

FALLEN WOMEN: THE INMATES OF THE MAGDALEN SOCIETY ASYLUM OF PHILADELPHIA, 1836-1908

This paper is a case study of the records of 2000 inmates of the Magdalen Society Asylum of Philadelphia between 1836 and 1908. It describes long-term changes in the characteristics of the inmates, the methods of reforming them, the effectiveness of those methods, and official asylum policies. The goals are twofold: first, to test historical theories regarding the evolution of asylums in the nineteenth century, and second, to evaluate the effects on the Magdalen Society of changes in Victorian attitudes to sexuality and prostitution and of changes in the social and institutional environment of Philadelphia.

The Magdalen Society Asylum of Philadelphia was the first association in America devoted to the reform of prostitutes. By isolating fallen women from their former associations and exposing them to a strict regimen of prayer and piecework, the subscribers hoped "to be instrumental in recovering to honest rank in life those unhappy females, who, in an unguarded hour, have been robbed of their innocence, and sunk into wretchedness and guilt."¹ The records of the asylum are particularly appropriate for the present purpose, since they provide data over a broad period (1836-1908) and highly detailed information — including some on the fate of the inmates after they left the asylum — for the period of greatest change, 1878-1908.² In addition, the records are remarkably complete and readily quantifiable.

A recurring theme in the recent literature on nineteenth century asylums is the shift from rehabilitation in the first half of the century to purely custodial functions after the Civil War. In the process, asylums became increasingly regimented, enforcing an exacting daily routine, strict discipline and uniform procedures for all inmates.³

For the most part, historical investigations of asylums have relied on statements made by their supporters and administrators. However, the statements of reformers may bear little relation to the actual operation of the asylums. In some cases, spokesmen for asylums were actually ignorant of conditions in their institutions, and they frequently indulged in wishful thinking. Furthermore, there were often conscious attempts to conceal the real operation of institutions, for the sake of public approval and funding. If we wish to go beyond an intellectual history of the ideology of asylums, we must look at what asylums actually did rather than just what they said they were doing. The differences between the theory and practice of asylums can lend insight into the constraints under which they labored.

In order to test whether the Magdalen Asylum changed from rehabilitative to custodial functions, it is necessary to use sources which reveal the day-to-day treatment of the inmates and the effectiveness of the asylum in modifying their behavior. The various registers of admissions and departures for the Magdalen Asylum, the reports of the Visiting Committee, and the matron's diaries of daily events provide considerable detail about the inmates, especially after 1878.⁴ They allow analysis of admissions policies, treatment of inmates, the failure rate of the asylum and characteristics of the inmates. In addition to these materials, the

Annual Reports and weekly minutes of meetings of the Board of Managers were used as sources for information on policy decisions.

There are reasons to expect significant differences between asylums for prostitutes and other kinds of asylums. Despite official hostility, prostitution flourished in the nineteenth century, possibly to a greater extent than before or since.⁵ Although they saw it as a threat to social morality and masculine energy, many Victorians also thought prostitution was necessary. Thus, the policy towards prostitution vacillated between regulation and reform.⁶ This paper argues that the ambivalence of the Victorians towards prostitution contributed to significant differences between the evolution of asylums for the control of prostitutes and those for other deviant and dependent populations.

The body of this paper consists of two parts. The first section describes the long-term shifts in the characteristics of the inmates of the Magdalen Asylum, changes in their treatment, the relative success of the asylum in achieving its goal of reform in different periods, and changes in asylum policy. The second section assesses the relative importance of various internal and external factors in producing the major changes in the asylum. A brief conclusion suggests some broader hypotheses and directions for future research.

Evolution of the Magdalen Society Asylum

In its early years, the Magdalen Society Asylum functioned as a refuge, open to even the most hardened prostitutes. Most of these stayed only a few days or a few weeks, just "long enough to get reclothed and recuperated."⁷ But if the asylum was a refuge, it was one of last resort. The inmates were constantly being "deeply impressed with their guilt in the eyes of their maker."⁸ Conditions were spartan, and the inmates worked long hours for their keep. It seems that only the naive and the desperate could be persuaded to commit themselves. In the early period, the Magdalen Asylum seems to have specialized in the latter: "the family was composed almost exclusively of the illiterate and the depraved," who were "always alternating between the Prison Alms House and places of licentiousness."⁹ The asylum met with little success in its attempts at rehabilitation in this period.¹⁰ The early *Annual Reports* were often optimistic, but since they were primarily vehicles for the solicitation of funds, they could not very well admit that the asylum served no other purpose than to scold some of the most miserable of society's cast-offs.

During the 1850s, the Board of Managers attempted some fundamental changes of asylum policy. They searched for women "whose early opportunities for improvement were superior to those who preceded them."¹¹ They attempted to recruit women who were younger, better educated, less corrupt, and of a higher social class. At the same time, the managers decided that itinerant Magdalens should be discouraged, and all should be urged to stay for one year.¹² However, it appears that these policies had little effect until after 1877, when Miss Anna MacDonald died, ending her 40 year tenure as matron of the asylum. Under her successor, Elizabeth T. Freeberger, the asylum was transformed from a refuge for prostitutes into a home for wayward girls. Shortly after Freeberger was appointed, a "change in the rules regulating the family" was announced, which asserted that "those of advanced sinful life, whose confirmed habits of intemperance, and other contaminating vices, unfit them for companionship with younger and more hopeful inmates" would no longer be admitted.¹³ Within a year, it became a rule to stay in the asylum for twelve months.¹⁴ This time, the policies were actually followed.¹⁵

Changes also took place in the treatment of the Magdalens. No longer did the managers insist that "whatever shall tend to . . . give them confidence in their resolution of amendment must be avoided."¹⁶ The rhetoric of damnation and pollution virtually disappeared, and the atmosphere apparently became less repressive. Before 1850, one of the chief concerns of the Visiting Committee was the prevention of escape. They were constantly "securing the fence" or "disposing of the articles in the yard so as to preclude their being used to facilitate . . . a departure from the house."¹⁷ Nevertheless, even after the fence was enlarged from 11 feet to 13 feet high, the Magdalens continued to "elope" over it in alarming numbers. By the 1890s, escape was almost unheard of. The attempt to produce overwhelming guilt was replaced by a new concern with maintaining the cheerfulness of the "family." Pleasurable evening entertainments became the rule, such as ice cream and cake or viewing a magic lantern.¹⁸ Under Matron Freeberger, the severest punishment was locking up on bread and water. While previously only religious speakers had been allowed, concerts and poetry readings were now given at the asylum, as well as lectures on such secular topics as travel, microscopy, and physiology.¹⁹

For the period after 1877, detailed information on the characteristics of the inmates survives. These data indicate that between 1878 and the latter part of the 1890s, there was a dramatic shift towards inmates that were young, Protestant, rural-born, and never previously employed. For the most part, these trends reversed slightly during the twentieth century.

Table 1 shows the changing age structure of the inmate population between 1878 and 1910. The percentage of women 21 or older dropped from 52.6% in 1878-82 to 5.1% around the turn of the century, while the percentage 25 or over dropped from 30.7% to zero. At the same time, the Magdalens became more homogeneous in terms of age, as the standard deviation fell from 6.63 to 1.76 years.

TABLE 1
Age Distributions of Inmates of the Magdalen Society
(Percentages)

Age	<i>Period</i>						<i>Total</i>
	<i>1878</i> <i>to</i> <i>1882</i>	<i>1883</i> <i>to</i> <i>1887</i>	<i>1888</i> <i>to</i> <i>1892</i>	<i>1893</i> <i>to</i> <i>1897</i>	<i>1898</i> <i>to</i> <i>1902</i>	<i>1903</i> <i>to</i> <i>1909</i>	
Under 16	8.8	12.8	28.6	29.1	23.5	30.9	22.1
17-20	37.6	68.2	64.3	64.8	71.3	59.6	60.9
21-24	22.9	12.0	4.8	4.9	5.1	7.8	9.8
25 and over	30.7	7.0	2.3	1.2	—	2.1	7.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of cases	170	217	168	165	136	230	186
Mean age	21.7	18.3	16.9	16.6	16.8	16.7	17.8
Standard deviation	6.6	4.4	2.4	2.0	1.8	2.3	4.1

Equally striking is the change in the religion of the inmates. The asylum was always predominantly Protestant, but in the years from 1878 to 1882, 23.5% of entering inmates were Catholic. The representation of Catholics dropped steadily over the next two decades, until it reached a low of 1.9% in 1893-7. By 1903-9, the percentage had recovered to 7.4%.²⁰

The most important change in the birthplaces of the inmates was a decline in the percentage of inmates born in Philadelphia, Camden, and New York, and a corresponding increase in the percentage born in rural Pennsylvania, New England, and the West. The percentage born in Philadelphia dropped from 51.7% in 1878-82 to 31.8% in 1898-1902, while the percentage born elsewhere in Pennsylvania increased from 13.8% in 1878-82 to 42.6% in 1903-08. During this period the percentage of foreign-born inmates fell from 20.6% to 7.4%. Most of this change was due to a fall in the percentage of German and Irish inmates, from 12.5% to 2.0%.

We can get some indication of the ethnicity of native-born inmates through analysis of surnames. Of course, this is only a rough guide since many names were anglicized. The percentage of native-born inmates with Scottish and Irish names was approximately the same as the percentage of inmates actually born in those countries in all periods. However, the percentage with German surnames increased from 1.8% in 1878-82 to a high of 11.5% in 1893-7.²¹

There was also considerable change in the previous employment of the Magdalens. In 1878-82, 60.6% of the entering inmates had been employed in some sort of job, but by 1898-1902, this had fallen to only 5%. Within the group that had previously held jobs, there was a general shift towards the more skilled occupations. Both trends reversed after 1902.

These data indicate that the policy adopted in the 1850s excluding older, more corrupt prostitutes did not become really effective until the 1880s and the 1890s. The same can be said for the rule which required inmates to remain in the asylum for a full year, as shown in Tables 2 and 3. These tables are shown separately because they are based on data compiled by different matrons using different procedures, and are therefore not strictly comparable.²² The reasons why the policies first promoted in the 1850s were actually applied only in the 1880s and the 1890s are explored later in this paper.

TABLE 2
Distribution of Duration of Stay, 1836-1877
(% of Total Admissions)

<i>Duration of Stay</i>	<i>1836-1847</i>	<i>1848-1857</i>	<i>1868-1877</i>
Under 1 month	60.5	20.1	5.2
1 month	4.5	12.0	11.9
2-3 months	7.3	12.9	17.6
4-5 months	3.4	6.3	12.0
6-10 months	3.2	5.1	10.4
11 months	0.6	1.2	2.8
12 months	0.6	1.5	2.0
13 months	0.3	0.3	1.6
14-23 months	2.0	5.1	4.0
24 or more months	1.7	3.0	1.6
Unknown	16.2	32.4	31.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of cases	357	333	251
Mean	2.2	5.1	5.9
Median	0.7	1.2	3.0

TABLE 3
Distribution of Duration of Stay, 1878-1908
(% of Total Admissions)

	<i>1878</i>	<i>1883</i>	<i>1888</i>	<i>1893</i>	<i>1898</i>	<i>1903</i>
	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>
<i>Duration of Stay</i>	<i>1882</i>	<i>1887</i>	<i>1892</i>	<i>1897</i>	<i>1902</i>	<i>1908</i>
Under 1 month	19.5	13.1	8.4	9.1	10.0	16.8
1 month	12.8	8.9	6.0	2.4	10.7	8.9
2-3 months	15.2	12.6	7.2	4.2	8.6	9.4
4-5 months	7.3	11.3	6.0	3.0	2.8	5.6
6-10 months	22.0	11.7	9.8	0.0	3.5	9.0
11 months	1.8	6.6	1.8	2.4	1.4	2.2
12 months	9.1	27.2	33.1	48.2	50.7	26.3
13 months	2.4	2.8	6.0	5.5	2.9	4.5
14-23 months	8.7	4.2	12.6	10.6	5.7	12.3
24 or more months	1.2	1.4	9.6	14.0	3.6	5.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of cases	164	213	166	164	140	179
Mean	6.0	7.3	10.8	12.4	9.2	8.9
Median	3.8	6.9	11.3	11.6	11.3	8.1

It is clear that the Magdalen Society Asylum did not have an increase in the proportion of dangerous and chronic cases, as historians have postulated for other kinds of asylums. On the contrary, there was a pronounced trend in the opposite direction. However, the argument that asylums in the late nineteenth century increasingly stressed regimentation and uniformity is entirely consistent with the evidence of duration of stay and other characteristics of the Magdalen Society inmates.

As the Magdalen Society Asylum became more selective, relaxed its emphasis on personal guilt and salvation, and standardized in some respects the treatment of the inmates, its rate of failure diminished. The destinations of the Magdalens are shown in Tables 4 and 5. Again, we must be cautious in making comparisons between these two tables, since they are based on data compiled by different matrons and the classification is subjective. The percentage of inmates who left to go to their families, a job, friends, or husband increased from 21.6% in 1836-47 to 86.3% in 1893-97, while the percentage sent to almshouse, or who escaped, were dismissed for improper conduct, left at their own request, or died declined from 56.1% to 1.2%.²³ There are data on recidivism for the period after 1878. The percentage of inmates who returned to the asylum declined from 18.6% in 1878-82 to 3.6% in 1893-97.

The best evidence on the effectiveness of the asylum is data on 137 inmates who were subsequently married. The rhetoric of the Board of Managers often cited marriages as the ultimate goal of reform. The fact that an inmate was listed as married indicates not only that she found a husband, but also that she at least indirectly maintained contact with the matron who recorded the information. Unfortunately, the information on marriage was recorded only during the 1880s, so long-term changes in the rate of marriage cannot be measured. However, the information can be used to identify which characteristics of inmates were associated with subsequent marriage.

TABLE 4
Destinations and Reasons for Departure of Magdalen
Society Inmates, 1836-1877
(Percentage distributions)

	<i>1836</i>	<i>1848</i>	<i>1858</i>	<i>1868</i>
	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>
	<i>1847</i>	<i>1857</i>	<i>1867</i>	<i>1877</i>
Family	0.9	0.4	0.9	0.0
Husband	2.6	0.4	0.9	0.0
Service	12.1	4.3	19.8	32.2
Other employment	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0
Hospital	0.9	0.4	0.9	2.5
Alms House	18.1	8.6	1.8	2.5
Own request	13.8	25.4	7.2	21.5
Friends	6.0	13.7	18.9	21.5
Dismissed for improper conduct	16.4	18.0	10.8	12.8
Escaped	5.2	3.2	2.7	1.6
Died in asylum	2.6	3.2	2.7	1.6
Other	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0
Unknown	21.5	20.5	33.3	3.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of cases	116	278	111	242

TABLE 5
Destinations and Reasons for Departure of Magdalen
Society Inmates, 1878-1908
(Percentage distributions)

	<i>1878</i>	<i>1883</i>	<i>1888</i>	<i>1893</i>	<i>1898</i>	<i>1903</i>
	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>to</i>
	<i>1882</i>	<i>1887</i>	<i>1892</i>	<i>1897</i>	<i>1902</i>	<i>1908</i>
Family	14.0	52.4	54.9	72.8	58.4	57.5
Husband	1.7	1.4	1.8	1.2	0.0	1.0
Service	19.3	10.1	17.1	11.1	4.5	11.6
Hospital etc.*	9.4	6.9	6.0	5.4	4.3	6.5
Other institution	8.1	9.0	10.5	7.8	9.7	13.3
Own request	12.3	6.7	2.4	1.2	0.6	1.0
Friends	4.1	2.4	1.8	0.6	1.1	1.4
Dismissed for improper conduct	7.6	3.8	0.6	0.0	2.2	0.5
Escaped	5.8	4.3	4.3	0.0	0.6	2.9
Died in asylum	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
Unknown	12.9	1.0	0.0	0.0	18.5	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of cases	170	217	168	165	136	230

*Blockley Hospital, State Hospital, Philadelphia Hospital, Home for Consumptives, Went home due to illness, Maternity Hospital, Orthopedic Hospital.

The inmates listed as “married” tended to have all the characteristics that the Magdalen Society was selecting for. Relative to other inmates of the same period, those who subsequently married were more often young, Protestant and rural born. Furthermore, they tended to remain in the asylum for exactly the prescribed one year, and when they left they more frequently returned to their families.²⁴

Causes of the Transformation

The transformation of the Magdalen Asylum raises several questions. Why did the asylum adopt a policy of admitting only the least corrupt of fallen women, while other kinds of asylums seem to have admitted more and more chronic cases? Why did they develop more uniform and even regimented standards of admission and procedures for handling the inmates, as reflected in the twelve-month rule? Why, after these policies were first announced in the 1850s, was the asylum unable to carry them out until the 1890s? Why did the asylum reduce its emphasis on personal guilt and salvation, and adopt less harsh modes of persuasion? Perhaps most importantly, why did the Magdalen Asylum have greater success in reforming its inmates towards the end of the century, while some other types of asylums seem to have had less?

It is easiest to explain why the policies of admitting only comparatively innocent prostitutes and requiring them to stay for a year were not carried out for many years after they were supposed to be in effect. The minutes of the Board of Managers state repeatedly and explicitly that the asylum had great trouble finding women willing to enter the asylum, and so they had to take anyone they could get, no matter how corrupt or unwilling to stay for a year.²⁵ In 1856, the Managers attempted

“to call to the attention of those who might be called a better class (who have not yet been so deeply steeped in crime) by the pastoral visits of ministers and by properly authorized agents who in their dwellings as well as by the wayside handed them tracts well adapted to arouse the wanderers, loudly appealing to them to foresake their ways of sin.”²⁶

However, as late as 1875, Matron MacDonald excused her unfilled beds because “it is proper to state that all efforts to gather in a larger number have been unavailing.”²⁷ The population of the asylum increased somewhat during the Civil War and during depressions, but under Matron MacDonald it was never maintained at capacity for more than a few months. Prior to 1878, there was significant seasonal fluctuation in the population of the asylum; on the average it was 8 to 15 percent larger in the winter than the summer, which suggests that the institution was used as a casual refuge from the weather. After 1878, there was no significant seasonal variation at all. However, it was not until 1887 that the Board of Managers first complained that suitable applicants had been rejected for lack of space.²⁸ On three occasions, data on rejected applicants were provided in the annual reports, and these statistics are given in Table 6. Since it covers only three isolated years, this evidence is not by itself conclusive, but it illustrates a sequence of events indicated by other evidence.

How was the asylum able to increase the applications of less hardened and more pliable prostitutes? In part, this may have resulted from the increasing number of prostitutes in the city. It seems that prostitution expanded in the late nineteenth century, but even if the rate actually remained constant, the growing population of the city would have led to a rise in absolute numbers of prostitutes.²⁹ At the same time, conditions within the asylum became more attractive to prospective inmates as the managers relaxed their determination to “exclude indulgence.”

TABLE 6
Reasons for Rejection of Applicants
to the Magdalen Society Asylum
(Percentage distributions)

	1882	1883	1893
No room to accommodate	—	—	41.1
Too old	34.9	29.5	11.0
Pregnant	32.5	35.1	11.0
Not really fallen	32.5	36.4	—
Incorrigible, feeble minded, or otherwise unsuitable	—	—	37.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of cases	43	44	73

Source: *Annual Reports* for 1883, 1884, 1894.

While these factors undoubtedly contributed to the supply of inmates, there was another development that was probably even more important. Prior to the incumbency of Matron Freeberger, it seems that virtually all of the inmates either brought themselves or were actively recruited from the streets and brothels, although a few were sent by the police. After 1878 the asylum developed ties with other institutions which supplied the kind of innocent inmates they were looking for. During the first decade of Freeberger's tenure, 5 such institutions referred inmates to the asylum; by the turn of the century, this had grown to 25.³⁰ The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children supplied by far the greatest number of inmates. The source of referral of inmates was regularly recorded after 1887, and these data are presented in Table 7.

TABLE 7
Source of Referral of Magdalen Society Inmates
(Percentage distributions)

	1888 to 1892	1893 to 1897	1898 to 1902	1903 to 1907
Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	35.5	65.2	42.1	20.1
Police, etc.*	21.1	7.9	22.1	22.3
Family	22.9	15.9	22.1	22.4
Other institutions	9.7	8.6	11.6	31.9
Brought herself	4.8	1.8	0.0	2.7
Unknown	6.0	0.6	2.1	1.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of cases	168	165	140	230

*Mr. Camp, Prison Agent; Detective Almingdinger; Detective Fenstermacher; Officer; Magistrate; Station House; House of Corrections.

The alleviation of oppressive conditions within the asylum and its integration into networks of exchange with other institutions may have been a consequence of the change of matrons. The personalities of the matrons are obscure, but there are indications that Miss MacDonald was especially strict and orthodox.³¹ It seems that Matron Freeberger, who was a generation younger, was less sternly puritanical and put energy into recruitment. In any case, the quantitative evidence clearly indicates that the changes accelerated after Freeberger was appointed.

Whether it was because of the increased number of prostitutes in Philadelphia, the amelioration of conditions within the asylum, the growth of institutions concerned with saving wayward girls from the path of wickedness, or Matron Freeberger, there can be little doubt that the growth in the numbers of applicants was crucial to the increased selectivity of the Magdalen Asylum. It is quite plausible that all four factors contributed to the change.³²

While it is fairly easy to understand why the Magdalen Society was unable to carry out its intended policies until the 1890s, it is more complicated to explain why they adopted the policies in the first place. The increasing preference for young, uncorrupted inmates is the opposite of the trend towards the admission of more chronic cases by other types of institutions.³³ However, these other institutions — especially insane asylums — were either public or were increasingly dependent on public funding. Because of this, they were frequently required to accept anyone. Many institutions were required to care for wards of the State and persons committed to asylums by the courts. These involuntary committals often involved more radical deviance. In other words, other institutions took more chronic cases not because they wanted to but because they were forced to do so. Little information survives concerning the finances of the Magdalen Society, but it is near certainty that all of their subscribers were private.

Beyond finances and control, there are things that set the Magdalen Society apart from other asylums. As suggested earlier, there are intrinsic differences between prostitution and other forms of social deviance. No Victorian would have argued that the services of the insane, the criminal, or paupers were necessary, but they raised this very argument with regard to prostitution. Nor was it considered necessary to lock up prostitutes for the protection of society. As long as they were fairly discreet, prostitutes could be ignored, and if they acted offensively, they could be treated as criminals. There were alternative strategies for attacking prostitution, besides incarcerating the prostitutes. In particular, one could discourage the customers, or attack third parties involved in the business, such as pimps, madams, and dance halls.³⁴

At the same time, the Victorians were uniquely preoccupied and threatened by sexuality. Most threatening of all was the sexual woman, since she had the power to drain men's vital energies.³⁵ The control of women in Victorian America required their de-sexing. The restoration of prostitutes to the path of virtue was one aspect of this control.

On balance, however, the Victorian attitude to prostitutes was ambivalent. They were a greater threat than other deviants, but towards the end of the nineteenth century they were increasingly seen as a necessary evil. Before mid-century, reformers frequently saw the abolition of prostitution as their ultimate goal. Shortly afterwards, however, this attitude began to be challenged by the view that prostitution was a permanent feature of society and should be legalized and regulated.³⁶ One could not eliminate the social evil, but one could ameliorate its effects.

It was during this period — the second half of the century — that the Magdalen Society abandoned its attempt to rehabilitate hardened prostitutes and focused its attention on saving wayward girls “not yet steeped in sin.” They may have adopted this course in part because of their almost complete failure in their former role, but the decision was undoubtedly reinforced by the growing feeling that prostitution was inevitable. The “lowest of the low” were generally beyond rescue, and even if they could be saved, others would come along to take their place.

The policies of the Magdalen Society seem to reflect the changing interpretation of the causes of prostitution. Robert Riegler has persuasively argued that there was a shift away from religious interpretations of prostitution which stressed moral failure and personal salvation. The decline of puritan Calvinism diminished the stress on individual guilt and personal responsibility. Instead, prostitution was explained in terms of social and economic deprivation.³⁷

As long as the causes of prostitution lay with the individual, then it could be eliminated if only all of the fallen women could be redeemed; every time the Magdalen Society rescued an “unhappy female,” prostitution was diminished. On the other hand, if prostitution was caused by such things as poverty and alcohol, its cure was obviously beyond the meager resources of the asylum.

The changing policies of the Magdalen Asylum in the 1850s are entirely consistent with this interpretation. As we have seen, the early stress on personal discipline, guilt, and salvation was replaced by a less repressive atmosphere. If the early environment of the prostitute was the cause of her downfall, then one would need only to alter her environment in order to rescue her. Thus the asylum attempted to recreate the atmosphere of the healthy and happy family.³⁸

As individual responsibility became less important, the treatment of the Magdalens became less individualized. The standardization of duration of stay in the Magdalen Society Asylum is probably indicative of a tendency towards standardization of all features of the inmates' lives. This standardization would provide stability, security, and regularity — the antithesis of the environmental sources of corruption. Of course, to some extent, standardized procedures may simply be a function of the age of an institution; with increasing experience the matrons and board of directors might learn which methods of treatment are most convenient and effective.

The new practices of the Magdalen Society were probably both more convenient and more effective. Surely it must have been more convenient for the matron to regulate a group of young, naive women than to attempt to control a diverse, dissatisfied and largely unrepentant group of prostitutes, most of whom were there only for food and shelter. If the wardens of asylums for the chronically insane could have transformed their institutions into homes for the moderately neurotic, they probably would have done so. They could not, because of legal, financial, and societal pressures. There were not such pressures on the Magdalen Asylum, because it was a private organization and society did not demand that prostitutes, like the insane or the criminal, be incarcerated.

The effectiveness of the new procedures of the Magdalen Society is suggested by the increased success of their attempts at reform. Of course, this may be simply a result of increased selectivity. As the Magdalen Society Asylum was transformed from a refuge for prostitutes into a home for wayward girls, it is to be expected that fewer departing inmates would have returned to the streets. Furthermore, as the managers repeatedly argued, the older, more experienced prostitutes who initially made up a large proportion of the inmate population may have had a corrupting influence on those who were younger and comparatively innocent.³⁹

In addition to the effects of greater selectivity, the success of the asylum may have been improved because of the adoption of more effective methods of rehabilitation. As the emphasis on profound guilt diminished, the inmates were increasingly allowed small pleasures and rewards. Thus, the original strategy of negative reinforcement was supplemented by positive encouragement.

In summary, the actions of the Magdalen Society were severely constrained by external structural factors. In particular, the asylum was unable to carry out its policies of selectivity and standardization because of a shortage in the supply of suitable applicants. However, if we wish to understand the sources of those policy changes, we must look to changes in theories on the source of prostitution and the reform of prostitutes. Ultimately, the causes of the transformation of the Magdalen Society Asylum seem to lie with the liberalization of religion and a new "scientific" orientation toward social problems, which viewed deviance as a consequence of environmental factors.

As described earlier, most of the long-term trends in the Magdalen Asylum reversed after 1900. The inmates became older, more often Catholic, and more often previously employed; the mean duration of stay declined, while the variance increased; referrals from the SPCC declined; recidivism went up; and the percentage of inmates departing to family, employment, or friends declined dramatically. During this period, the quality of the records deteriorated. The entries provide less detail, and the handwriting is often difficult to decipher. After 1908, the entries are too irregular to permit systematic analysis. In 1916 the remnants of the asylum were absorbed by the White Williams Foundation.⁴⁰

The decline of the asylum may have resulted from financial problems. In 1899, an "appeal for funds" was circulated which suggested that the shortfall of income had reached a critical stage.⁴¹ On top of this, Matron Freeberger was growing old, and the energy she devoted to searching out suitable inmates may have flagged. Perhaps the role of the Magdalen Asylum was taken over by other institutions, especially those with public funding. On the other hand, it is quite likely that the Magdalen Asylum deteriorated because of declining private interest in the reform of prostitutes.

Conclusion

Between the 1850s and the 1890s, the Magdalen Society changed from a refuge for hardened prostitutes into a home for wayward girls. During the same period, the treatment of the inmates became less harsh and oppressive, but the standards governing admissions and departures became more rigid and uniform. The basis for the transformation can be traced to policy changes formulated during the late 1840s and the 1850s, which seem to stem from broader changes in theories of deviance and reform. However, it was not until the 1880s and 1890s that the changes were successfully implemented, because before then the asylum was unable to recruit a sufficient number of innocent and pliable fallen women.

It could be easily argued that the Magdalen Society Asylum is unimportant; it never had a significant effect on prostitution in Philadelphia, and it warrants only a footnote in the history of moral reform.⁴² Nevertheless, this case study has some important lessons for the investigation of the development of asylums in the nineteenth century. In particular, it provides a vivid illustration of the contrast between policy and practice in institutions. If the quantitative evidence had not been available, it would have seemed that the period of greatest selectivity and uniformity in the Magdalen Asylum was the 1850s, since that is when these policies were promoted most vociferously. The delay of forty years in the effective application of these policies provides considerable insight into the workings of this kind of asylum.

More generally, the evidence from the Magdalen Society Asylum highlights the variety of patterns of institutional development in the nineteenth century. Most of the nineteenth century institutions that have been studied to date were substantially larger than the Magdalen Society Asylum, and they frequently were publicly funded. Unlike these asylums, the Magdalen Society did not undergo a shift from rehabilitative functions to purely custodial ones. I suspect this reflects basic differences in the nature of the organizations. There existed, probably, a social structure of institutions; small private ones at one pole and large public ones at the other. No single model of institutional development is appropriate to all of these.

The evolution of each asylum depends on its particular circumstances, such as whether it was publicly or privately funded, its physical and social location, its age, its intended function, and the personal idiosyncrasies of its managers. Nevertheless, we may be able to detect some general trends common to virtually all asylums. I suspect that a trend towards regimentation is one of these, but abandonment of attempts to rehabilitate is not. However, such monolithic generalizations may be premature.

Future research should make as much use as possible of the records of individual inmates of asylums if we are interested in more than an intellectual history of institutional theory. However, case studies will not be sufficient. In order to understand the evolution of institutions, we must begin to study the interrelationships between them.⁴³ Institutions influence each other both because of the direct transfer of inmates and because the managers are aware of each other's methods and policies. As more and more institutional files are converted to machine-readable form we will be better able to analyze the flows of inmates between institutions.

The study of the ways in which Victorian society dealt with its deviant and dependent populations has the potential to yield great insight into both the Victorian mind and the evolution of modern public policies. We should focus on the social and economic constraints faced by different kinds of institutions, and on the emergence of institutional networks in the late nineteenth century. In the long run, the most interesting questions may concern the effects of asylums on their inmates, and on society generally. The Magdalen Society Asylum appears to have had little effect on either prostitution or society. However, it is clear that other institutions — such as prisons — did have an effect, although frequently not the intended one. As we begin to analyze the case histories so carefully compiled by Victorians and Progressives, we will be better able to understand the real impact of asylums.

University of Pennsylvania
Department of History
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Steven Ruggles

FOOTNOTES

My thanks to Michael B. Katz, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Marcia Carlisle, Walter Licht, Patricia Ruggles, Nancy D. Ruggles, Erica Flapan, and Miriam King for their helpful comments and advice.

1. *The Constitution of the Magdalen Society of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1909), p. 3. Details of the history and operation of the asylum can be found in N.K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison*

(Philadelphia, 1937) pp. 266-69; *A Concise Account of the Magdalen Society Asylum* (Philadelphia, 1847); the *Annual Reports of the Board of Managers of Magdalen Society of Philadelphia* for 1819, 1820, 1901; *Annual Report of the White-Williams Foundation, 1917*; and a brief history handwritten in the front of the "Register of Admissions and Discharges, 1878-1908."

2. The quantitative evidence was derived from a variety of sources. All of the micro-level quantitative data on prostitutes for the period 1836-1877 was taken from the "registers of admissions and departures" for those years. Only limited data are available in this period: date of arrival, date of departure, duration of stay, and reason for departure or destination. During the period 1858-1862, the completeness and accuracy of the data deteriorated badly. Between 1878 and 1908 far better data are available. A main register provides all the information of the earlier period, plus information on age, birthplace, occupation, and the dates of arrival and departure for up to four re-entries. After 1885, the same register provides the source of referral of each inmate, and during the period 1908-09 it also gives detailed information on the parents of the inmates. A supplemental register of arrivals gives information on the religion of the inmates, and a separate register of departures distinguishes inmates who were subsequently married, and gives the destination or reason for departure for second, third, and fourth departures. Finally, missing data was frequently located in the matron's "diaries of daily events." All of these records are located in the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

3. David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston, 1971) pp. 206-295; Gerald Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York, 1977) pp. 257-342; Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978) pp. 94-96, 102; Peter L. Tyor and Jamil S. Zainaldin, "Asylum and Society: an Approach to Industrial Change," *Journal of Social History* 13 (1979): 23-48. Historians have offered a variety of explanations for the shift from rehabilitative to custodial functions. For example, Grob, Rothman, and Tyor and Zainaldin attribute the shift to changes in the inmate population. Asylums, they argue, were originally intended for the care of short-term, curable cases, but either because of internal or external pressures they increasingly were forced to admit the most troublesome, dangerous, and chronic cases. Tyor and Zainaldin, *op. cit.* pp. 23-48, explain the transition from rehabilitation to custody in terms of the professionalization of institutional leadership, the increasing scale of asylums, and, most importantly, the shift from private to public control of many institutions. Public control frequently meant not only that legislatures held the purse-strings, but also that the courts could dictate admissions. They further suggest that because of common internal changes, most institutions in the nineteenth century followed an organic, sequential pattern of development. Also see Christopher Lasch, *The World of Nations: Reflections on American History, Politics, and Culture* (New York, 1973) Ch. 1. Others stress external factors, including immigration, economic growth, and demographic change, all of which increased social dislocation and led to a decline in traditional means of social control. As perceived deviance grew and the old fashioned means of controlling it diminished, institutions were called upon to bridge the gap. However, when the demands on asylums grew, their inability to reform became more glaring. The regimentation of asylums and their retreat from the goal of rehabilitation was therefore a pragmatic response to conditions beyond their control. See Rothman, *op. cit.* pp. 265-295. On the need for institutions to exert social control, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* trans. Allen Sheridan (New York, 1977) *passim*.

4. See note 2.

5. Vern Bullough, *The History of Prostitution* (New Hyde Park, N.Y., 1975) pp. 187-198, 215; E. Woolston, *Prostitution in the U.S. Prior to the Entrance of the U.S. into the World War* (1921) pp. 3-38; A. Corbin, *Les Filles de Noce: misere sexuelle et prostitution: 19e 20e siecles* (Paris, 1978).

6. On this conflict and attempts to regulate prostitution, see David Pivar, *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control 1868-1900* (Westport, Conn., 1973) pp. 18, 32, 34, 83-85; R.R. Wagner, "Virtue Against Vice: A Study of Moral Reformers and Prostitution in the Progressive Era," Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Wis., 1971; Roy Lubove, "The Progressive and the Prostitute," *The Historian* 24 (1962): 308-330; John C. Burnham, "The Medical Inspection of Prostitutes in the Nineteenth Century," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 45 (1971): 203-18; John C. Burnham, "The Social Evil Ordinance — A Social Experiment in Nineteenth Century St. Louis," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 27 (1971): 203-207; Boyer, *op. cit.* p. 192; Robert Riegler, "Changing American Attitudes Toward Prostitution, 1800-1900," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29 (1968): 446.

7. *Annual Reports* (1891) p. 14; (1833) p. 6; (1873) p. 1; (1874) pp. 8-9; "Minutes of the weekly visiting committee," Feb. 10, 1852; "Weekly minutes of the Board of Managers," Feb. 10, 1852, p. 47.

8. "Minutes of the weekly meetings of the Board of Managers," Mar. 6, 1859, p. 234. In the earlier period, guilt, pollution, degradation and self-denial were constantly stressed, e.g., *A Concise Account of the Magdalen Asylum* (1847) p. 7; *Annual Reports*, (1831) p. 4; "Minutes of the weekly visiting committee," Feb. 5, 1818; *Annual Reports* (1835) p. 5. My thanks to Marcia Carlisle for the latter citations.

9. "Minutes of the weekly meetings of the Board of Managers," (1856) p. 123. This document goes on to attribute the increase in prostitution to "Pic-Nics, . . . which have so increased in latter years."

10. See Table 4, below. Evidently the Magdalens were often out of control until the appointment of the firm Matron MacDonald in 1835; see "Minutes of the weekly meetings of the Board of Managers," Dec. 7, 1819.

11. *Annual Reports*, (1855) pp. 3-4; (1854) p. 10. The preference for youth began as early as 1845; *Annual Reports*, (1845) pp. 4-5. The fact that this policy was adopted this early was pointed out to me by Marcia Carlisle.

12. "Minutes of the weekly meetings of the Board of Managers," May 10, 1855.

13. *Annual Reports*, (1878) p. 14. "More hopeful" sometimes meant not being a prostitute at all. On several occasions, the main register indicates that an inmate had simply been "ruined" by beau or employer. (Main register, Nov. 1883, Lucy Simkins Curry, Feb. 1877, p. 2; Aug. 1885, p. 97). Although the definition of prostitutes was more flexible in the nineteenth century than today, and prostitution was less professionalized, some inmates clearly had no claim to the title. However, the matron continued to reject applicants — and dismiss those already admitted — if it was discovered that they were "not really fallen," at least until 1883; see Table 6.

14. "Diaries of Daily Events," July 8, 1879. It appears that there was some controversy between the subscribers who felt that all repentant inmates should be accepted and the Board of Managers who favored a more restrictive policy. As late as 1882, when a woman was rejected on the grounds that she was too corrupt to be saved, this policy provoked some protests. In their *Annual Report*, the Board of Managers wrote, "without any reference to the specific merits of the case, we may be allowed to say, that there are often valid reasons for refusing promiscuous applications by a public institution; of which only itself can be the judge." *Annual Reports* (1882) pp. 9-10.

15. Evidence that policy was actually followed appears in the *Annual Reports* (1892) p. 9-10, 14. "Diaries of daily events," July 1, 1882; Aug. 10, 1882; Oct. 19, 1882; Apr. 9, 1883; July 4, 1883; Feb. 14, 1884; May 1, 1884; May 26, 1884; July 16, 1884.

16. "Minutes of the weekly meetings of the Board of Managers," Mar. 6, 1850, p. 234.
17. "Minutes of the weekly visiting committee," July 4, 1824; also "Minutes of the weekly meetings of the Board of Managers," Sept. 2, 1823, Jan. 11, 1808, Mar. 6, 1850; *A Concise Account of the Magdalen Asylum* (1847). These sources sometimes indicate that inmates were detained against their will; however, Marcia Carlisle's close reading of these materials has shown that it was official asylum policy that inmates could come and go at their own discretion, as the managers pointedly noted on several occasions (*Annual Reports* 1851, p. 17). The Magdalen Society had no legal authority to detain inmates. However, if they never did so one wonders why they found it necessary to put up a 13-foot fence and lock everyone up at night.
18. "Diaries of Daily Events," May 24, 1882.
19. *Ibid.* July 24, 1886; *Annual Reports* (1891) p. 14.
20. The percentage of Jews followed exactly the opposite trend; the first, "Rachel the Jewess," was admitted in 1883, and 14 more were admitted in the next 20 years. Rachel had been converted to Christ and saved, so Matron Freeberger was encouraged to repeat her experiment. "Diaries of Daily Events," Jan. 1, 1884.
21. The declining percentage of foreign born may be a function of declining age, since the young are always more likely to be native born. The increase in second generation Germans and the decline in second generation Scots occurred immediately after the change from Matron MacDonald — who was presumably of Scottish ancestry — to Matron Freeberger — who was probably of German descent. This may not have been a coincidence.
22. Table 2 is based on registers compiled by Matron MacDonald, while Table 3 is based on the registers of Matron Freeberger. The data for 1858-1867 are not shown, because there were too much missing data to yield meaningful results. The fact that there were no missing data at all after 1877 must be attributed to the greater care with which Matron Freeberger recorded arrivals and departures. In Table 2, the missing data may have resulted in a downward bias in duration of stay. Upon the departure of an inmate, the matron had to go searching through the register of admissions, find the entry for the Magdalen in question, and note the date and reason for departure next to the date of entry. If she could not find the record of admission, or if she did not want to leaf through dozens of pages, she could make a new entry and just record the information on departure. The latter practice accounts for most of the missing data in Table 2. If an inmate had registered only days or weeks before, the entry would be comparatively easy for the matron to find. Therefore, it is likely that many of the missing cases stayed longer than a month.
23. The data in Table 4 were recorded by Matron MacDonald, while those in Table 5 were recorded by Freeberger. Because the categories are subjective and are not mutually exclusive, the two tables are not strictly comparable. Differences of judgment may help to explain the discontinuities before and after 1878. However, there is evidence to suggest that the period immediately after Freeberger's appointment was somewhat chaotic. (The "Minutes of the Weekly Meetings of the Board of Managers," 1878, describe a "stampede of inmates over the wall, and various other incidents of defiance, including indecent exposure of some of the inmates in front of the windows). Placement with families, as opposed to placement in service, was a deliberate policy change. See the "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Board of Managers" in "Minutes of the Weekly Minutes of the Board of Managers" (1896) p. 233.
24. Those listed as "married" were young (under 19), Protestant, and born outside of Philadelphia, New York, and Camden 42% more frequently than those who were not, when we standardize for change over time; they stayed in the asylum exactly one year 95% more often, and returned to their families 65% more often.

25. "Minutes of the weekly meetings of the Board of Managers," Feb. 10, 1852, p. 47; *Annual Report*, (1833) p. 6; (1872) p. 6; (1875) p. 6.
26. "Minutes of the weekly meetings of the Board of Managers," (1856) p. 123. They had attempted to recruit additional inmates on several previous occasions. See *Annual Reports*, (1835) p. 5; (1847) p. 8; "Minutes of the weekly meetings of the Board of Managers," Nov. 12, 1850, Feb. 12, 1850.
27. *Annual Reports* (1875) p. 6.
28. *Annual Reports* (1887) p. 12.
29. See note 5.
30. The growth of institutions was so great that some inmates spent more time shuttling between them than as prostitutes. See, for example, the case of Maggie Smith, "Diaries of Daily Events," July 16, 1879. The proliferation of other institutions may have had other effects on asylum policy. It is possible that as the number of institutions grew, each took on a more specialized role. However, it appears that many of the newer organizations — such as the SPCC, the Children's Aid Society, Friends' Home for Children, and the New Jersey Children's Home Society — were devoted to the protection of children from the start, and their functions must have overlapped with the new role of the Magdalen Asylum. Even if specialization was simply a function of the growth in the number of institutions, that does not explain why the Magdalen Society sought the particular niche that it did.
31. She was described by Matron Freeberger (apparently) as a woman of "fervid piety and systematic mind" (handwritten history — see note 1.) Although she seems to have gotten on with the Managers well enough, her relationship with the inmates seem rather strained.
32. The changing characteristics of the inmate population cannot be ascribed to changes in the population of prostitutes generally. Three surveys of prostitutes were taken in 1859 and 1912 in New York and Philadelphia. These surveys are reproduced in William W. Sanger, *The History of Prostitution: its Extent, Causes, and Effects Throughout the World* (New York, 1939) esp. pp. 452, 545, 456, 460; George J. Kneeland, *Commercialized Vice in New York City* (New York, 1913) pp. 216, 232, 245, 215, 198, 229, 243; Vice Commission of Philadelphia, *Report on Existing Conditions with Recommendations to the Honorable Rudolph Blankenburg, Mayor of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1913) pp. 84, 85, 98, 99. Also, see Egal Feldman, "Prostitution, the Alien Woman, and the Progressive Imagination," for discussion of the changing ethnicity of prostitutes. *American Quarterly* 19 (1967): 192-206. While these data are far from unimpeachable, they provide a rough guide to the characteristics of non-institutionalized prostitutes. In all three cases, the mean age was about 24 years. Furthermore, there appears to have been a decrease in the percentage of prostitutes who were rural-born between 1858 and 1912. In all periods, the Magdalen Society prostitutes seem to have been younger and more often Protestant than those "in life."
33. See note 4.
34. Such strategies were increasingly followed after mid-century; see Lubove, *op. cit.* 308-330; Riegle, *op. cit.* 437-452. Estelle Freedman argues that deviance of women was perceived fundamentally differently from that of men; see *Their Sister's Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor, 1981) pp. 41, 52-57.
35. See Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (New Haven, 1957) pp. 348-393; W. Barker-Benfield, "The Spermatic Economy" in Michael Gordon (ed.), *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective* (New York, 1978) 2nd Ed., 374-402; Carl Degler, "What Ought to Have Been and What Was," also in Gordon, 403-435; Peter Cominos, "Late Victorian Sexual Respectability and the Social System," *International*

Review of Social History 8 (1963): 18-40, 216-250; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York, 1978); Keith Thomas, "The Double Standard," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959): 195-216; Stephen Marcus, *op. cit.*; Margaret Wyman, "The Rise of the Fallen Woman," *American Quarterly* 3 (1951): 167-177.

36. Actually, the situation is somewhat more complex. Demands for the regulation of prostitution put forth by physicians, military officials, and some politicians were countered by the demands of social purity advocates and feminist reformers for the eradication of prostitution through the imposition of a single, chaste standard of sexual morality. See Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge, 1980). Also, see note 6.

37. Riegle, *op. cit.*, pp. 437-52; Freedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 42-43, 110-116.

38. The Magdalens are usually referred to as the 'family' in the diaries of daily events. Paradoxically, the ideological changes of the 1850s did not really affect the composition of the asylum until the 1870s, when it seems that the environmentalist philosophy may have been on the wane. Evidence from a variety of sources suggests that the 1870s were a period of renewed emphasis on individualistic definitions of deviance and dependence, this time based on theories of heredity rather than on personal salvation; see Charles Rosenberg, "The Bitter Fruit: heredity, disease, and social thought," *Perspectives in American History* 8 (1974): 189-235; Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968) pp. 207-8, 180-83; David Brion Davis, *Homicide in American Fiction 1798-1865: A Study in Social Values* (Ithaca, 1957) p. 82; Norman Dain, *Concepts of Insanity in the United States, 1789-1865* (New Brunswick, 1965) p. 110. A change in explanations for deviance could easily be reconciled with increased selectivity, however. If deviance was genetically determined, then hardened prostitutes were incapable of reform regardless of environmental influences. Thus, only 'deserving' women — those who were not really professional prostitutes at all — had any hope of being saved.

39. The managers stated in 1882: "To admit to an asylum of juvenile Magdalens, . . . the most dissolute and depraved women, where they must necessarily mingle with the younger and the less guilty, would be to corrupt the former, without much hope of reclaiming the latter. In the intimacy of the family, the vicious women will take pleasure in detailing to her [fellow] inmates all her wicked experiences; even boastfully magnifying her vile conquests, to add interest to her story." *Annual Report* pp. 9-10.

40. *Annual Report of the White-Williams Foundation* (1917).

41. *Magdalen Society of Philadelphia: Circular* (1899).

42. In a city with thousands of prostitutes, the asylum usually held no more than a few dozen, and in 72 years, only 2000 were admitted. In the early years, most of these stayed in the asylum only a short time period before "returning to their old haunts," *Annual Reports* (1878), p. 6. When the asylum finally was able to lower its rate of failure, its inmates no longer came directly from the street, but were transferred from other institutions such as the SPCC or the Children's Aid Society. Given that they were no longer active prostitutes, it is possible that most of these wayward girls would not have returned to a life of sin even if they had never been to the asylum. If the asylum had virtually no effect, then we can eliminate all functional explanations for its existence. It was established as a means of controlling women, but it didn't work. To regard the asylum as a useful and necessary agency of social control would be a gross misinterpretation.

43. The course of the Magdalen Asylum was profoundly affected by the SPCC, and its policies were probably significantly affected by other institutions that were devoted to the reform of prostitutes; see note 31. There may have been a direct effect of other asylums.

Marcia Carlisle, who is writing her dissertation on ideology and moral reform in Philadelphia, argues that the policies of the Magdalen Asylum were reformed after the late 1840s because of criticism from a new organization, the Rosine Society. However, if the policy changes of the 1850s were inspired by the Rosines, one would have expected the Magdalen Asylum to loosen, rather than tighten, its standards for admission, since the Rosine Home was evidently more egalitarian in its early years. What may be more important is Carlisle's finding that the Rosine Home, like the Magdalen Asylum, increasingly preferred to admit younger and less corrupt prostitutes as time went on. This suggests that we should look for explanations that are applicable to both organizations. See Carlisle's unpublished paper, "The Boundaries of Sisterhood: An Essay on Class and Gender in 19th Century America," esp. pp. 21-34. Also, see Carlisle's dissertation, "Prostitutes and Their Reformers in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia," Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1982, pp. 125-27.