This collection is available at The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis. If you would like more information, please contact us at stlouis@shsmo.org.

Introduction

3 cubic feet, 12 oversize volumes

The Christian Women’s Benevolent Association Records contain Christian Women Benevolent Association (CWBA) Board Meeting Minutes (1899–1952); Christian Old People’s Home Ledgers and Meeting Minutes (1915–1949); Christian Hospital of St. Louis Board Meeting Minutes (1923–1959); and scrapbooks, photographs, videotapes, and ephemera relating to the CWBA’s activities from 1899 – 2011. Most notably, the records include admittance ledgers from the Christian Orphan’s Home as well as the Mothers and Babies Home of St. Louis from 1899 to 1933. The admittance ledgers are a particularly rich source of genealogical information, as they contain applications for entry into the home. Details such as date and place of the child’s birth; vaccination records; parents’ full names, birthplace and occupation, and nationality and religion; and location of the nearest living relative are listed.

In 1886, Sarah Matilda (Mattie) Hart Younkin gathered five women, including Fannie Shedd Ayars, for a prayer circle in the basement of First Christian Church in St. Louis. From this prayer circle rose a goal: to establish an institution that was different from typical asylums, and to protect children while creating a loving, family-like environment for teaching self-reliance and instilling Christian values. These women founded the National Benevolent Association of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 1887. Their first home, the Christian Orphan’s Home, opened in 1897.

The Mothers and Babies Home opened in St. Louis on June 1, 1899, as an expansion of the Christian Orphans’ Home, with Ayars at the administrative helm. Memorial funds for a separate room within the Christian Orphan’s Home to care for babies had accumulated until the women voted to establish a separate home that accepted children under two years of age. To accommodate the Mothers and Babies Home, a larger house was rented and eventually a hospital section was added. In the first six months of its existence, the Mothers and Babies Home cared for 85 babies, adopted out 15, secured work for 25 women, and gave temporary shelter to 31 women.

In early 1903, the Christian Woman’s Benevolent Association purchased a home at 2835 Lawton Avenue for use as a hospital. Board members from CWBA and local doctors were appointed to a joint committee, which developed standards of care, as well as rules and regulations by which the hospital would provide services. The doors of Christian Hospital opened to patients in August 1903.

In 1911, the group opened a home to care for the elderly - the Christian Old Peoples Home at 6600 Washington Avenue in University City. Later that year the group split into two - the Christian Women’s Benevolent Association, led by Fannie Shedd Ayars, and the National Benevolent Association. The reasons for the split were twofold. Fannie
Shedd Ayars’s stance was that all women and children, regardless of marital status and circumstances of conception, should be admitted to the Mothers and Babies Home. Admission ledgers indicate that mothers, including unmarried ones, were admitted to the Mothers and Babies Home until they could find work. Not all of the founding women shared Ayars’ liberal views, however, and this conflict contributed to her departure. The second cause of the split was discrimination against female leadership—the National Benevolent Association had recently enacted policies that eliminated women from management positions.

Christian Hospital and the Christian Old People’s Home continued to expand throughout the early and mid-20th century. In 1962, the Mothers and Babies Home and Christian Orphan’s Home were converted to the CWBA Youth Home, which provided resident care for the wards of the juvenile court system of Metropolitan St. Louis. In the 1970s, CWBA sold Christian Hospital, and the proceeds were used to expand the Christian Old People’s Home and build new facilities for the Youth Home. The CWBA’s mission of caring for youth in St. Louis persisted through the 1980s, when the Youth Home closed due to state aid cuts, management turmoil, and a lack of private donations.

In 1975, the CWBA built a new facility for the Christian Old People’s Home at 800 Chambers Road in Ferguson, Missouri. It was rebuilt in 2011 and renamed the Christian Care Home. In December, 2018 the home closed, citing the loss of Medicare funding. Following the closure of the Christian Care Home and the Christian Women’s Benevolent Association dissolved.

The National Benevolent Association remains active today, with a headquarters in St. Louis, and recently celebrated its 130th anniversary. Christian Hospital also remains active today and merged with Barnes-Jewish Inc. in June 1993 to form BJC Healthcare.

**Donor Information**
The records were donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by Viola Wieble on December 17, 2018 (Accession No. 4379).

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**Box List**

**Box 1**
- Christian Women’s Benevolent Association
  - Board meeting minutes, 1911-1952
- Mothers and Babies Home
  - Board meeting minutes, 1899-1903; 1926-1948
  - Campaign and construction newspaper clippings, 1929
  - Admittance ledger, 1899-1909
Box 2
Christian Old People’s Home
Admission ledgers, 1929-1935; 1942-1945
Board meeting minutes, 1915-1917; 1923-1949
Christian Hospital of St. Louis
Board meeting minutes, 1923-1936; 1955-1959

Box 3
CWBA Photographs, Scrapbooks, and Ephemera
f. 1-3 Photographs of Christian Hospital, 1925
f. 4 Photographs of children who were adopted from the Christian Orphans Home and Mothers and Babies Home, 1929-1935
f. 5-6 Photographs of Youth Home and Christian Orphans Home Facilities and Residents, 1920-1980
f. 7 Scrapbook, including photographs of CWBA members and Christian Hospital, 1934-1980
f. 8 Scrapbook, including photographs of CWBA members, Christian Hospital, Christian Orphans Home, and Christian Old People’s Home, 1930-1950
f. 9 Scrapbook, including photographs of CWBA members, Christian Orphans Home, and Christian Old People’s Home, 1937
f. 10 Photographs of Christian Care Home groundbreaking, facilities, and residents, 2011
f. 11 Unidentified, loose photographs of CWBA activities, 1920-2011
f. 12 Scrapbook page, letter from the Office of George W. Bush acknowledging his invitation to the Christian Care Home Open House in September 2011
f. 13 Historic ephemera left at Christian Care Home by residents and collected by CWBA members, including 1904 World’s Fair Invitation; Voter Badge, ca. 1840

Videotapes
CWBA Member Geraldine Kamenko’s Retirement Celebration, June 25, 1998
CWBA Youth Home Demolition, March 14, 1994
CWBA 100 Years, 1999
CWBA Nursing Home, no date

Oversize Volumes (12)
Christian Orphans Home admission ledger, 1899-1901
Mothers and Babies Home admission ledgers, 1901-1902; 1901-1917; 1902-1904; 1902-1908; 1908–1911
Combined Christian Orphans Home/Mothers and Babies Home admission ledgers, 1908-1921; 1908-1910; 1910-1913; 1911-1914; 1921; 1921-1933