



# Binding Out

New METC exhibit explores apprenticeship as social welfare for orphaned children.

A Bible, a new suit of clothes and perhaps a small sum of money; upon termination of an indenture at 18 or 21 years of age, a young man or woman could expect these few items as the hard earned rewards from his or her master.

## EXHIBIT RATING SYSTEM

★ Very amateurish; factual errors; poorly displayed.

★★ Factually correct but poorly displayed.

★★★ Interesting but nothing new or insightful.

★★★★ Strong scholarship, well displayed.

★★★★★ Excellent in scholarship and display quality.

To submit a review or suggest a book or exhibit for review, please email [gordon@gardenstatelegacy.com](mailto:gordon@gardenstatelegacy.com)

### Exhibition:

### Orphan to Apprentice: Child Indentures as Social Welfare

Museum of Early Trades & Crafts

9 Main Street

Madison, NJ 07940

<http://metc.org>

Tel.: 973-377-2982

Closes: February 15, 2013

Admission: Adults \$5; Children (6+), Students, Seniors (62+) \$3; Members, Children (under 5) Free

Parking: ★★

Kid-Friendly: ★★

Handicapped Accessible: ★★★

Exhibit: ★★★★★

Review by Gordon Bond

“Most children expected to lose at least one parent, possibly both, before they became adults,” claims an introductory plaque to the Museum of Early Trades & Crafts’ latest exhibit.

During the period between the Revolution and Civil War, death did indeed stalk a bit closer in New Jersey, as it did elsewhere in the early Republic. Disease and accident, compounded by an understanding of medicine yet to include microbes, kept mortality a common feature of everyday life. When the victim claimed was a parent, it introduced an

## EXHIBIT PARKING RATING SYSTEM

★ Not enough parking.

★★ Not many spaces but  
enough for a small  
museum/site.

★★★ Plenty of parking.

## EXHIBIT KID-FRIENDLY RATING SYSTEM

★ Not really something  
young children will  
enjoy.

★★ Older children may  
find interesting.

★★★ Children of all ages  
will enjoy.

Some exhibits may not be for children but institutions may offer programs specifically for interpreting the displays for kids and school groups. Contact the museum or site.

## EXHIBIT HANDICAP ACCESS RATING SYSTEM

★ Not accessible.

★★ Partially accessible or  
requires advance  
arrangements.

★★★ Fully accessible.

obvious strain on the society at large. Children without parental guidance were potential threats in the making—future criminals or wastrels whose lives could very well be at the community’s cost, sustained either by thievery or charity. But what to do with such orphans?

How New Jersey communities answered this question is the subject of the museum’s new exhibition, “Orphan to Apprentice: Child Indentures as Social Welfare,” opening September 11, 2012 and extending to February 15, 2013.

As the name suggests, that answer involved a system of apprenticeship—“binding out,” as it was called. Orphans would be placed with new families and brought up with some form of trade or skill by which, presumably, they could go on to earn their way and become useful, productive members of society.

“Orphan to Apprentice” approaches this system by looking at the real life stories of five examples reflecting the various forms such apprenticeships could take. The information comes from extant indenture contracts, letters, and other documentary evidence. Artifacts from their collection show samples of the kinds of tools they would have employed in their labors.

Before getting into that, however, it was important to note the alternatives to binding out, which is covered by the first case. Orphanages, run by wealthy benefactors and religious institutions, began to appear in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. They provided better academic educations, and while their students would still be bound out, that advantage gave them access to choicer trades. Factory labor permitted a widowed mother to retain custody while providing needed family income, but often cheated the child out of the opportunity to learn long-term job skills. Most would never get out of the low-wage factories. Adoption was a third option, though it remained largely informal until the first adoption law in Massachusetts in 1851.

The stories presented to exemplify apprenticeship includes that of Sarah Gillen, a 14 year-old orphan sent in 1846 to live with John D. Taylor, a shoemaker from Bloomfield in Essex County. She was an example of what girls could expect from the system. Rather than a trade, young Gillen was taught the skills needed become a wife and mother—that was what her society would expect of her, remaining dependent on finding a husband for support.

Joseph Francis was a 12 year-old African-American boy sent to a farm in New York State in 1826. Such was common for boys of his race, bound out to become farm hands or servants with little hope of owning a farm of his own when he grew up. In both instances, the society at large was force-fitting these children into lives and trades



“Orphan to  
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sheds light onto  
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a real public  
education  
system.

dictated by the accepted norms for their gender and race.

Obviously, the fit was often not right for either party. Sixteen year-old Nelson B. Eveland was an example of what might happen in such cases. He was bound out in 1842 to Owen Doremus, a skilled stained glass artist, to learn the art of painted glass. Evidently things didn't work out and they were back before the Orphan's Court, mutually agreeing to dissolve the contract.

John Rooney, at age 18, was still considered a minor—the age of adulthood was 21 in 1832, when he was apprenticed to Isaac Cockfairs, a hat-maker. Older apprentices such as Rooney meant masters likely didn't have to worry about providing education and their physical size made them better-suited to the labor inherent to trades like printing or blacksmithing.

We tend to think of an “orphan” as having lost *both* parents, but in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a child whose father had died would be considered a “half-orphan.” Traditionally, men would see to the education of their children, particularly sons. Such was the case for Peter Post, whose widowed mother, Hannah, sought an apprenticeship for him in 1844. Half-orphans at least had the advantage of someone who could actively seek out the best positions possible. Hannah worked hard to get 15 year-old Peter an apprenticeship with Charles O. Corbey, a Bloomfield shoemaker.

“Orphan to Apprentice” sheds light onto an era of American history before there was a real public education system. The concept of the public school in America dates back to 1635, but the compulsory public education system we know today was not established in every state until 1918.

In concept and content, the exhibit stands well. The use of actual stories of real children makes the connection with that past all the more visceral. The one criticism I can make is that the graphics could have been a little more creative. The lengthy text panels contain well-presented information, never getting bogged down. But the bigger ones should have been two columns, as the eye sometimes has a hard time finding its way back to the start of the next line of text. That aside, the selection of artifacts representing the trades was interesting and invites the visitor to learn more from the extensive displays on the lower level.

I understand that the graphics budget had been cut and there was a fairly tight timeframe in which to collect and interpret everything. So, once again, the staff at METC managed to pull together a worthwhile exhibit, making the most of the limited resources afflicting such institutions.

I gave the “kid-friendly” factor two stars: “Older children may find

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it interesting.” The exhibit itself, due to the amount of reading, may not appeal directly to younger children. Nevertheless, the subject offers an opportunity to give the past some relevance to young people—this is what *your* life might have been like if you lived then instead of now. Taking advantage of that requires guidance by a parent or teacher. To that end, the METC has prepared a 38-page “Educators Reference Packet.” This provides adults with deeper contextual information with which to challenge children to think critically about the complex issues at stake.

Adults who would like to learn more will want to take advantage of the four lecture series: September 23, 2012, “Mutually Beneficial: The Story of Indenture and Informal Adoption in American Literature,” presented by Carol Singley, PhD; October 14, 2012, “Gradual Emancipation and Indentures in New Jersey and Pennsylvania,” presented by Sharon Sundue, PhD; November 11, 2012, “The Out-of-Place Child: The State’s Right to Intervene in Private Affairs,” presented by Diane Marano, JD; January 13, 2013, “Industrialization: The Changing Story of Child Labor,” presented by Lara Vapnek, PhD. (All start at 2:00 P.M.; see [www.metc.org](http://www.metc.org) for details.)

“Orphan to Apprentice” is the first installment under the METC’s new Curator of Collections & Exhibits, Siobhan Fitzpatrick, who comes from the Valley Forge National Historic Park, where she worked as a Museum Technician. It also represents a concerted effort to combine exhibition with more rigorous scholarly publication. If the present exhibit is anything to judge by, the two future exhibits now in planning stages promise to firmly establish the Museum of Early Trades & Crafts as among New Jersey’s more important museums.

**Exhibition:**

**Lights! Camera! Action! History of Film in New Jersey 1890–1960**

Cornelius Low House Middlesex County Museum

1225 River Road

Piscataway, NJ

<http://www.co.middlesex.nj.us/culturalheritage/museum1.asp>

Tel.: (732) 745-4177

Closes: December 31, 2012

Admission: Free

Parking: ★★★

Kid-Friendly: ★★★

Handicapped Accessible: ★★★

Exhibit: ★★★★★

Review by Gordon Bond

Most aficionados of New Jersey history will likely have come across how Fort Lee had been the original “Hollywood.” They may also



Alice Guy Blaché

But it is when the exhibit turns to the lesser-known aspects of New Jersey's movie history that it becomes really interesting.

have heard how Edison's early movies were filmed in the Garden State. But few may really appreciate just how embedded the movie and later television and radio entertainment industry really was. "Lights! Camera! Action! History of Film in New Jersey 1890–1960," an exhibit currently on display through the end of the year at the Cornelius Low House delves into this celluloid history.

The rooms of the house, dating back to 1741, follow a rough chronological history, beginning with some of the earliest forms of projected entertainment, including some fine examples of lantern slides and projectors. Thomas Edison's contributions to early cinema are covered, complete with a huge replica of his famed "Black Maria" studio that takes up half the room. But it is when the exhibit turns to the lesser-known aspects of New Jersey's movie history that it becomes really interesting.

Fort Lee's role in early cinema is often mentioned—but did you know the first women-owned movie studio was there? Alice Guy Blaché formed Solax Studio on September 7, 1910. Not only was she a pioneer in terms of her gender, but also in being the first to employ such effects as reverse action, slow and fast motion, stop action, double-exposure, and the fade-out.

Moviemaking in these early days was something of a slap-dash process, with entire films being made in a couple days on shoestring budgets. Between 1910 and 1920, Blaché's Solax cranked out 354 movies. Given how new it all was, equipment was being invented or improved all the time, leading to patent wars that made or destroyed the fortunes of would-be movie moguls. David Horsley, an Englishman who settled in Bayonne with a bicycle business and running a pool hall, entered the new industry when he met a former Biograph Studios employee, forming Centaur Films along with his brother. Horsley, along with a union of other independent film companies, succeeded in breaking the chokehold monopoly Edison's company had. When the weather proved too unreliable on the east coast, it was Horsley who opened the first studio in sunnier California, helping usher in the era of Hollywood.

New Jersey featured in the consumption end of the equation with early movie theaters and the first drive-in built outside Camden in 1933. But the Garden State played important roles in the technology that would come to challenge the dominance of the motion picture industry for America's entertainment—television. Inventor and science fiction publisher Hugo Gernsback broadcast what some historians believe to have been the first regular television programming in August of 1928 from his station WRNY in Coytesville, New Jersey. Only a handful of fellow amateur experimenters could pick up his

signals. The next year, C. Francis Jenkins started broadcasting 48-line images from station W2XCR in Jersey City—modern sets scan at 1080 lines. His rudimentary Radiovision kits—one of which is on display—sold throughout the country.

Artifacts on display include vintage projectors, early movie posters, a collection of glass slides used to promote upcoming movies, props, and a case devoted to New Jersey's own Lou Costello. The exhibits are well-put together and the only real criticism I have is the several typos found in the display texts.

There are replica stereoscopes and zoetropes, and other early forms of visual entertainment to provide some hands-on activities for kids and school group tours can be arranged.

“Lights! Camera! Action! History of Film in New Jersey 1890—1960” encompasses many of the lesser-known contributions of our state to the early motion picture industry and even New Jersey historians may learn something new.

