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**Raising Upright Citizens:  
Social Welfare and Growing Influence for Elite Women in the Gold Rush City**

*Amanda Laule*<sup>1</sup>

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During the nineteenth century, middle-class white women, as the “conscience housekeepers of America,” spearheaded reform movements across the United States.<sup>2</sup> As women moved westward following the discovery of gold, they brought traditions of social reform with them and adapted their practices to their ever-changing environment. While women in San Francisco emulated the charitable undertakings of their predecessors on the Eastern seaboard, the social fluidity of the frontier made their work distinct. Following an outbreak of cholera in 1850, a group of ten elite women formed an organization to care for newly orphaned children. This organization, known as the San Francisco Protestant Orphan Asylum (SFPOA), was one of California’s first social welfare organizations. As an institution, the SFPOA provided orphans and half-orphans (children of single mothers) with a place to live, learn, and grow.

While the organization offered their wards better circumstances, they expected them to comply with their teachings. As a Wild West town, San Francisco gained a reputation for vice, danger, and immorality. By taking command of the care of orphans, elite women sought to purge the city of vice by instilling Protestant values and morality in the next generation. Through daily religious instruction, regimented schedules and practical lessons respective to gender norms, wealthy white women attempted to mold San Francisco’s children into model Americans.

Despite being few in number, these women gained civic influence and power through their operation and maintenance of the SFPOA. While these women sought to exert their total control, immigrant groups – particularly Irish Catholics – contested their efforts in the public and private spheres. Although East Coast reformers laid the groundwork for reform, reformers in San Francisco carved out distinct civic roles as moralizers at the perceived edge of the civilized world.

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<sup>1</sup> Amanda Laule graduated from Franklin and Marshall College with a Bachelor’s degree in History and Anthropology and will begin pursuing her Master’s in History in Fall 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985), p. 173.



### **San Francisco and Westward Expansion**

In January 1848, nine days before the Mexican-American war concluded with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, a New Jersey carpenter struck gold.<sup>3</sup> While James Marshall shared his discovery with his employer, Johann Sutter, the two men hoped to keep news of their good fortune to themselves. However, over the next few weeks, rumors made their way to San Francisco and quickly ignited gold fever worldwide.<sup>4</sup> By the beginning of 1849, a flood of gold seekers transformed San Francisco, the gateway to the gold country, from an insignificant port of several hundred to a city of 30,000.<sup>5</sup> Young, single men comprised the majority of the migrants, as the journey to California was fraught with danger. While some single and married women made the journey anyway, historians estimate that these women were outnumbered fifty to one in the first year.<sup>6</sup> The population was overwhelmingly male, but historian Susan Lee Johnson claims “the Gold Rush...was among the most multiracial, multiethnic, multinational events that had yet occurred within the boundaries of the United States.”<sup>7</sup> The allure of gold country drew Americans and fortune-seeking foreigners to the frontier. Revolutions across Europe and famine in Ireland pushed many German, English, and Irish immigrants to the United States, many of whom made their way west. While anti-immigrant groups such as the “Know Nothing” party formed in the East in response to these arrivals, Yankee San Franciscans generally welcomed immigrants (except for Chinese migrants) so long as they exhibited American characteristics of industry and orderliness.<sup>8</sup> Few pioneers planned to make San Francisco home; yet, transient or not, the large population created a demand for infrastructure and increased stress on civic resources.

### **Chaos in San Francisco**

With new arrivals from all over the world, San Francisco developed quickly and haphazardly to accommodate its population. Historians have written extensively on the city’s unprecedented and chaotic growth, as well as its larger consequences.<sup>9</sup> Historian Roger Lotchin describes the process as

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<sup>3</sup> Leonard L. Richard, *The California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Roger W. Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846-1856: From Hamlet to City*, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> William Benemann, *A Year of Mud and Gold: San Francisco in Letters and Diaries, 1849-1850*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), p. xv.

<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Baker Barnhart, *The Fair but Frail: Prostitution in San Francisco, 1849-1900*, (Nevada Studies in History and Political Science, No. 23. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986), p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush*, 1st ed., (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846-1856*, p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on aspects of San Francisco’s chaotic growth, see Susan Craddock, *City of Plagues: Disease, Poverty, and Deviance in San Francisco* and *Tuberculosis, tenements and the*

having “little government planning for the use of land, and much of what there was turned out badly.”<sup>10</sup> Lacking sufficient materials to meet demand, inhabitants constructed buildings using cheap and accessible wood and canvas. These makeshift buildings congregated on the desirable lowlands in the early years, which resulted in a crowded city center.<sup>11</sup> Frequent fires plagued these neighborhoods and destroyed much of this early construction, making matters worse. While destroyed buildings were replaced with fire-resistant stone, this method resulted in a patchwork of shoddy buildings alongside new ones. Scarce resources and poor living conditions made San Francisco an unpleasant place to live during its initial growth.

Against the backdrop of this urban disorder, San Franciscans gained a reputation for lawlessness and immorality. As scholar Barbara Berglund Sokolov describes, the “arm of the state could only reach so far” to enforce the law, which allowed excessive indulgence and violence to flourish on the Western frontier.<sup>12</sup> Free from the social norms and constraints of Eastern society, young male migrants readily indulged in gambling, drinking, and prostitution. Historian Joshua Paddison suggests these excesses made California internationally “famous for its unruly sobriety,” licentiousness, and untamed nature.<sup>13</sup> Reports of these lewd behaviors scandalized national and international audiences alike, who claimed that San Francisco was “a God-forsaken place” and a morally corrupt land.<sup>14</sup>

While East Coast newspapers likely sensationalized its reputation, San Francisco was a dangerous place to live. Fights fueled by too much alcohol and male pride became part of the rhythms of frontier life. Male patrons who frequented saloons bore witness to daily crimes. In December 1849, E.A. Upton wrote in his journal about a violent brawl that left a young New Yorker dead on the floor with a severed artery.<sup>15</sup> Only five days after testifying about this “most disagreeable affair,” Upton wrote an additional journal entry about witnessing a “row...in the Haley House” which nearly killed both

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*epistemology of neglect: San Francisco in the nineteenth century*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); William Issel and Robert W Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932: politics, power, and urban development*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Andrew A. Robichaud, “‘The War on Butchers’: San Francisco and the Remaking of Animal Space, 1850–1870” in *Animal city: the domestication of America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846-1856*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846-1856*, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Berglund Sokolov, *Making San Francisco American: Cultural Frontiers in the Urban West, 1846-1906*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Joshua Paddison, “‘Woman is Everywhere the Purifier’: The Politics Of Temperance, 1878–1900,” in *California Women and Politics: From the Gold Rush to the Great Depression*, ed. Robert W. Cherny, Mary Ann Irwin, Ann Marie Wilson (Nebraska: University Of Nebraska Press, 2011), p. 60.

<sup>14</sup> “The Admission of California,” *Weekly Alta California*, 1 December 1850.

<sup>15</sup> Benemann, *A Year of Mud and Gold*, p. 99.

shooters.<sup>16</sup> East Coast critics lamented that not even the Sabbath was a day of rest from crime. As J. K. Osgood, a young pioneer, wrote in a letter to a companion, “Gambling is carried on all hours of the day and during Sunday.”<sup>17</sup> Less indulgent pioneers witnessed and heard crime without ever stepping inside a saloon or gambling hall. As Caroline Stoddard noted in her journal, “[e]very week, or night rather, there are one or two shots in these gambling establishments. The wonder might be, that more do not fall victim in these horrible places.”<sup>18</sup> To the horror of San Francisco’s wealthier residents like Stoddard, crime, including violent throat slittings, could be seen right outside their windows.<sup>19</sup> Exasperated by the immoral habits of their city, wealthy white San Franciscans wanted a drastic change. To combat these social ills, members of the middle class, particularly privileged white women, emulated traditions of social reform pioneered by their East Coast counterparts.

### **Combating Social Ills on the East Coast**

A decade before the Gold Rush, Protestant fervor ignited during the Second Great Awakening of the 1830s. It pushed Protestant Evangelicals to purge their communities of sin and social disorder.<sup>20</sup> At the start of the decade, industrial capitalism’s growth changed East Coast communities’ social geography. In search of superior circumstances, “New England’s daughters, like New England’s sons,” set out on the “roads and canals of the new commercial world.”<sup>21</sup> Growing industries in cities like Boston and New York enticed men and women to leave their rural natal communities behind. However, in times of misfortune, urban citizens suddenly realized they lacked the family networks to support them.<sup>22</sup> To the disgust of the wealthy, the destitute made their homes on the streets and openly indulged in illicit sexuality and intemperance, which disrupted the family and begat further poverty.

Protestant reformers built institutions to tame disorder and set the norms for how disorderly inmates should or should not behave. Institutions, from prisons to orphanages, allowed reformers to monitor the disorderly and change their ways. By setting standards of behavior, historian Michel Foucault explains that this standard, or “Normal,” acted as a “principle of coercion” which compelled the observed to conform to its regulations and indicate their “membership of a homogenous social

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<sup>16</sup> Benemann, *A Year of Mud and Gold*, p. 101.

<sup>17</sup> Benemann, *A Year of Mud and Gold*, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> Benemann, *A Year of Mud and Gold*, p. 107.

<sup>19</sup> Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846-1856*, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 88.

<sup>21</sup> Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, p. 81.

<sup>22</sup> Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, p. 85.

body.”<sup>23</sup> As the educators of these norms, white reformers positioned themselves as morally superior to the disorderly, usually non-white populations. According to this view, white reformers divided the world into civilized individuals and uncivilized “others” based on how closely their behaviors aligned with Euro-American standards. As historian Berglund Sokolov explains, by regulating “disorderly” people, white reformers bolstered “Euro-American dominance over people of color, patriarchy, and capitalism.”<sup>24</sup>

Social constructions of gender and purity allowed white middle-class women to take leading roles in reform. American society historically associated women with domestic responsibilities, yet their role as guardians of the home became increasingly idealized in the nineteenth century. During the Second Great Awakening, pastors called on women to take pride in their role as nurturers of family moral health. Through these associations, white women gained a position of moral authority, and by arguing they could make urban environments more homelike and safe, they extended this authority into the public sphere.<sup>25</sup> Female reformers, who intended to cleanse their communities, formed benevolent societies to address growing needs. However, to maintain their propriety, they campaigned for issues that fell within their jurisdiction as good women, such as temperance, chastity, and nurturing those in need.

As news of the discovery of gold reached Protestant reformers in the East, they began directing their attention to the boundaries of the United States. Although California joined the United States in 1850, to American eyes, the state existed outside the bounds of civilization. With undeveloped land, few moralizing institutions, and unchecked lawlessness, California did not resemble an American state. However, as Evangelicals brought their message of morality to the state, they also brought American institutions to mold the social landscape. As historian Fredrick Jackson Turner asserts, the frontier served as the crucible where disparate communities formed into an American people and an untamed frontier formed into a piece of the nation.<sup>26</sup> Californian reformers participated in the nation-making process by transposing American moral and social orders to the frontier.

### **Moralizing Mothers Arrive in San Francisco**

The social fluidity of San Francisco empowered white middle-class women to spearhead social welfare initiatives that would mold the city into a perfect American place. As white middle-class women migrated westward, beginning in 1850 and increasing in the 1860s, they brought reform traditions

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<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Second Vintage books, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 184.

<sup>24</sup> Berglund Sokolov, *Making San Francisco American*, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Paddison, “Woman is Everywhere the Purifier,” p. 60.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1921), p. 23.



with them. Within San Francisco's Protestant churches, reverends inspired their congregations to take immediate action. During a sermon, Reverend Charles A. Farley asserted, "[w]hen...the Genius of our American institutions, has fairly developed itself, we shall see...these black clouds disappear from our horizon, and...not merely the external, but the moral wilderness blossom as the rose."<sup>27</sup> Empowered by this message, elite women in San Francisco took up the moral mantle to cleanse the chaos.

The 1850 cholera outbreak inspired reformers to create one of California's first social welfare institutions. The SFPOA, formed to care for several newly orphaned and half-orphaned children, promised a comfortable home, healthful nutrition, and quality education to those in need. In the eyes of the elite, children who grew up on the streets became delinquents and damaged the city's moral atmosphere. However, through regimented schedules, religious instruction, and practical lessons respective to gender roles, elite reformers hoped to mold San Francisco's children into upright American citizens. As a result of this training, elite reformers hoped to produce young adults who valued hard work, adhered to Protestant morals and passed those good qualities to their future children. As Euro-Americans, white reformers sought to maintain social hierarchies that kept them in power. Therefore, they sought to uplift Euro-American children and train them to be useful members of society. While their efforts to exert influence were resisted, especially by competing groups, these initiatives allowed women to push gender boundaries in the civic sphere. From overseeing the construction of buildings to hosting elaborate pageants, elite women played distinctly active roles in the moralizing nation-making process.

### **The Origins of the San Francisco Protestant Orphan Asylum**

In January 1851, ten ladies founded the SFPOA after a cholera outbreak. In 1849, just as pioneers caught Gold Fever, America began to experience one of the deadliest outbreaks of Asiatic cholera.<sup>28</sup> As male pioneers moved across the country, the disease came with them, further harming the Native American communities migrants encountered and impacting the rest of the United States. Although the majority of San Francisco's population was single, transient men, a small number of families settled in the area, and, as a result, children suffered alongside adults. In 1851, only about "one-thousand school-age children" lived in the city in total, meaning any deaths had a significant impact on the population.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the high death toll left many children homeless and without parents to give them intensive, nurturing care.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "The Moral Aspect of California," *Daily Pacific News*, 3 December 1850.

<sup>28</sup> Benemann, *A Year of Mud and Gold*, p. 55.

<sup>29</sup> Marta Gutman, *A City for Children: Women, Architecture, and the Charitable Landscapes of Oakland, 1850-1950*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 42.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Ann Irwin, "Going About and Doing Good": The Lady Managers of San Francisco, 1850-1880" in *California Women and Politics: From the Gold Rush to the Great Depression*, ed.

As active members of the community, elite women took notice of the growing number of orphans and widowed mothers in poverty. Although the city government made efforts to quell the spread of the disease and its consequences, the system had “obvious deficiencies” as suspicions of corrupt and wasteful spending left programs without proper funding.<sup>31</sup> Elite women acted quickly to offer long-term solutions to house orphaned children in need. Although spiritual leaders like Reverend Williams were responsible for shepherding the souls of San Francisco’s inhabitants, he only began contemplating solutions at the suggestion of a female member of his congregation, Mrs. Nathaniel Lane.<sup>32</sup> As a mother and the wife of a member of the Board of Supervisors for an Industrial School that cared for “[j]uvenile delinquents,” she was likely knowledgeable about the growing needs of the city’s children.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, when Mrs. Lane learned of the four Bacon children, aged three to twelve years old, in 1850, she enlisted the help of others, including her pastor, Reverend Albert Williams. Once the news reached Mrs. Albert Williams, she and her husband hosted several “goodly” ladies in the First Presbyterian Church in the hopes of reaching a non-denominational solution.<sup>34</sup>

At that meeting, three pastors’ wives – Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Willey, and Mrs. Warren – recognized that they must build an institution to oversee their upbringing to provide quality care to the handful of homeless children. These three ladies offered their services as the President, Vice-President, and Secretary, respectively and joined seven others to complete the executive board of their new organization, the Protestant Orphan Asylum (later the San Francisco Protestant Orphan Asylum).<sup>35</sup> The reformers officially incorporated their organization in February 1851 upon the completion of their constitution and by-laws. As written in its original constitution, the object of the society was to “take under its care destitute and friendless orphan and half orphan children and provide them with a home, sustenance, and education during the period of their dependence.”<sup>36</sup>

### **The Protestant Orphan Asylum and Female Agency**

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Robert W. Cherny, Mary Ann Irwin, Ann Marie Wilson, (Nebraska: University Of Nebraska Press, 2011), p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> Irwin, “Going About and Doing Good,” p. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Albert Williams, *A Pioneer Pastorate and Times, Embodying Contemporary Local Transactions and Events*, San Francisco, Wallace & Hassett, printers, 1879, p. 111.

<sup>33</sup> Charles P. Kimball, *The San Francisco directory for the year 1850*, (San Francisco: Journal of Commerce Press), p. 127.

<sup>34</sup> Williams, *A Pioneer Pastorate and Times*, p. 113.

<sup>35</sup> Henry G. Langley, *The San Francisco directory for the year 1858*, (San Francisco: Commercial Steam Presses: S.D. Valentine & Son, 1858), p. 378.

<sup>36</sup> Constitution, By-Laws & Minutes of the Proceedings of the San Francisco Orphan Asylum Society (Liber A), 1851-1861, Edgewood Collection, Box 1, Folder 1, San Francisco Public Library, p. 1.

Although middle-class women formed a small portion of the population, they played a substantial role in the creation of social welfare in San Francisco. The ten ladies who formed the SFPOA were pioneers of social welfare in the city. The middle class itself, according to Lotchin, was only thirty-nine percent of the population in the 1850s, men outnumbering women six to one in 1852.<sup>37</sup> Despite their limited numbers, these ladies accomplished many of their reformist goals, including building their permanent two-story children's home. Throughout the year, the *Daily Alta California* published numerous articles updating the city's residents on the Protestant Orphan Asylum's progress. San Francisco Directories highlighted the organization, its number of wards, and its ongoing projects. While these contemporary sources could speak to the influence and reputation of the Orphan Asylum, it is important to acknowledge any underlying goals of the newspapers. By boosting the reputation of the SFPOA, these sources could provide good press for the city's reputation. To contradict reports of lawlessness, contemporary sources that sympathized with the ladies' cause could have overestimated their moralizing influences. While possibly sensationalized, these reports do highlight the impressive statistics of the organization.

Upon its founding, the SFPOA was one of the first social welfare organizations in the state.<sup>38</sup> Even more impressively, of the sixteen benevolent societies listed in the *San Francisco Directory for the year 1858*, the SFPOA was one of the four oldest organizations and the first to be founded by women.<sup>39</sup> While other groups, such as white and foreign men, formed their own charitable societies upon arriving in 1849 and 1850, they served different purposes. These organizations, including the Firemen's Mutual Benevolent Association and the Eureka Benevolent Society, were formed to help men find employment and to provide financial aid in times of trouble. In contrast, the organizations founded by white female reformers were typically designed with reform in mind. Organizations like the Ladies Protection and Relief Society and the Ladies Seamen's Friends Society sought to improve inmates' physical circumstances and their morals. As social nurturers and purifiers, white women dominated reform.

As a result, many social welfare institutions like the SFPOA were uniquely feminine spaces. Women, who composed the executive board and board of managers, worked together to make all their financial, charitable, and logistical decisions. However, to make property management easier, the ladies recruited the help of three men – Mr. Boring, Mr. Nallen, and Mr. C.V. Gillespie – two of whom were the treasurer's and manager's husbands. Although Californian women could own property, these men had access to civic spaces barred from women and could offer political, civil, and financial expertise. However, these men played supplementary rather than leading roles. As detailed by the minutes, the

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<sup>37</sup> Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846-1856*, p. 104.

<sup>38</sup> Langley, *The San Francisco directory for the year 1858*, p. 378.

<sup>39</sup> Langley, *The San Francisco directory for the year 1858*, p. 378.

ladies oversaw their meetings, reviewed committee reports, and discussed the location of a new headquarters autonomously.<sup>40</sup> Within the socially fluid environment of San Francisco, these women could take on much more aggressive roles than their East Coast counterparts.

### **Helping the “Deserving Poor”**

While these white reformers wanted to uplift the city’s morals by raising productive citizens, they only extended their care to specific groups of children who they believed could be civilized, specifically Euro-American children. By March 1851, the SFPOA welcomed nine half-orphans from three different families: the Dodds, the Plumbridges, and the Wards, all between the ages of three and twelve years old.<sup>41</sup> As news spread throughout the city, the board of managers began reviewing and accepting applications for other deserving cases. In accordance with the order of meetings, the board discussed the reports from the various committees before dedicating much of their time to reviewing applications. In some cases, the Vice President presented the case herself to the rest of the members, detailing each child’s family circumstances, age, and origin. Although the organization’s mission was to care for the friendless, the board reviewed cases to ensure they were worthy or deserving of their help. As a private institution, the SFPOA could “refuse to admit unruly or sick children” and applicants who did not fit their moral standards.<sup>42</sup> By filtering through applicants, the ladies aimed to seek out the “deserving poor.”

In the eyes of these reformers, deserving children were white and capable of being taught. Although California was a free state, racial prejudice ran rampant throughout San Francisco. While few, free African Americans were segregated from their white peers to prevent what Euro-Americans feared would be “the creation of a ‘mongrel race of moral and mental hybrids’ and ensur[e] the success of American state-building.”<sup>43</sup> In hopes of making San Francisco a “civilized” place, white female reformers also sought to separate white and nonwhite children. Admittance and discharge records from 1853-1854 illustrate which immigrant groups the accepted children belonged to, all of them falling under the category of “white.” Of the seventeen children accepted by the institution from November 1853 to April 1854, four were Irish, two were French, two were German, four were English,

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<sup>40</sup> Constitution, By-Laws & Minutes of the Proceedings of the San Francisco Orphan Asylum Society (Liber A), p. 51.

<sup>41</sup> Constitution, By-Laws & Minutes of the Proceedings of the San Francisco Orphan Asylum Society (Liber A), p. 52.

<sup>42</sup> Gutman, *A City for Children*, p. 48.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew Gardner Kelly, “Schoolmaster’s Empire: Race, Conquest, and the Centralization of Common Schooling in California, 1848–1879,” *History of Education Quarterly*, 56:3 (2016): p. 448.



one was American, and four were unknown but appeared to have “fair” complexions.<sup>44</sup> In a socially fluid frontier town, these biases allowed white female reformers to push for a racial hierarchy. Alongside race, mental capacity was important in determining a child’s worthiness or belonging. Education was an important part of the children’s daily routines and experiences in the orphanage as it was part of their transformation into productive citizens. However, when children proved incapable of cooperating or learning, the board recommended removing the child. In 1876, the orphanage accepted a young child named Fanny Capen. Although the orphanage initially accepted her into the society, they soon removed her once they determined she had a mental disability. Once the *Chronicle* published the news of the removal, the board of managers was forced to respond to accusations of neglect. The ladies wrote the following:

[o]n the 30th of November last Mrs. R. F. Banker applied to the Admission Committee of the Asylum to place the child Fanny Capen in the institution. This lady stated that Mrs. Capen, the adopted mother of the child, was then in a destitute and dying condition... At the same time, the lady stated that the child had a nervous disease which she did not understand. [T]he order was given, and the child admitted; but when it proved to be an imbecile unable to control any of its organs or to make known its wants, it became such a care to the nurse, in the already overcrowded nursery, that it was deemed due to the other children to have it removed.<sup>45</sup>

Although the reformers wanted to raise the next generation of productive American citizens, they viewed some children as incapable of being civilized. As a result, disabled children, children of color, and delinquent children were all pushed away from their institutions and into public institutions, almshouses, or the streets.

While specific racial backgrounds and mental disorders disqualified certain applicants, white children also had to fit other, albeit much less strict, criteria. As a rule, the SFPOA gave preference to young, white children from broken homes. As indicated by the admittance and discharge records from 1853-1854, the organization primarily accepted children eleven years old and younger.<sup>46</sup> Overall, it was beneficial for the asylum to seek orphans within this age range as they required fewer resources and complied more with training. While young infants required the “constant attention of female nurses,” older children required supervision to prevent them from misbehaving, such as engaging in sexual or deviant behaviors.<sup>47</sup> However, even the youngest applicants needed to be reviewed. In September 1851, Mrs. Gillespie, a member of the board of managers, reported that a “destitute half orphan babe 18

<sup>44</sup> San Francisco Protestant Orphan Asylum, Admission and Discharge Records Filed by Year 1851-1896, 1853-1854, Edgewood Collection, Box 19, Folder 1-2, San Francisco Public Library.

<sup>45</sup> “Protestant Orphan Asylum,” *Daily Alta California*, 7 January 1876.

<sup>46</sup> Admission and Discharge Records Filed by Year 1851-1896, 1853-1854, Edgewood Collection.

<sup>47</sup> “Charitable Institutions of San Francisco,” *Daily Alta California*, 22 April 1855.

months old” required a proper, stable home.<sup>48</sup> According to the minutes, Mrs. Gillespie was “authorized” by the rest of the board to “ascertain what arrangements could be made at the asylum for the care of the child.”<sup>49</sup> Overall, the young, defenseless infant appeared to win over the board and their sympathies.

In hopes of reducing the number of delinquent children and preventing them from becoming delinquent adults, female reformers sought to remove children from inadequate parents and into their “superior” care. As a part of the application process, many single parents or guardians wrote letters to the board explaining the child or children’s circumstances. In 1854, a pleading mother named Jane Brady underscored her and her children’s growing need. She wrote, “It is now two years since I was left alone, to struggle with three fatherless boys whose respective ages are three, four, and six.”<sup>50</sup> She explained that while she previously provided them with a comfortable and respectable upbringing, new circumstances prevented her from giving them the life they deserved.<sup>51</sup> As Brady’s letter illustrates, both single parents and the reformers prioritized quality of life care. In the eyes of the reformers, a half-orphan needed as much help as an orphan did because one inadequate parent was as harmful to a child’s development as no parents. This perspective is well illustrated in the minutes from August 1851 as the board examined Mr. Hunt’s petition. Mrs. Wiley reported that he had asked to place his two young girls with them, as their mother was an “unsteady woman,” and he needed to work to support them.<sup>52</sup> In the eyes of many reformers, “evil parentage,” especially amongst non-white or non-Protestant groups, transmitted “its kind to an evil descent,” like an incurable disease.<sup>53</sup> With limited space and resources, the SFPOA could not accept every needy orphan or half-orphan. However, the ladies sought alternative homes to provide these children with a proper upbringing.

In the eyes of the reformer, the ultimate goal of the institution was to provide deserving children with upright homes. While reformers saw themselves as experts in raising upright citizens, they believed a real domestic environment could also benefit a child’s development. Over several decades, the orphanage sought out adoptive families for their children. The adoptive parents needed excellent references from respected community members to be approved. One letter, written by Reverend Walsunth, illustrates the types of qualities that the SFPOA looked for. In 1861, he wrote,

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<sup>48</sup> Constitution, By-Laws & Minutes of the Proceedings of the San Francisco Orphan Asylum Society (Liber A), 1851-1861, Edgewood Collection, p. 47.

<sup>49</sup> Constitution, By-Laws & Minutes of the Proceedings of the San Francisco Orphan Asylum Society (Liber A), 1851-1861, Edgewood Collection, p. 47.

<sup>50</sup> Admission and Discharge Records Filed by Year, 1851-1896, Edgewood Collection.

<sup>51</sup> Admission and Discharge Records Filed by Year, 1851-1896, Edgewood Collection.

<sup>52</sup> Constitution, By-Laws & Minutes of the Proceedings of the San Francisco Orphan Asylum Society (Liber A), 1851-1861, Edgewood Collection, p.51.

<sup>53</sup> Williams, *A Pioneer Pastorate and Times*, p. 115.

“Mr. and Mrs. C.J. Scholl...have long had residence here and have, by their upright...conduct, show themselves deserving of the respect and confidence of all who are acquainted with them.”<sup>54</sup> This letter highlights the qualities that Protestant reformers valued and their desire to ensure model citizens would pass good attributes to the next generation.

### **Finding a Suitable Home**

To further their mission of moralizing young children, the ladies sought out a suitable home to promote their development. As members of the elite, the lady-managers were well-connected with many wealthy, powerful, and land-owning men across the city, and they utilized these connections to find suitable properties. From 1851 to 1854, the SFPOA rented out properties from charitable male citizens at a discount. In March 1851, the ladies accepted a generous offer from Mr. W. D. M. Howard for the “use of a house in Happy Valley free of rent for three months.”<sup>55</sup> Once the property was secured, the board dedicated their time to furnish and prepare the space with donations from several benefactors. While the organization moved to a larger home in 1852, the visiting committee reported that it was unsuitable for their growing group.

By 1854, the society’s numbers increased even more “rapidly,” and the board decided that they needed to “secure a home of [their] own” rather than rent or use the homes of generous supporters of the organization.<sup>56</sup> Reminiscing about her time serving the Orphan Asylum, Mrs. Haight recalls the challenges of acquiring a new, more appropriate home. By 1854, congestion in the city center made the city’s hills become “valued as an ‘airy’ place to settle.”<sup>57</sup> Around this same time, many members of the middle class began seeking property on the hills to escape the disorder of the city, with this pattern solidifying by 1857.<sup>58</sup> Through their elite connections, the ladies acquired the help of the city’s mayor, Captain C. K. Garrison, who “discovered several blocks belonging to the city, which he caused to be offered at public auction.”<sup>59</sup> As a result of his efforts, the SFPOA’s trustees purchased the property at a very reasonable price. In total, the SFPOA received “twelve fifty-vara lots, two entire blocks” for one hundred dollars.<sup>60</sup> Under the mayor’s order, the new building would have to be fire-proof, which

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<sup>54</sup> San Francisco Protestant Orphan Asylum, Admission and Discharge Records Filed by Year 1851-1896, 1853-1854, Edgewood Collection.

<sup>55</sup> Constitution, By-Laws & Minutes of the Proceedings of the San Francisco Orphan Asylum Society (Liber A), 1851-1861, Edgewood Collection, p. 47.

<sup>56</sup> W.A. Haight, *Some Reminiscences of the San Francisco Protestant Orphan Asylum*, (San Francisco: publisher not identified, 1900), p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846-1856*, p. 16.

<sup>58</sup> Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846-1856*, p. 16.

<sup>59</sup> Haight, *Some Reminiscences of the San Francisco Protestant Orphan Asylum*, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Haight, *Some Reminiscences of the San Francisco Protestant Orphan Asylum*, p. 4.

proved to be a significant challenge. The ladies struggled to find enough stone for construction until Mr. Haight, the husband of a board member, enlisted the support of Mr. Theodore Adams, a “prominent contractor” who located a nearby quarry to utilize for the construction.<sup>61</sup> About three years after its founding, the SFPOA completed construction on their new building at the cost of “30,000 dollars.”<sup>62</sup> At two stories tall, the building itself emulated a typical family home. On the first floor, there were several parlors and halls, as well as a room for the matron of the home.<sup>63</sup> On the second floor, a handful of children, separated by gender and age, slept in one large room that mimicked sleeping arrangements within a standard middle-class home.<sup>64</sup> However, in addition to emulating a home, the institution also commanded respect. Situated on a hill away from the city center, the SFPOA appeared as a powerful and official institution.<sup>65</sup> The asylum’s immense size and expensive brick walls reflected the elite women’s power, influence, and ability to accomplish large projects.

The construction’s size and scale illustrate these women’s social influence. At a time when the majority of construction utilized canvas or wooden frames, a stone building was an impressive accomplishment. Newspapers and the directory sang the praises of these women’s achievements, claiming that the house, “built of stone and brick, expressly for the purpose, is highly creditable to the Institution, and one of the noblest monuments of San Francisco benevolence.”<sup>66</sup> While the work these women accomplished despite their small numbers was impressive, these reports also helped to boost San Francisco’s image as it transformed from a rowdy frontier town to a sophisticated urban center. By promoting the moralizing work of these women, San Francisco newspapers likely sought to contradict San Francisco’s reputation as a lawless land.

### **The Importance of a “Proper” Education**

Across the United States, Protestants emphasized the importance of education in a child’s life. In churches, such as the First Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, religious leaders created Sunday schools to impart religious lessons and values to the children in their congregation. Religious instruction passed on to children through biblical lessons was meant to demonstrate how good and pious people behaved in society and the consequences of sin.

As pious women, these elite reformers shared this same view of education. They sought to create upright citizens by instilling civilized values, such as industry, self-control, and piety, in young white orphans. During the first few years, the SFPOA could not secure a full-time teacher to tutor the

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<sup>61</sup> Haight, *Some Reminiscences of the San Francisco Protestant Orphan Asylum*, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> Langley, *The San Francisco directory for the year 1858*, p. 378.

<sup>63</sup> Haight, *Some Reminiscences of the San Francisco Protestant Orphan Asylum*, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Gutman, *A City for Children*, p. 57.

<sup>65</sup> Gutman, *A City for Children*, p. 65.

<sup>66</sup> Langley, *The San Francisco directory for the year 1858*, p. 378.



children. In a report from 1855, the SFPOA stated that “[a]lthough it had always been the intention of the association to provide means for the education of children under its care...it was not until about one year since that the services of a regular teacher were procured.”<sup>67</sup> Before the board secured a teacher in 1854, the children attended a local public school during the day. During these years, public schools, overseen by Protestant men, sought to impose American ideals on these children.

Male reformers, mirroring the efforts of female reformers, sought to exert their influence within the public school system. Public schools functioned as reform and cultural assimilation sites like orphanages and prisons. As historian Matthew Gardner Kelly asserts, elites hoped to cultivate the frontier into an “unquestionably American place” by imposing their vision of “American government and culture” upon public schooling.<sup>68</sup> During the 1850s and 1860s, school administrations and school boards were “top-heavy” with Protestant men who subscribed to the notion that the “state should enlist schools to bring order to society.”<sup>69</sup> One of the state’s most influential superintendents, Andrew J. Moulder, shared these attitudes about the impact of education. In his report on the state of education, Moulder wrote,

Picture to yourselves the results that would follow in one generation, if all the children of the State could be placed under the charge of such Teachers. Instead of the ignorant and besotted boor, the child would grow to be an intelligent, influential, and public-spirited citizen, capable of understanding clearly the wants of his State—potent to influence—to mold the policy of its legislation...The mind, cultivated by education, would invent new methods of production, devise remedies for old evils, foresee and suggest means to avert impending dangers. Such are the fruits of a good system of education, directed and applied by able Teachers.<sup>70</sup>

Lessons taught in public schools reflected the moralizing mission of these reformers. In 1855, under a revised law, the state required that “all instruction within public schools be conducted in English,” which directly disadvantaged Mexican-American children.<sup>71</sup> However, while Protestant reformers sought to exert their total control over education, their ambitions were not always successful. Not all public schools complied with these visions, particularly as immigrant groups pushed for greater representation and inclusivity. As a result, the female reformers took the children’s education into their own hands rather than relying on public educators. By 1855, the board of managers secured the help of

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<sup>67</sup> Charitable Institutions of San Francisco, *Daily Alta California*, 22 April 1855.

<sup>68</sup> Kelly, “Schoolmaster’s Empire,” p. 447.

<sup>69</sup> William Issel and Robert W Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 102.

<sup>70</sup> *Report of Trustees of the San Francisco Orphan Asylum*, (Sacramento: no publisher identified, 1860), p. 100.

<sup>71</sup> Kelly, “Schoolmaster’s Empire,” p. 457.

a full-time teacher and created a schoolroom within the home itself so that the children would be taught on-site.

### **Lessons Inside the Classroom**

Within their new home, white reformers began formally and informally educating young children on how to be productive and industrious citizens. The ladies dedicated several rooms to their instruction and engagement to support the children's daily routines. Upon completion of the new building, the ladies reported that the schoolroom and playroom were "large" and "well-ventilated" rooms ideally suited to the use of the children.<sup>72</sup> As a part of their daily routines, children learned the "main branches of a plain education," which included lessons about the English language.<sup>73</sup> While some of the children came from non-English speaking countries, such as France or Germany, the reformers believed it was essential for all students to learn proper English and grammar. In addition to language, some children received lessons in the arts, such as music. However, some children's classes were discontinued so that the money could be used in more productive ways. For Ellen Cleaves, a young orphan in the 1880s, the board decided to pay her "10 dollars a month until she was eighteen years of age and discontinue the amount paid for music lessons."<sup>74</sup>

At the same time that children learned English and other important subjects, the teacher taught lessons on morality. Taught in "the paths of purity and virtue," these young children learned how to behave with restraint and self-control.<sup>75</sup> Religion was important in imparting moral lessons and guidance to pupils. The ultimate goal of this educational system was to turn the "little ones, thus gathered from every section" of the city into "useful working men and women."<sup>76</sup> Through repetitive daily training, children learned how to read and write and behave as "useful" people in society.

### **Good Role Models and Practical Lessons**

Outside of the classroom, matrons taught children lessons about hard work and industry within the parameters of gender. To oversee the care and instruction of the young children, the board of managers hired matrons to live in the home. Matrons, often with their own children, acted as mothers for the dozens of children they cared for. As the orphanage expanded over the next eight years, the board of managers began employing a teacher, nurse, and cook, in addition to the matron, to care for the growing number of wards. At that time, the orphanage cared for fifty-two children, thirty-three boys

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<sup>72</sup> "Ladies Orphan Asylum," *Daily Alta California*, 20 April 1854.

<sup>73</sup> "Protestant Orphan Society," *Daily Alta California*, 2 February 1859.

<sup>74</sup> Revised Constitution and, 1882-1889, Edgewood Collection, Box 1, Folder 5, San Francisco Public Library.

<sup>75</sup> "Protestant Orphan Asylum," *Daily Alta California*, 17 September 1862.

<sup>76</sup> "Protestant Orphan Asylum," *Daily Alta California*, 17 September 1862.

and nineteen girls.<sup>77</sup> In the publications to the *Daily Alta California*, the organization spoke very highly of their first matron, Mrs. Wilson, stating, “[i]n the selection of a Matron they were peculiarly happy, and under the superintendence of the Managers, the great objects of the institution have been attained by the judicious and efficient administration of Mrs. Wilson, who is as a mother and a kind and attentive nurse to the interesting objects of her charge. Not a death has occurred in the institution.”<sup>78</sup> Provided with a salary and lodgings, matrons lived full-time in the asylum to maintain order within its walls and to oversee their progress. As second mothers, matrons imparted practical skills and disciplined the children they cared for. Throughout the week, in addition to regular school lessons, the children received instruction in sewing, cleaning, and mending, which they would utilize as young adults to maintain an orderly home. Matrons required all children, once of a sufficient age, to participate in household chores and maintenance. However, while every child participated, little girls and boys received different jobs deemed appropriate to their gender. For example, while the “older girls” were “instructed in useful household employments,” the older boys were “required to assist in outdoor work.”<sup>79</sup> While elite reformers wanted to impart lessons of industry to the children, they divided work along gender lines as they would find them in the adult world. By educating and training young children to be useful and well-mannered adults, reformers could prevent disruption in the social order. In the eyes of the reformers, useful working men and women would produce well-mannered children, therefore slowly purging society of vice and social ills. This worldview pushed elite reformers to extend their influence to create, in their view, ideal citizens.

### **Monitoring Their Progress**

To ensure the correct care of the children, the board created several committees, such as the visiting committee, to monitor the progress of their wards. At least once a month, a visiting committee would visit the asylum to report on the institution’s needs and the children’s condition. Upon reviewing the state of the building, the visiting committee members would discuss with the matron what supplies to purchase. During a meeting in August 1852, the ladies reported that “the Institution was in need of several articles of provisions, flour, potatoes, ...a list of which was handed to the President of the Finance Committee, with instructions to procure them.”<sup>80</sup> Nutrition and overall health were important to the reformers as they supported the development of their wards. At each visit, the committee also noted any illnesses in the asylum. In March 1853, the committee presented to the

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<sup>77</sup> “Protestant Orphan Society,” *Daily Alta California*, 2 February 1859.

<sup>78</sup> “The Orphan Asylum,” *Daily Alta California*, 9 August 1852.

<sup>79</sup> “Protestant Orphan Society,” *Daily Alta California*, 2 February 1859.

<sup>80</sup> Constitution, By-Laws & Minutes of the Proceedings of the San Francisco Orphan Asylum Society (Liber A), 1851-1861, Edgewood Collection, p. 62.

board that they “found the Children as comfortable as they could be made with the present limited accommodations” and added that all “the Children are well with one exception.”<sup>81</sup>

While the reformers valued the health and happiness of the children they cared for, they also wanted to assess the success of their work. To distribute the duties and ensure the validity of each report, the members of the visiting committee changed at regular intervals. Each month, the committee noted how the children behaved and their temperament. In the eyes of the reformers, the visiting committee was essential to ensure that the children were cared for and raised correctly. As Foucault notes, “surveillance, defined and regulated, [was] inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching.”<sup>82</sup> By regularly surveying the children, the board of managers kept track of how the children adjusted to the home and how they were developing over time.

### **Exerting Their Influence**

As the children progressed, the reformers demonstrated the proficiency and progress of their children at numerous public events to show the efficacy of their efforts. Pageantry played an important role for these female reformers. By placing these children on display, pageants reinforced their teachings for the children themselves and reinforced the overall nation-making process. At anniversary celebrations, the board of managers presented their children to a large and curious audience. During the organization’s eighth anniversary celebration at Musical Hall in 1859, the *Alta* reported that young children “were all comfortably clad, looked happy, contented, and cheerful” as they were seated near the stage.<sup>83</sup> The clean and content appearance of the orphans signaled to the public that the SFPOA produced clean and well-behaved children. In addition to their physical appearance, the children’s actions also conveyed their exceptional care. The singing of hymns during the celebration and future celebrations reflected well on the progress being made within the institution. During the ceremony, the children sang a hymn taught to them by the matron. They sang the following verse:

Earthly comforts fade and perish,  
Sorrrows often joy attend,  
But if God’s truth we still cherish,  
He will prove our constant friend  
Then to him I’ll go—nor falter,  
And on Him cast every care,  
I will die upon the altar—

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<sup>81</sup> Constitution, By-Laws & Minutes of the Proceedings of the San Francisco Orphan Asylum Society (Liber A), 1851-1861, Edgewood Collection, p. 68.

<sup>82</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 176.

<sup>83</sup> “Protestant Orphan Society,” *Daily Alta California*, 2 February 1859.

God will hear the Orphan's prayer.<sup>84</sup>

This hymn demonstrated the efficacy of the ladies' devoted religious teachings and their instruction on obedience. Through their daily experience of rigid routines, set schedules, and morality lessons, children internalized the messages that Protestant women instilled in them.<sup>85</sup>

Through performance, the children demonstrated their growth into civilized young people. At the twentieth anniversary celebration in 1871, the performance was more elaborate. To begin the celebration, boys and girls "entered the Pavilion, marching down the entire aisle singing, and took seats on the stage."<sup>86</sup> "Exclamations of delight on the part of the audience" could be heard from all across the room as the orphans came in.<sup>87</sup> In addition to their display, the audience was impressed by their appearance. Reports stated that the children were "neatly attired, all presenting a cheerful appearance; the bloom of health on their countenances speaking louder than words that they were well provided for."<sup>88</sup> Through their appearances and demonstrations, the children conveyed that the elite ladies were successful in their civilizing efforts. The celebration also featured more songs, the "recitation of Scriptural verses," and an "exhibition of that healthful exercise—calisthenics."<sup>89</sup> These heavily choreographed productions proved that the SFPOA was a legitimate and influential institution. By proving that their methods created docile children, these women received the respect and admiration of San Francisco's citizens.

### **Challenges to Protestant Ideology and Authority**

While these reformers wanted to successfully influence the entire city, immigrant groups, particularly Catholic immigrant groups, met their efforts with resistance. Although Protestantism was the dominant religion in San Francisco, Irish Catholics represented the "largest single ethnic group" in the city.<sup>90</sup> Although white San Franciscans were more eager to accept "Irish and Italian immigrants more quickly into ethnic white identities" than their East Coast counterparts were, ideological tensions between Catholics and Protestants remained.<sup>91</sup> In particular, Protestant anxieties around Catholics were rooted in their relationship to the church hierarchy. In particular, as historian Roger Lotchin elaborates, Protestants questioned Catholic loyalties to the United States as they pledged their allegiance to Rome and, as a result, lacked the "qualifications to impart democratic and republican

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<sup>84</sup> "Protestant Orphan Society," *Daily Alta California*, 2 February 1859.

<sup>85</sup> Gutman, *A City for Children*, p. 48.

<sup>86</sup> "Protestant Orphan Asylum," *Daily Alta California*, 11 February 1871.

<sup>87</sup> "Protestant Orphan Asylum," *Daily Alta California*, 11 February 1871.

<sup>88</sup> "Protestant Orphan Asylum," *Daily Alta California*, 11 February 1871.

<sup>89</sup> "Protestant Orphan Asylum," *Daily Alta California*, 11 February 1871.

<sup>90</sup> Gutman, *A City for Children*, p. 41.

<sup>91</sup> Berglund Sokolov, *Making San Francisco American*, p. 10.

principles” to the next generation.<sup>92</sup> While Protestants believed their control over public schooling improved the next generation, Catholics saw it as an attempt to erase their values and traditions.

In protest to Protestant authority, Catholics sought to separate themselves from Evangelical child-savers. Within their own homes, Irish mothers heavily regulated their own children’s upbringings by directing their attention to the Catholic Church and its teachings. As a result, these women could “control cultural reproduction through childhood” by instilling in them the values and traditions that were set on changing or erasing them entirely.<sup>93</sup> Rather than relying on Protestant benevolence, Irish immigrants organized welfare societies to help their fellow Catholics. The object of the Hibernian Society, as listed in the *San Francisco Directory for the year 1858*, was to “perpetuate generosity, by extending relief to emigrants from Ireland.”<sup>94</sup> By insulating themselves as a community, Irish and Italian Catholics sought to support their people and avoid the influences of Protestant reformers.

### **The Catholic Orphan Asylum**

While Catholics resisted Protestant control, they also actively competed against them by founding a rival orphan asylum. An all-male board founded the Catholic Orphan Asylum (COA) to serve San Francisco’s Catholic children in need. Organized only a few months after the SFPOA in March 1851, the COA opened its doors to young residents that next September.<sup>95</sup> In contrast to the SFPOA, race played a different role for their Catholic counterparts. Irish, Italian, and “Mexican and other Hispanic children” found acceptance within the orphanage walls. In contrast to white Protestant reformers, Irish nuns welcomed non-white children in the hopes of saving their souls.

Compared to the SFPOA, the COA grew rapidly and needed much more space to accommodate their wards. By 1854, the Catholics sought to build a new edifice to meet the needs of their children. Upon its completion, the orphanage advertised its accomplishment in the newspaper, legitimizing its work and boosting the city’s moral image. Within the article, the Asylum highlighted how “disciples of the Roman Catholic faith” worked steadfastly in “undertaking a work of Christian benevolence,” which resulted in the completion of the new “ornament to the city.”<sup>96</sup> By 1855, “one hundred and twelve children” called the new building home, while the Protestants reportedly cared for thirty children.<sup>97</sup> While the SFPOA received significant support from some of the city’s wealthiest families and philanthropists, the organization struggled to compete with its Catholic counterparts when it came to securing a full-time instructor. Upon its founding, the COA dedicated a portion of

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<sup>92</sup> Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846-1856*, p. 316.

<sup>93</sup> Gutman, *A City for Children*, p. 63.

<sup>94</sup> Langley, *The San Francisco directory for the year 1858*, p. 378.

<sup>95</sup> Langley, *The San Francisco directory for the year 1858*, p. 378.

<sup>96</sup> “Charitable Institutions of San Francisco,” *Daily Alta California*, 22 April 1855.

<sup>97</sup> “Charitable Institutions of San Francisco,” *Daily Alta California*, 22 April 1855.



their first building to their children's schooling. Within this schoolhouse, the institution provided instruction in the "various branches of education," such as language and arithmetic, to the children who were "capable" of learning.<sup>98</sup> By operating their own school, the COA protected their children from proselytizing Protestants in the public school system. As scholar Matthew Garnder Kelly highlights, Protestants faced many "dilemmas" as they pursued "American state-building in a contested, multiracial space."<sup>99</sup> Just as Protestant men on the school board found resistance to their work, female reformers faced roadblocks throughout their journey. However, while they did not wholly succeed in moralizing and reforming the entire city, their efforts pushed the boundaries of gender.

### Conclusion

Although reformers were a minority of the population even into the 1870s, they mobilized to shape the city into their desired image. While their moralizing efforts were met with resistance, their work had larger impacts, particularly on the role of women on the frontier. Despite lacking full citizenship themselves, reformers pushed their work well into the civic sphere. To benefit the SFPOA, female reformers gained skills that women of their rank typically lacked. Though they recruited several men to help them financially, these women did the bulk of the work themselves. Female reformers funded the construction of the buildings through outreach programs, fundraising campaigns, and ventures into the community to petition for donations. These experiences taught women invaluable business management and campaigning skills, which were essential for participating in the civic sphere. While not considered full citizens without the right to vote, women actively engaged with the questions facing their city, particularly about American identity and which groups belonged. Women also provided answers to these questions through their work within the orphanage. As they sought out white children, elite reformers sought to reinforce an American social order that placed Euro-Americans at the top. As reformers, elite women assisted in transforming San Francisco from an untamed outpost to a modern American city. As they completed this work, women carved out a niche of authority for themselves.

Yet, while they gained new roles of power, these women did not want to be associated with women's rights activists. While newspapers frequently referred to women as civilizers, they often clarified, "we do not include the strong-minded, nor the bloomer. We mean the pure, the refined, the intelligent, whose kingdom is her home and whose realm is her household; and who feigns and rules, and rules—supremely, through the power of her refined sentiments and holy afflictions."<sup>100</sup> Rather than

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<sup>98</sup> "Charitable Institutions of San Francisco," *Daily Alta California*, 22 April 1855.

<sup>99</sup> Kelly, "Schoolmaster's Empire," p. 472.

<sup>100</sup> "Who are the Civilizers of the Country?" *San Joaquin Republican*, 23 June 1855.

power, society and the reformers themselves described reformers as having influence and the capacity to encourage others to behave uprightly. Before the Civil War, elite reformers sought to distance themselves from their unsexed counterparts. While they had extended their influence well beyond the private sphere, most of these women wanted to retain their identity as moralizing mothers. Regardless, by branching out of their traditional roles, elite women pushed the boundaries of how women could engage with the civic sphere, opening the door for future reformers to campaign for their enfranchisement.