

McLean County Museum of History

Baby Fold Collection

Collection Information

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| Volume of Collection: | 1 Box |
| Collection Dates: | 1902-2003 |
| Restrictions: | None |
| Provenance: | None |
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| Location: | Archives |

Brief History

Nancy and Allen Mason were pioneers in Normal– moving here just after the Civil War. Nancy Mason opened her home to be used by the active and retired Methodist Deaconesses that operated Deaconess Hospital – now Advocate BroMenn Medical Center.

The local Deaconess women saw a growing need in our community – care for orphaned and abandoned children. Orphan trains dispatched from the east coast brought children to towns all across the US. At each stop the children would get off and stand on the platform while families – typically farm families – selected the children they wanted to take home. This provided homes for many older children who could help on the farm, but not for infants and toddlers. In 1905, the Deaconess Society sent a new graduate of their Training School, Nellie Randle, to Normal to get the Mason home organized as a home for young children.

When Nellie Randle was hospitalized with pneumonia, the Deaconess Society sent another Deaconess, Tompie Asher, as a temporary replacement. She came to Normal in 1908 and her assignment lasted 27 years. She brought the agency through WWI and into the midst of the Great Depression. “Mother” Asher cared for orphans and toddlers with very few resources except for a spirit that would never give up and support of the community and churches. In 1910, the Board of Trustees met and decided to move to 4 lots on East Willow. The home was considered to be virtually in the country and had no running water, no electricity and no access to paved roads.

Around the turn of the century, The Baby Fold aggressively sought adoptive homes for children, particularly those who were especially vulnerable— children with special needs, minorities and sibling groups. Adoption laws were almost nonexistent. People would simply come to The Baby Fold nursery, select a child, and take the child home.

In 1939, Reverend William and Gwendolyn Hammitt were named as Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent and they got busy making significant improvements to the agency. The first order of business was to improve the physical living areas. As soon as the building improvements were underway, they focused on hiring trained professionals to staff specific functions such as nursing and social work. Then they began working with Illinois Governor and State Legislature to improve adoption laws.

Over the next several decades, The Baby Fold would undergo significant changes in both services and facilities. In 1966 The Baby Fold began a residential program for children with emotional and behavioral challenges. Providing special education was a natural outgrowth for children living at The Baby Fold. In 1971, Special education services were first offered through the Child Development Center, which later became Hammitt School.

In 2000, the former Illinois Soldier and Sailors Children’s School building on Oglesby was purchased from the town of Normal and totally renovated to house foster care and adoption services, family support services, clinical services and to provide a training center for staff and gymnasium and chapel for the children. In 2002, Hammitt School was expanded to the high school and junior high school.

Today The Baby Fold is a multi-faceted agency specializing in the care of children and youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities, or at risk for a variety of reasons. They work through foster care, adoption services, special education, and family and community services.

– Excerpted from the Baby Fold website history, Dec 2017.

Scope

The collection includes newsletters, annual reports, newspaper articles, fundraiser fliers, etc.

Box and Folder Inventory

Folder 1: General history

- 1.1. "Fifteen Years In Retrospect" (Superintendent's Mid-Year Report to the Baby Fold Board of Trustees, November 15, 1954), by William A. Hammitt, 9 pgs.

Folder 2: The Baby Fold Story (a periodic publication)

- 2.1 *The Baby Fold Story*, volume 10, number 3, 75th anniversary edition, 1977.
- 2.2 *The Baby Fold Story*, volume 13, number 2, in memoriam, Rev. Charles William Sedgwick, 1980.
- 2.3 *The Baby Fold Story*, Spring / Summer, 1999 (2 copies). *The Baby Fold Story*, Spring / Summer, 2000 (2 copies)
- 2.4 *The Baby Fold Story*, Fall / Winter, 2000 (2 copies)
- 2.5 *The Baby Fold Story*, 1902-2002 Commemorative 100th Anniversary Issue

Folder 3: Newspaper articles

- 3.1 *Pantagraph* supplement, May 4, 2002, "The Baby Fold, Celebrating 100 Years."
- 3.2 *The Normalite*, July 23, 1998, page 8, "The Baby Fold Camp: Every Day Is Special!"

Folder 4: Reports

- 4.1 The Baby Fold 1997 Annual Report
- 4.2 The Baby Fold 1998 Annual Report
- 4.3 The Baby Fold 1999 Annual Report

Folder 5: Dedications and Celebrations

- 5.1 Dedication program, June 7, 1953, Nursery Building, (2 copies).
- 5.2 Text of 10/25/99 awards presentations. Lifetime Achievement Award presented to Richard M. Winters, and 20 years service award to Mary Ann Pullin.
- 5.3 "Celebrate With US," A booklet highlighting services, thanking donors on the completion of the Baby Fold Family Center and Residential Treatment Center in 2000.
- 5.4 A Service of Consecration of the Baby Fold Family Center and Residential Treatment Center, March 26, 2000.
- 5.5 100th Anniversary Celebration, Sunday, May 5, 2002

Folder 6: Calendars

- 6.1 1952
- 6.2 1953

Folder 7: Miscellaneous

- 7.1 The Baby Fold; Come and See, an undated tri-fold pamphlet
- 7.2 Undated solicitation card; “Peace on Earth,” a Christmas theme
- 7.3 Undated solicitation card; “Help Build Them a Future,” a toy block theme
- 7.4 Pamphlet asking patrons to support the 1999 Festival of Trees
- 7.5 Pamphlet asking patrons to support the 2000 Festival of Trees
- 7.6 Pamphlet asking patrons to support the 2003 Festival of Trees
- 7.7 Booklet “The Baby Fold, Enfold Me, Help Me, Guide Me”
- 7.8 Journal Article, “Adoption Revision—An Illinois Home-Front Necessity!” by William A. Hammitt, in *The Social Science Service Review*, September 1944, pp. 347-359.

Folder 8: Newsclippings, 1950s

- 1.1 Most undated.

See also in Library Stacks:

Home Town in the Corn Belt, 1900-1950, compiled by Clara Louise Kessler, Volume V, “The Baby Fold,” by Reverend William A. Hammitt (begins on page 120).

Doctoral thesis by Thomas R. Logsdon published in 1999. *Changing to Meet the Need: The Baby Fold and Its Evolving Ministry to Central Illinois*.