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Hist. 124

## The Connecticut Industrial School for Girls:

### A Wayward Institution for Wayward Girls

Less than half a mile away from the center of Wesleyan University's campus, there exists a landscape which, over the last century and a half, has experienced transformation after transformation. The vast majority of Wesleyan's student body, however, is unaware of the site's existence, let alone its significance. Only a select few are lucky enough — or perhaps, unlucky enough — to what exists at 166 Long Lane: Any freshman who takes his car along with him to Wesleyan must park it in the lot beside the Cady Building, which, incidentally, is the farthest parking lot from Wesleyan's campus. From the outside, the Cady Building looks like a school of some sort, and, at one point, it was a school. But currently, the appearance of the Cady Building belies its function: It now serves as the offices for Wesleyan's maintenance staff.

Indeed, for much of its history, the site on which the Cady Building stands has projected an outward image in conflict with its actual function. In 1870, the Connecticut Industrial School for Girls was established on the site, with the mission of reforming wayward girls. From the outset, the directors of the School did their best to pastoralize the landscape, so that it would not *appear* to be institutional. And in the beginning, the School, to its credit, did not function like a normal institution. Over time, however, the School began to stray from its reformatory ideology, and increasingly began to function like a penal institution. In decreasingly subtle ways, the landscape of the School began to reflect the shifting ideology.

## I

The United States' rapid urbanization in the 1800s gave rise to brand-new social issues, which made for a confusing and conflicting image of city life. At that time, in New York, “the nightly debauches in the Five Points District and the marauding juvenile gangs along the waterfronts were an unseemly contrast,” to the increasingly commercial and pious city.<sup>1</sup> This problem was recognized by all of society. The first to look for a solution were social reformers, later joined by conservatives elites, who did not want to see their city overridden by children.

Juvenile delinquency had long been an issue in Europe, since its cities had been established far before those in America. Therefore, in 1818, John Griscom, of Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, conducted an investigation into the London Philanthropic Society's institution for delinquent children.<sup>2</sup> On Griscom's recommendation, the New York House of Refuge opened on January 1, 1825, and became the first institution of its kind in the United States. As superintendent, Nathaniel C. Hart instituted an educational program stressing reading, spelling, writing, and a tremendous amount of moral and religious training.<sup>3</sup>

By 1844, however, conditions at the Refuge had deteriorated. Elijah P. DeVoe, an employee, got into an argument with the Superintendent, and was fired.<sup>4</sup> With nothing to lose, DeVoe aired his grievances: “An Asylum is supposed to afford shelter or protection — a place to flee to. The Refuge has hitherto been a place to fly from.”<sup>5</sup> The administration called its

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<sup>1</sup> Robert S. Pickett, *House of Refuge: Origins of Juvenile Reform in New York State, 1815–1857*, 1st ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1957), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 33-34.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 142-143.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 159.

discipline “moral and intellectual” but DeVoe called it “physical and mechanical.”<sup>6</sup> The idealism of the founders having eroded, the Refuge became known as a punitive jail.<sup>7</sup>

By 1854, the Refuge had relocated to a large, imposing building on Randall’s Island, which bore a resemblance to the City Penitentiary — the Refuge not only functioned like a penitentiary, but was also built like one.<sup>8</sup> Yet, despite its failures, the Refuge system had been duplicated many times by the 1840s. However, the emergence of the reformatory in the 1850s spelled the end of the Refuge system. In 1876, New York established the Elmira Reformatory, and the Refuge was dead.<sup>9</sup>

The reformatory, just like the Refuge, was an idea borrowed from Europe. But unlike the Refuge, the reformatory distanced itself from traditional penal methods. Refuges were built according to a congregate model, meaning that every inmate was housed under the same roof. In contrast, reformatories were built according to the segregate model, and were made up of several smaller buildings, known as cottages. American reformers, including the Massachusetts State corrections commission, fully embraced the ideology of the cottage system: “Each house is to be a *family*... It is the design to give a home interest, a home feeling and attachment, to the whole family.”<sup>10</sup> Cottage-planned institutions felt like homes, and not like penal institutions.

In the 1850s and 60s, Indiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania established cottage-planned institutions of their own.<sup>11</sup> The Ohio Board of State Reformers said

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<sup>6</sup> Pickett, 160.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara M. Brenzel, *Daughters of the state: A Social Portrait of the First Reform School for Girls in North America, 1856-1905* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 35.

<sup>8</sup> Pickett, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>10</sup> Robert M. Mennel, *Thorns & Thistles: Juvenile Delinquents in the United States, 1825–1940* (Hanover, NH: The University of New Hampshire, 1973), 54.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 55.

“that it was a mistake to locate [the Cincinnati House of Refuge] so near a city, and we prefer the farm and family system.”<sup>12</sup> Nearly all cottage-planned reformatory schools were located in rural areas, outside of the corrupting influence of cities. Further, these new, cottage-planned institutions placed a greater emphasis on moral and academic education. By 1857, the reformatory had become the dominant system for addressing juvenile delinquency.

## II

Following the national trend toward reform, the Connecticut Industrial School for Girls in Middletown, Connecticut, was opened on June 30, 1870, but the story of the school began in 1864, on the New Haven green. A citizen had seen an unfortunate girl sitting on the steps of Center Church, and told the Mayor what he had seen, although the story was “too revolting to repeat.”<sup>13</sup> Inspired by the citizen’s story, the Mayor asked the legislature to solve the problem of delinquent girls.<sup>14</sup> The General Assembly sympathized with the cause, and in 1868, granted the State the right to “act as guardian to the person of any girl, who between the ages of eight and fifteen years shall be committed to its charge, according to law for the physical, mental and moral training of such girl...”<sup>15</sup> The privately run school was built on the site of a former farm in Middletown, Connecticut, near the campus of Wesleyan University.

For twelve years, the Connecticut Industrial School served “friendless” girls in its original configuration. The school had four cottages, Pratt Home, Street Home, Rogers Home, and Allyn Home, in which the girls resided. True to their names, the cottages looked like homes. Classes, religious services, and paper-box making took place in the main building. The Board of

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<sup>12</sup> Mennel, 56.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Gilman, “The Charities and Reformatories of Connecticut,” Address delivered on June 30, 1870, 27.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Melissa L. Hendrick, “RG 178:002, Long Lane School, 1867-2000,” Connecticut State Library, accessed December 15, 2017, [https://ctstatelibrary.org/RG178\\_002.html](https://ctstatelibrary.org/RG178_002.html).

Directors described the ideology of the school as such: “Its design is not that of a prison to which criminals are consigned for punishment, but that of a temporary place of custody and instruction. Its object is prevention and reformation, by giving to the children that special physical, mental, more, social and industrial training...”<sup>16</sup>

By 1880, however, the school had already planned renovations which contradicted the reformatory ideology. In the Tenth Annual Report, the Board of Directors said that “there is now a pressing necessity for a fifth Home to provide for *older* girls of a *certain class*, who are committed to the School more numerous than in former years.”<sup>17</sup> Central to the cottage plan is the idea that girls of all ages and types should live together, but the administration had deviated from that thinking. Knowing, perhaps, that it was opening itself up to criticism, the Board of Directors went on to say that “our family system is good, but it can be made better by having an additional building, complete in itself, and separated from the others.”<sup>18</sup> This proposal resulted in the erection of Russell Home, later known as a cottage for difficult girls. The stratification of the population at the Connecticut Industrial School was, in effect, a rejection of the cottage plan.

After building the New School and Chapel Building, the Board of Directors again strayed from the ideals of the institution. The first floor of Fessenden Hall, which used to house the paper box-making, was used as a cooking school once the New School and Chapel Building was completed.<sup>19</sup> The Board of Directors effectively doubled down on industrial training, and said as

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<sup>16</sup> Board of Directors, *Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Directors*, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074708432;view=1up;seq=2>, 22.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Board of Directors, *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Board of Directors*, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074708432;view=1up;seq=2>, 22.

much in the Eighteenth Annual Report: “The aim of our instruction is primarily practical.”<sup>20</sup> At this point, the Connecticut Industrial School began to prioritize practical training over academic and moral education — just as the House of Refuge had. Although the School looked like a cottage-planned institution, it was simply continuing old practices in new buildings.

For twenty-one years, the Connecticut Industrial School continued those old practices. By 1920, however, the buildings were no longer new. In the Fifty-First Annual Report, the Board of Directors makes a plea to the State, and deficiencies in the school’s facilities are listed.<sup>21</sup> In response to this concerning news about the physical state of the School, and growing concerns about privately run reformatories, the General Assembly transferred ownership of the School to the State, and also raised the age limit for committed girls from sixteen to eighteen.<sup>22</sup> The State, in an attempt to further pastoralize the institution, promptly renamed it Long Lane Farm.

Next, the State set out to rationalize the buildings of Long Lane, and within a span of seven years, built eight new cottages, an infirmary, and a Superintendent’s residence.<sup>23</sup> In the process, all of the existing cottages were razed. The new cottages bore the same names as the old cottages, but it was clear that they were built of a different style. The cottages were rebuilt smaller — occupancy went down from thirty-five to twenty-five, and the cottages no longer looked like quaint homes; they were linear and more institutional in appearance.<sup>24</sup> This rebuilding process continued for several years, and in 1940, the Cady School Building was finished, which, again, was a large, linear, institutional building.

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<sup>20</sup> Board of Directors, *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Board of Directors*, 52.

<sup>21</sup> Board of Directors, *Fifty-First Annual Report of the Board of Directors*, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074708432;view=1up;seq=2>, 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Board of Directors, *Sixty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Directors*, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074708432;view=1up;seq=2>, 10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

As the aesthetic of the cottage system changed at Long Lane Farm, so too did its operation. In 1936, the General Assembly passed a labor law that capped institutional employees' work weeks at fifty-fours. The Board of Directors at Long Lane petitioned against this law, for it meant that each cottage had to have two housemothers.<sup>25</sup> The Board of Directors said: "This means that the girls find themselves in the position of children with two sets of parents, who relieve each other at definite times, and with the best intentions in the world, fail to carry out each other's policies."<sup>26</sup> The cottage system was meant to simulate the structure of a stable family, but at this point, instability was codified in law. In 1943, the name was changed again, this time, to Long Lane School; so, with a new name and an increasingly far-fetched version of the cottage system, Long Lane carried on.

The next period in the development of the Long Lane came in 1969, when the Connecticut School for Boys, in Meriden, began to experience issues with inmate abuse and mistreatment. The State wanted to reduce the number of problematic institutions, so it proposed a merger with Long Lane. In December of 1972, after three years of negotiations, the first boys from arrived.<sup>27</sup> Residents in Middletown were not receptive to the idea of this more dangerous inmate population being housed near their homes.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, by May of 1973, all but twenty of the 120 boys in Meriden had been transferred to Long Lane.<sup>29</sup> The twenty boys remaining were deemed dangerous, having committed offenses such as murder and aggravated assault, and

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<sup>25</sup> Board of Directors, *Sixty-Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Directors*, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074708432;view=1up;seq=2,7>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> The Hartford Courant (1923-1991); Hartford, Conn. [Hartford, Conn]05 Dec 1973: 71a.

<sup>28</sup> The Hartford Courant (1923-1991); Hartford, Conn. [Hartford, Conn]12 Dec 1972: 15.

<sup>29</sup> The Hartford Courant (1923-1991); Hartford, Conn. [Hartford, Conn]08 May 1973: 3.

they were to stay in Meriden until proper facilities were built at Long Lane. Yet, even before the dangerous boys arrived at Long Lane, security concerns arose.

Within months of the first boys' arrivals, an average of six or seven inmates were escaping from Long Lane every week, which necessitated changes to the landscape.<sup>30</sup> In December of 1973, Gov. Thomas J. Meskill approved building of 15-foot-high security fence around Briggs Cottage, which was selected to house mildly difficult boys.<sup>31</sup> The erection of this fence, in deviation from the cottage system, marked the first visible sign of penal restriction at Long Lane. The fence, however, was not enough to curb the runaway problem, and just one year later, in 1974, a new cottage, Kimball, was opened to house habitual runaways.<sup>32</sup> Of course, with the dangerous boys still at Meriden, these additional security measures were not the end of the renovations at Long Lane.

In 1976, the Diagnostic and Secure Treatment Unit was completed; the thirty-six-bed, maximum security facility cost more than two million dollars.<sup>33</sup> Each of the three units had its own control room which monitored every rooms and controlled the electronic doors.<sup>34</sup> The windows were covered with stainless steel screens, and the bedroom units — which were not referred to as cells — contained steel beds, toilets, and mirrors, all of which were bolted down.<sup>35</sup> The Superintendent, Dr. Kenneth Roulx said that he would try, “as much as possible,” to conduct a program similar to that offered in the open cottages.<sup>36</sup> The Unit, as it was called, was expected to be virtually escape-proof.

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<sup>30</sup> The Hartford Courant (1923-1991); Hartford, Conn. [Hartford, Conn ]05 Dec 1973: 71a.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> The Hartford Courant (1923-1991); Hartford, Conn. [Hartford, Conn]22 Nov 1974: 61d.

<sup>33</sup> The Hartford Courant (1923-1991); Hartford, Conn. [Hartford, Conn]15 Oct 1976: 35d.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

The runaway problem, however, persisted throughout the next decade, and in 1989, it reached a boiling point, when seven teenagers, including one charged with murder, waltzed out of the Unit, and escaped. Thomas M. Moriarty, a spokesman for the school, said “we’ve had runaways before, but seven at one time is a lot.”<sup>37</sup> This escape attempt, in particular, caused many to demand further security measures, but State officials refused to fence in the entire campus, fearing that it would ruin the benefits of the cottage system.<sup>38</sup>

Instead, in 1995, the State proposed an eighteen-million dollar renovation of Long Lane, which would convert it into a uniformly maximum security facility, but according to the Hartford Courant, “some residents feared the changes would convert Long Lane into a prison.”<sup>39</sup> At the same time, negotiations regarding the relocation of Long Lane began to take place. Most notable was a plan to build a new facility near the Connecticut Valley Hospital, which was also in Middletown.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, Wesleyan University made an offer to buy Long Lane’s property. Discussion, however, reached a standstill — the neighborhood surrounding Long Lane pushed for relocation, but the neighborhood near the Connecticut Valley Hospital was unwilling to have another inmate population in its midst.

In September of 1998, an inmate at Long Lane, Tabatha Brendle, hanged herself, which prompted a scrutinizing investigation by the State. Child health advocates described the conditions at Long Lane “appalling,” so a major upgrade campaign was launched.<sup>41</sup> According to the Governor, however, “work did not make the necessity for a new, larger Long Lane any less

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<sup>37</sup> The Hartford Courant (1923-1991); Hartford, Conn. [Hartford, Conn]11 Nov 1989: D9E.

<sup>38</sup> The Hartford Courant (1923-1991); Hartford, Conn. [Hartford, Conn]12 Feb 1987: B9.

<sup>39</sup> Hartford Courant; Hartford, Conn. [Hartford, Conn]22 Feb 1996: B.1.

<sup>40</sup> Saul Spiegel, "Long Lane School Relocation," Juveniles; Juvenile Delinquency, , accessed December 15, 2017, <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2001/rpt/2001-R-0167.htm>, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Hartford Courant; Hartford, Conn. [Hartford, Conn]25 Dec 1998: A3.

urgent.”<sup>42</sup> In 1998, Wesleyan University made an acceptable offer to buy Long Lane, and in 1999, the General Assembly voted to establish the 240-bed, maximum security, Connecticut Juvenile Training School near the Connecticut Valley Hospital.<sup>43</sup> Long Lane remained until all of its population was relocated, and by 2003, the land was vacant.

### III

Just as Long Lane strayed from the ideals of the cottage plan, so too did the State Industrial School for Girls in Lancaster, Massachusetts, which, having been established in 1856, was the first reformatory in the United States. In *Daughters of the State*, Barbara Brenzel says that the transformation at Lancaster was primarily due to “classification [of girls] according to types of deviance.”<sup>44</sup> In addition to classification based on crime, the rising age of the inmates at Lancaster spelled the end of the cottage plan.

At Long Lane, the erection of two cottages, Russell Home and Smith Home, marked a deviation from the cottage plan. Russell home was built to house “*older girls of a certain class*,” meaning older, more difficult girls who had committed more serious crimes.<sup>45</sup> In creating Smith Home, girls on the other end of the spectrum were separated. Smith Home was where girls “could be placed for a while, where large discretionary power could be permitted, to more fully develop individuality of thought and action,” in order to test their “fitness for lives outside the School.”<sup>46</sup> When Long Lane was first established, every girl was being tested for their “fitness

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<sup>42</sup> Hartford Courant; Hartford, Conn. [Hartford, Conn]25 Dec 1998: A3.

<sup>43</sup> Spiegel, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Brenzel, 166.

<sup>45</sup> Board of Directors, *Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Directors*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> Board of Directors, *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Directors*, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074708432;view=1up;seq=2>, 35.

for lives outside the School,” but by the late 1800s, only a small portion of its population was marked as reformable.

As law and ideology changed, the inmate populations at Long Lane and Lancaster both grew older. Over a period of fifty years, the upper age limit for girls at Long Lane was raised from fifteen to eighteen. These older girls, having been set in their ways, were regarded as being less likely to reform. At Lancaster, the same occurred: “Legislative changes, which syphoned the younger girls away from Lancaster, must have provided some relief... The result was that the girls sent to Lancaster would be older.”<sup>47</sup> The populations at Long Lane and Lancaster grew increasingly stratified, and according to Brenzel, the “systematic classification of inmates by age and crime.... marked a reversal of the mid-century reformist vision.”<sup>48</sup>

Over the years, the training at Long Lane became less focused on academics and morals, and more focused on practical, vocational training. After a few years, girls began making paper boxes in Fessenden Hall, and, in 1889, cooking classes began. At that time, the Board of Directors said that “the aim of our instruction is primarily practical.”<sup>49</sup> At Lancaster, vocational training “caused further degradation of its educational program. The trustees justified this by social science “evidence” that the poor, the deviant, and the female had smaller brains and limited mental ability.”<sup>50</sup> In the Fifty-First Annual Report, the Board of Directors of Long Lane said that “we have eliminated them from the classroom the girls who have proved incapable of advance.”<sup>51</sup> The shift away from academic and moral education, which was justified, in part, by the claim that certain girls were unable to learn, occurred at Long Lane and Lancaster alike.

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<sup>47</sup> Brenzel, 104.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Board of Directors, *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Board of Directors*, 52..

<sup>50</sup> Brenzel, 144

<sup>51</sup> Board of Directors, *Fifty-First Annual Report of the Board of Directors*, 12.

The increasingly violent population at Long Lane in the 1970s was, in part, due to the merger with the Connecticut School for Boys. But it also had root in federal law; in 1974, Congress passed the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP).<sup>52</sup> Included in the bill were four “core protections.” Two of them, Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders, and Jail Removal, were responsible for making juvenile inmate populations more dangerous. Under the Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders, youths who were delinquent, but not criminal, were taken out of correctional institutions and treated by local programs.<sup>53</sup> The Jail Removal protection removed youths who were in adult prison populations and placed them into juvenile correctional facilities. The consolidation of juvenile inmate populations left only the most violent youths incarcerated, which was part of the impetus for increased security measures at Long Lane.

Although the Connecticut Industrial School for Girls was founded with the best intentions, it did, over the course of a decade and a half, deviate from those original intentions in a spectacular way. What was once a quaint, rural campus became a landscape marred by fences and deteriorating institutional buildings. Changes in law meant that over time, the population at Long Lane grew increasingly old and violent. The School’s administration, in conflict with the cottage plan—but in concert with traditional penal methods—, chose to stratify the population. Further, the School’s administrators lost hope in the cottage system, and in the very girls who were in their care; with the move away from academic and moral education in favor of vocational training, the School’s administrators signaled that true reform was not likely. After the merger with the Connecticut School for Boys and the additions of high-security facilities, Long Lane, for the first time looked like the penal institution it had become.

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<sup>52</sup>Albert R. Roberts, *Juvenile Justice Sourcebook: Past, Present and Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 43.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 44.

Nowadays, the site at 166 Long Lane once again belies its true function. In the first week of school, I went on a run with a friend, and as we made our way, we passed by the Cady Building. I knew this to be the Physical Plant offices, but from the outside, it was clear that the building used to serve another purpose, so I became curious, and suggested to my friend that we have a look inside. Unfortunately, this was on a Saturday, and the Physical Plant office was closed, so all of the doors were locked. As we were walking away, feeling defeated, I noticed a small door on the side of the building, up a fire escape. Up we went, and lo and behold, the door creaked open. Just inside was the former auditorium of the Long Lane school, which was, to my surprise, beautiful and bright. Directly below the auditorium lies the old gym, and when I was standing on the former court, I looked up, and saw something peculiar: High up on one side of the gym is a large window, covered with bars, behind which lie the bleachers. I then wondered to myself, what kind of institution was this?

Although the Cady Building does not look like a home, it does not look like a prison. Yet even now, after it has been renovated by Wesleyan, it still retains fixtures that make clear its former function. And that begs the question of why the School's administrators were so insistent on keeping the cottage system's aesthetic, even after abandoning its function. To me, when I was inside of the building, the true nature of Long Lane was clear: It was a prison. And to the teenagers who lived there, the same must have been true. As soon as the administration started stratifying the population, started increasing vocational training, the teenagers at Long Lane must have known they were not just teenagers, but inmates. What, then, was the point of holding onto the cottage system for so long? High ideals are admirable, but when they can no longer be actualized, they only serve as a cruel reminder of what could have been.