



<b>Record Group:</b>	Department of Institutions and Agencies
<b>Subseries:</b>	Board of Children's Guardians/Board of Child Welfare
<b>Series:</b>	Case Registers, 1895-1967
<b>Accession #:</b>	1984.025
<b>Series #:</b>	SINCG007
<b>Guide Date:</b>	Pre-1989 (DJ)
<b>Volume:</b>	15 c.f. [12 vols. and 8 boxes]

[Content Note](#) | [Contents](#)

### Institutional History

A product of the Progressive Era's increased awareness of critical social problems, the State Board of Children's Guardians was formed in 1899 to improve the care of the state's orphaned and dependent minors, in hopes of better preparing them for productive adulthood.

As happened often in the case of Progressive reforms, the impetus for the board developed from an investigation of current conditions. In 1897 Governor David O. Watkins formed a committee to report on the condition of children in municipal and county almshouses. The committee discovered that many almshouses roomed children with "mental defectives," epileptics and the unemployed; in some cases, children were even held in state prisons. The committee also reported that most children were not segregated by sex, resulting in the birth of many illegitimate children. In all cases, almshouses failed to provide schooling for their underage charges. As a result of these findings, the legislature created the State Board of Children's Guardians on March 28, 1899 (P.L. 1899, c. 165).

The State Board of Children's Guardians, composed of seven people appointed by the governor, was authorized to supervise the welfare of all children who resided in almshouses. As soon as a child was committed to an almshouse by an overseer of the poor, it became a ward of the board of guardians and could remain there only thirty days, unless the board deemed otherwise. Agents appointed by the board of guardians placed children in the care of a person or private family and visited them quarterly.

During the next twenty years additional legislation steadily expanded the responsibilities of the State Board. The Public Law of 1910, c. 13, empowered the Juvenile Courts of New Jersey to place delinquents under the care of the State Board of Children's Guardians when they concluded that a "bad home" was responsible for their delinquent acts. Also in 1910, the board of guardians decided that mothers who were unable to support themselves and their children could place themselves in a foster home. They could also designate their own home a foster home, but in so doing they gave up legal custody of their children. Finally, Public Law 1913, c. 281, provided cash assistance for children under the age of sixteen whose mothers could not support them. This program, a precursor to Aid to Families and Dependant Children, entailed the creation of the Home Life Department within the State Board of Children's Guardians.

### Bibliography

Barkhorn, Janet L. "A History of the New Jersey State Board of Children's Guardians From its Inception." Fordham University: M.A. Thesis, 1947.

Bremner, Robert H. From the Depths, New York: New York University Press, 1972, 201-229.

Platt, Anthony M. *The Child Savers*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969, 101-136.

N.J. Commission on Defective, Delinquent and Dependent Children, and their Care. Report to the Legislature. 1898.

### Content Note

From 1899 to 1915 the State Board of Children's Guardians kept records of all who came into their care. Some of the earliest cases date from 1892 although those are rare. The volumes contain facts about each case, such as the county of origin, date of admission, age, from whom the individual was received and most importantly, the agents' comments on the status and "moral condition" of the parents. Personal data is also provided describing physical, mental, and "moral" condition of each person under custody. Additional information describes the homes and institutions into which the individual was placed and finally released.

The cases are arranged roughly chronologically, although several in a row will be grouped by county or municipality. Each volume contains loose files that supplement particular cases files.

### Contents

<u>Volume</u>	<u>Case Nos.</u>	<u>Date Span</u>
1	1 - 500	1895-1900
2	501 - 998	1900-1901
3	999 - 1498	1901-1903
4	1499 - 1994	1903-1905
5	1995 - 2492	1906-1909
6	2493 - 2990	1909-1911
7	2991 - 3494	1911-1913
8	3495 - 3947	1913-1915

Created April 2004

If you have any questions about the information in this collection guide, please contact [njarchives@sos.state.nj.us](mailto:njarchives@sos.state.nj.us)