a space distinct from city life.⁷⁸ Rows of neat, rectangular windows with



HOUSE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Figure 1

wooden shutters obscured sisters from passing pedestrians. The square construction of the building mirrors most Catholic convents at the time as well as schools and orphanages—built with straight hallways and rows of rooms with single windows for order and organization. Most identifiable is the wooden fence constructed around the home. At this point, the building likely only housed mainly sisters and novitiates, women training to become professed nuns. Around 1888 the SGS would expand upon the building’s footprint in order to take in more wayward

⁷⁷ Freedman, *Their Sisters’ Keepers*, 91.

⁷⁸ “House of the Good Shepherd (Currently St. Anne’s Institute) c. 1895 Albany NY,” AlbanyGroupArchive, flickr.com, accessed August 2022, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/albanygroup/15042534159>.

women of the city.⁷⁹ In the rear of the building to the left the stacks of the laundry wing (see Figure 1) are clearly visible, protruding from a smaller wing that housed equipment for inmates to complete their labor of washing clothing and other industrial items. Space for this labor—a steam laundry—was included in the original construction of the Albany institution, indicating from the onset that the physical space planned by the SGS was to be set up as a disciplinary home for women who worked under and resided alongside the sisters.

A 1907 photograph of the same building in Albany run by the SGS offers further insight into the expansion of the order’s work and the clear mission of reforming women through the performance of labor (Figure 2).⁸⁰ In this photograph, the gardens behind the convent walls are visible as well as, standing in the center of the frame, the sisters themselves in robes of white and black (Figure 2). Women who had taken vows as nuns wore black habits while female inmates and “penitents”

(women who remained in the home living a religious life but did not take religious vows) wore white.

By 1907, an additional two-story



Figure 2

⁷⁹ *The Argus*, “A New Industrial School,” April 7, 1888, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 7. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed August 10, 2022); *The Argus*, “A Worthy Institution,” October 7, 1889, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed August 10, 2022).

⁸⁰ Katherine Eleanor Conway, *In the Footprints of the Good Shepherd, New York, 1857-1907* (New York: Convent of the Good Shepherd, 1907), HathiTrust Digital Library, accessed Fall 2021. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008416292/Cite>

wing had been constructed in the front of the previous residence hall, with identical styles of neat, rectangular windows with wooden shutters. The windows on the new wing were also small and visible are white curtains, drawn to protect both the women inside from prying eyes but more importantly to shield the public from the views of these deplorable females. As well, isolation of inmates was meant to lead to introspection and reformation.⁸¹ The 1907 photograph of the Albany House of the Good Shepherd also shows the size of the laundry in which female inmates performed manual labor. The laundry section of the building was attached via a small breezeway or hallway to the main dormitory-style part of the home. This signaled the central aspect of laundry work with easy accessibility for female inmates to go about their day performing this labor. This laundry work brought income to the SGS as well as served as a primary function of character reformation for women sent to the home for various offenses, the majority of which was prostitution. Inside the fence a small garden with statues is visible, a place for women in the house to be outside and walk while still being secluded from the public eye. While reliant on the local community for both revenue and intake of female inmates, these homes attempted to operate separate and removed from the public.

Other convents in Albany and Troy were built in similar styles to seclude sisters from public view and allow them to carry out their religious devotions within private spaces. Significantly, however, teaching orders (those focused in education and hospital work) did not have large fences around their convents like the SGS. While not all orders of Catholic nuns in Albany took in wayward women like the SGS, styles of architecture used in building these spaces for most Catholic religious women reflected the effort to separate them from normative

⁸¹ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 239. Foucault wrote that some “operations of correction were the conscience and the silent architecture that confronted it..the cell confronts the convict with himself; he is forced to listen to his conscience.”

ideas of femininity at the time. As unmarried women of varying ages, nuns were a tricky segment of people to place within a society that emphasized marriage and motherhood as the traditional role for most women. Convents in both cities reflected the identity of nuns as removed or even secretive, making them almost gender-less with their identification as primarily religious people instead of feminine. Becoming a “bride of Christ” by professing vows as a nun elevated sisters to a status apart from ordinary women, “transferring allegiance from worldly men” and nullifying the need for traditional roles as wives or mothers. As well, this independent existence was perceived as “a perennial threat to male control and power over women’s bodies and behavior.”⁸² Sisters seized control of not only their bodies but also other women’s’ bodies in SGS homes through their management of laundry labor and containment. This public separation was made visible in the brick-and-mortar construction of physical spaces such as convents and Houses of the Good Shepherd. The SGS seized control over female bodies by accepting inmates from public places and segregating them into their own tightly managed space, invisible to public view.

The convent of the Sisters of Mercy on 634 New Scotland Avenue mirrored the construction of the SGS homes, made of brick and built with neat rows of small single windows,



Figure 3

dormitory-style (Figure 3). The convent had a small area of outdoor space surrounding it, and

⁸² JoAnn Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), cited in Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 83.

was built in an almost identical rectangular and efficient style to the SGS home.⁸³ Unlike the SGS home, however, this order of Catholic nuns did not work with “fallen” women and as such did not need a fence to separate them from the public (Figure 4).⁸⁴ Because the Sisters of Mercy did work with women whose morals were seen as dangerous to society, the convent was more visible and accessible to the public. Similarly, the



Figure 4

differences in work performed by the SGS and other Catholic orders in Albany and Troy was evident by the outward appearance of the convents and group homes they constructed. The Convent of the Sacred Heart located between South Pearl Street and Southern Boulevard was much larger than the SGS building and was built in a decorative, elaborate style (Figure 5).⁸⁵ With a large chapel, rounded windows, and a bell tower, this convent was not focused on reforming inmates



Figure 5

⁸³ Unknown, “Religious Albany, New York, Convent of Mercy, 634 Scotland Avenue, Side View,” Photograph. Albany, New York, n.d. From Albany Public Library: *Pruyn Collection of Albany History*, New York Heritage Digital Collections, <https://nyheritage.contentdm.oclc.org/>.

⁸⁴Unknown, “Religious Albany, New York, Convent of Mercy, 634 Scotland Avenue, Side View,” Photograph. Albany, New York, n.d. From Albany Public Library: *Pruyn Collection of Albany History*, New York Heritage Digital Collections, <https://nyheritage.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16694coll26/id/1298/rec/75>.

⁸⁵ Unknown, “Religious Albany, New York, Convent of the Sacred Heart,” Photograph. Albany, New York, n.d. From Albany Public Library: *Pruyn Collection of Albany History*, New York Heritage Digital Collections, <https://nyheritage.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16694coll26/id/1295/rec/72>.

through labor but instead on worship and fellowship among the Catholic sisters.⁸⁶ Similarly, however, the Convent of the Sacred Heart was constructed to create private spaces for nuns as seen in the secluded courtyard separated from public view by brick walls and dormitory style rooms (Figure 6).⁸⁷

What separated the SGS from other orders was the specific social work they performed and the population which they ministered to: prostitutes and women labeled as sexually problematic. Eventually, the SGS also began to work with younger girls as well as



Figure 6

young adult women, opening a partner

institution to the House of the Good Shepherd called St. Anne's Reformatory School for Girls.

The building plans were introduced in April of 1888 and public bids opened for the construction, with a total estimated cost of 100,000 dollars.⁸⁸ This institute took in problematic girls who were housed, schooled, and ministered to by the sisters. As well, the girls performed labor in the form of laundry and also smaller tasks like sewing and clothing repair. Less forbidding in some ways than the House of the Good Shepherd, St. Anne's Reformatory had similar dormitory windows in neat rows and was constructed of brick. Like the House of the Good Shepherd, St. Anne's also had a large imposing fence (seen to the right) which separated the outdoor space provided for

⁸⁶ The Sisters of Mercy are a Catholic religious order founded Katherine McAuley in 1827 in Dublin, Ireland. The order arrived in the United States in 1843 and spread across the country building schools and hospitals. The order focuses on education, health care and pastoral services. For more visit "Our History," Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 2021, <https://www.sistersofmercy.org/about-us/our-history-mercy-heritage-center/>.

⁸⁷ Unknown, "Religious Albany, New York, Convent of the Sacred Heart, Courtyard," Photograph. Albany, New York, n.d. From Albany Public Library: *Pruyn Collection of Albany History*, New York Heritage Digital Collections, <https://nyheritage.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16694coll26/id/1296/rec/73>.

⁸⁸ *The Argus*, "A New Institution," April 7, 1888, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 7. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed August 10, 2022).

inmate girls from the general public.⁸⁹ As well, the reformatory appeared to have orderly gardens, an appealing front drive and an overall neat exterior—likely appealing to the society of Albany and Troy and standing as an emblem of the uplifting work provided by the SGS (Figure 7).

Even the convent of the Good Shepherd, in the same location but home to sisters who may not actively participating in the care of wayward girls, was a large imposing brick building



Figure 7

set off from the public

with small windows and a large fence surrounding it (Figure 8). The convent on West Lawrence Street—which became St. Ann’s School of Industry and Reformatory, the SGS home for younger girls—stood three stories tall and had the same style of architecture.

The SGS home built in Albany’s sister city, Troy, also exhibited the same style of architecture and design as other local convents and group homes. Originally constructed in 1887 and operated as a



Figure 8

⁸⁹ Unknown, “Religious Albany, New York, Convent of the Good Shepherd, West Lawrence Street, Front View,” Photograph. Albany, New York, n.d. From Albany Public Library: *Pruyn Collection of Albany History*, New York Heritage Digital Collections, <https://nyheritage.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16694coll26/id/1294/rec/71>.

home for wayward women, the building housed a commercial laundry in the basement floor where inmates performed daily labor in service to the SGS (Figure 9).⁹⁰ The initial four-story



Figure 9

home became both convent home and school for wayward girls known as the Guardian Angel School of Industry and Reformatory. With various expansions over the home's existence, in 1952 the last wing was constructed in a way that "the buildings, connected by passageways, formed a complex that enabled occupants to move about without having to go outside." The laundry and girls' home is visible in the bottom

left corner attached by passageways to a larger building resembling a more traditional catholic convent or church (Figure 10).⁹¹

Today the building is home to the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's service building, boiler room and mail

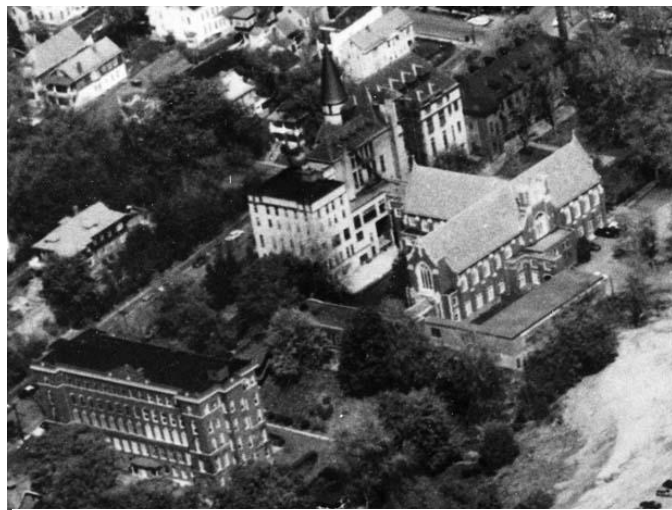


Figure 10

⁹⁰ Unknown, "Exterior view of the J Building, as seen from People's Avenue (north elevation, date unknown), Institute History: People's Avenue Complex, Rensselaer Institute Archives and Special Collections, n.d., accessed August 2022, <https://archives.rpi.edu/index.php/institute-history/building-histories/peoples-avenue-complex>.

⁹¹ Unknown, "Aerial photograph showing the layout of the original complex," Institute History: People's Avenue Complex, Rensselaer Institute Archives and Special Collections, n.d., accessed August 2022, <https://archives.rpi.edu/index.php/institute-history/building-histories/peoples-avenue-complex>.

plant. The chapel and larger outbuildings were demolished but the laundry and group home itself remains (Figure 11).

Catholic directories at the time also described the SGS as a distinct institution within the American Catholic Church and in the Diocese of Albany, describing SGS homes as separate and operating without heavy interference from diocesan leaders.



Figure 11

The Catholic directory for 1888 described both the SGS laundries in Troy and in Albany as “correction” institutions which “afford a retreat to those females who have had the misfortune to fall into crime.” The R.C. House of the Good Shepherd on Peoples Avenue in Troy (Figure 9 and 11) contained eighteen inmates in 1888 with a second department titled the Mount Magdalen School of Industry “for the correction and education of homeless, wayward, and corrupt children.”⁹² Notably, the home operated “under the supervision of the State Board of Charities,” not the Diocese of Albany—signaling that the SGS functioned as a form of state prison instead of a religious reformatory site.⁹³ The Albany House of the Good Shepherd—temporarily located on Broadway in 1888—was only briefly noted but also catered to at least four women and eighteen orphans.⁹⁴ The 1890 Sadlier’s Catholic Directory, Almanac and Ordo noted that within the Diocese of Albany, the House of the Good Shepherd (now located in its new location on Central and Broadway) was not initially attended by any male clergy—meaning the SGS

⁹² *Sadlier’s Catholic Directory, Almanac and Ordo, 1888* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1888), 150, Internet Archive, accessed August 2022, <https://archive.org/details/SadliersCatholicDirectory1888/page/150/mode/2up>.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

themselves controlled all aspects of the institution.⁹⁵ Only by 1886 did a male clergy member attend to the institution from his home parish of the Church of the Blessed Sacrament.⁹⁶ Only the mother superior, Francis De Sales, was listed alongside the Convent of the Good Shepherd as well, not any indication of the number of sisters housed within—perhaps suggesting fluidity in numbers as “magdalens” or inmates came and went.⁹⁷ In 1886, numbers continued to grow, and the SGS house in Albany contained twenty-two sisters and one hundred female children, while in Troy, the SGS cared for thirty-one women and 178 girls.⁹⁸ By 1890, both homes in Albany and Troy had grown to attend to more local women. The Troy institution now boasted fifty-five female inmates and fifty-seven girls in the Mt. Magdalen School of Industry and Reformatory while the Albany House of the Good Shepherd catered to at least five women and twenty-six girls in its second department, the St. Ann’s School of Industry.⁹⁹

By 1900, the SGS continued to work in both cities, ministering to more women who were deemed unworthy by society for various reasons—the majority, prostitution or sexual impropriety. The Albany SGS home contained sixteen professed sisters by 1900, some of whom may have been former inmates, and eight “out-sisters.”¹⁰⁰ The second half of the SGS home, St. Ann’s, remained under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Charities—a secular organization—

⁹⁵ *Sadlier’s Catholic Directory, Almanac and Ordo, 1890* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1890), 158, Internet Archive, accessed August 2022 <https://archive.org/details/SadliersCatholicDirectory1890/page/158/mode/2up>.

⁹⁶ *The Official Catholic Directory for the Year of Our Lord 1906* (New York: P.J. Kenedy, 1906), 196, Internet Archive, accessed August 20, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/officialcatholic1906unse/page/n325/mode/2up?view=theater>.

⁹⁷ *Sadlier’s Catholic Directory, Almanac and Ordo, 1890* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1890), 161, Internet Archive, accessed August 2022 <https://archive.org/details/SadliersCatholicDirectory1890/page/161/mode/2up>.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁹⁹ *Sadlier’s Catholic Directory, Almanac and Ordo, 1890* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1890), 163, Internet Archive, accessed August 2022 <https://archive.org/details/SadliersCatholicDirectory1890/page/163/mode/2up>.

¹⁰⁰ “Out-Sisters” most likely refers to novitiates or sisters who had not yet professed vows and as such were still permitted to leave the cloister. *The Catholic Directory, Almanac and Clergy List, 1900* (Milwaukee: The M.H. Witzlus Co., 1900), 266. Internet Archive, accessed August 15, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/CatholicDirectoryAlmanacAndClergyList1900/page/n265/mode/2up?view=theater>.

and housed seventy child inmates.¹⁰¹ In 1908, the Albany SGS house had twenty-five sisters and one hundred inmates while the Troy house had twenty-eight sisters and 187 inmates.¹⁰² In 1916 the Albany home had twenty-seven sisters and 135 inmates while the Troy home had thirty-six sisters and 175 inmates—clearly still flourishing into the twentieth century. These numbers reflect that despite changing attitudes toward female sexuality at the turn of the century and leading into World War One, the SGS’ position at the line of impropriety and acceptable behavior for women, and as mediators of this boundary, remained constant. Young girls especially continued to be sent to the two homes, indicating that although social attitudes towards the place of women were gradually shifting, concerns about young female sexuality continued. The SGS navigated these tensions by continuing to provide their institutions as safe and secure repositories for problematic women and girls, serving to alleviate social fears of sexual deviancy while also strengthening their position as a group that benefitted society with its presence.

At this point, the SGS had expanded its institution in Troy, now called the Guardian Angel Home and Industrial School “for the training of unprotected girls,” a category made distinct from both orphans and wayward young women by the sisters in their mission to aid young girls in both cities.¹⁰³ Reading of later Catholic almanacs also suggests that the SGS’ homes for women had become well-known and commonplace, as within the Catholic directories advertisements were printed for state of the art laundry equipment perfect for “small institutions”

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 266.

¹⁰² *The Official Catholic Directory for the Year of Our Lord 1886* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1886), 220. Internet Archive, accessed August 19, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/officialcatholic1908unse/page/220/mode/2up?view=theater>.

¹⁰³ *The Official Catholic Directory for the Year of Our Lord 1916* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1916), 243-144. Internet Archive, accessed August 19, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/officialcatholic1916unse/page/242/mode/2up?view=theater>.

that were “easy to operate and care for.”¹⁰⁴ The presence of these advertisements hints at the very least that the association of Catholic group homes and laundry labor was acknowledged and accepted within the Catholic community and likely the larger secular community as well. Advertisements also appeared for iron fencing, with one company noting they had recently installed fencing for another girls’ home in Columbus, Ohio; this demonstrates the continued desire to seek privacy and seclusion within Catholic organizations like the SGS.¹⁰⁵ The same almanac from 1926 listed both SGS institutions in Albany and Troy with the Albany home having thirty sisters and 220 girl inmates, and Troy having twenty-three sisters and 145 inmates.¹⁰⁶

Lasting effects of Progressivism, especially the “spirit of social control” described by Estelle Freedman in her text *Their Sisters’ Keepers*, meant that society continued to be concerned with prostitution after World War I as “deeply held fears of the harlot as a threat.”¹⁰⁷ Prostitutes were no longer viewed as victims, as in the late nineteenth century—an idea which also benefitted SGS homes as places for victims to recuperate while transforming spiritually—but as potentially corrupting individuals who spread disease.¹⁰⁸ Reformers at large “emphasized the old conception of the preservation of society” over reformation of the individual.¹⁰⁹ Into the

¹⁰⁴*The Official Catholic Directory for the Year of Our Lord 1926* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1926), 166. Internet Archive, accessed August 19, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/officialcatholic1926unse/page/n165/mode/2up?view=theater>.

¹⁰⁵*The Official Catholic Directory for the Year of Our Lord 1926* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1926), 150. Internet Archive, accessed August 19, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/officialcatholic1926unse/page/n149/mode/2up?view=theater>.

¹⁰⁶*The Official Catholic Directory for the Year of Our Lord 1926* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1926), 240-241. Internet Archive, accessed August 19, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/officialcatholic1926unse/page/n149/mode/2up?view=theater>.

¹⁰⁷ Freedman, *Their Sisters’ Keepers*, 147.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁰⁹ Helen W. Rogers, “A Digest of Laws Establishing Reformatories for Women in the United States,” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 13 (November 1922): 384 cited in Freedman, *Their Sisters’ Keepers*, 146-147.

twentieth century, SGS institutions like that of Albany and Troy continued to fill a need to contain sexually promiscuous women and girls who represented a danger to society.

Inside the physical space of the houses, the SGS reinforced their status as equivalent to penitentiaries. Foucault outlined several principles of prisons or reformatories in *Discipline & Punish* that describe mechanisms also utilized by the SGS. First, a principle of total isolation qualified an institution as a prison, in Foucault's argument—isolating the convict “from the external world, from everything that motivated the offense, from the complicities that facilitated it” to form instead an obedient and homogeneous population of inmates.¹¹⁰ He also analyzed the formation of the Auburn model in the United States—based on Auburn prison in New York—as a “clear reference to the monastic model” in which prisoners lived under a code of near-silence, going about their daily labor in a penitent silence, “isolated in their moral existence.”¹¹¹ Under the Auburn system, “prisoners were to sleep alone in a cell at night and labor together in a workshop during the day,” forbidden to speak with other inmates despite sharing labor and meal spaces.¹¹² Even the use of the term inmate signified that women in the homes were viewed as subordinate and criminal in nature.¹¹³ By this characterization and clear comparison, SGS institutions strongly followed if not were wholly managed as prisons. Within the SGS institutions, female inmates were typically required to live in a prayerful state of quiet solitude, working in the laundry while also reflecting upon their sins.

Women taken in also were stripped of their names, as noted in a description of a similar SGS laundry in Newark, New Jersey, as inmates “[are] given a new name, so that her identity in

¹¹⁰ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 236-237.

¹¹¹ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 238.

¹¹² David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 82.

¹¹³ The third chapter of this thesis explores more fully how the term inmate was applied to females inside SGS institutions, especially in public and in the press.

the world need not be known except to the authorities of the house.”¹¹⁴ This created a loss of personal identity with the goal of reclaiming that ‘fallen’ soul for God and for the good of society. Dissociating their public identity—their name—and giving women a new identity inside the House of the Good Shepherd reinforced the physical barriers between the SGS space and the outside world. Women inside the home were detached from their public identity and both mentally and physically cut off from the society they previously engaged with.

Foucault defined work as a central agent of carceral institutions—something also found in the SGS homes in Albany, Troy and across the United States. Penal work is a “principle of order and regularity” which “bends bodies to regular movements, imposes a hierarchy and a surveillance that are all the more accepted...by occupying the convict, one gives him habits of order and obedience.”¹¹⁵ SGS nuns utilized the labor of female inmates in their homes as a mechanism through which to both ‘reform’ women labeled as wayward or deviant, and a method in which to enhance their own status as leaders of a small but distinct community of women. Establishing a social hierarchy within the walls of the Houses of the Good Shepherd strengthened the capacity of the nuns to both reform inmates inside and influence moral character of the public outside. Even the abundant comparisons Foucault made between prison labor and convent work indicates the extent to which the SGS manipulated the environment of inmates to produce obedience, discipline and reform. Foucault described convent workshops as “the perfect image of prison labor,” which while different from industrial factories, carried out the goals of discipline and punishment even more because of the added layer of solitude and

¹¹⁴ *The Sunday Call*, “Work to Save Girls and Women by Sisters of the Good Shepherd,” March 11, 1906, Newark, New Jersey: F.F. Patterson. Rutgers University Newspaper Project, Library of Congress Chronicling America. Accessed August 2022, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/pages/results/?state=New+Jersey>.

¹¹⁵ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 242.

confinement.¹¹⁶ The SGS themselves conveyed a message of reform through discipline and labor to the public through local police and the courts, offering “to the new judge of the Police Court their convents as refuge for poor, erring, or destitute girls.”¹¹⁷ In this manner, the SGS manipulated their own image to present a visage of benevolent reform while substituting their institutions as equivalent locations for erring women to local and state prisons.

Historian David Rothman likewise defined prisons as places of separation, obedience and labor.¹¹⁸ By this definition, the SGS institutions functioned as penal environments as within each home, all three aspects of this idea were enacted: inmates and nuns were both separated from the community, followed a clearly defined structure of obedience to superiors, and performed labor. The laundry was clearly described as “a large brick building” in the rear of the House of the Good Shepherd, “fitted up with all the modern improvements, washing machines, wringers, ironers, etc. Here the girls work six hours in the day, upstairs in the building are a number of machines at which are employed the younger girls making clothes and sewing on other things.”¹¹⁹ This description in *The Argus* denoted not only the presence of the laundry itself but a public acknowledgement of the labor performed by female inmates, and labor performed under the SGS’ direction. Additional details of younger inmates sewing clothes suggests that in some ways the SGS benefitted from female labor, likely selling the clothing made in the home. Another SGS laundry in Newark, New Jersey, was “self-supporting” with a general laundry business that employed approximately two hundred women in washing, ironing, operating sewing machines, and in the washroom. This “busy little factory” did laundry for New York

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 243-244

¹¹⁷ *The Argus*, “Life Behind Convent Walls: Albany House of the Good Shepherd and its Reformatory Work,” October 21, 1900, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022).

¹¹⁸ Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*, 105.

¹¹⁹ *The Argus*, “Tissue of Falsehoods,” October 8, 1895 (Albany, New York), From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org> (accessed January 29, 2022).

households, and the “industrial work keeps inmates sufficiently yet not laboriously employed.”¹²⁰ The spaces inside SGS laundries—in Albany, Troy, and more broadly in other laundries formed by the order across the United States—functioned as sites of labor equivalent to convict labor. Indeed, the SGS over time would work with local city law enforcement to accept and care for convicted women.

SGS Houses of the Good Shepherd in Albany and Troy as well as across the country followed similar construction styles, with building additions frequently created in the late 1890s due to rising demand for places to send wayward women and girls. The House of the Good Shepherd in Helena, Montana, for example, serves as a similar study for the homes in Albany and Troy as its preservation in the National Register of Historic Places details the elaborate architectural details and timeline of the building. Like the homes in Albany and Troy, the Helena house had a large dormitory that underwent several expansions as more girls “requested” to live with the order. Significantly, the basement was also expanded three times. In many SGS homes, such as the one in Troy, women and girls did industrial laundry in the basement of the house—the details on Helena’s House of the Good Shepherd denotes that over the course of the order’s work in the United States, laundry work remained a primary function of inmate reform.¹²¹

¹²⁰ *The Sunday Call*, “Work to Save Girls and Women by Sisters of the Good Shepherd,” March 11, 1906, Newark, New Jersey: F.F. Patterson. Rutgers University Newspaper Project, Library of Congress Chronicling America. Accessed August 2022, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/pages/results/?state=New+Jersey>.

¹²¹ “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: House of the Good Shepherd Historic District,” Montana State Historic Preservation Office, *United States Department of the Interior National Park Service*, October 1990. Archives.gov, pdf, accessed August 20, 2022, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71976247>.

Having the laundry in the basement was not only functional with heavy machinery placed downstairs, but made daily labor convenient and immediate for inmates.

The space of the laundry and the space the laundry claimed within the cities of Albany and Troy also reinforced the image of the SGS homes as prison-like, and as places for separation and reformation of women. The foundation for the home was completed in 1889 on Central Avenue, a main street into downtown Albany.¹²² The SGS home was located on local maps occasionally as a “school” and was only a few blocks from a Catholic Church, and also quite near the Roman Catholic Cathedral located in the heart of the city, near the Capitol building (Figure 12).¹²³ The SGS institution also opened fairly close to the Albany penitentiary, still in existence in 1854 but labeled on an 1891 city map as the city almshouse.¹²⁴

Presumably, as detailed by the SGS’ agreement to work alongside city courts in the late 1880s in accepting convicted women, the penitentiary and later almshouse were comparable institutions which prostitutes were often sent to. Being close to downtown businesses also served the SGS’ laundry industry.



Figure 12

¹²² *The Argus*, “A Worthy Institution,” October 7, 1889 (Albany, New York), From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org> (accessed January 29, 2022)

¹²³ Frederick W. Beers, *Atlas of the Hudson River Valley From New York City to Troy, including a Section of About 8 Miles in Width*, Section 33, Map. New York: Watson & Co., 1891. From New York Heritage Collection, accessed August 15, 2022, <https://nyheritage.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/hrvi/id/49/rec/4>.

¹²⁴ Jay Gould and I.B. Moore, *Map of Albany County, New York: from Actual Surveys*, Map. Lionel Puncus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, New York Public Library Digital Collections, Accessed August 21, 2022. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/d1387690-c6b4-0133-26da-00505686a51c#/?uuiid=d1551f40-c6b4-0133-d629-00505686a51c>

Most of religious Albany was located in the downtown area, including several orphan asylums administered by religious orders. Today, the St. Anne Institute remains on the grounds of the former SGS laundry and reformatory for



Figure 13

young women—a large complex still devoted to caring for young people with sexual or behavioral problems.¹²⁵ The same brick exterior still stands with additional buildings constructed since 1920, creating a larger complex dedicated to helping wayward youth (Figure 13).¹²⁶



Figure 14

In Troy, the 1891 Atlas of the Hudson River Valley did not distinctly mark the R.C. House of the Good Shepherd on the map. However, when compared with the building’s original and current location, some clues on the atlas section indicate that the SGS home was built near other local charitable institutions like St. Vincent’s Orphan Asylum and Troy Hospital,

¹²⁵ For more information visit <https://stanneinstitute.org/>.

¹²⁶ “St. Anne Institute,” Google Maps. *Google* (accessed August 18, 2022), <https://www.google.com/maps/place/St+Anne+Institute/@42.671631,-73.8001405>.

operated by the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent (Figure 14).¹²⁷ The location of the home on the corner of Peoples Avenue and Eleventh Street is adjacent to a line marked ‘chapel,’ most likely the chapel attached to the dormitory and laundry of the House of the Good Shepherd. As in Albany, the SGS House was constructed semi-adjacent to downtown Troy and both business districts and city courts—this made it fairly straightforward for the SGS to both receive inmates sentenced by local judges but also to successfully promote and carry out their industrial laundry business, powered by inmate labor.

The SGS in Albany and Troy constructed two institutions for women and girls which brought, simultaneously, a public visibility and an element of seclusion. Buildings that housed female inmates and children were large, made of brick, and sat squarely in central locations near downtown business areas. Laundry work completed by inmates came and went as women and girls labored in service of the sisters. The Houses of the Good Shepherd were fenced and set off from the public with small windows and closed doors as few visitors were permitted and sisters themselves typically remained cloistered inside the convents. Inmates were hidden from public view with secluded gardens and small-windowed dormitory rooms. As laundry equipment was housed normally in the basement or rear portions of the Houses, women labored in a private world ruled by the SGS who controlled every aspect of inmate life. The physical space these institutions occupied both allowed the SGS to create a public visage of charity and aid, while also erasing from view a specific group—“wayward” and socially unacceptable women. By confining other women inside a physical space and managing that space privately and publicly, the SGS created two institutions that acted as prisons in everything but name.

¹²⁷ Frederick W. Beers, *Atlas of the Hudson River Valley From New York City to Troy, including a Section of About 8 Miles in Width*, Section 34, Map. New York: Watson & Co., 1891. From New York Heritage Collection, accessed August 15, 2022 <https://nyheritage.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/hrvi/id/69/rec/5>.

Chapter 2: “To Win Souls to God”: The SGS’ Methods for Moral Reform

In October of 1900, a local Albany police court judge named William H. Leuders publicly applauded the work of the SGS in accepting delinquent women and girls. He stated, “Our penal institutions should not be places of punishment, but homes of reformation and correction.”¹²⁸ This good and noble work brought public acclaim to the SGS and produced women who were hard working, proper and respectable. Letters from former penitents of the Albany House of the Good Shepherd to the Mother Superior often noted personal transformations, with women writing they were “on firm ground now” and had experienced a renewal of life. One woman wrote of her need for the SGS’ influence, saying, “You must write to me, mother, for even your letters give me more courage...I was your little piece of ground and you planted the flower of goodness there—so you must water it.”¹²⁹ The SGS, in their institutions, implemented systems of reform that affected both body and soul of inmates. Not only did the SGS contain women and girls in physical spaces, but they sought to reform them morally and spiritually through emotional and social control. By controlling all aspects of the environment around inmates, the SGS managed create a reputation of moral superiority while mediating fears of social degradation.

Examining the Houses of the Good Shepherd in Albany and Troy through the context of discipline and punishment, as theorized by Foucault, offers one perspective of how SGS nuns came to control other women and through this control mediate their own place in society. A second lens through which to study these institutions is that of asylums or psychiatric organizations: as places where human beings experienced (or were meant to experience) radical

¹²⁸ *The Argus*, “Life Behind Convent Walls: Albany House of the Good Shepherd and its Reformatory Work,” October 21, 1900, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

shifts in character and worldview. Other organizations including orphanages and schools—often run by religious orders—also provide a vast area for comparable research.¹³⁰ The Houses of the Good Shepherd also functioned as relative spaces to asylums. Erving Goffman’s seminal text on the nature of asylums offers insight into how the SGS managed to capture not only the physical body of a female inmate but her mental and moral state as well.¹³¹ This chapter serves primarily as an analysis of the SGS handbook for creating and managing a House of the Good Shepherd using Goffman’s construction of total institutions. This analysis allows historians to further understand the role of the SGS personally—within institutional life—and more broadly in a network of social relationships between women, and between Catholic religious women and urban society. The work of the SGS in the late nineteenth century in Albany and Troy unites themes in the historiography of reform, religion, and sexuality.

The SGS managed to find a foothold in American life as a group of religious women who navigated the tensions of the Progressive Era by widely becoming known for their mission of preservation and education of innocent, destitute, fallen women and girls. “The conversion and sanctification of those fallen women” turned the SGS’ work from simply removing and hiding

¹³⁰ The scholarship on Catholic or religious-run orphanages and schools (often linked) is fairly extensive. For a selection of work on this topic, consider: Brown and McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us*; Elizabeth McKeown and Dorothy Brown, “Saving New York’s Children,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 13 (Summer 1995): 77-96; John O’Grady, *The Catholic Church and the Destitute* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); Peter Romanofsky, “Saving the Lives of the City’s Foundlings: The Joint Committee and New York City Child Care Methods, 1860-1907,” *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 61 (January-April 1977): 49-68; a revealing study of the treatment of Catholic orphans can be found in Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1999).

¹³¹ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961). Goffman was a Canadian sociologist who studied sociology at the University of Chicago. He was considered one of the most influential sociologists of the twentieth century and his text *Asylums* focused on “micro-interactions between patients and staff” and the effect on patient experience and behavior. He argues that total institutions, namely, asylums, strip individuals of any former identity and re-socialize them under new guidelines, which are perpetuated regardless of patient utility due to specific roles and structures enacted daily inside. His work inspired examination and change of asylum structure and treatment of mental patients. For more consider Nick Bouras, “On *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, by Erving Goffman,” *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 205, no. 6 (December 2014): 427; for a history of Erving Goffman’s life see Tom Burns, *Erving Goffman* (London: Routledge, 1992) or Gary Alan Fine and Gregory W. H. Smith, *Erving Goffman* (London: SAGE, 2000).

problematic women to actively transforming society through teaching good morals and reforming prostitutes.¹³² The SGS in Albany and Troy—as two representative urban spaces in late nineteenth-century United States—embodied many of the social fears of degradation through sexual activity, in particular more public female sexuality. Penitents cared for by the SGS were “given every opportunity of mental, moral and physical improvement.”¹³³ As well, the SGS reinforced boundaries of social groups by established separate reformatories for African American women “in every monastery to which these are admitted.”¹³⁴ In this regard, by watching over “wayward” women and prostitutes, the SGS made their institutions into symbols of social reform and became active agents in alleviating fears of social decay.

Through active ministry, the SGS sought to change the environments in which they worked by impacting and uplifting women in unfortunate circumstances. The completion of this work was achieved primarily through intake and care for wayward women. The SGS were guided by several principles laid down by the foundress, Sister Mary Euphrasia, and repeated by later sisters over the decades of the order’s existence. The idea of “zeal” was critical to the SGS. “All religious Institutions have a particular end,” wrote one sister, in 1895, “Our particular office...our vocation, is not to save and sanctify ourselves along, it is also to labor for the sanctification of others.”¹³⁵ In their missionary work the SGS “must form hearts and in order to form them we must instruct them...in this manner we will accomplish our fourth vow [of

¹³² Elinor Tong Dehey, *Religious Orders of Women in the United States: Accounts of Their Origin And Of Their Most Important Institutions, Interwoven with Brief Histories of Many Famous Convents* (Hammond, Indiana: W.B. Conkey Company, 1913), 145. HathiTrust Internet Library, Accessed August 25, 2022, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433068297377&view=1up&seq=203&skin=2021>, 145

¹³³ Dehey, *Religious Orders*, 146.

¹³⁴ Dehey, *Religious Orders*, 146.

¹³⁵ Sisters of the Good Shepherd, *Practical Rules for the Use of the Religious of the Good Shepherd for the Direction of the Classes* (Angers: Lecoq, 1898), 1. HathiTrust, accessed August 22, 2022, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hxpnlk&view=1up&seq=21&skin=2021>.

zeal].”¹³⁶ SGS women who cared for inmates in their institutions ought to “raise those who are fallen” and “be full of holy zeal to save the poor souls” in front of them.¹³⁷ This vow of zeal taken by the SGS enabled the order to form institutions that became what Goffman designates “total institutions.” A total institution, he argued, is an institution whose encompassing character is symbolized by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside world and to departure, most often realized in a physical barrier like locked doors, high walls, or fences.¹³⁸ Goffman classified convents and religious orders as total institutions because of the cloistered environment often present in these spaces. The SGS followed cloister guidelines for both sisters and inmates, making their Houses of the Good Shepherd an example of a total institution.

Not only did the SGS create physical barriers keeping inmates from the outside world—walls and fences—but they also created emotional barriers inside the house by strictly defining social groups and creating a hierarchy of relationships between sisters, inmates, and peers. The SGS followed rules that delineated the clear difference between religious and penitents inside Houses of the Good Shepherd, as “absolute separation” was necessary between “the Community of Religious and the persons who are the object of our works...between the community and the classes there should be an immense distance...”¹³⁹ A necessary hierarchical structure of power in the SGS and the homes they ran helped the sisters establish authority over wayward women and girls. The Superioress (or Mother Superior) was the SGS nun in charge of the institution. Underneath her, a “first Mistress” organized and led each class of penitent women (it is unclear how classes of penitents were organized, perhaps by intake date or by particular offense). This

¹³⁶ Ibid., 1.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁸ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 4.

¹³⁹ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 58.

‘first mistress’ acted as a facilitator and intermediary between the Superioress and inmates, and administered punishments to girls in her class.¹⁴⁰ The mistress also needed to “watch carefully over correspondence” and enforced visitation hours, controlling communication with the outside world for girls inside the home.¹⁴¹ Managing communication with children especially in relaying news of the community outside the house was a technique of control utilized in the relationships between sisters and inmates.

A certain class of inmates known as Magdalenes or the “consecrated” existed between true inmates and the sisters themselves. These women were inmates who had decided to take religious vows and remain with the order inside the House of the Good Shepherd. While viewed as women who had chosen to seek a holier life, the Magdalenes remained underneath the power and disciplinary rule of the sisters. Expected to live in “piety, regularity, devotedness, submission, and good spirit,” the Magdalenes were “powerful auxiliaries” to the established hierarchy inside each house.¹⁴² As the “crowning work” of the order, the Magdalen sisterhood was open to “chosen souls who have renounced the world.” These women could never be admitted to full membership in the congregation of the SGS but did make three religious vows and observed perpetual cloister.¹⁴³ For “wise reasons” the Magdalens were necessarily always separate at least in spirit from other inmates and from the sisters themselves, supposedly allowing them to be in a lasting state of spiritual reflection even while employed in domestic duties such as laundry.

These women symbolized the transformation one could experience while inside a House of the Good Shepherd and reinforced the power of the SGS and the Mother Superior through

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 60.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 71.

¹⁴² SGS, *Practical Rules*, 119-120.

¹⁴³ Dehey, *Religious Orders*, 147.

their obedience and decision to remain in the institution. Nuns were to “treat the consecrated with a certain deference, but firmly and without shutting our eyes to their defects...they may be a great help but should not be permitted to govern the class.”¹⁴⁴ Rewarding consecrated Magdalenes with a higher social status inside the institutions than the inmates, especially new inmates, gave the SGS a firm grip on relationships between women in the homes as well as created a power structure for newly sentenced women to aspire to climb, if they remained.

The SGS homes also embodied total institutions not only in physical design but also in the kind of relationships and emotional spaces created. A key fact of total institutions was “not guidance or periodic inspection...but rather surveillance.”¹⁴⁵ The SGS themselves acknowledged in order guidelines that surveillance and authority were key to bringing up children in the virtues of the Catholic church. In houses of the Good Shepherd and in convents, “rule, authority, surveillance, recompenses, punishments, work, plays, redoubled surveillance during the recreations—all is done with a view to prevent sin and increase virtue.”¹⁴⁶ Zeal implied oversight of women interned for the purpose of reformation and was intrinsically linked to labor and sisters’ management of labor inside SGS homes: “All our employments are established and confided to us to save souls. All that obedience demands, zeal also demands.”¹⁴⁷

Work and surveillance were tied together for the sisters sought to transform women and girls through constant and continued monitoring of both physical labor and mental or moral states. Sisters were advised to “redouble your vigilance. Watch them in the chapel, watch them at work; watch them particularly during the hours of recreation...let your surveillance extend to

¹⁴⁴ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 120.

¹⁴⁵ Goffman, *Asylums*, 7. Foucault also discusses surveillance in an analysis of the panopticon. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195.

¹⁴⁶ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 52.

¹⁴⁷ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 52.

everything...”¹⁴⁸ Watching over each aspect of inmate life became a critical piece of the mission to reform these women and girls—even at times of recreation, sisters were to disperse among the classes so that “the children be, and feel that they are, watched.”¹⁴⁹ Not only was surveillance used and practiced by the SGS to solidify their power over inmates but it was also necessary that inmates understood and witnessed daily their own surveillance, understanding that the watchful eyes of the SGS were always upon them. Sin lurked in corners where sisters might not be watching, and younger inmates especially were always to be carefully looked after to avoid any chances of escaping surveillance. Surveillance was also absolutely necessary in the dormitories of Houses of the Good Shepherd, like that of Albany and Troy, with enforced silence and darkness. Inmates should be “taught to go to sleep with pious thoughts” and moral lessons reinforced through silent watchfulness of the sisters over women and girls at rest.¹⁵⁰

Procedurally, detailed instructions for nighttime and daytime routines for inmates inside the home—all under the constant watchful eyes of sisters—enhanced moral transformations because of constant surveillance. As the SGS managed every detail of daily routines, inmates experienced an omnipresent pressure to transform their own personalities to be obedient and working towards self-improvement. Management of routine and extreme visibility also heightened the control sisters had over inmates, as the women and girls inside the House of the Good Shepherd were reminded of their status as delinquents and the nuns’ role as reformers.

The SGS also expected obedience from the girls and young women inside their Houses of the Good Shepherd. Obedience in action and in spirit allowed inmates to experience the transformative power of faith and fully embrace the process of reformation offered by the sisters.

¹⁴⁸ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 53-54.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁵⁰ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 153.

The first mistress or sister in charge of inmates “ought to exact from the children an absolute obedience...and make them understand that the Religious charged with the surveillance, has the full responsibility of all, and the right to their entire submission.”¹⁵¹ Becoming obedient members of a penitent class allowed girls and women to experience a conversion of morals and sometimes of faith, as occasionally women inside the home decided to remain with the SGS and take vows as consecrated Magadalenes—not full members of the order but under cloister rules. Submission to the power and influence of the sisters meant a surrender of self and giving up rights to mobility, self-governance and personal relationships outside the house. In return, inmates received physical and spiritual care and were taught to become perfect examples of Christian ideals. This change was not always particularly easy or accepted by inmates, as noted by several articles published in local newspaper *The Argus* of women complaining of being detained against their will by the SGS.¹⁵² Relinquishing individual identity as part of a spiritual overhaul was necessary for inmates to be successfully rehabilitated.

Inmates of total institutions typically experienced “a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanations of self.”¹⁵³ Inmates of these spaces experienced a transformation that essentially detached the notion of self and grouped them with others into a mass of obedient and transformable humanity. For the SGS, their “vocation requires humility, annihilation of self” for both sisters and inmates- for nuns, as an aspect of devotional work and for inmates, as an aspect of change.¹⁵⁴ Goffman called this transformation of self a mortification- the self was,

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 75.

¹⁵² Two examples of these stories include *The Argus*, “Girl Held a Prisoner: The Charge Made by a Lansingburg Attorney,” October 7, 1895, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 7. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022); *The Argus*, “Tissue of Falsehoods,” October 8, 1895, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 5. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022).

¹⁵³ Goffman, *Asylums*, 7, 14.

¹⁵⁴ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 14.

systematically, mortified and began “radical shifts in *moral career*” made possible through an erasure of former identity.¹⁵⁵ Mortification of the self as a concept was also utilized by the SGS in the practice of sisters patiently embracing their role as overseers of a wayward ‘flock’, and also for penitents learning to reject their former corrupt ways and embrace holy virtues. Mortification, or curtailment of self, was also enacted through immediate “separation from the outside world,” brought on by withholding of visitation privileges, daily scheduling and little to no social intercourse.¹⁵⁶ The SGS enacted this concept through managing and restricting visits to inmates in their homes, as described in local newspapers attempting to report on the work and progress of the House of the Good Shepherd in their community of Albany. Visits were not permitted for the first two months of an inmate’s stay at the House of the Good Shepherd, which enforced the complete separation from the outside world and allowed the SGS to assume control of the inmate’s life.¹⁵⁷

Other kinds of “loss and mortification” attributed to total institutions mirrors practices found across religious orders, not only the SGS, and certainly for inmates of Houses of the Good Shepherd. Entrance processes which stripped inmates of former street clothing in exchange for habits, for example, represented a loss of individual self. Most significantly, the most important possession was lost: a name. “One’s full name, whatever one is thereafter called, loss of one’s name can be a great curtailment of the self,” and this was clearly evident in the practice of the SGS in stripping female inmates of their common names and replacing them with saintly or religious names during their time inside the home.¹⁵⁸ “As soon as any one [inmate] is received

¹⁵⁵ Goffman, *Asylums*, 14.

¹⁵⁶ Goffman, *Asylums*, 14.

¹⁵⁷ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 176.

¹⁵⁸ Goffman, *Asylums*, 18-19.

she is given a new name” inside an SGS house.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, sisters were taught that the “best means of bringing them [penitents] to good, is to make them understand...that with a new name they are to commence a new life, that they will be judged and esteemed only by their conduct in the house.”¹⁶⁰ The erasure of public and former identity from outside the house followed by establishment of a new persona as an penitent inmate of the SGS reinforced the complete character transformation the sisters sought to achieve. With a new name, inmates severed former relationships that were viewed as sinful and created new ones with religious women who lifted them out of degradation. Change was enacted upon the body of the inmate not only by physical detachment from society but also by created a complete and total disconnect with their prior social and emotional lives.

When inmates entered the House of the Good Shepherd, their belongings were stripped from her to cut off association with her former outside self and assimilate into the role of penitent. When girls entered the home, they would “leave off their worldly dress...care shall be taken that she do not keep possession of the objects she has brought...which may be dangerous to her because of the souvenirs attached to them.”¹⁶¹ This method of stripping inmates of the physical characteristics of their public selves and individual belongings symbolized a transformation upon crossing the threshold of the home. Outside, girls had photographs, papers, rings, clothing, etc., that represented their lives and reflected their actions. Removing these items reinforced a mental shift from free woman or girl into penitent. Inside the institutions, women and girls received new attire depending on their class. Cloistered women—cloistered sisters and

¹⁵⁹ *The Sunday Call*, “Work to Save Girls and Women by Sisters of the Good Shepherd,” March 11, 1906, Newark, New Jersey: F.F. Patterson. Rutgers University Newspaper Project, Library of Congress Chronicling America. Accessed August 2022, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/pages/results/?state=New+Jersey>.

¹⁶⁰ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 175.

¹⁶¹ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 178.

Magdalens—wore white habits with a scapular and a blue cord while “outdoor sisters” who sometimes left the convent wore black habits with blue cords. All sisters and penitents carried a rosary and a crucifix, and often a heart with the figure of the Good Shepherd engraved on it.¹⁶² The utilization of uniforms and identical styles of dress stripped women of their former identities and made each woman equal to her peers.

Uniforms of standard issue, such as habits, were clearly marked as belonging to the institution, thus making the inmates and sisters also a kind of property of the order of the SGS.¹⁶³ Young female inmates in the House of the Good Shepherd in Troy (also known as the Mt. Magdalen Reformatory for Women and Girls) wore uniforms of white habits with aprons that were modest and reserved a later photograph from the home showed continued use of uniforms for inmates, while a cloistered sister in a similar white habit oversaw classes and domestic labor (Figure 15).¹⁶⁴ Absence of personal dress meant that women inside the homes no longer identified with previous employments or activities perhaps attached to their clothing and instead were clothed in the habit of a religious woman—a concrete visualization of the moral woman

¹⁶² Dehey, *Religious Orders*, 148.

¹⁶³ Goffman, *Asylums*, 19.

¹⁶⁴ “The House of the Good Shepherd in Troy, N.Y., circa 1940,” 1940, Collection, Rensselaer County Historical Society, Troy, New York. Used in Rheann Kelly, Christina Kovats and Natalie Medley, “What About the ‘Lost Children’ (And Mothers) of America?” The Marshall Project, November 3, 2017. Accessed January 2022, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2017/11/03/what-about-the-lost-children-and-mothers-of-america>.

they were intended to become. Additionally, the habits and uniforms worn by inmates and sisters inside Houses of the Good Shepherd like the one in Troy negated outward signs of identity and



Figure 15

made women equal in the eyes of God and their peers. By wearing identical clothing that was white, women inside the homes were metaphorically washed of previous sins and made into a kind of visible “clean slate.” Erasing outside clothing also erased former signs of employment or vocation, particularly prostitution, in turn making former relationships represented by attire invisible.

Nuns managed personal relationships in the House of the Good Shepherd as a tool of control and method of moral improvement. New inmates were discouraged or prevented from continuing previous friendships as “they should be made to understand that they must try to forget the past. They ought not to be place in contact with companions they knew in the world...”¹⁶⁵ A kind of “role dispossession” subsequently occurs in which the inmates’ separation from the outside world was continuous and created a deep break with past (and more sinful) roles in public.¹⁶⁶ No mention of new friendships was made—presumably, inmates were encouraged

¹⁶⁵ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 179.

¹⁶⁶ Goffman, *Asylums*, 14.

to remain silent and self-reflecting. While sisters were encouraged to treat new inmates kindly and with charity, the severing of ties with outside lives was total and complete. Sin and temptation found in the cities and in public were viewed as so dangerous to inmates that nuns were told to “make every effort to induce them to remain in the asylum” and persevere in their newly acquired Christian ways.¹⁶⁷ The SGS even endeavored to maintain control over women and girls who had left the home by being a watchful eye over their public actions, ready to receive the inmates again if they strayed from their new moral path. This management of social relationships and decision-making along with continued surveillance made the SGS a total institution that extended beyond convent walls in its moral or spiritual impact.

The management of relationships between inmates and the outside world, peers, and sisters reinforced the idea of mortification of the self when applied to the SGS. Inside the House of the Good Shepherd, inmates detached from name and previous behaviors and were given new, holier names and clearly defined routines for daily life. For mental patients, in total institutions a new inpatient “finds himself cleanly stripped of many of his accustomed affirmations, satisfactions, and...is subjected to a full set of mortifying experiences: restriction of free movement, communal living, diffuse authority of a whole echelon of people.”¹⁶⁸ Like mental hospitals, the SGS in both their Albany and Troy houses established communal living under strict, religious routines, with sisters at all times overseeing inmates and administering discipline. Thus, the SGS homes qualify as comparable to mental institutions in the sense that the organization of each home was designed to wholly recreate women and girls in a clean Catholic image.

¹⁶⁷ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 182.

¹⁶⁸ Goffman, *Asylums*, 148.

The SGS promoted further detachment from public self within Houses of the Good Shepherd with the goal of creating new and more virtuous character. While “on the outside, the individual can hold objects of self-feeling,” inside total institutions, territories of the self were violated—the boundary that the individual “places between his being and the environment” was broken. One such violation is the ownership and possession of self-knowledge—for example, when facts about an inmate’s former life and “social statuses and past behavior” were shared during intake, that knowledge no longer belongs to the inmate but to the staff of the institution. Here, Catholic confession (practiced by SGS sisters and encouraged for penitents) formed a setting for the admission of facts and feelings about the self that relinquishes self-ownership and exposes mentally the raw self of the inmate.¹⁶⁹ Catholic practices of confession administered to women and girls inside SGS homes clearly enacted a transfer of self-authority and ownership to the sisters, through the vehicle of the confessional. Inmates, according to SGS guidelines, “should be taught how to examine their conscience...and present themselves at the holy tribunal to accuse themselves of their crimes.”¹⁷⁰ Children (or persons inside Houses of the Good Shepherd in general) needed to be made to understand the “necessity of true contrition” which involved admission of sin in preparation for penance.¹⁷¹ Knowledge of inmate sins gave SGS nuns power over women and girls inside the homes as they were able to manipulate the emotional state of inmates seeking absolution or forgiveness. Confessing sins committed in the outside world and living under the label of “penitent” inside the home created a complete moral separation from former lives as well as physical- making the SGS not only a containing space for the female body but also for female actions and sexuality. Moral punishment could be meted out

¹⁶⁹ Goffman, *Asylums*, 23-24.

¹⁷⁰ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 42.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

through manipulation of administering sacraments or lifestyle choices, for example, in making Catholic girls in the home wear “every-day dress” instead of more formal clothing on Sundays or feast days—denoting to other inmates that that particular woman or girl had the stain of some kind of sin remaining on her, excluding her from moral unity with the rest of the group.¹⁷² Clothing once again became a symbol of transformation and a visual label through which women were identified as morally good or still suffering in sinfulness.

Indeed, the SGS’ depiction of inmates demonstrates the distance the sisters sought to cultivate between girls inside their institutions. Inmates were intended to learn about their own sinful state of existence and hopefully become inspired to change. Female children in the home required careful treatment and this treatment, normally, included a strong and continued effort to create relational distance between the girls and nuns. The girls were described in terrible detail as devious, devilish children who were there to corrupt good nuns. Advice for sisters working in SGS houses included strong warnings about inmates like the following:

“I warn you to be on your guard against their wiles, to fear them, as you would the snares of the serpent. Remember, that while we are studying these poor children in order to know them, they are cunningly, I would almost say maliciously, studying us, and striving to know us. You may be sure, they examine you from head to foot; we are never free from their espionage.”¹⁷³

In this description, female children inside the home were characterized not just as mischievous but malicious and cunning—almost as if to say the girls were evil and contriving to destroy the holiness of each sister presiding over them. This extreme characterization of inmates belied a belief on the part of the SGS that for true moral transformation to occur, distance was essential in the control and operation of each institution. Emotional relationships between sisters and inmates were discouraged with sisters advised to speak little in the presence of the children,

¹⁷² SGS, *Practical Rules*, 50.

¹⁷³ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 88.

and “not laugh loudly, nor cry, nor, except on very rare occasions, eat or drink.”¹⁷⁴ These basic actions and the lack thereof in interactions between inmates and nuns were essentially dehumanizing the children by removing them from normal behaviors. In this way, interactions between sisters and inmates were intended to be devoid of human emotion and reinforce the image of nuns as an aloof group with complete control over the girls’ lives. The sisters were encouraged to still practice charity and kindness with the inmates, but in a distant manner that avoided strong emotions and allowed girls to experience moral and mental change through silence and reflection.

Systems of punishments and rewards also played a role in making the SGS homes into “total institutions” which controlled all aspects of inmate life. Punishment and reward also influenced group character in a total institution with group dynamics affected by a perceived group or distributed punishment, or, likewise, a reward on the behalf of the whole.¹⁷⁵ The sisters recognized the influence punishments and rewards had over inmate groups as whole, with detailed guidelines on the frequency, distribution, and administration of both. They had the “right to punish a fault without having specified in advance the punishment to be inflicted” but also recognized the need for individual punishments and clarity in discipline actions.¹⁷⁶ Punishment-worthy offenses included: faults against authority, public resistance to the Mother Superior or Mistress, faults against charity, fighting, lying, encouraging revolt, faults denoting impiety, or faults against morals. The faults against morals were extremely grievous and SGS women were advised to not “cause scandal by making public an act known to us alone”—indicating the

¹⁷⁴ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 88.

¹⁷⁵ Goffman argued that punishments and privileges were key modes of organization peculiar to total institutions, and that punishments in the inmates’ “home world” were a conditioning behavioristic model which fit neatly into residential work systems (like that of the SGS). Goffman, *Asylums*, 51.

¹⁷⁶ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 112.

secrecy surrounding moral sins.¹⁷⁷ Effective punishment came from the feeling of public shame an inmate experienced when called out for wrongdoing in front of peers. The SGS wrote, “What touches a young girl who is punished, is in general, not so much the privation of pleasure as the humiliation she feels.”¹⁷⁸ This statement demonstrated how nuns realized the power of social setting in disciplining girls and inmates in the Houses of the Good Shepherd.

Sisters recognized their control over the emotional state of inmates and manipulated the inmate environment to achieve their goals of moral improvement. Young inmates were also “awakened by the desire of gaining a prize or the fear of losing it,” and SGS women used rewards to inspire obedience.¹⁷⁹ While these recreations might have varied based on location—different activities in the cities of Albany and Troy than in the countryside of a Midwestern state—girls inside the homes valued them and the SGS recognized this. Recreations were also limited because these hours or activities were viewed as most dangerous to the moral character of inmates, as “during recreation..evil projects are formed, bad friendships commenced, that the children lead each other astray by conversations contrary to morals to against authority.”¹⁸⁰ By strictly governing periods of relaxation, the SGS reinforced their central lesson to inmates that labor and industry would save them from their own sinful characters.

The SGS central tenet of reformation through labor also reflected their vow of zeal but also belief in the power of work in transforming the mind. “Those who pray and those who, instead of prayer offer their labor to God, as all who are employed in the most laborious works of the house can do,”—both sisters and inmates—“often labor more efficaciously for the salvation

¹⁷⁷ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 113-114.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁷⁹ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 118. Goffman argued that any total institution acts as a “kind of dead sea in which little islands of vivid, encapturing activity appear,” or more succinctly, rewards—most often in the form of recreational activities or diversions. Goffman, *Asylums*, 69.

¹⁸⁰ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 135.

of souls.”¹⁸¹ Guidelines for both personal and vocational work of the SGS indicated that work and labor were as critical as prayer for uniting the soul with God—as such, it is unsurprising that labor formed the backbone of the sisters’ zealous work with wayward women. Additionally, as self-encompassing institutions, the SGS had an identifying characteristic—labor as a driving factor of income for the order. Laundry labor had two goals for the SGS: to improve female character and morality and to bring in money.¹⁸² For the SGS, participating in group laundry work and other domestic labors meant an engagement in physical activity but also engagement in identity transformation. Women who participated in this labor gave their time and effort to a source of income for the order and while doing so participated in a secondary labor of changing the mind from sin to godliness.

Stimulating moral change through work and labor was a tactic used in both Houses of the Good Shepherd in Albany and Troy. Because inmates of the homes were already destined for lives of labor because of their poverty outside of the institution and status in the cities of Albany and Troy and as such, were to be encouraged to embrace hard work and routine. Advice for SGS women and women in their care included phrases such as “love work, my dear children: it is a means of preserving you from great temptations. Rather than do nothing, wind yarn” and “beware of having any fear of work; remember that is the chief austerity which we practice in our Congregation.”¹⁸³ Idleness was seen to bring forth vice and indolence viewed as a paralyzing agent which destroys goodwill and incites individuals to evil and sin.¹⁸⁴ Any money a girl inmate earned while residing inside the House of the Good Shepherd—typically for girls who might

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁸² Goffman argued that for the first goal (moral transformation), complete organizations required individuals to be “visibly engaged...in the activity...which entails a mobilization of attention and muscular effort, a bending of oneself to the activity at hand.” Any study, he wrote, of how individuals adapt to being defined and identified likely involves understanding how they deal with engagement in organizational activities. Goffman, *Asylums*, 177.

¹⁸³ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 121.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

leave the house one day—could be set aside and controlled by the Mother Superior, who might “allow a little interest on their savings” and distribute some money to spend while under the sisters’ care.¹⁸⁵ This control of a resource, money, personally earned by an inmate, replicated a method of power and authority in total institutions.

Controlling relationships between inmates and between sisters and their charges gave the SGS overarching control over the education and reformation of wayward women and girls. By using physical tools like rewards, recreations or punishments, the sisters created a social relationship between themselves and inmates that fostered a goal of moral improvement. The SGS, as staff of each institution, created a manipulated strategy for inmates to “self-direct” their own personal change.¹⁸⁶ Sisters also recognized different characters or types of personalities among inmates and gave instructions on how best to reform each personality type. “Bold forward girls” who had decided “not to improve” needed stern and swift reprimands along with public and unflinching severe treatment.¹⁸⁷ Proud and “very sensitive” girls needed to be shown that “their faults render their good qualities useless,” implying a use of shame as a tool for moral change.¹⁸⁸ While sisters’ treatment of various kinds of inmates based on demeanors was valuable and demonstrated the nuns’ care and attention to inmate life, this also shows that the SGS manipulated their inmate population by sometimes using comparison and public humiliation as tools of reform.

Through their management of inmate selves and moral lives, SGS nuns contained public fears of immoral women acting out in society. The power wielded by the SGS not only impacted

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁸⁶ “Both desired and undesired conduct,” Goffman argued, “must be defined as springing from the personal character of the inmate himself,” and driven by a personality morality throughout the institution. The SGS homes follow Goffman’s assessment of total institutions here based upon this plan for inmate transformation. Goffman, *Asylums*, 87.

¹⁸⁷ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 196.

¹⁸⁸ SGS, *Practical Rules*, 196.

inward change for inmates but helped to solidify the sisters' reputation as a group that could uplift and transform females, especially girls, making them into pious and respectable citizens. The SGS attempted to transform inmates as tools through which their own reputation and power was communicated to the public. In turn, public reaction to the presence and mission of the SGS demonstrated a high regard for the sisters in caring for wayward women and girls. The following chapters of this thesis utilize print sources (authored by both the SGS and local newspapers) that demonstrate how the SGS sought and received acknowledgement for their social work. Examining public discussion of the SGS underscores the common value held by both the nuns and by Catholic and non-Catholic society for moral improvement. Continuing to use this reputation of "a labor...of the noblest, purest character," the Sisters of the Good Shepherd established their role as morally superior women who improved social values and mitigated female degeneration.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ *The Argus*, "House of the Good Shepherd: Its Noble Mission and Work—the Coming Bazaar," November 1, 1888. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org> (accessed January 29, 2022).

Chapter 3: Nuns and Neighbors: Analyzing Women’s Religious Life Within Urban Society

On Thursday, November 1, 1888, between a column on voter intimidation and a large print ad for horse blankets, Albany’s newspaper *The Argus* reported briefly on the work of nuns who needed community help to collect funds for a house that they hoped to build for wayward women. In “robes of pure white” the sisters devoted their lives to the blessed work of taking care of “unfortunates.” These “ministering angels” were members of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.¹⁹⁰ Seven years later, the same newspaper presented a column detailing a local lawyer’s allegations that the sisters were keeping “girl prisoners” forced to do laundry and confined without the due process of law. The newspaper sent a journalist to investigate the situation, concluding that the institution was a place of beauty, cleanliness, and order.¹⁹¹ Questions remained, however, about the work of the sisters. Why send a reporter to reveal the goings-on behind the convent walls? Changing views on the work of the order in the press reflected the unique position of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd within the urban communities of Albany and Troy, New York.

The House of the Good Shepherd began operating in Albany in 1884 and the Mt. Magdalen Reformatory of the Good Shepherd in Albany’s sister city, Troy, also opened that year.¹⁹² Both homes began to appear in brief mentions in local press. Four years later, the sisters had been successfully nurturing wayward women back to socially appropriate behavior, as

¹⁹⁰ *The Argus*, “House of the Good Shepherd: Its Noble Mission and Work—the Coming Bazaar,” November 1, 1888. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org> (accessed January 29, 2022).

¹⁹¹ *The Argus*, “Tissue of Falsehoods,” October 8, 1895. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org> (accessed January 29, 2022). Press reporting the scandalous uncovering of true convent life was not a new phenomenon at the end of the nineteenth century. For example, *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* published in 1836 revealed salacious details of sexual abuse inside a Montreal convent. Maria Monk, *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* (London: Published for the Trade, 1850), Hathitrust Internet Archive.

¹⁹² Michelle Jones and Lori Record, “Magdalene Laundries: The First Prisons for Women in the United States,” *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences* 17, no. 1 (2014), 172.

shown by the positive reporting by *The Argus*. The call for the Albany community to donate monetary funds to the sisters also indicates the increasing level of recognition that the sisters and their work had in the city. There “was never a more worthy object” for the people’s aid, and the SGS continued to build their mission of reforming the lowliest women in the city.¹⁹³

The public recognition of the SGS along with their increasingly visible social work brings to light several relationships that the order maintained and created. Navigating this network of social relationships, the SGS in Albany and Troy created a space for unwelcome members of society to potentially form acceptable social bonds. However, the SGS’s public perception was not simply one of angelic benevolence. Later sources indicate alternate views, prompting questions as to the position of the order within the city. This chapter examines community perceptions of the two homes to understand the wider view of the SGS in Albany and Troy. It focuses on Catholic and non-Catholic perceptions of the “homes” and the reputations developed by the sisters and inmates.¹⁹⁴ The SGS became seen by the public as a regulatory body which improved society and deserved support and approval. Local newspaper treatment of the order and their work also supported the sisters’ mission and position in society as a positive, beneficial force.

Examining newspapers and other primary sources that provide an outside record of the SGS’s work in these two cities raises several questions about the SGS’ role. It is important to understand not only how the SGS were perceived by other Catholics, but also by other laity. In what ways did society create or limit space for the SGS through perceptions of their reform efforts in running these two institutions for women? What did the public view of the SGS

¹⁹³ *The Argus*, “House of the Good Shepherd,” Nov. 1, 1888.

¹⁹⁴ I will use the term home or homes to denote the two SGS institutions in this chapter because of the use of the word by *The Argus* journalists. When describing the two Houses of the Good Shepherd in Albany and Troy, reporters most frequently used the word home.

demonstrate about Catholic and Irish Catholic women at the time? Within the context of the period—from 1884 to around 1920—the SGS women’s institutions in Albany and Troy offer examples of how Catholic women actively sought to change social values by containing and controlling female sexuality. Through their work in reforming “fallen” women, the SGS created a positive public image and promoted the work of the Catholic church.

The public perception of the SGS found in primary sources such as local newspapers is significant because this demonstrates the role the sisters played in positioning Catholics as upstanding moral citizens in urban society. The SGS promoted Catholic teachings in their reform work in an era of increasingly larger efforts by Protestant women to reform society. Three historiographical contexts inform this chapter: moral reform and welfare work; the particular place of Catholicism in late nineteenth-century America; and Progressive era views on gender and sexuality. This chapter adds to each aspect of the historiography by placing Catholic nuns at the center of scholarly analysis of women and women’s work at the turn of the century.

A close examination of the SGS in Albany and Troy using public sources like media suggests that the sisters’ work brought together themes of gender, sexuality, work, and public acceptability.¹⁹⁵ What initially was the positive reception of the SGS transformed into questioning the sisters’ work and subsequent confirmation of the value of the group to the cities of Albany and Troy. As a group of women made distinct by religious vows, the SGS in these two cities functioned as a barrier between problematic female sexuality and middle-class society. The

¹⁹⁵ This chapter relies primarily upon *The Argus*, the primary newspaper printed in Albany and Troy between 1865 and 1921.¹⁹⁵ Printed daily, *The Argus* reported on local news in Albany and Troy, and the surrounding area. The paper printed news of local happenings, crime reports, weather, and other small stories that were relevant to readers in the city. As a representative source of information on both cities, *The Argus*’s inclusion of the SGS and their work in numerous editions is significant.

SGS were able to use societal views on sexuality to their advantage to craft a reputation for uplifting women and serving the greater good of the community.

Early mentions of the SGS in Albany in *The Argus* introduced the sisters to the public as a group that would contribute to the moral improvement of the city. Described in relatively positive terms, the sisters were identified by name, having “associated themselves for benevolent charitable purposes” in the business of reforming “female penitents.”¹⁹⁶ A second notice one month after this one in 1884 published by *The Argus* informed readers again of the positive mission of the SGS. The sisters purchased a piece of property consisting of three lots and buildings in West Troy formerly owned by the “Retreat for Ladies and Homeless Girls” for \$23,000. The transfer of property was signed and completed in the county clerk’s office.¹⁹⁷ Most likely administered by a male official, the sale also included a small mortgage held by a man named James Slattery of New York City. While primarily transacted by women, the sale of this particular plot of land to the SGS was made even more credible by the overseeing of the purchase by a male civic figure—the clerk—and given the title of a “worthy charity,” signaling public approval for the sisters’ mission.¹⁹⁸ Several years later, the same newspapers lauded praise upon the SGS for work in their home in Albany and supported a local bazaar designed to raise funds for the sisters to construct a new building. The “sincere Christian women,” wrote the author, “have consecrated their lives to helping the fallen...never obtrusive in the least degree in their manner, their happy faces are a welcome sight to many people of Albany who have learned to love and aid them in their blessed work.” Many “unfortunates,” the newspaper described,

¹⁹⁶ *The Argus*, “For the Reformation of Female Penitents,” June 11, 1884, vol. 52 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2, from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

¹⁹⁷ *The Argus*, “A Worthy Charity,” July 8, 1884, vol. 52 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 6, from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 6.

would gladly seek the company and help of the sisters—identifying them as a safe place for women and a positive group in Albany society.¹⁹⁹ This fair was featured heavily throughout 1888 editions of *The Argus* as journalists continued to draw attention to the “worthy cause” which was the mission of the SGS. A rousing success, the fair drew large audiences and was a beautifully effective appeal for aid. Booth prizes and even a scholarship raffle were offered to attract the public to the fair to benefit the sisters, signifying the increasing amount of recognition the SGS were gaining in Albany and Troy.²⁰⁰

The SGS, as reflected by the amount of newspaper press dedicated to the 1888 benefit and later notices of the sisters’ work, was claiming a place in Albany society as a well-respected and legitimate group that served a crucial role in the community. The sisters acted as a critical divider between the bad and good of society, as it was considered an “absolute necessity that fallen women...should not be allowed to come in contact with young and inexperienced children.”²⁰¹ This role—reforming deviant women—was an important part of the larger social system of the city. Local relationships continued to develop between the SGS and the Albany and Troy communities throughout each home’s existence. Evidence of the continued connection between the urban population and the sisters, such as lectures given in the local Leland Opera House with proceeds benefitting the House of the Good Shepherd, dotted *The Argus* pages into the twentieth century.²⁰² The sheer number of articles, long or short, printed about the SGS and their two institutions in Albany and Troy signaled the position they held within the community

¹⁹⁹ *The Argus*, “The Coming Bazaar,” November 1, 1883, 3. from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²⁰⁰ *The Argus*, “—en Among the Booths,” December 6, 1888, vol. 75 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²⁰¹ *The Argus*, “The Coming Bazaar,” November 1, 1883, 3.

²⁰² *The Argus*, “The Passion Play of 1890: An Illustrated Lecture” March 31, 1891, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 7. from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 6, 2022).

as a group that contributed to the common good. *The Argus* mentioned the House of the Good Shepherd over four hundred times from the date of the homes' openings up into 1920. In a paper printed daily, this continued attention and inclusion with other local news indicated the solid, respected place in society the SGS held.

The SGS received further positive publicity in local papers as they began ministering to local women through the two homes in Albany and Troy. After the foundation of the building for the SGS home in Albany was laid, journalists reported that the “great work” of the sisters in “preservation of innocence” was about to begin. The brief summary also detailed the mission of the SGS house in Albany: “the new house will be used for two classes, Girls under sixteen whose surroundings are bad and whose morals are exposed to danger, and those women who have led a life of shame and who wish to reform.”²⁰³ Reading this article and others like it in the local Albany paper indicate that journalists, and presumably their readers, viewed the sisters as a group that propagated a kind of sexual cleanliness in the city. In handling groups of women that did not wholly have a place in society--unmarried, promiscuous women and girls—the nuns of the SGS began to cement their reputation as a group of holy, pristine, and industrious women. The paper reported the following spring that the house was completed and ready to begin ministering to the public.

Part of the opening of the SGS' home in Albany was carefully crafted both to portray the Sisters as benevolent women and also to open up the home to public inspection. The paper reported that on April 20, 1890, the Right Revered Francis McNeirny would bless the building, and “it will then be thrown open and the public invited to inspect the institution and see what the

²⁰³ *The Argus* “A Worthy Institution,” October 7, 1889 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 7. from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 6, 2022).

Sisters of the Good Shepherd are going to do for Albany.”²⁰⁴ The language here suggests several interesting conclusions about the public view of the SGS. First, the role of the male reverend in blessing and opening the home alongside male reporting of these events demonstrates that the Sisters were still seen as subordinate to a male clergy, and thus acceptably governed by a male Catholic governing force. Second, the invitation to the public to ‘inspect’ the home suggests that despite their growing reputation for saving poor and promiscuous women from the Albany streets, the sisters were still viewed as secretive and suspicious by the general population.

This same article also included a description of the process by which someone would visit an inmate of the home. Visitors who wished to see a girl or woman in the house were permitted to do so only through a wooden latticework wall and in the presence of one of the nuns. This was for “the protection of the unfortunate inmate as anything else,” and only one visitor per month was allowed.²⁰⁵ The sisters positioned themselves as moderators of public visitation of inmates and thus as moderators of proper public relationships with wayward women. Moderating visits allowed the sisters to become viewed as motherly caretakers, or as custodians of public morals and private penitence. Most interestingly, the article culminated in a quick assessment of the value of the House of the Good Shepherd. The author wrote that “the character of the institution must be remembered. To many and the majority of the inmates it is a prison to which they have been legally committed, as they would be to a house of correction,” where the sisters were for the most part kind. Only rarely did the SGS resort to “confinement in a cell” as a method of punishment.²⁰⁶ Here, the nuns were depicted as dutiful women who are

²⁰⁴ *The Argus*, “A Noble Institution: the House of the Good Shepherd to be Opened Soon,” April 6, 1890, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 9. from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 6, 2022).

²⁰⁵ *The Argus*, “A Noble Institution: the House of the Good Shepherd to be Opened Soon,” April 6, 1890, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 9. from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 6, 2022).

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

simply serving the public by taking criminal women off the streets and doing so in a caring, loving manner. The sisters' methods were not questioned but instead accepted as necessary and a positive option alongside traditional prisons and prison treatment.

Even the work inside the House of the Good Shepherd was more publicly known throughout the homes' existence, as brief notices of updates to the laundry machinery in the home appeared in *The Argus*, as shown in a 1900 notice of the new "laundry plant" being installed.²⁰⁷ The public also respected the space as separate and distinct, as exemplified by city attorneys' reluctance to enter the space unless permitted. In the case of two girls potentially wrongly convicted, an attorney sent to the institution with a writ of habeas corpus visited at eight o'clock. However, the sisters advised him that "it was against the rules to open the doors after six o'clock" in the evening and so he returned the next morning.²⁰⁸ Respect for the nuns' rules demonstrated respect for the order's created space and an acknowledgment of the importance of the work they performed.

Indeed, the dedication of the House of the Good Shepherd itself reflected an initially positive and reverent characterization of the work of the nuns. Managed by a male leader—the bishop—the sisters were given silent approval to minister to the sinful women of the city. The dedication ceremony even attracted a crowd so large that "the chapel was crowded, halls were crowded, and hundreds turned away."²⁰⁹ Significantly, the inmates wore "white caps and long white veils," allowing them to be present in a public event but still hidden away from the public

²⁰⁷ *The Argus*, "Small Talk of the Town," January 12, 1900, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 5. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁰⁸ *The Argus*, "Girls Sentenced to Six Months," September 11, 1903, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁰⁹ *The Argus*, "Dedicated by the Bishop: The House of the Good Shepherd Formally Opened Yesterday," April 21, 1890, April 6, 1890, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 6/7, 2022).

eye. Inmate dress also presented a public statement by the SGS of the order's morally improving influence on women. Altar boys and priests led the procession into the chapel for the benediction by the bishop and the priests were listed by name in the article. The journalist wrote that the nuns engaged in "the work of rescuing their fellow-creatures," denoting that the sisters were not so much part of normal society but instead divided into a group of separate, secluded women.²¹⁰ The separation of the women (both nuns and inmates) from the crowd allowed for the public to view them positively as a group that was in the process of purifying themselves and the city, while not tainting the other citizens in any way. Likewise, the relatively unobtrusive presence of the SGS in both cities shielded them from too many public interactions. Reporters advocating for the SGS's cause described the group and the homes as "not fully appreciated" and "unknown save to a few"—doing noble work quietly and modestly.²¹¹ Occasionally women and girls appeared to wish to enter the SGS home too, as one column in *The Argus* demonstrated in August 1898. A homeless girl named Sophie asked a local judge to send her to the home to avoid other vagrant girls who "led her rather a hard life"—suggesting a recognition of the power of the sisters to separate inmates from troublesome people.²¹² The SGS appear here to be doing work almost behind the scenes of city life—cleaning up after problem women and doing so in a way that made the nuns appear even more devout and holy.

Male Catholic leaders also interacted with the SGS and the homes they operated, signaling another level of societal approval for their social work. The bishop at the time, Bishop McNeirny, occasionally interacted with the sisters and inmates, for example performing the

²¹⁰ Ibid., 8.

²¹¹ *The Argus*, "A Deserving Charity: The Sisters of the Good Shepherd Appeal to Albanians," April 17, 1892, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 11. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 9, 2022).

²¹² *The Argus*, "Sophie's Sad Story: At Her Request the Girl Was Sent to the House of the Good Shepherd," August 31, 1898, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

sacrament of confirmation for six women in the home on Wednesday, June 13, 1888.²¹³ Men also interacted occasionally with the SGS in various settings, as overseers (in the case of the bishop) or as investigators (as journalists printing news of female inmate convictions). The Troy common council, heads of city departments, and the Rensselaer County board of supervisors visited the House of the Good Shepherd annually to perform an inspection.²¹⁴ The sisters were still observed and approved by male civic leaders, with a passing inspection and subsequent celebratory lunch marking the occasion. Continuing to receive positive approval from male community leaders allowed the SGS to continue to practice their mission of reforming wayward women.

As a charitable institution, the SGS homes were also subject to routine inspections by the New York State Board of Charities. On May 28, 1897, *The Argus* printed a short column about General Selden E. Marvin's assessment of local city charities. Marvin wrote the institutions run by sisterhoods (like the SGS) were better managed than other non-religious organizations, and the Houses of the Good Shepherd in Troy and Albany were to be commended for the work with "a class of unfortunate girls who are so employed to lift them to a higher and better standard of womanhood."²¹⁵ Implicit in Marvin's assessment is a conclusion that the sisters were "better" women than the inmates they cared for. Because of their willingness to associate with wanton women in a custodial role, the sisters elevated themselves to higher social standings. As well, the good influence of the sisters came at a lower cost than other reformatories—making it quite appealing for the State to send young girls to the Houses of the Good Shepherd. While it cost

²¹³ *The Argus*, Untitled column, Sunday June 17, 1888, vol. xl (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²¹⁴ *The Argus*, "Their Annual Visit," December 11, 1893, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 7. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 9, 2022).

²¹⁵ *The Argus*, "Capitol Hill Chat," May 28, 1897, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 4. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022)

five dollars and ten cents to send a woman to the Hudson reformatory, it only cost the county a dollar and seventy-four cents to send her to the SGS.²¹⁶ Using this to their advantage the SGS claimed a place among local institutions as the best option for promiscuous women to be reformed.

Newspaper excerpts printed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the primary operating years of the homes in Albany and Troy—continually highlighted the SGS as a kind of repository for problematic women. Brief blurbs appeared almost daily describing the kinds of women removed from Albany’s streets and sent to the home of the Good Shepherd. A Mrs. Annie Cook, once a “well-known young lady of this city,” was sent to the House after being widowed and becoming a drunkard.²¹⁷ Two years later, another “habitual drunkard,” Mary Cassidy, was sentenced to 180 days in the Troy home.²¹⁸ Small offenses like “creating a disturbance” were enough to send women to the home, with six months a typical sentence.²¹⁹ Men used the SGS to escape problematic spouses, for example in the case of a Michael Nolan who “caused the arrest of his wife, Mary, for injury to property.”²²⁰ Mary had been drinking and smashing things in his house. Drinking and expressing emotions of rage and anger were so inappropriate for a woman that the situation demanded Nolan send his wife to the SGS for care.

²¹⁶ *The Argus*, “Local Bills Discussed: Several Hearings Arranged for Yesterday before cities committee,” February 15, 1899, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022). \$5.10 in 1899 would be approximately 177 dollars today, and \$1.74 would be approximately 60 dollars today.

²¹⁷ *The Argus*, “Amusements,” Saturday Morning, April 16, 1887, vol. 74 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²¹⁸ *The Argus*, “West Troy,” May 11, 1889, vol. 75 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²¹⁹ *The Argus*, “Small Talk of the Town,” November 8, 1906, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022); “Six Months for Mamie Holmes,” January 3, 1907, *The Argus* (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²²⁰ *The Argus*, “Caused Wife’s Arrest,” May 10, 1900, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

From the opening of the two institutions into the first decades of the twentieth century, *The Argus* printed almost daily notices of various women sentenced to time in each home. These numerous snippets of news followed the same format in each printing—the woman was usually named, her crime or crimes listed, and the length of her sentence to the SGS House. In the year 1904, for example, *The Argus* printed notices of women convicted to the SGS homes at least every week if not daily.²²¹ The clippings consistently were titled using terms that portrayed the SGS institutions as beneficial places, such as a refuge. On occasion, the papers shared stories that painted the SGS home as a haven keeping women from criminals and malicious male citizens. For example, in the “sad story of unfortunate Nellie Quinn,” journalists recounted the recent and gruesome murder of a local woman by her male companion. A former inmate at the SGS house because of “an appetite for liquor,” Nellie Quinn’s death was implied to be a result of her return to the world outside the institution.²²² Her inability to resist temptation led her to fall into bad company rather than remaining in the safe space created by the SGS. While the sisters were

²²¹ Some examples of clippings detailing female convictions in 1904 include: *The Argus*, “Warm Place for Catherine,” January 20, 1904, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022); *The Argus*, “Sent to House of Good Shepherd,” February 25, 1904, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022); *The Argus*, “Held for Grand Jury,” March 3, 1904, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022); *The Argus*, “Committed to Refuge,” March 25, 1904, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022); *The Argus*, “Rose Faid Committed,” March 30, 1904, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022); *The Argus*, “Cohoes Woman Takes Acid,” May 22, 1904, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 7. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022); *The Argus*, “Went to House of Good Shepherd,” August 15, 1904, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 10. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022); *The Argus*, “Aged Woman Cared For,” October 30, 1904, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022); *The Argus*, “Sent to House of Good Shepherd,” November 27, 1904, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 5. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²²² *The Argus*, “Sad Story of Unfortunate Nellie Quinn,” October 3, 1907, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 1. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

mentioned only briefly, the paper's inclusion of Nellie's former status as an inmate indicated a clear connection between the SGS and female improvement. Brief notices like one sharing the commitments of Marcy Craft and Margaret Hartman to the House of the Good Shepherd for burglary in 1911 continued to appear in the pages of *The Argus*.²²³ By continuing to include news of new SGS inmates and describing the houses in positive terms, the newspaper reflected an opinion that the sisters performed a useful function in the city by taking in women who disturbed the social order.

Both young and older women were sent to the home for misconduct, regardless of age. Mrs. Mary McCue sent her sixteen-year-old daughter Julia to the home for "skipping out with a theatrical troupe," an act of misconduct she viewed as extremely defiant.²²⁴ Jane Johnson, frequently in a local almshouse, was found "in a hallway," and sent to the home for six months.²²⁵ Another woman awaiting trial for blackmail in 1898 was accepted by the Mother Superior at the time.²²⁶ While ultimately the woman—a Mrs. Cody—was not sent to the home, she was permitted and encouraged to visit with the Sisters during the day while she was in jail, implying that city officials believed in the civilizing and uplifting effect of the nuns enough to allow locally jailed criminals to visit the House for moral improvement.²²⁷ Girls were sent for small petty crimes, such as the case of Elizabeth Welch, fifteen, who stole a ring and a small

²²³ *The Argus*, "Girls Committed," October 1, 1911, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²²⁴ *The Argus*, "West Troy Dashes," October 29, 1887, vol. 73 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²²⁵ *The Argus*, "Sent to the House of the Good Shepherd," April 7, 1905. (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²²⁶ *The Argus*, "Will Care for Mrs. Cody," December 11, 1898, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²²⁷ *The Argus*, "Amount of Bail Fixed: Mrs. Cody Cannot be Released on her Own Recognizance," December 24, 1898, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 6. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022)

amount of money from a local woman.²²⁸ Two “partner” beggar girls were sentenced to the home upon arrest by the local humane society.²²⁹ Describing the girls as partners invoked a more sinister intent to steal, rather than simply a state of poverty. These girls and other women who were sentenced to the home were described by newspaper reporters as dangerous and unruly, like one Mary Cleary who was so enraged at her sentence that she threatened “if she had a gun she would blow the head off the judge” who sat at her trial.²³⁰ The repeated characterization of SGS inmates as dangerous to the public solidified the institutional reputation as a place where “bad women” went. The inmates shared one thing in common—through their actions they threatened to disturb societal standards of behavior.

Women who existed outside the control of a male figure, whether father or husband, threatened to upset the social order and thus were perceived as criminals. Interestingly, inmates cared for by the SGS were placed under female control—sisters superseded fathers and husbands in a position of power. For example, Julia Remis, the “husbandless mother” who had five children was charged with “violating the section of the penal code which relates to the endangering of public morals.”²³¹ Having multiple children—and as the newspaper implied, with different fathers—made Remis a corrupting and deviant woman. Her “peculiar code of morals” needed to be hidden away behind SGS walls so as not to threaten any other people in the community. Additionally, Remis was seen to need some form of control, in this case taking the form of the sisters.

²²⁸ *The Argus*, “Sent to the Home of the Good Shepherd,” July 2, 1899, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 4. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022)

²²⁹ *The Argus*, “Beggars Sent Up,” September 16, 1899, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²³⁰ *The Argus*, “Threatened the Judge,” April 19, 1907, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²³¹ *The Argus*, “The Husbandless Mother,” December 8, 1909, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

Adjectives like disorderly, wayward, and unfortunate peppered descriptions of women sent to SGS homes in both cities from the mid-1880s into the twentieth century. Minnie Dugan-Ford was a “disorderly girl” who ran away from the House in Albany, was caught by patrolmen, and returned.²³² News from Cohoes—a suburb of Albany—included a brief note on one “Mrs. Michael Gannon, whose admittance to the Hudson Reformatory was refused,” sent to the SGS home in Troy.²³³ This implied misbehavior so great that the first reformatory would not accept her—indicating the extent of social misfits that the SGS were willing to take in. Ciara Byrne, an accused thief, frequented “houses of ill-fame” and was committed to the SGS House in Troy early the following year.²³⁴ Implicit here was the meaning of houses of ill-fame as places of prostitution, thereby denoting subtly that Ciara Byrne was a sexually promiscuous woman who needed to be kept off the city streets. Delia Delaney, an Irish girl, was sent to the home after being picked up by local police for wandering about the streets of the city, abandoned by her father.²³⁵ Immigrant girls often were sent to the homes with poor reputations. The newspaper reporters typically identified the ethnicity of these girls as well, associating their foreign-ness with criminal behavior. For example, Mary Barberietta participated in an assault (likely on a relative) and was sent to the house as a result. Her father claimed she was “wilful and does not behave herself,” indicating that perhaps Barberietta’s real crime was simply disobeying the male

²³² *The Argus*, “Protest was Not Made,” August 31, 1897, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 7. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022)

²³³ *The Argus*, “Cohoes,” January 9, 1888, vol. 75 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²³⁴ *The Argus*, “A Kleptomaniac: One Was Arraigned Before the Recorder of Watervliet,” January 17, 1898, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 6. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²³⁵ *The Argus*, “Police Court Notes,” December 12, 1889, April 7, 1905. (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 5. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 6, 2022).

head of the family.²³⁶ Her status as an immigrant also made her seem less worthy and contributed to her image as a wayward girl.

Children were also sent to the SGS homes in both cities, although the *Argus* sometimes failed to report on occasion whether these children were male or female, instead simply grouping them as delinquents who needed containment for some unknown reason.²³⁷ A neglected child named Nellie, age thirteen, was sent by a local magistrate to the sisters in August of 1892.²³⁸ Interestingly, a “Dr. Cobb” who sent three children to the home in January of 1888 also sent a wayward young domestic to the home a month later. She was previously in the “employ of a prominent resident of Mohawk street,” and certain information about her case, the journalist wrote, would cause a great sensation in the city—alluding to some kind of scandalous behavior within the home of a wealthy citizen.²³⁹ Repeated sentencing by this “Dr. Cobb” suggests that the local community recognized the SGS as a convenient place to send problem girls.

Girls sent to the homes were usually characterized by the press as misguided, rebelling against both parents and standards for female behavior. Theresa Carosilli, an Italian girl and “very pretty young miss” was committed to the House by her father after “absent[ing] herself for days at a time from home.” As a “disorderly child” whom he could not control, Carosilli’s father deposited her in the separate space created by the SGS.²⁴⁰ A girl was rescued from two adults

²³⁶ *The Argus*, “Sent to House of Good Shepherd,” September 3, 1899, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²³⁷ *The Argus*, “West Troy Pointers,” January 11, 1888, vol. 75 (Albany, New York: 186-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²³⁸ *The Argus*, “Charged with Neglecting Their Children,” August 9, 1892, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 10, 2022).

²³⁹ *The Argus*, “Cohoes,” February 21, 1888, vol. 75 (Albany, New York: 186-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²⁴⁰ *The Argus*, “Police Court Notes,” July 21, 1891, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 5. from New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library. <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 10, 2022).

who beat her and forced her to beg on the streets for money in 1899. This girl was simultaneously described by the newspaper columnist with pity and disgust, as a “slave of beggars” and wily and secretive. Being with the sisters protected her from two other nefarious characters who called to claim her as a family member, and the case resulted eventually in the girl being contented and happy, “being brought up to be a sensible and useful member of society.”²⁴¹ Having a child who was “wayward” was seemingly ruinous to parents and they turned to the SGS for help. One mother was so distraught over her wayward daughter needing to go to the home that she attempted suicide by drinking carbolic acid.²⁴² It is unclear whether she was upset over her daughter’s behavior or by having to send her to the sisters, but each factor suggested societal discomfort over girls acting out. The SGS also accepted orphan girls who were not seemingly guilty of any crime other than homelessness, as in the case of Minnie Welch, a “plump little girl” who had been cycling between houses and streets in Albany night after night.²⁴³ Vagrancy at any age defied societal standards for how and where women should live and made them deserving of some form of containment to mediate their status of homelessness. Another girl went to sleep on one of the benches in a city park and was promptly sent to the SGS for being “a disorderly child.”²⁴⁴ The article in this case was titled in a way that ascribed the SGS as the new and good home for wayward girls—improving upon their former bad homes, whether that meant outdoors or an actual residence.

²⁴¹ *The Argus*, “Little Cripple: Slave of Beggars,” November 26, 1899, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 13. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁴² *The Argus*, “Cohoes Woman Takes Acid,” May 22, 1904, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 7. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁴³ *The Argus*, “No Home for a Little Child,” May 14, 1901, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁴⁴ *The Argus*, “Mary Has a Good Home,” June 4, 1901, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 6. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

The dividing characteristics between women and girls varied, presenting interesting conclusions about how sexuality and a girl's sexual deviancy threatened to upset social norms. Girls were sent to the home for acts of indecency that were not even their fault, as in the case of Louisa Peyroult in the fall of 1890. Peyroult, only fourteen years old, was the victim of a series of assaults—presumably sexual assaults—upon her by the husband of her sister. A local priest learned of the accusations and “had the girl removed” to the SGS home in Troy.²⁴⁵ This story—while seemingly about the man behind the crimes—highlights how sexual activity, regardless of if voluntary or involuntary, tainted the female reputation to the extent that removal from public view was needed. Peyroult's containment in the SGS home for her safety not only cast her as a person who should be hidden from view, ruined by sexual immorality, and therefore no longer fit for public life. She also was then categorized as immoral alongside women who might have chosen to deviate from society's standards despite her status as a victim of assault. Likewise, Maggie Smith, only fifteen years old, with a reputation “of having escaped on three occasions from the House of Shelter” (another local charitable home) was charged with being a disorderly child. She also had been the victim of an assault by a man named William Welch or alias “Jack the Ripper.” The newspaper followed this grim description with details that Maggie was sent to the SGS house so that she could not run away and that magistrate would be able to locate her when Welch was on trial. The House of the Good Shepherd where Maggie was sent was quoted as being impossible to escape from.²⁴⁶ Maggie's case further demonstrates the fact that the SGS

²⁴⁵ *The Argus*, “Wanted on a Serious Charge,” October 28, 1890, (Albany, New York: 186-1921), 7. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 9, 2022).

²⁴⁶ *The Argus*, “Disorderly Girl: Escaped Three Times from the House of Shelter,” May 18, 1898, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 7. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

created a space in which to contain girls who were viewed as immoral even involuntarily, and that publicly the order could capably contain such girls.

Older girls who sat on the cusp of adulthood sometimes tested the boundaries of social morals too and were sent to the home. It appeared that parents whose older children needed discipline used the home as a kind of short-term remediation method, as in the case of Henrietta Howard, an eighteen-year-old in Cohoes who ran away in January 1894. Before her disappearance, Henrietta, or Ettie, had previously been sent to the House of the Good Shepherd for two weeks by her parents for “an act of disobedience.”²⁴⁷ It seemed that her parents used the home as a punishment tool for reforming their daughter’s behavior. *The Argus*’ account of Ettie’s return provides even more interesting insight into the relationship between parents, children, and the SGS. On January 12, 1894 (one day after printing the original missing notice), Ettie returned home. She had left home because she “feared her mother would have her locked up in the House of the Good Shepherd again,” and so she ran away. The paper also reported that Ettie’s mother “stated she was extremely anxious to have it understood that she and her husband considered the character of their daughter pure still, and that though perhaps willful she was not a bad girl.”²⁴⁸ By sending Ettie to the SGS, her parents demonstrated local regard for the sisters as a force for improving their daughters who they could not control. The SGS stepped in to act as surrogate mothers who cleaned up young women and re-instilled acceptable morals. Because of this, the SGS was accepted in the community as a welcome group, supported by the media with constant descriptions as a benevolent institution.

²⁴⁷ *The Argus*, “Ettie Howard Missing,” January 12, 1894, (Albany, New York: 186-1921), 1. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 9, 2022).

²⁴⁸ *The Argus*, “Ettie Howard Returned,” January 13, 1894, (Albany, New York: 186-1921), 1. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 9, 2022).

The SGS homes in both cities continued to develop into locations where the female reputation could be improved and remodeled. Girls like Maggie Leonard could go to live in the SGS home after tarnishing their reputations through sexual misbehaviors. Maggie Leonard went to stay in the home in 1896 after running off with a married saloonkeeper, Henry Kelly, in the nearby town of Fonda. Leonard's father accused the man of abduction and rape after his daughter traveled to New York City and Europe with him.²⁴⁹ Though Kelly was seen to be guilty of the crime of corrupting young Maggie Leonard, she was tainted by both her sexual relationship with him—publicly detailed in court—and by leaving her good home. As a result, she was sent to the House of the Good Shepherd in Albany for reformation.

Women of any age could be sent to the SGS homes, as the city courts determined that the sisters provided an easy location to deposit petty offenders. An elderly alcoholic and thief were sent to the institution in 1901 after admitting to many former arrests.²⁵⁰ Alcoholism was a common reason women were sent to the home. A woman named Mary Wallace escaped from the House of the Good Shepherd in Troy in April 1897 and was resentenced to the institution for being a “habitual drunkard” as accused by her husband.²⁵¹ It seemed here that the only grounds for her sentencing was the testimony of her husband about Mary's alcoholism, demonstrating how men who could not control their wives might have used the SGS as an option for exerting marital control. Another young woman was sent to the home for six months after being found

²⁴⁹ *The Argus*, “Abduction is Alleged: Saloonkeeper Henry Kelly and Sixteen-Year-Old Maggie Leonard,” February 27, 1896, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 6. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022).

²⁵⁰ *The Argus*, “Albany Woman in Trouble,” December 5, 1902, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁵¹ *The Argus*, “The Canal Appointments,” April 26, 1897, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 6. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022)

intoxicated on the Albany streets.²⁵² Women commonly were convicted of drunkenness after repeat offenses, resulting in sentencing to the SGS for moral improvement after failing to uplift themselves. Catherine O'Connor, forty-five years old, was one such example after sleeping outdoors and being drunk and in total disarray.²⁵³

Women sent to the homes also were often viewed as lower-class members of society as they worked as domestics, were unattached to a male counterpart, or were from poorer families. Class and ethnic tensions played into the convictions of women sent to the SGS homes, as evidenced by the large number of Irish women sentenced to work in the laundries. For example, McCue and Gannon were both names of Gaelic origin. Very few articles mentioned women of color sent to the home, like the young girl Lecty Shaw in December 1900 who was sent to the home for acting strangely.²⁵⁴ Another Black woman served a six-month sentence in the institution in 1913 after creating a disturbance on one of the city streets.²⁵⁵ Virginia Allen, a sixty-one-year-old black woman, arrived at the institution in 1914 for the crime of vagrancy.²⁵⁶ However, race may have played a role in some women's convictions as associating with black men was often viewed to be more troublesome. In 1911, a white woman named Dolly Hepner

²⁵² *The Argus*, "Sent Up for Six Months," April 1, 1901, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁵³ *The Argus*, "Young Woman's Downfall," September 25, 1901, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁵⁴ *The Argus*, "Colored Women in Court," December 12, 1900, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 5. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁵⁵ *The Argus*, "Workman Went to Jail," March 29, 1913, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁵⁶ *The Argus*, "Six Months for Conway, Says Brady," January 20, 1914, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 6. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

was keeping company with a black man named George Kemp—a piano player—and after being found with him was sentenced to the SGS home for six months.²⁵⁷

Occasionally girls were sent to the House of the Good Shepherd for other more ambiguous reasons. However, these reasons usually implied an act of misconduct or entanglement with nefarious, unacceptable behavior. Julia Cary, aged eleven, was sent to the House “at her own request” after being wanted as a witness in the “Carpenter abduction case,” and not returning home to her parents. She was found by her parents in the home a year later.²⁵⁸ Minnie Le Preaze was sentenced to the home—notably identified as Roman Catholic—for one year after committing “petit larceny” in Troy.²⁵⁹ Another young woman was picked up and sent to the SGS home for simply wandering the city after her father abandoned her and went back to Ireland. This young woman, Delia Delaney, was fifteen and destitute.²⁶⁰ The newspaper notice about Delia is especially notable as the reporters identified her as both young and Irish. Irish women were commonly viewed as inferior and significantly more likely to be sentenced for delinquent behavior, even if only wandering as was Delia. Being found in “bad society” was reason enough for a conviction, as in the case of Mary Manning in 1902.²⁶¹

Even women who seemingly committed no crimes or exhibited malignant behaviors could be sent to the SGS homes. The SGS created a secluded space for these women, allowing

²⁵⁷ *The Argus*, “Said She Lived in Albany,” January 22, 1911, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁵⁸ *The Argus*, “West Troy Events,” November 15, 1887, vol. 74 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²⁵⁹ *The Argus*, “The Girl Burglar Sentenced,” August 21, 1889, vol 11 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²⁶⁰ *The Argus*, “Police Court Notes,” December 12, 1889, vol. 11 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 5. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²⁶¹ *The Argus*, “Off the Path of Righteousness,” April 5, 1902, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

public leaders in the police and court systems to easily separate women who defied sexual or social norms from the rest of the community. One such example was Catherine Heath, a nineteen-year-old who in June of 1913 caused a community scandal by accusing a man named Dominick Goley of “making a slave of her.” Goley, a lunchroom proprietor, was arrested for assault. While the investigation into the matter was carried out, Heath was “detained at the House of Good Shepherd.”²⁶² The SGS home by the twentieth century had become known and utilized by the public as a place to deposit women who were defying standard female roles and potentially threatening male power, as in the case of Heath and Goley. Women in the homes were often viewed as undesirable, and incapable of becoming fit for society. An Annie Meehan, sent to the SGS on a charge of vagrancy, had already been imprisoned and was “a low character and dissipated.”²⁶³ She was not worthy of attention because of her inability to change and relegating her to the hidden space of the SGS institutions was the best option for society.

On other occasions, the homes of the SGS were used as alternatives to the penal system, by both delinquent women, the court system, and the sisters themselves. Ann Berry was “found quite drunk but very merry” on the streets of Troy in 1889 and stated to police that “she was not drunk and was on her way to the House of the Good Shepherd,” indicating she viewed the home as a kind of halfway house to escape imprisonment in the local penitentiary (where she was promptly sent).²⁶⁴ Previously incarcerated in the city jail, Berry’s statement that she was headed for the SGS implies that the sisters acted as a mediating space between the local jails and city streets—accepting delinquent women who were seemingly unable to return immediately to

²⁶² *The Argus*, “Judge Brady Probing Slave Story of Woman,” June 13, 1915, vol. 164 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

²⁶³ *The Argus*, “Away for the Summer,” May 9, 1902, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 6. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁶⁴ *The Argus*, “Merry Ann Berry,” June 2, 1889, vol. 11 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed March 1, 2022).

normal society. Women sentenced for other petty crimes often appeared at the home as well. For example, fifteen-year-old Emma Rich was sent to the home in 1891 for larceny and remained there “subject to the wishes of the authorities.”²⁶⁵ Emily Weeks was sentenced to the home for committing forgery, theft, and for throwing carbolic acid in her mother’s face.²⁶⁶ This assault would seemingly warrant an actual conviction, but the county courts determined Weeks deserved to be reprimanded into the care of the sisters in the hopes of improving her mental condition.

The SGS home was viewed by the urban population as a confining space similar in many ways to a prison, as the nuns kept within their walls “tricky” or deceitful women and girls. Reporters used terms like “sentenced” and “confined” when describing females sent to the two homes, indicating acknowledgment of the nature of the restricted environment that the SGS created.²⁶⁷ For some societies, confinement referred to the separation of women from the public during menstruation, pregnancy, or childbirth—all associated with female sexuality. Use of the term here by male *Argus* writers, the word more broadly represents the separation of any visible or perceived signs of female sexuality from the public. On one occasion in 1890, a girl “of genteel appearance” between fifteen and sixteen years old, declared to be “a State pauper,” seemingly hoodwinked the public into thinking she was a poor soul in need of care. Instead, this “tricky pauper” was a girl named Katie Mallon who had absconded from the House of the Good Shepherd in Troy.²⁶⁸ The newspaper’s characterization of Katie Mallon as tricky, sneaky, and deceitful paired with her association as an inmate of the SGS home indicates how the public

²⁶⁵ *The Argus*, “Before Judge Clute,” October 17, 1891, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 9, 2022).

²⁶⁶ *The Argus*, “Charges Against Emily Weeks: She Must Answer the Charge of Getting Money Falsely,” July 2, 1901, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁶⁷ *The Argus*, “Lizzie Stole a Hat,” October 1, 1900, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁶⁸ *The Argus*, “A Tricky Pauper,” October 7, 1890, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022).

viewed the sisters as a group that contained women of bad characters. Mallon's description also presents a public view that women in SGS homes were consciously choosing to be bad using the word 'absconded' to denote Mallon's rebelliousness and active participation in rebelling against societal norms. Another "rather slick girl" sneakily managed to steal a horse and carriage to drive all over the area and, even more damning, in the company of "two young fellows." Her behavior—both promiscuous and dishonest—resulted in sentencing to the House of the Good Shepherd.²⁶⁹ Girls entered the home described as sneaky, tricky, or devious and left the home as virtuous, upstanding citizens. The nuns acted as a barrier between the public and these women and girls, providing a much-needed buffer that protected society's morals.

The SGS homes in Albany and Troy were often compared to prisons by the local papers as well, and even by local lawmakers. A bill introduced in 1897 provided for the transfer of persons committed to the House of the Good Shepherd and St. Ann School of Industry in Albany and the Mt. Magdalen School of Industry and Reformatory of the Good Shepherd in Troy to "any other prison for women in the state."²⁷⁰ What stands out in this description is not so much the naming of the two SGS homes in a list of women's institutions but the equating of the two homes with penal institutions. Viewed as prisons by lawmakers and the public, the SGS homes functioned to contain criminal and problem women in the same fashion as standard prisons. The moral improvement of these inmates became secondary to keeping them away from the public, which suggests the sisters were more focused on positioning themselves as a group that kept social stability than actually helping the women they served. The state legislature even attempted to create a law that allowed both city and state courts to commit "females of various charges" to

²⁶⁹ *The Argus*, "Rather Slick Girl," December 9, 1900, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁷⁰ *The Argus*, "Trust Bills Delayed," March 30, 1897, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 1. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022).

the House of the Good Shepherd, further indicating how the public viewed the SGS homes as equivalent to prisons in many ways.²⁷¹ Although the bill faced considerable opposition, simply the fact that a male representative put forward the idea brings to light how male civic leaders viewed the SGS homes as possibly an extension of the penal system. The bill was later revived in the Senate judiciary committee as a sufficient alternative for girls aged twelve to twenty-five who were imprisoned. The main reason, supporters of the bill argued, that the SGS homes were good options for these girls was so “they could be visited by their friends” and near their homes. As well, the senators reassured the public that “there need be no fear that any magistrate would not respect a girl’s religious sentiments” in sending her to the SGS over another house of detention.²⁷² Several conclusions appear in this iteration of the bill’s discussion: 1.) the continued view of local and state leaders that the SGS homes were places that could adequately contain problem girls; 2.) the belief that the SGS served a needed role by taking girls out of their own homes for reformation while still keeping them nearby; 3.) the idea that the religion of the SGS—Catholicism—was less important than finding a home for these girls.

Over the final decades of the nineteenth century, the SGS’ work in Albany and Troy in these two homes for women expanded. The sisters continued to take in women in need of care and moral improvement, and gradually grew their homes into noteworthy, recognized institutions in the community. However, not all stories describing the SGS homes praised their work. An 1894 edition of *The Argus* included a brief story describing a planned inspection of the “sweating system” (i.e. sweat shop) in vogue in the city of Troy, centered on the House of the Good

²⁷¹ *The Argus*, “Albany Water Bill: Other Legislative Matters of Interest to Residents of This Region,” April 10, 1897, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022); *The Argus*, “Home and Vicinity Bills,” April 14, 1897, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁷² *The Argus*, “Local Bills Advanced,” April 21, 1897, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 2. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022)

Shepherd. This sweating system—using cheap or free labor at the disadvantage of others—was suspected of being used by the sisters. The inmates of the Troy house “work on sewing machines turning out wrappers and other apparel for women. These operatives are given clothing and plain food, but no cash compensation...the proceeds revert to the institution.”²⁷³ Modern prisons continue to use inmate labor to benefit economically, with a multi-billion-dollar industry centered on incarcerated Americans.²⁷⁴ Describing inmates as operatives signaled suspicion among city officials that the SGS was benefitting economically from their religious work of reforming women. The article highlights how, significantly, the SGS were not viewed as consistently open and honest with the activities going on behind the walls of the House of the Good Shepherd, and economic benefit from the laundry completed by the women inside threatened to give the SGS undeserved wealth. Subsequent columns printed in the same newspaper suggested that the journalists were simply spreading inflammatory rumors, as attorney Henry J. McCormick denied the investigation and promoted the good work of the SGS.²⁷⁵ Simply including both articles in back-to-back daily editions of the paper suggests that the local population did not quite understand the work of the SGS, and as such, were often inclined to be suspicious of the work performed by the order.

²⁷³ *The Argus*, “Troy Sweating System: May Investigate the House of the Good Shepherd,” February 4, 1894, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 5. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022).

²⁷⁴ The discussion of prison labor is ongoing in the twenty-first century. For some sample discussion of prison labor in the United States, consider the following: Whitney Bennis, “American Slavery, Reinvented,” *The Atlantic* (September 21, 2015), <https://www.theatlantic.com/business.archive/2015/09/prison-labor-in-america> (accessed May 9, 2022); or Robert T. Chase, *We Are Not Slaves: State Violence, Coerced Labor, and Prisoners’ Rights in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020). Shane Bauer’s recent book on the link between prisons and profit in America also provides a deeper look into the link between prison labor and economic gain in the United States. Shane Bauer, *American Prison: A Reporter’s Undercover Journey into the Business of Punishment* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018).

²⁷⁵ *The Argus*, “A Lawyer’s Denial,” February 6, 1894, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 6. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022).

Occasionally the SGS and both institutions were associated with news that was eerie or even criminal. A policeman assigned to duty in the House of the Good Shepherd was found dead floating in the East River in December of 1900 after leaving for work.²⁷⁶ Later, a fire in the House of the Good Shepherd in Troy caused the death of the janitor and the near-death of one of the sisters along with heavy damage to the building itself.²⁷⁷ These brief articles do not negate any positive press the SGS received but instead demonstrate how the sisters had attained a place of recognition within the community, enough to warrant notice when bad things happened near them.

Other articles printed in *The Argus* suggest that life within the SGS homes in both cities was not as happy and idyllic as it seemed from the outside. Girls often ran away and tried to escape the institutions, usually failing, and being resented to the SGS for longer stays. Lizzie Burns ran away in 1900 and tried to take a train to Watertown, New York. Making it to Utica, she then encountered the local Commissioner who suspected her story was false and took her back to Troy.²⁷⁸ Another woman, Carrie Rives, failed to appear in court after an arrest for drunkenness and was sentenced by the local judge to go to the House of the Good Shepherd. She cried and said, “she did not want to go there and asked to be sent to the penitentiary, but her request was ignored.”²⁷⁹ Two other women ran away in 1901 to try to return to their lives of ill

²⁷⁶ *The Argus*, “Floating in East River,” December 3, 1900, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 1. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁷⁷ *The Cohoes Republican* “A Fatal Fire in Troy: Fire in the House of the Good Shepherd This Morning,” April 6, 1903 (Cohoes, New York: 1892-1920), 4, From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022); *The Argus*, “Death From Suffocation,” April 7, 1903, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁷⁸ *The Argus*, “Annie Told A Nice Story,” August 1, 1900, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁷⁹ *The Argus*, “Returned to House of Good Shepherd,” October 23, 1901, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

repute, as the newspaper reported that the women were about to return to their positions in the Kimball house, presumably a house of prostitution.²⁸⁰ Local police became involved when a “woman of 25 and a girl of 16” escaped wearing blue calico dresses, and headed for the local train station.²⁸¹ The most extreme case occurred when a girl died trying to escape the institution in August 1913. Climbing out a window using an “improvised rope of bed covering,” the “incorrigible” girl fell and shattered her skull.²⁸² The paper still identified the girl as unworthy of pity because of her crimes, but the question remained as to what about the sisters’ care drove her to attempt such a daring escape. Whatever the SGS advertised, the local women seemed to understand that containment in the homes meant a secluded and perhaps cruel lifestyle that they wished to avoid. Newspaper evidence such as this story suggests that some women even resorted to possible suicide in order to escape or evade imprisonment by the SGS.

On several occasions in the late 1890s, journalists at *The Argus* began to suspect that the SGS’ work was not as holy and pristine as previously thought after rumors of mistreatment began to circulate. The local paper sent journalists to investigate on two occasions. In 1895, a woman named Julia Curtin accused the sisters of holding her against her will and secluding her from visitors. Her lawyer, Calvin E. Keach, alleged that “the girl is kept in the institution against her will,” and that “these girls are treated as if in a state prison, locked in their bedrooms at night. Unlocked in the morning by an electric signal.”²⁸³ Keach argued that the girl was imprisoned against the rule of law and her will, kept behind “iron bars” and punished harshly for rule-

²⁸⁰ *The Argus*, “Carrie is Making A Rapid Race,” October 16, 1900, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁸¹ *The Argus*, “From House of Good Shepherd,” June 8, 1903, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁸² *The Argus*, “Girl Killed Trying to Escape,” August 9, 1913, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁸³ *The Argus*, “Tissue of Falsehoods,” October 8, 1895, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 5. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022).

breaking.²⁸⁴ Upon research and speaking with the Mother Superior (Mother Mary de Sales at the time), in the case of Curtin, the paper concluded that the SGS' work was indeed righteous and necessary for public improvement. Keach likely recognized or realized some validity in Curtin's claims, however, as he continued to represent the same woman under various aliases. If true, her "startling and sensational story" out of Lansingburg, New York, wrote *The Argus*, "will show a state of white slavery not supposed to exist in this State or this country."²⁸⁵ In this case, the girl—now called Mary Curtis—was held, prisoner. Significantly, the mother superior readily admitted that the girl was held without due process of law and kept from her sister and lawyer.²⁸⁶ The lawyer, Keach, also told the newspaper that he believed the SGS kept this girl and others prisoner because they were "forced to work on shirts in a steam power manufactory at the rear of the institution, surrounded with a high fence with pointed nail work at the top."²⁸⁷ Calling out the true nature of the SGS institution publicly signaled that Keach not only believed the sisters were abusing their power over women and girls but profiting off of their labor. Public printing of Keach's suspicions also signaled that despite the virtuous reputation cultivated by the SGS, they were still viewed skeptically by the public.

The use of the phrase "white slavery" indicated both positive and negative views of the work of the SGS and the reputations of the inmates they cared for. Keach's use of the term showed a belief that the nuns themselves were turning white women into "slaves" by working them in an industrial laundry with no pay. "White slavery" also meant society's fear that white women would become sexual slaves to men of ill repute (in the South, this meant African

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁸⁵ *The Argus*, "Girl Held a Prisoner: The Charge Made by a Lansingburgh Attorney," October 7, 1895, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 7. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022).

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

American men) and fall victim to forced prostitution. In 1913, *The Argus* printed a column detailing “white slave cases” before a local judge in which a Greek man was arrested for soliciting girls into prostitution. Another woman was sent to the SGS home after enticing a girl into a saloon—presumably for similar purposes.²⁸⁸ The following year the same judge heard a second “white slavery” case in which local man Clifton Draper was indicted for “inducing and procuring two young girls to lead lives of shame.”²⁸⁹ Judge Brady also heard another woman claim that a lunchroom proprietor had been “making a slave of her” and because of her fear, she did his bidding.²⁹⁰ She was also sent to the SGS home. The urban community seemed to fear white women being forced to work in a slave-like state underneath an all-female Catholic group, but feared, even more, the idea of white women becoming sexual slaves to men.

However, suspicion of the true nature of the sisters’ work must have remained, as an article was published five years later in which a second reporter went to the House of the Good Shepherd to investigate life behind the convent walls. Driven by a sensational story from another former inmate of the SGS, the Albany Convent drew interest in what activities might have occurred behind closed doors. “It seemed a sensible idea for *The Argus* to send a person with a notebook to ‘expose’” the Albany SGS, wrote the paper, and inquire about daily life in the convent.²⁹¹ Once again, the social identity of the SGS as an organization was reaffirmed to be

²⁸⁸ *The Argus*, “White Slave Cases Before Judge Brady,” February 14, 1913, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁸⁹ *The Argus*, “When Jury Says Guilty: Clifton C. Draper Must Serve Time on White Slavery Charge,” December 12, 1914, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁹⁰ *The Argus*, “Judge Probes Slave Story of Woman,” June 13, 1915, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁹¹ *The Argus*, “Life Behind Convent Walls: Albany House of the Good Shepherd and its Reformatory Work,” October 21, 1900, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed January 24, 2022).

positive. “The nuns of the House of the Good Shepherd are gathered from the best Catholic families, of stainless history,” wrote *The Argus*, “that no taint of moral heredity shall mar their usefulness in the peculiarly trying ordeal of association with the outcasts of the city.”²⁹² The reporter found only pristine, clean conditions inside the institution and even included excerpts of former inmates’ letters that heaped praise upon the nuns’ work and influence. The author also made a clear distinction between the sisters and the lower-class women they oversaw, making sure to identify the nuns as good catholic women whose influence could only improve those of the women around them. A uniquely female force, the nuns existed in this de-sexualized religious space that enabled them to participate in social reformation and become a publicly known group that existed to improve the city alongside other Protestant groups, laypeople, and male civic leaders.

The SGS may have used this carefully crafted reputation to take advantage of their position and obtain certain levels of power over local women. Newspapers continued to report on women who claimed the sisters held them against their will. As early as 1888, and into the twentieth century, stories appeared like that of Julia Curtin which corroborated the theme of the SGS ‘capturing’ wayward women. The attorney for Laura Lang took her case to the Appellate division court after her release from the SGS was retracted, “maintaining that his client is being detained in a private institution.”²⁹³ In 1889 Miss Annie Amoe sued the SGS house in Troy for “detention,” claiming that she had been forcibly detained and “not permitted to communicate with outside friends.” *The Argus* and *The Troy Times* reported that Miss Amoe, “causing something of a sensation,” voluntarily went to the House of the Good Shepherd but then was

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁹³ *The Argus*, “Legal Brevities,” October 17, 1911, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 6. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 12, 2022).

“virtually a prisoner” and only released upon obtaining a writ of habeas corpus.²⁹⁴ The fact that Annie Amoe was able to bring legal action against the SGS and the institution for damages up to ten thousand dollars further supports the idea that the SGS truly were controlling women of lesser reputations in ways that restricted freedom of movement and social perception. As well, the choice of the *Argus* to include Amoe’s story demonstrates that while she might not have been deemed a socially acceptable woman, her supposed imprisonment also cast the SGS in the public eye as perhaps questionable or malicious.

The SGS attempted to maintain a reputation for societal good even during times of turbulence for the order and the institutions they managed. A lengthy article ran in *The Argus* on November 1, 1901, about a mass revolt at the St. Ann School of Industry- the extension of the House of the Good Shepherd in Albany. Twenty girls in the school mutinied and smashed the windows, causing enough commotion to push the sisters to ask for the aid of local police.²⁹⁵ The girls would not listen to the Mother Superior or any sisters, and were described as incendiary, troublesome, and recalcitrant. The paper also included details that the girls revolted in the yard before entering the laundry where they were made to do manual labor and a major part of the rebellion was the refusal to enter to begin working. The police were sent for and appeared on the scene carrying “clubs and other things with which they had armed themselves.”²⁹⁶ The leaders of the revolt were arrested and taken down to the station, causing a large commotion and a large public crowd of onlookers. Amid this melee, one girl even escaped in a patrol wagon and claimed to police that she was being kept against her will by the sisters and overworked by them.

²⁹⁴ *The Argus*, “Claims She Was a Prisoner,” April 14, 1889, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 8. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State Library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 6, 2022).

²⁹⁵ *The Argus*, “Open Revolt in St. Ann’s School: Twenty Girls in the Institution Mutiny and Smash the Windows,” November 7, 1901, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

While *The Argus* journalists were willing to print suspicions of mistreatment and mismanagement by the sisters, the paper never went so far as to favor the ‘wayward’ girls who appeared in their stories. A 1911 column once again reiterated that the women who were inmates in SGS institutions were clearly of a lower class than the nuns and other women outside the home. The summary of charitable institutions in Albany printed that day described the House of the Good Shepherd as “an attempt to give the wayward girl the chance she never had,” and described the inmates as ignorant, illiterate, and “less developed mentally than eight-year-olds in the public schools.”²⁹⁷ The sisters who took care of these women were depicted as self-sacrificing and morally superior, working hard to elevate these women out of their despicable states. Because the sisters were not threatening any male power by reforming other women, they were given implicit permission to wield power over their female inmates any way they saw fit. Sources indicate as well that occasionally associating with the SGS could have cast a favorable light on misbehaving women, as was the case for Betty Brewster in 1912. Arrested for carrying a gun, she was a former inmate of the SGS home. Her behavior was “commendable” and “she had not threatened to shoot anyone,” so the judge let her go free. Betty then apparently returned to the House of the Good Shepherd to thank the sisters for “good advice and comfort” –though not enough to wholly steer her away from a life of crime.²⁹⁸

The House of the Good Shepherd in Albany was still flourishing at the end of the first World War, as the sisters continued in their mission to reform unfortunate women and girls. The urban community seemed to still need the SGS as a group that would solve the issue of wayward

²⁹⁷ *The Argus*, “Schools Of Albany that Are Out of the Ordinary,” October 1, 1911, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 1. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

²⁹⁸ *The Argus*, “Betty Had Gun But Goes Free: Girl Arrested Carrying Six-Shooter Has Sentence Suspended by Judge Scott,” December 4, 1912, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 3. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

women and continued to send females to the home throughout the early twentieth century. The SGS expanded their work to include an elementary school that opened in 1919. The school could “accommodate many” and already catered to seventy-five current inmates.²⁹⁹ Expansion of the SGS’ work in these two cities indicated the continuing acceptance of the order in the community and recognition of the valuable work they performed in dealing with women and girls who did not fit into traditional gender roles.

Over the final decades of the nineteenth century and leading into the twentieth century, the SGS in Albany and Troy cultivated a reputation as a positive social force through their two institutions, the House of the Good Shepherd and the Mt. Magdalen Reformatory. Newspaper attention to the actions of the sisters, the events in and around the two homes, and the wayward women sentenced to detention in both homes demonstrated a clear pattern of recognition for the good charitable work performed by the order. As well, the press expressed a common belief that although secluded and somewhat secretive, the SGS contributed to the overall moral health of society. They placed the SGS at the boundary between “good” and “bad” women by outlining their role in containing these women and keeping them from corrupting fellow female members of society. Mediating social anxiety over misbehaving women, the SGS cemented a place in the city as a group of women whose work was valuable.

²⁹⁹ *The Argus*, “House of Good Shepherd School Opens Next Week,” August 28, 1919, (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 12. From New York State Historical Newspapers, New York State library, <https://nyshistoricalnewspapers.org> (accessed April 11, 2022).

Into the twentieth century, the SGS in Albany and Troy continued to function as a receiving space for women and girls who were victims of sexual misconduct or committed crimes themselves. In the eyes of the public, women sentenced to both institutions were guilty of offenses that normally upended or challenged social standards for the proper conduct of women. When, for example, a Mrs. May Healey who resided on Pearl Street in Albany was attacked and assaulted by former mayor James Miles of Rensselaer, she herself was sent to the House of the Good Shepherd as both victim and portrayed perpetrator of social disruption. Charged with “endangering the morals of her eleven year old daughter,” even though she herself was a victim of assault, Healey was viewed as a criminal for the actions of a man against her.³⁰¹ The containment of Healey inside the House of the Good Shepherd after a violent crime involving an attack upon her female body demonstrated how the SGS served to negate society’s fears of the female body and improper sexuality by containing women who represented a disruption to their proper roles. The SGS maintained a reputation as a group of morally righteous women who helped to defray social degradation by reforming females who did not comply with social expectations.

Through their mission of zeal for fallen women, the SGS navigated a society in which male figures led both church and state and crafted a niche for themselves in society through which they functioned largely independently. JoAnn Kay McNamara argued that universally, religious women have had to develop alternative spiritualities and imitate Christ through works of charity in order to share in a “spiritual hierarchy” and use a status of chaste celibacy of religious life to obtain an “autonomous identity.”³⁰² In Albany and Troy, the SGS used this status

³⁰¹ *The Argus*, “Ex-Mayor Miles Gets Six Month Sentence,” April 30, 1919 (Albany, New York: 1865-1921), 5. New York State Historical Newspapers, accessed August 28, 2022, <https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn83045592/1919-04-30/ed-1/seq-5/>.

³⁰² McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 1-2.

to distance themselves from traditional womanhood, including marriage and motherhood in the standard sense. Instead, they became substitute mothers for poor, destitute and disobedient women in their reformatory institutions, acting as a kind of motherly force for all of society through improving those who brought down social morals through their corruptive actions. Navigating several social relationships, the SGS carved out a physical and spiritual space in which the nuns obtained power over inmates and controlled an internal world of moral transformations. This internal space gave the SGS external power through a reputation for social improvement.

Physical spaces created by the SGS—in the cities of Albany and Troy called House of the Good Shepherd, Mt. Magdalen Reformatory for Women and Girls, St. Anne’s Institute and School of Industry, or Guardian Angel House—became equivalent spaces to penal institutions based on the execution of their mission and purpose. Reforming women, many of whom were prostitutes, accused or convicted of sexual deviancy (whether perpetrators or victims) made the SGS a containing space for a female sexuality that threatened to upset the standards of public society. These women, instead of being sent to local jails or state penal institutions, were sent to SGS homes as alternative spaces in which they were transformed through labor and penitent life.

Doing industrial laundry mirrored labor performed in prisons as inmates worked for little or no pay and their labor benefitted the SGS through profit for each home in the city.³⁰³ The separation of inmates from the outside world and inmates from other less deviant inmates (i.e.,

³⁰³ Michel Foucault argued that prisons “express in concrete terms the idea that the offence has injured, beyond the victim, society as a whole,” through levying on the time of inmates. Penal imprisonment both deprived individuals of liberty and technically transformed them, becoming an “instrument of efficiency in the task of reformation.” The SGS served to highlight how wayward women harmed society through corruption of women and youth. Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 232-233, 244.

prostitutes from wayward girls) inside the homes conveyed a clear idea that women who disobeyed societal norms for female sexual behavior were to be closeted away, quietly and discreetly reformed. The SGS' key role as the moderator in the social relationship between prostitutes and wayward women and polite society—the mediators of sin through their reform work—allowed them to establish their roles as contributors to the common good. The connection between the SGS and the American penal system remains ripe for historical exploration as the connections between Catholic sisters and the development of contemporary morals is deep, rooted in a large history of various institutions, parochial schooling, and reputation.

Inside both SGS houses in Albany and Troy, the sisters managed inmate life and experience to promote obedience and contemplation. Maintaining routines and firm discipline allowed the inmates to experience the full conversion to a morally improved and more devout life. As a segment of Catholic charitable work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Houses of the Good Shepherd are historical examples of the important role religious women played in codifying public views on female sexuality. The SGS guarded against female impurity inside the laundries, with “a regular life of work, study and prayer.” Rehabilitation was designed for “molding character and strengthening the will” through manual labor.³⁰⁴ Daily schedule management and strict rules about behavior enabled SGS nuns to emotionally as well as physically control the lives of inmates. This thesis expands normal scholarly understandings of Catholic nuns to portray these women as moral defenders of the public. The SGS used physical and emotional control of a specific group of women to access a social power traditionally reserved for men, and SGS laundries became spaces in which women upended standard female roles.

³⁰⁴ Brown and McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us*, 114.

The SGS was an order that created “docile bodies in a domino-effect” and manipulated inmate self to become compliant and submissive to a system of team management.³⁰⁵

Comparative asylums for fallen women in Ireland or in other North American cities, including other Houses of the Good Shepherd, shared these characteristics: a regime of prayer, silence, laundry work, and lengthy stays for inmates.³⁰⁶ Psychological aspects of discipline and reformatory procedures made the SGS homes into encompassing spaces that consumed inmate lives and protect the community against the dangers of sin and sinful women.³⁰⁷ As an order of women who controlled other women leading into a century that would bring massive and impactful changes to female lives, such as the right to vote, the SGS and their work historically are important to a greater understanding of the history of women and Catholicism in the United States.

JoAnn McNamara identified nuns throughout all of Catholic history as an influential force in driving back fears of sin and sin in society, especially into the modern era. Women religious across Europe and globally in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries moved into the center of public religious life by turning to vocational professions—teaching, nursing, or other charitable works. Even secular men who previously regarded religious women as sentimental or trivial began to rely on them as a force that “socialized virtuous citizens and cared for the victims of unbridled industrial development.”³⁰⁸ Examining the SGS working in Albany and Troy at the end of the nineteenth century, we can explicitly identify the SGS as a civilizing and nurturing force in two urban communities threatened by the social change of a new century and changes in

³⁰⁵ Nancymarie Phillips, "Education for Girls in the House of the Good Shepherd, U.S. 1940-1980" (2008), 227, ETD Archive. 241. <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/etdarchive/241>.

³⁰⁶ James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalene Laundries*, xv.

³⁰⁷ Goffman, *Asylums*, 4.

³⁰⁸ McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 602.

gender ideologies. It is important to understand how social reception of the SGS' work underscored how firmly the order established themselves in Albany and Troy as a contributing, positive, uplifting community of independently functioning women. Press clippings and news reports spoke highly of SGS work and explicitly called out sinful women in their convictions and subsequent sentencings to the Houses of the Good Shepherd. These frequent and repeated notices of female convictions emphasized, over and over, the idea the SGS homes were spaces of female moral improvement. "Bad" women were sent into the homes and "good" women emerged after a period of cloistered, hidden change. Cementing a place as reformers who fought the onslaught of social decay, the SGS represented publicly how a group of females could navigate social relationships or barriers to contribute to the health of the entire community.

Examining the SGS reveals a legacy of social work that simultaneously stigmatizes and applauds the work of religious women in the United States leading into the twentieth century. Reforming wayward women through requiring the performance of daily physical labor left a lasting impression of order and success but also discipline and stern governance inside SGS homes. The sisters crafted an image of uplifting Catholicism that improved sinful women behind closed doors, easily remedying a problematic group for the community around them. Lived experiences of inmates inside the homes as revealed through glimpses in local newspapers suggests inmate life was often difficult. The imprint that the SGS left on the communities of Albany and Troy, New York into and after the first World War was one of devout and important work—a work which still needs to be explored in greater detail by scholars of both women's history and the history of Catholicism in American society.

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