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THE ROBERT W. RYERSS MUSEUM AND LIBRARY: A CASE STUDY IN UPPER CLASS PHILANTHROPY IN LATE VICTORIAN PHILADELPHIA

AN HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY WRITTEN UNDER THE DIRECTION OF DR. JOHN GORDON AND DR. ROBERT KENZER

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Abstract: “The Robert W. Ryerss Museum and Library: A Case Study in Upper Class Philanthropy in Late Victorian Philadelphia” looks at the philanthropy of the Robert W. Ryerss family in Gilded Age Philadelphia. It places the Ryerss family within the spectrum of philanthropic spirit and activity that swept upper class Philadelphia in the late nineteenth century and analyzes the unique act of creating a public library and museum out of a private home within the context of the larger trend of scientific giving and museum foundation that characterized this era. Historical scholarship is extremely limited about this particular class of donor because most researchers have chosen to focus on the prolific philanthropists of the age or on the grass-roots charitable organization societies. This study will aid future historians assembling a more complete look at upper class American philanthropy at the end of the nineteenth century.
The idea for this paper, although I did not recognize it at the time, was planted by two separate incidents that occurred while I was interning at the Robert W. Ryerss Museum and Library in Fox Chase, Pennsylvania. The first grew from a conversation held during our weekly staff meeting at Ryerss in the summer of 2002. A new brochure had been designed for the museum, and we were trying to come up with a new mission statement that would allow visitors to gauge what Ryerss was about and for future staff and managers from Fairmount Park to uphold. It was a complicated task, full of subtleties, and the question arose of what Robert Ryerss, the man who made the museum, library and park possible, would have wanted it to say. Was the Fairmount Park Commission honoring his legacy by maintaining his bequest of a free library and museum for the public? Who had been making sure, since the house was first given to the city, that this donation was being maintained in the same spirit in which it was given?

The second event was another conversation a year later at Ryerss with one of the historic preservation officers from Fairmount. She brought up a question that had been asked at the museum before: was the Ryerss family unique in their act of donating a free library and museum to the city of Philadelphia? Were other people in their same class of life carrying out a similar sort of philanthropy, or was it something exceptional? No adequate response had been made to those queries, and existing literature provided no definite answers.

Thus, an idea was born from a combination of those two incidents: to examine the philanthropy of the Robert W. Ryerss family and find its place within concurrent charitable activity, and to ascertain whether the legacies of these philanthropists were maintained if they left no trust or remaining family to see that it was done. I found the
answers to these questions in a variety of sources. The most helpful resources were people, especially Theresa Stuhlman, Historic Preservation Officer for Fairmount Park, and the staff at Ryerss. The collections at the Ryerss Museum and at the Fairmount Park headquarters in Memorial Hall provided me with numerous primary sources, including the family wills and several pieces of correspondence with park officials. I supplemented these sources with original newspaper articles about Burholme and the Philadelphia Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the Temple University Urban Archives collection.
Late-nineteenth-century America was marked by a wave of philanthropic activity among its most privileged citizens. The activities of Philadelphian Robert W. Ryerss and his family embodied that spirit. Their acts of generosity characterized the mood of the age, from the desire to do public good by building churches and donating to orphanages, to protecting animal rights by founding a farm to house retired horses. The Ryerss family provides an interesting case study of the variety of charitable activity that upper class Americans were engaged in during the Gilded Age. Although philanthropic activity was widespread among the upper class at the end of the nineteenth century, accounts of their activity are often overshadowed by the giants of financial giving whose endowments and donations built universities and museums on a grand scale.

This paper addresses the paucity in information regarding the philanthropy of the mid-level wealthy in Philadelphia. Robert W. Ryerss, who, among other things, founded a shelter for aged equines, and donated his house to the city of Philadelphia as a library and museum, exhibits many of the philanthropic characteristics of those oft-studied multi-millionaires in his habits of donation. However, there remains a subtle difference between his methods and theirs. This distinction is in the style of giving, and it was a result of the financial disparity between him and the multi-millionaire robber barons of industrial-era fame. Ryerss offers an example of the types and varieties of philanthropy in which his social peers were involved in Philadelphia during the Gilded Age.

If the philanthropy of these well-to-do men has been forgotten, so has their legacy. Perhaps the two go hand in hand. If they did not leave enough money to establish a foundation or a decades-long family tradition of giving, then they did not leave a clear enough path of activity for historians to follow. Their bequests have been lost amid the
mass of papers reviewing the minutes of meetings of charitable organizations to which they belonged. It is not a question of whether they were giving, because they certainly were. Instead, it is a matter of finding them. This essay offers a case study a single philanthropic family. A careful review of the Ryerson family and their charity hopefully will provide potential source material for a more in-depth study of the philanthropy of the mid-level wealthy.

A limited amount of literature exists regarding the philanthropy of the class of mid-level wealthy, during those final decades of the 1800s. Accounts of moderate individual giving are nearly impossible to find, although the history of philanthropy is a widely researched subject. A great deal has been written about the rise of scientific philanthropy (a term that will be clarified shortly) in America, including a dissertation on Philadelphia charity by Julia Rauch entitled “Unfriendly Visitors: The Emergence of Scientific Philanthropy in Philadelphia, 1878-1889.” Robert Bremner, in his book American Philanthropy, provides a survey of philanthropic activity in the United States. The essay collections Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History and Philanthropic Giving supply solid background information on the development and intricacies of nineteenth century philanthropy. Information on museums and philanthropy can be found in Helen L. Horowitz’s Culture and the City: Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago from the 1880’s to 1917 and in Daniel Fox’s Engines of Culture: Philanthropy and Art Museums. Each of these writers addresses the popularity of organized charity, but they largely focus on the involvement of the multi-millionaires in it. Discussion of the smaller-scale donors and activists is hard to find.¹

Background on Philadelphia’s philanthropic tradition, the upper class, and the development of charity was taken mostly from Digby Baltzell’s *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* and *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia*. Baltzell has done extensive work on the social history of Philadelphia, and his comprehensive listing of upper-class families was invaluable. Another illuminating source regarding employment patterns in elite nineteenth-century Philadelphia was Gary Nash’s article called “The Philadelphia Bench and Bar, 1800-1861.”

Laura Stutman, a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, studied the Ryerss family and the Robert W. Ryerss Museum and Library in 1999 as part of work towards a Masters degree in Historic Preservation. In her paper, called “Period Rooms at Ryerss Museum,” Stutman discussed the family, its social status, and some of their philanthropy, but focused mostly on the rooms and displays at the museum. The family’s place in Philadelphia society and its charitable impulses provided background for her study.

It is important for the purposes of this study to clarify the terms philanthropy and charity. Robert Payton uses *Webster’s New Dictionary of Synonyms* to elucidate the difference between the terms philanthropy and charity, “*Philanthropic*...suggest[s] interest in humanity rather than the individual ... the giving of money on a large scale to

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organized charities, to institutions for human advancement or social service, or to humanitarian causes." Charity, on the other hand, is generosity to the poor in the form of immediate relief. Thus, philanthropy is concerned with improving the lives of fellow men by trying to provide a solution to a larger problem (such as poverty) rather than simply donating money or food and providing a temporary solution to a much larger problem. According to Robert Bremner, "Philanthropy has covered a wider field than charity; the problems of the poor have not been philanthropy's only or even primary concern. The aim of philanthropy in its broadest sense is improvement in the quality of human life." Broad goals for improvement, especially to the extent dictated by these definitions of philanthropy, have often been undertaken by those with the means to give on a large scale and have covered many fields. In addition to hunger and poverty, philanthropists tackle education, culture, and even non-human issues such as animal rights.

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Philanthropic activity in the United States experienced a boom in the years after the end of the Civil War. As Robert Bremner observes, "The twenty-five or thirty years after the Civil War seemed, to Americans living at the time, an era of stunning achievement in all fields of philanthropy." Organizations that had their roots in the war years, such as the Sanitary Commission, demonstrated the trend away from spontaneous

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5 Ibid., 85.
giving to a more organized, efficient means of benefiting the needy. Rather than simply handing money and food to impoverished citizens, or allowing the sick to go untreated, these organizations systematized provisions and relief and stimulated public interest in philanthropy.\(^6\)

This new trend of organized charity, christened “scientific philanthropy,” combined the charitable impulses of men with logical efficiency in order to provide an opportunity for those willing to help themselves. Proponents of this new system of philanthropy reduced the problems so commonly associated with welfare because scientific philanthropy was, according to Julia Rauch, based on “moral uplift of the poor through the exhortatory efforts of visitors, and the punitive withholding of aid from the ‘unworthy’.”\(^7\) Organization was also important for those donating sums too large to be used in a single place. A guideline for the dispensation of contributions was useful in ensuring efficient use of a large financial gift.

The most famous Gilded Age philanthropists are also the most frequently examined, especially their motives and tendencies in giving. Such individuals as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, Marshall Field, and Leland Stanford donated many millions of dollars to charitable organizations throughout the course of their lives, and even began charitable trusts in their own names that are still active today. They are universally associated with philanthropy and money. These fabulously wealthy “robber barons” made their fortunes during the booming post-Civil War industrial movement and all, in a variety of ways, gave some of that money back to society.

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\(^6\) Ibid., 87.

\(^7\) Rauch, 10.
For all of the fame, fortune, and generosity of these individuals, they were not the only well-to-do Americans concerned with charity in at the end of the nineteenth century. A whole class of people who occupied positions among the social elite contributed a great deal of their time and personal fortunes to philanthropic causes. These men and women, many of whom believed passionately in the causes they were giving to, have not been the subject of extensive study. This class, the mid-level wealthy, was certainly above average in their financial means and lifestyles, but they were not living on the grand multi-millionaire style of those most famous robber barons. These men inherited their money from their fathers, or made their fortunes in banking and investing, and they were every bit as enthusiastic about putting their money to good use as those wealthy men who have been the subject of so many studies.

Those who were giving the most money in the late nineteenth century were setting a trend in donation that would determine the most “acceptable” charities for the wealthy. Their theories in giving were similar to those engaged in scientific philanthropy, what Andrew Carnegie termed “to help those who will help themselves.”

John D. Rockefeller expressed this sentiment in his autobiography:

The best philanthropy, the help that does the most good and the least harm...is not what is usually called charity. It is the investment of effort or time or money...to expand and develop the resources at hand, and to give opportunity for progress and healthful labor where it did not exist before.

The new scientific philanthropy was extremely popular, and by the early 1900s had been perfected around the nation in the form of the Charity Organization Society.

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which focused on efficient distribution of charitable resources.\textsuperscript{10} Scientific giving was not the only form of charity, but it had fast become the most popular venue by which concerned citizens could provide assistance to the needy. In her dissertation on the rise of scientific philanthropy, Julia Rauch claims, “The new benevolence verged on being a philanthropic fad; it was the dominant thrust in social welfare reform in the U.S. during the Gilded Age.”\textsuperscript{11}

Equally involved in the Gilded Age wave of philanthropy, although less visible than the Rockefellers and Carnegies, was an entire section of the upper-class population in the United States. These men and women donated both time and money to churches, orphanages, soup kitchens, and chapters of the Charity Organization Society (COS) around the country. The Philadelphia equivalent of the COS was the Society for Organizing Charity, known by a similar acronym as the SOC. Membership in the SOC, according to Rauch, was generally taken from “an elite stratum of native born white Americans,” members of the upper-class who had the resources to assist the needy.\textsuperscript{12} Animals were another popular cause among the social elite at the time, “The humane treatment of animals had been a popular, even fashionable cause since the founding of the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1865,” Ruth Crocker observes.\textsuperscript{13}

The city of Philadelphia was a hotbed of activity during the philanthropic upsurge at the end of the nineteenth century. It has a rich history of philanthropy dating back to

\textsuperscript{11} Rauch, 7.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 8.
the city’s founding father, William Penn. As a staunch Quaker, Penn viewed charity and assistance to the less fortunate members of society as a religious obligation instead of an act of generosity. Hard work and thrift were an integral part of the Quaker lifestyle and, according to Robert Bremner, so was “employing the rewards of diligence and frugality for benevolent and humanitarian purposes.”

Although Penn paid only a few visits to his city, his legacy of generosity greatly influenced its subsequent settlers, including Philadelphia’s favorite son, Benjamin Franklin. Although Franklin did not acknowledge the influence of Quakerism on his character, his actions reflected the beliefs held by Penn and his Friends. Franklin advocated and exemplified the importance of both industriousness and a thrifty lifestyle, but his philanthropic legend extends quite a bit farther than Poor Richard’s Almanac. In 1727, more than 150 years before Andrew Carnegie would publish the Gospel of Wealth, Franklin began a pattern of philanthropy in Philadelphia that would permanently affect the development of the city and be echoed by Carnegie and his peers. He first founded the famous Junto, a social society, which later went on to help establish the Philadelphia library, the Pennsylvania Hospital, and the academic institution that would eventually become the University of Pennsylvania. Among those large projects came smaller public improvement ventures, such as the volunteer fire company and a rudimentary police department.

Philanthropists in Philadelphia worked for a wide variety of causes to help the less fortunate. Orphans, widows, minorities, churches and prisoners all received the loving attention of the charitable societies. In addition to the work done by Franklin,  

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14 Bremner, American Philanthropy, 10.  
15 Ibid., 15.  
16 Ibid., 17.
numerous charitable societies, such as soup kitchens organized by the Quakers, sprang up in Philadelphia throughout the early nineteenth century. The Philadelphia Prison Society was an early Quaker organization dedicated to prison reform and the tradition was carried on by the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, which made personal efforts to see unjustly imprisoned individuals freed. The Germantown Relief Society, founded in 1873, was America’s first charity organization society and it was imitated by the more well known Society for Organizing Charity in 1879. Even the illustrious banker and philanthropist Stephen Girard personally administered relief to the poor during the 1793 epidemic of Yellow Fever.\footnote{John B. McMaster, \textit{The Life and Times of Stephen Girard} (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1918), 221.} From its foundation, Philadelphia was a city with a philanthropic bent.

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It is among these activists that Robert W. Ryerst and his family are to be found when looking at Philadelphia philanthropy during the Gilded Age. Their financial status, family history, and charitable activity placed them firmly among their peers in society. However, Ryerst’s unique final act of donating his house as a museum and library to the city of Philadelphia sets him apart from that mid-level wealthy set and reveals his having been influenced by those fantastically rich men who were funding libraries for entire cities rather than smaller neighborhoods. Robert W. Ryerst was the last remaining member of a branch of an old family that had its roots in a city with a rich history of charitable and philanthropic activity.
Robert Waln Ryerss was a descendant of the Walns, an established, influential Philadelphia family. He was the only son of Joseph Waln Ryerss (1803-1869) and Susan Waln (1806-1832). Joseph was the son of John P. Ryerss of Staten Island, New York, and Hannah Waln, of Walnford, in Monmouth County, New Jersey. Their only child, Robert, was born on March 8, 1831 and his mother Susan passed away a little more than a year after his birth. In September, 1847 Joseph remarried; to his first wife's younger sister, Anne. Robert was raised by Anne, who was his aunt as well as his step-mother, and the two continued to live together after his father passed away in 1869.

The Waln family history is closely intertwined with the City of Philadelphia itself. Richard Waln emigrated from England to Philadelphia with William Penn on the ship Welcome in 1682. Several family members followed and all resided in Philadelphia or the surrounding counties, including an estate in New Jersey called "Walnford." By the middle nineteenth century, the city was replete with Waln family descendants, including Robert's mother and stepmother, both of whom were practicing Quakers. Quaker doctrine places a strict emphasis on philanthropy, and although Joseph did not consider himself a Quaker, it is likely that this religious tradition of generosity influenced him.

Joseph W. Ryerss earned his wealth in the shipping and railroad trade. He was an importer/exporter with the Lincoln and Ryerss firm, which Laura Stutman speculates was based in New York. Joseph also acted as President of the Tioga Railroad, a small rail line that was supposed to operate out of the coal regions of central Pennsylvania towards

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18 Ryerss Family Bible, Ryerss Museum and Library, Fox Chase, PA.
20 Stutman, 15.
21 Ibid., 13.
the New York state line, but may never have come to fruition. In a copy of his obituary
Joseph was also listed as one-time president of the Philadelphia Exchange.22

In 1859, when he was 56, Joseph Ryerss purchased land in Fox Chase, a suburb of
Philadelphia, and commissioned the building of a summer home, called Burholme, which
would ultimately become the Ryerss Museum and Library. The new “country seat” was
named after the ancestral home of the Waln family in England. It can be assumed that
the Ryerss family spent the rest of the year at their house on the exclusive Walnut Street,
where many of the city’s elite resided. Joseph passed away only ten years after
Burholme’s completion.

Robert W. Ryerss was 37 when his father died. Unmarried, he continued to live
with his stepmother until her death from pneumonia in 1886. Robert graduated from the
University of Pennsylvania in 1851 and received a degree in law from that same
institution in 1854. The 1887 Social Directory contains a listing for Robert W. Ryerss,
lawyer, with a business address at 605 Walnut Street and his home address at 922 Walnut
Street. An article in Harper’s Monthly Magazine describes the allure of Ryerss’s area:
“Walnut Street, which holds a status like that of Fifth Avenue in New York, old Beacon
Street in Boston, or Lucas Place in St. Louis, forms the backbone of the distinctively
“fashionable” region.”23 It appears that Robert and Anne preferred to live mostly outside
of the city at Burholme. A 1905 article in the Philadelphia Record reveals that Robert

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22 Obituary, Joseph Waln Ryerss, in scrapbook belonging to Anne Waln Ryerss, Storage, Ryerss
Museum and Library, Fox Chase, PA.
23 “A Clever Town Built by Quakers,” Harper’s Monthly Magazine, 64, December 1881-May
1882, 325.
had liked to spend his time there when not traveling, and both he and Anne were counted
there in the 1870 census instead of at their house on Walnut Street.\textsuperscript{24}

Although Ryerss held a degree in law and maintained an office address, only
scattered records of his legal practice remain. An obituary published in an unknown
newspaper in 1896 states,

\begin{quote}
His father was engaged in the East India Trade and amassed quite a fortune. The
son, Robert studied law, but he never practiced, as by his father's death he
became independently rich. He was a shrewd businessman, and always put his
money where it would bring him good return.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

There is a bit of a lapse in this account, as Robert was admitted to the Pennsylvania Bar
Association on December 11, 1856 and his father did not pass away until 1869. Laura
Stutman found Ryerss mentioned in the \textit{McElroy's Directory} listings several times as an
attorney. In 1854 he is listed without mention of a profession at 250 Walnut Street.
Later, in 1859, he is listed at 233 South Fifth Street, and again in 1860 as “Attorney” at
the same address.

By all accounts, Robert Ryerss appears to have been a quiet, well-read man who
preferred spending evenings at his country estate rather than in the company of elite
Philadelphia society.\textsuperscript{26} He was a member of several clubs, which will be discussed later
in more detail. The most scandalous event of his life took place in 1895 when at age 64
he married his longtime housekeeper and companion, Mary Anne Reed, an English
woman of about fifty. Having been a confirmed bachelor until this point, the marriage
was sure to have caused a great sensation among his social peers. Stutman quotes a letter

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Philadelphia Record}, May 21, 1905, Anne Waln Ryerss Scrapbook, Ryerss Museum and
Library.  
\textsuperscript{25} Stutman, 17.  
\textsuperscript{26} "Burholme is now a public park," October 20, 1907, Publisher unknown, Campbell Collection,
vol. 6, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.
\end{flushright}
from Waln genealogist Oliver Hugh to Frank Willing Leach that notes how Robert
“created a great scandal by marrying in his old age his housekeeper, a woman of very low
birth.”27

If Mary and Robert’s marriage created a stir, his death was sure to have caused an
even greater one. For it was to his new wife Mary Anne that Robert left his estate when
he died on February 16, 1896. Robert had been ill for several years leading up to his
death, and had no other living heirs. Although no records remain other than the wills, it
is clear that Mary and Robert formulated a plan for his estate prior to his death. He
allowed her to keep and maintain his estate for the remainder of her life, but had very
specific plans for the land and money after her death. His will states,

I give to my wife Mary A. Ryerss, my house and lot No. 3342 Walnut Street in
fee; I also give to my said wife absolutely all my carriages, harness, farming, and
gardening implements also all my silver, jewelry, China, household goods...28

Mary was to maintain the estate as she saw fit until the time of her death, when it was all
to pass to the city as part of a larger gift from the family. She attempted to turn the house
over to the city in 1896, almost immediately following Robert’s death, but it was not
accepted until 1905. A few years after Robert’s death, Mary remarried a man named
Reverend John G. Bawn. Mary and Reverend Bawn moved to the carriage house on the
edge of the estate and remained there until her death in 1915. In 1905 she officially
turned the house over to the city, much to the relief of proper Philadelphia society.29

Throughout his lifetime, Robert did a great deal of traveling. A travel diary in the
museum collection, dated 1894, lists his visits to Cairo, Jerusalem, Damascus, Beirut,

27 Stutman, 20.
28 Will of Robert Waln Ryerss, copy on file at Ryerss Museum and Library.
29 The Leach letter quoted earlier places another class judgment when it goes on to add, “But she
[Mary] was good enough to turn Burholme over to the City soon after her husband’s death though it had
been left to her for life. She married John G. Bawn, a man in her own class of life.”
Constantinople, Vienna, Venice, Geneva, Lucerne, Paris, London, and York. Robert collected a variety of furniture, china, and souvenirs during the course of his travels, most of which remains at Burholme. Robert's will stated:

I devise and bequeath to the City of Philadelphia all that part of my Farm near Fox Chase with my Country seat called Burholme to be used as a Public Park the same to be called “Burholme Park.” The park to be for the use and enjoyment of the people forever; also my dwelling house on the hill with free access thereto, the grounds to be included in the Park. The house to be fitted up as a Public Library and reading room in which are to be placed my books and one or more rooms reserved for my pictures, old china, silver, glass, and furniture, and other curiosities as my wife during her life or by Will may designate as a Museum, so that the house may be used as a Library and Museum Free to the Public.

Today the Fairmount Park System of Philadelphia runs the museum. Known as Burholme Park, the building is mostly utilized by members of the surrounding community. In keeping with Robert's original bequest, the museum, library, and surrounding park are still accessible at no charge to the public.

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Robert W. Ryerss's 1896 bequest of a museum and library to the city of Philadelphia was well within the growing trend of upper class philanthropy as outlined by the dominant figure of Andrew Carnegie in his 1889 article “Wealth,” which was quickly rechristened “The Gospel of Wealth” by a newspaperman. In the article Carnegie stresses the importance of philanthropy by the wealthy, because money is meant to be used by those who have it for the greater good, not kept locked away where it benefits no one. Carnegie lays out a list of seven worthy institutions, that, when contributed to, in

30 Robert W. Ryerss's Travel Bible, Ryerss Museum and Library.
31 Will of Robert W. Ryerss.
turn contribute to a better society: (1) founding a university; (2) establishing libraries; (3) establishing hospitals, medical colleges, and laboratories; (4) providing land for development of parks; (5) constructing meeting places and concert halls; (6) constructing swimming facilities; and (7) constructing of church buildings.\textsuperscript{32}

The influence of Carnegie's article is undeniable, as there has not been a volume written on the genesis of modern philanthropy that does not mention the "Gospel of Wealth." Carnegie's sentiments truly, as stated by Kathleen McCarthy, "reverberated with the prejudices, aspirations, and biases of the fabulously wealthy postwar nouveau riches he represented."\textsuperscript{33} However, it is possible to overestimate the influence of his list on philanthropic society at large. His catalog, although noble, hardly suggested anything astonishing or new. Wealthy elite had supported arts and education in America well before 1889 when the article was published. Judith Seelander calls Carnegie's libraries and concert halls "worthwhile but highly traditional charity projects."\textsuperscript{34} Interest in philanthropy had increased in America's upper class after the end of the Civil War as a response to social problems, such as vagrancy, and widespread health issues. Public activity was again stimulated in 1890 by the publication of Jacob Riis's \textit{How the Other Half Lives}, a photographic essay on the slums of New York City. When released the book, "received national attention as well as public approval...." According to the book's introduction, written in 1957, Riis's work was viewed by many as a call to action, especially for those able to help the poor.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} Carnegie, 32.
\textsuperscript{34} Sealander, 225.
In the course of his philanthropic activities Robert Ryess fulfilled numbers two, four, and seven of Carnegie’s suggestions, indicating that even if Carnegie did not start the trend, many lesser philanthropists were participating in it. The exact listing in the article does not matter as much as the spirit in which the article was written. It embodies Carnegie’s ideals, and those of the other wealthy Americans who were engaged in similar activities at the end of the nineteenth century.

As philanthropy was expanding in the late nineteenth century, museum foundation was experiencing a similar growth spurt in the United States. Almost within a single decade, from 1870 to 1881, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Cincinnati Art Museum seemingly sprung up in their respective cities. They represented an aesthetic similar to that present in charitable philanthropies, interest in the public good. Almost in keeping with the “help those that help themselves” mentality, public museums offered a means of displaying culture to a population that would not necessarily be exposed to it any other way and were only available to individuals who had the initiative to venture through their doors. The museum movement was an extension of philanthropy that was limited to the very wealthy. While charitable societies were generally run by upper-class men or women, museum activity was strictly limited to the rich.

Ryess’ donations provide an excellent example of the type of action that was advocated by men such as Henry Ward Beecher, minister of the Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn. Pieces of Beecher’s sermons are often featured in literature regarding the genesis of the museum movement in nineteenth-century America.

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because of their message. Akin to the rich philanthropists, Beecher was concerned with how wealth was put to use. Preacher to New York’s elite, he believed that class structure existed for a reason, and that worthy people could work their way up through the ranks. Helen Horowitz explains, “Beecher saw the need for the expression of riches both in private houses and in public institutions. The handsome dwelling would serve as an example and as an inspiration to the less fortunate. The art it contained could and should be shared.”37 Ryerss did share his wealth, though on a much smaller scale than the large fine art museums being constructed in America’s major cities.

These new museums were often funded by donations from wealthy individuals, or based around their donated collections, such as the fine arts museum in Boston. Indeed, museums were often founded with the same educational intention as a library or a university, thus connecting them with those same ideals that characterized philanthropy of the wealthy throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. At the opening ceremony for the Boston Museum, the Superintendent of Schools claimed that “every museum, every museum of fine arts particularly, is not only a museum, but a school.”38

Education was not the only goal that supported the construction of fine arts museums in the U.S. It shared another theme— the introduction of culture to the masses. It was the same idea that encouraged the construction of concert halls and grand public libraries. Just as the Boston Public Library was “the first full expression of the late nineteenth century’s understanding of culture,” the new art museum in Boston was an embodiment of the goals of its founders to preserve, exhibit, and provide instruction in

37 Horowitz, 21.
the fine arts. Although education is not necessarily the same thing as culture, in this case it is often equated.

Perhaps the educational goals of the new museums were slightly exaggerated by those men who sought public approval for their projects. Museums, especially art museums, have often been accused of attempting to manipulate the public into accepting upper-class cultural ideals by presenting them as superior. The priorities of the wealthy in their philanthropy and the growing movement of museum foundation are both examples of another important movement of the Gilded Age, social control. In an increasingly democratic, seemingly chaotic post-war country, old social boundaries were threatened by the masses of immigrants, emerging labor unions, and political radicals that were found in every major American city. Organized scientific philanthropy and newly-founded cultural institutions proposed to help reduce social tensions by easing social dislocation and the decay of tradition and the community in the United States. Places of learning allowed the intelligent, driven members of poor society to better themselves. They also provided ways to teach new immigrants, leading by example, what it was to be “American.”

Philadelphia’s very exclusive upper class would have been greatly threatened by the disruptions in what had traditionally been a very strict social order. The Philadelphia elite were an extremely well-insulated group. While they did possess some capacity for change and addition to their ranks, the central core was made up of several very old, very large families that worked hard to keep admittance to the society difficult. Members of

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39Horowitz, 25.
41Rauch, 9; Harris, 545-566.
this social group earned their wealth in occupations that ranged from railroads and copper mining to finance and shipping. Each elite family was characterized by substantial wealth and impeccable family trees. Law was especially prevalent as a career choice among the younger generations of the wealthy families. Like Robert Ryerss, many a son of a wealthy merchant attended exclusive boarding schools and Ivy League universities before taking their law degree. Even individual professions, such as law, maintained exclusive admittance standards. Gary Nash claims that in Philadelphia “lawyers were recruited, for the most part, from wealthy mercantile families and gradually coalesced into a distinct upper class.”

At the end of the nineteenth century the elite stayed close together, both in business and in social life. The upper class in Philadelphia lived downtown in the fashionable Rittenhouse Square area, along Walnut and the surrounding streets. They also began to spread out from the city, building fancy summer homes in the outlying suburbs. As previously discussed, the Ryerss family was listed in the Philadelphia directories in 1884, 1887, and 1891 as residing at 922 Walnut Street. Boyd’s Blue Book, “the elite private address directory” generally lists both winter and summer references for each entry, but the Ryerss second home is not mentioned. Burholme was not in a fashionable area of the city; Fox Chase never had the good fortune to flourish in the same way as the Chestnut Hill, Germantown, or Whitemarsh sections. However, it was easy to

42 Baltzell, Philadelphia Gentlemen, 53.
43 Nash, 205.
44 Baltzell, Philadelphia Gentlemen, 177.
access due to the construction of a stop along the outbound rail line in Fox Chase, known today as Ryers station.45

These privileged inhabitants of the city maintained their close social ties through membership in selective clubs. The critical example of the exclusive men’s club is the illustrious Philadelphia Club. According to Digby Baltzell, “The Philadelphia Club has been a Proper Philadelphia stronghold since its founding in 1834.”46 Only slightly second to the Philadelphia Club was the Rittenhouse Club, of which Robert Ryerss was a member from 1875. The Rittenhouse was a more intellectual organization, whose members are inclined towards the arts and involvement with the University of Pennsylvania.47 Club membership acted as a first step in the ascension to acceptance into the elite circles of Philadelphia society.48

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Clubs were not the only way that upper class Philadelphia families maintained their social ties. James K. Simon’s Biographies of Successful Philadelphia Merchants, published in 1864, introduces the charitable activities that united the Philadelphia upper class. Simon writes, “It is from this class that liberal subscriptions to enlightened public

45 The spelling is correct; the city dropped the second "s" at an unknown date. This station caused an interesting controversy with Ryerss’s neighbors, the Jeanes family. Joseph Ryerss purchased the land for his estate from Joseph Jeanes, who protested bitterly when the railroad line and station were put in across his property. The family eventually abandoned their mansion on the plot adjoining Ryerss’s land.
46 Ibid., 347.
47 Ibid., 172.
48 This tightly-knit elite class in Philadelphia has also been responsible for driving away some great philanthropic gifts, mostly in the form of fine art, as various philanthropists or their family members were snubbed by society. The Mellon, Widener, and Rosenwald art collections, all assembled in Philadelphia, were donated out of state at the bequest of their owners. For further discussion of this phenomenon, see Digby Baltzell, Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia.
improvements come, and they are constantly performing disinterested and high minded acts." One example of such philanthropy is wealthy Philadelphians involvement with the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (hereafter referred to as the SPCA). At the end of the nineteenth century it suddenly became very fashionable to support the activities of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, newly founded in New York State. The history of the SPCA is one that is studded with famous names from its beginnings in Britain. The RSPCA (given the "Royal" title by Queen Victoria in 1840) was a "favorite charity of the upper classes" in England before it moved to the United States in 1866. The American division of the SPCA was founded by the son of a rich shipbuilder from New York who used the strength of his social acquaintances to form the ASPCA. The group proliferated and was organized in various cities by wealthy urban elites. Several prominent philanthropists donated heavily to the SPCA. For example, before she inherited her fortune, Olivia Sage, founder of the Russell Sage Foundation, had supported the cause through donations and annual subscriptions. Later, after 1906, Sage donated $10,000 to the New York chapter for an animal hospital and animal ambulance. Even Dorthea Dix, who died almost ten years before Robert Ryerss, and is better known for her actions than her monetary donations to charitable institutions, left $500 of what little she had to the Boston SPCA. Assistance to the SPCA approached the status of an upper class trend towards the end of the nineteenth century.

51 Ibid., 57.
52 Crocker, 209.
53 Robert Bremner, The Public Good, 185.
Both Anne and Robert Ryerss were very active in the creation of the Philadelphia chapter of the SPCA. The names of their co-founders reflect a wide spectrum of Philadelphia elite, including former Mayor Morton McMicheal; M. Richards Muckle, business manager of the Public Ledger; J. B. Lippincott, owner of a publishing company run under his name; and Horace Binney, a contributor to the University of Pennsylvania Hospital. Also active in the early SPCA were several members of the prominent Biddle family which owned several successful Philadelphia businesses including a jewelers and a brokerage firm.54 The presence of these names in the SPCA archive indicates upper class concern with animal charities, and demonstrates that the Ryerss family’s philanthropic interests were similar to those of their peers.55

Ryerss appears to have been heavily influenced by the women in his life when it came to choosing his charitable causes. The most frequent early recipients of the Ryerss family’s donations were not orphans or widows, but tired and overworked carthorses. Anne, Robert’s stepmother, began the family tradition of animal charity when she was still an unmarried young lady in Philadelphia. An article in the Evening Ledger recounting the formation of the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals mentions how “In the early days of the movement two young women, Elizabeth S. Morris and Anne Waln, undertook the care of smaller animals who were strays.”56

Anne’s love for animals is evident in her personal scrapbook, which remains in the

54 1887 Social Directory; Morton McMicheal was on the first Fairmount Park Commission, which eventually assumed control of the Ryerss Museum and Library.
55 While none of these men were members of the ultra-elite Philadelphia Club, several were listed as members of the Rittenhouse Club the same year that Robert Ryerss is listed. It appears that these men shared social interests as well as charitable ones. See “1891 Rittenhouse Club Members: Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania Archives,” USGenWeb, Online, Internet, http://www.rootsw.com/~usgnweb/
56 “Now My Idea Is This!” The Evening Ledger, October 26, 1927, SPCA History file, Temple University Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA.
museum collection and features a poem agitating against the abuse of cart horses and several articles regarding animal welfare and the practice of vivisection.\textsuperscript{57}

When she passed away, Anne left a great deal of money to the SPCA. An obituary published in the \textit{New York Times} dated December 3, 1886 reveals, "The will disposes of personal property and real estate valued in the neighborhood of $400,000. Among the bequests is one of the $70,000 to the Pennsylvania SPCA."\textsuperscript{58} Her will specified that the institution founded with the money be called the "Ryerson Infirmary for Dumb Animals." Anne’s love for animals may have been influenced by her Quaker upbringing, which stressed kindness to all creatures as well as generosity to those less fortunate.\textsuperscript{59} Anne was also concerned for human welfare. On her death she donated generously to the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.

After a lifetime with Anne, Robert demonstrated a similar passion for animal welfare. At the time of her death, Robert was President of the Pennsylvania SPCA. He made use of the funds left to the SPCA by Anne to purchase an estate in Coventryville, Pennsylvania and dedicated it solely to the care of old and injured horses. According to Anne’s wishes it was first called the "Ryerson Infirmary for Dumb Animals" and its foundation gained Robert some unusual notoriety throughout the city.\textsuperscript{60} His name appears in Herman L. Collins’ \textit{Philadelphia: a Story of Progress} in a playful article entitled "Persons and Things in the Class of Civic Institutions." The piece goes:

\textsuperscript{57} The family had portraits painted of their most beloved animals, several of which still hang in the library at the Ryerson Museum today. They also buried several of their dogs and one horse, named Old Grey, on the property in graves marked by headstones. With the exception of Old Grey’s, the headstones still remain around an oak tree next to the house.

\textsuperscript{58} "An Infirmary for Sick Animals," \textit{New York Times}, December 4, 1886, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.


\textsuperscript{60} The farm still exists today in Coventryville, Pennsylvania and is funded in part by money left to the farm by Robert W. Ryerson. It is now known as the Ryerson Home for Aged Equines. It is still dedicated to the memory of Anne Waln Ryerson. See http://www.ryerson.com/legacy.html.
Robert W. Ryerss fastened his name upon public notice through his sympathies for worn out horses. In 1889 there appeared to be a procession of applicants for that philanthropist's kindly dollars ... at one time the estate valued at $70,000 was solely dedicated to the support of a dozen rheumatic and super annuated steeds.\textsuperscript{61}

In spite of the article's slightly mocking tone, the farm was a serious enterprise that involved many of the city's leading lights. Another small feature article about the annual inspection of the farm in 1892 describes a visit by all of the managers followed by a dinner at Burholme, the country seat of President Ryerss.\textsuperscript{62} The names of the men on the board of the Ryerss farm are many of the same wealthy men who ran Philadelphia government and newspaper offices, headed up clubs, and served on hospital boards.

Concern for animal welfare appears to have been especially popular among members of the Philadelphia upper class. Most of the men with the same charitable interests as Ryerss, such as the SPCA and the Home for Aged Equines, were listed as members of the Rittenhouse Club, but not the Philadelphia Club. Whether these men were ever invited to join the Philadelphia Club is uncertain, but it reaffirms their status as members of the upper-class if not the premiers of the elite.

The second woman who bore a great influence on Robert was his wife and longtime housekeeper Mary. Before his marriage Robert’s personal philanthropic preferences tended towards animal welfare and children’s charities. He endowed a permanent free bed in the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia in Anne’s memory at the cost of $2,400 and continued to be active in both the SPCA and at the Home for Aged Equines until his death.\textsuperscript{63} He was very careful to mention in his will that all of the animals left to Mary were to be “kept by her at Burholme as long as they live, the horses not to be worked.”


\textsuperscript{62} S.F. Hotchkin, The York Road, Old and New (Philadelphia: Binder and Kelly, 1892), 9.

\textsuperscript{63} The certificate affirming this donation is in the collection at Ryerss Museum and Library.
Robert was also responsible for the construction of the Church of the Holy Nativity in Rockledge, Pennsylvania, a town neighboring Fox Chase. He deeded the lot to the church in 1893 and his will, which was written shortly after his wedding in 1895, directed his executors to spend a sum not exceeding $30,000 on the construction of the church. Although he had donated the land to the church before his marriage, Mary retained final approval of the construction plans for the new building. Together, the two of them formulated the plan for the church as well as the museum and library.

Robert's will, which was signed on June 25, 1895, appoints the Pennsylvania Company for Insurance on Lives and Granting Annuities and his wife Mary A. Ryerss as his executors. The will was very specific on how the money was to be dispersed. Robert distributed approximately $100,000 in his will, with $14,250 of that original sum in annuities to various people. If the annuitants, including Mary, were to live for twenty years following his death, his estate would have distributed another $266,600 among them.64 Significantly, Robert's will created a twenty-year trust that specified the use of the residuary funds of his estate each year.

His first bequest left $1,000 to each adult person who had been in his employ for ten years at the time of his death, and $100 each to those who had not been there ten years. As mentioned earlier, Robert left the entirety of his property to his new wife, as well as $1,000 each month as long as she lived. Robert also stipulated that Mary received an additional annuity of $12,000 each year to be paid before all other gifts were given out. First and foremost, Robert took care of his animals and his wife; the animals were to be kept well and not worked in the least, and judging from her annuity, so was Mary. He gave six individuals annuities ranging from $150 to $600. Unfortunately, his

64 Will of Robert W. Ryerss.
relationships to each of these people are not made clear in the will and no other record of them is kept at the museum. Approximately $29,000 was given in various quantities (none over $5,000) to people he lists as friends, and to one man who was probably a live-in servant.  

In all of his bequests, Robert listed by name only a single family member other than Mary. He left $5,000 to his cousin Elizabeth W. Kempton, clear of any inheritance tax but without an annuity. As she was not given anything else, nor was she named as an executor of his will, it can only be assumed that the two were not close. His only intimate surviving family member was Mary.

After the personal bequests, the will listed the various organizations that also received gifts. First listed was the previously-mentioned fund for the Church of the Holy Nativity, which Mary later improved upon with her own money. Robert left the Ryerss Infirmary [for Aged Equines] $10,000 and $5,000 each to the House of St. Michael and All Angels for Colored Cripples, The Children’s Hospital Home for destitute Colored Children, Bedford St. Mission and the City Mission of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Comparison reveals that the charities to which Robert donated reflect closely the places to which Anne had earlier bequeathed money. Anne left endowments for the Home for Aged Colored Persons, the Children’s Hospital, the Colored Orphan Asylum, and the SPCA.  Similarly, Robert chose to leave his money to organizations benefiting African American children and the Ryerss Institute for Aged Equines (an extension of the

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65 Will of Robert W. Ryerss. One of the men listed as “friend” and given $1,000 was Reverend Wilbur F. Paddock. The Reverend was an Episcopal minister who delivered a sermon called “A Great Man Fallen” regarding the death of Abraham Lincoln on April 23, 1865 in St. Andrew’s Church, Philadelphia. The sermon and information about Paddock can be found Online at chaucer.library.emory.edu/lincoln/data/paddock.sgm. Another friend listed was Ludovic Cleeman, who acted as Treasurer of the exclusive Philadelphia Club in 1891, of which Robert was never a member.

66 Will of Anne Ryerss, Copy on file at Ryerss Museum and Library, Fox Chase, PA.
SPCA which had been founded with Anne's money). Whereas Anne also assisted two organizations that aided American Indians, Robert's taste ran closer to religion, leaving money to several religious missions and to the Holy Nativity church. Mary, who was a great supporter of local churches throughout her lifetime, may have influenced these final donations.

Robert's will established a twenty-year trust that divided the remainder of his fortune into quarters. The first fourth was to be given to Mary, the second to the Pennsylvania SPCA, the third to the corporation of the church to be built at Rockledge, and the final quarter was to be used by the insurance company for purchasing books for the library at Burholme. Upon expiration of this trust, which was administered by the Pennsylvania Company for Insurance on Lives and Granting Annuities, the principal of all the residuary estate was to have been equally divided between Mary, the SPCA, and Holy Nativity Church, and the city of Philadelphia, "to use the income of their share in maintaining the Park and Library at Burholme." According to the letter written by Mary's heirs, the annual sum that the city received under the trust varied between $5,000 and $6,500.67 This figure implies that the total annuity from the trust was in the area of $20,000 to $26,000.

It is this section of the will that gives a strong impression that Robert was more concerned with the library aspect of a public Burholme than the museum. He only specified that more books be added, not more curiosities for the collection, and only discussed the building in terms of the library. Robert demonstrated the influence of popular philanthropy on the upper class with this action, which mirrors those of the

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67 Letter, Mary Ryerson Bawn's Heirs to the Fairmount Park Commissioners, November 1, 1917, Fairmount Park Headquarters, Memorial Hall, Philadelphia, PA.
extremely affluent philanthropists who were founding libraries all across the country. A free library provided an educational advantage for the Fox Chase neighborhood, which was not a wealthy area.

Although Ryerss was not a large institution, it was the only one of its kind in the neighborhood and was very popular from its opening. No documents remain containing instructions designating what types of books were to be purchased for the new library. Exactly what sort of library Burholme was intended to be, popular or more scholarly, is unknown. Reverend Bawn and Mary’s niece Alice Vallee described the books as “suitable for a Public Library,” but it is difficult to determine whether they meant the books were appropriate for a public library or if they were merely popular with the patrons. The Rare Book Collection still housed at Ryerss Library features a variety of titles and is somewhat revealing. Anne’s remaining personal books include popular women’s fiction and Robert’s part of the collection has a distinctly more intellectual composition. It is likely that Ryerss Library began as exactly what it remains today, a lending library that focuses mainly on popular fiction mixed with a few more scholarly reference books.

The park marked the other notable part of his contribution to the city. Designated public spaces were only beginning to be prevalent at the time, founded with the hopes of mitigating the ill effects of city living on health of the population. Philadelphia’s huge Fairmount Park, the first of its kind, was established in the mid-1850s and was the pride of the city following the Centennial Exposition. Parks and public spaces fast became
extremely popular throughout the United States. An article in the Philadelphia Inquirer dated August 1, 1897 raved about Robert's legacy:

One of the most popular movements that has taken place in Philadelphia in recent years is that looking towards the establishment of small parks, breathing spaces for the city's poor in the vicinity of their homes. ... It is likely that the late Robert W. Ryerss had some such idea in mind when he devised in his will that his magnificent half-million dollar estate...for a pleasure ground, to be known as Burholme Park.

The rich could afford to leave the city in search of healthier regions, but the poor had to make use of what was available close to their homes. Robert wanted to leave the people of Philadelphia a library to improve the public mind and a park to improve their health.

The museum half of Robert Ryerss' bequest was Mary's favorite project. While his will mentions that all of his collections and curiosities should be displayed in the house, no more detailed instructions are provided in it. However, it was this aspect of Burholme that Mary pursued most enthusiastically following Robert's death. As the main beneficiary of the estate and Robert's closest surviving family member, it fell to her to see that her husband's wishes were carried out as he would have wanted. She took this responsibility very seriously, but she may, however, have gotten slightly off track. Mary offered the house to the city in 1896, almost immediately following Robert's death. City officials hesitated for almost ten years before accepting the donation in 1905. In the mean-time, Mary had moved out of the mansion into the carriage house and focused entirely on traveling, expanding the museum collection and assisting her favorite charities.

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The Victorian mentality of the importance and appearance of wealth is often associated with museum foundation in the Gilded Age. There was, at the time, what Steven Conn refers to as a "culture of acquisitiveness;" it was a desire to demonstrate wealth and sophistication through the acquisition of "stuff." Conn claims:

Objects in the late Victorian world must be seen, then, as invested with a meaning deeper than as signifiers of status. They were connected directly with ideas and with knowledge of the world, and nowhere more so than in museums.\textsuperscript{69}

Burholme, with its collection of objects from across the globe, was Mary Ryerson Bawn’s opportunity to display her late husband’s wealth and her worldly experience. She was extremely enthusiastic about the museum, often personally conducting tours dressed in a traditional Japanese robe or modeling a piece from the collection of ethnic jewelry.\textsuperscript{70}

Mary’s zeal for the museum at Burholme led her to take several trips abroad to acquire more objects for the collection. It was, unfortunately, this same enthusiasm for travel and collection that led to her death in 1916. She passed away in Peking, China on December 18 after contracting pneumonia and being hospitalized for three days. Her obituary specifically states that she and Reverend Bawn were traveling with the intention of increasing the collection of objects to be displayed in the museum.\textsuperscript{71} Mary had completed her will in September, just before she departed for the trip, reportedly in a rush to finish it prior to her travels.\textsuperscript{72}

Before her death Mary was extremely concerned with the way that Fairmount Park dealt with the house. She remained highly involved with both the park and the

\textsuperscript{70} Stutman, 9.
\textsuperscript{71} "Dies While Seeking Gifts for City," \textit{The Philadelphia Ledger}, January 22, 1917, at Ryerson Museum and Library.
\textsuperscript{72} Letter, Mary Ryerson Bawn's Heirs to Fairmount Park Commissioners, see footnote 67.
museum until she passed away. In 1915 she wrote a letter to the Fairmount Park Commissioners chastising them for not following through on her recommendation for constructing an addition to the building that would house all of the new collections. She stated that even though there was sufficient space at present to display the items, the "most precious heirlooms are hidden away in one of the rooms on the third floor, never seen by the public eye." Mary and Reverend Bawn had apparently been agitating for this addition since at least 1910. An article in the *Germantown Guide* details a visit by the city history society to the mansion where they were given a tour by Reverend Bawn in which he told them about a recent trip around the world in which "they had applied themselves and their money in acquiring very many curios to be added to the already large collection," and that, "The city should build a fireproof annex to accommodate these." The couple did not meet with a great deal of success in their mission between 1910 and 1915. In her letter to the commissioners, Mary even proposed funding the addition with money from Robert's residuary fund, but all of her efforts proved fruitless. When she passed away in China in 1916 the house had still not been touched and her newly-widowed husband took up the cause.

If Mary had been improving upon the museum and its collections in her husband's memory, Reverend Bawn probably carried on his work in Mary's. He continued, along with Mary's other heir Alice Vallee, to petition the park to construct the fireproof addition to house the collection. A letter from the Ryerss' Trust Officer, dated

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74 Letter, Mary Ryerss Bawn to Fairmount Park Commissioners, April 11, 1915. Ryerss History and Wills File, Memorial Hall, Philadelphia, PA.
1917 and written at Reverend Bawn's request, proposed using part of the residuary fund for the books to enlarge the museum and house the objects of art. Money from the book income had previously been used to make alterations and repairs to the house, so the request to spend the money on an addition was not without precedent.

It is thus reflected how Mary's favoring of the museum over the library resulted in the expansion of the museum by taking money away from the library fund. Rather than expand the building in order to house more books or provide more reading room, the addition was built to house the objects that she collected on her travels. Robert did state in his will that all of his valuables were to be displayed at Burholme in the museum "as she may direct," but nowhere did it mention accumulating new items at the expense of the library collection.

That is not to say that the library itself was neglected. New books had been purchased, so that by the time Mary's heirs requested the addition in 1917 there were, supposedly, over 6,000 volumes in the library, "mostly purchased out of the residuary fund" and 930 reader's cards for those who patronized it. The letter claimed that in the first six months of 1917 an average of 60 books per day were taken home by patrons. Robert's legacy of a public lending library was certainly still being honored, if a little overshadowed by Mary's love for the museum.

In spite of her focus on the museum at Burholme, Mary carried out a great number of other charitable activities in honor of her deceased husband. She completed construction of the Church of the Holy Nativity at the cost of $70,000. The newly-finished church featured a stained glass window in memory of Robert W. Ryerson, and she

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75 Letter, Ryerson Trust Officer to Fairmount Park Commissioners, 1917, Ryerson History and Will File, Memorial Hall, Philadelphia, PA.
76 Letter, Mary Ryerson Bawn's Heirs to the Fairmount Park Commissioners, see footnote 67.
provided funding for a Sunday school there that was named the “Robert W. Ryerss Primary School.” Perhaps Mary’s most interesting act in memory of Robert was the construction of the Robert W. Ryerss Memorial Ward at the Lebanon Hospital for the Insane near Beirut. This hospital is a bit of a mystery, as the only documented accounts of it are found in Mary’s will and obituaries. There is a photo in the collection at the museum of Mary at the hospital in Asfuriyeh, Lebanon, but further details and even knowledge of its continued existence is unknown. Mary, in her will, did in memory of Robert what he did for Anne, and endowed a bed at the Children’s Hospital of Pennsylvania in his name.\textsuperscript{77}

Mary’s personal charities appear to have been of an entirely religious nature. No longer did the Ryerss family (of which she considered herself the last surviving member) contribute to the SPCA, but gave all of their philanthropic energy to funding local mission work in Rockledge as well as abroad. In addition to providing a great deal of money to the Holy Nativity Church, Mary donated land at the corner of Central Avenue and Cottman Street across from Burholme Park, where St. Aiden’s church was eventually constructed.\textsuperscript{78}

When Mary Ryerss Bawn passed away, only her husband and Alice Vallee remained to see that her instructions were carried out properly. No trust was set up in her will like the one established by Robert’s. The previously-mentioned letter from her heirs to the Fairmount Park Commissioners, which extends a full fifteen pages, provides excellent insight into both Mary’s goals for Burholme and their own. The letter explains in rather dramatic terms Mary’s hopes and struggles in her relationship with the museum.

\textsuperscript{77} Will of Mary Ryerss Bawn, Copy on file at Ryerss Museum and Library, Fox Chase, PA.
\textsuperscript{78} “St. Aiden’s Parish History,” Online, Internet, <http://staidans.ringworld.org/history.html>.
There was ever present with Mrs. Bawn the beautiful thought that in placing on exhibition, her rare Art treasures, she was affording pleasure to multitudes of lowly people, and was helping to cultivate and improve the public taste, especially of the Masses.

These lines echo strongly the sentiments being expounded by leaders in the museum world at the turn of the century. Museums were viewed a forums through which intellectual leaders could provide culture to the masses. Indeed, Mary followed Henry Ward Beecher's recommendation to the rich that they display the art in their houses for the benefit of the poor almost to the letter. Her desire to assist the public was so strong that she endured "many years of patient toil, wanderings in foreign lands" and spent vast sums on the purchase, shipping, and maintenance of objects for her museum.79 The museum had indeed become hers, because although it was her husband's money that brought it into existence, it was Mary's work and persistence that allowed it to become what it is today.

Robert W. Ryerss' role in all of this is difficult to discern. Aside from the original donation in his will, he was removed from the process that was the logical extension of his life's philanthropic activity. His wishes have been fulfilled in that the museum was called the Robert W. Ryerss Museum and Library and it was and has always been free to the public. The library and museum are currently run by money from Fairmount Park and what remains of the Ryerss residuary fund. His desire to create a public institution has been honored since his death.

Almost all of the specific instructions provided by Robert Ryerss have been carried out. His will stated that if at any time vivisection was practiced or allowed by the employees of the Infirmary or the SPCA, then his bequest would become null and void.

79 Letter, Mary Ryerss Bawn's Heirs to the Fairmount Park Commissioners, see footnote 67.
The Infirmary for Dumb Animals still exists as the Ryerss Home for Aged Equines and provides housing for retired horses, indicating that such violations have never occurred. He stated that Mary had to approve all suggestions for the design of the Church of the Holy Nativity. The church was completed with his funding, so it can be safely assumed that Mary endorsed the final design.

Harder to determine is whether his general wishes were abided by. Technically, his original donation was still honored. But Mary stopped donating to the animal charities that were so important to him, and used money that would have gone to improve the library to improve the museum instead.

This is a problem that faces all philanthropists in the event of their death. There have been many attempts made by individuals to guarantee that their ideas and goals be fulfilled when they have passed on and an outside party is made responsible for their fulfillment. The continuation of their philanthropy after their death is an issue that every life-long donor faces. As with earlier issues of philanthropy, the majority of historical research that has been conducted on the issue focuses on the large donors, the individual who created entire foundations to carry on their life’s work. Historically, there are several ways that philanthropists have handled the challenge of allowing their money to continue to do their work after they have passed away. Those most famous of Gilded Age millionaires, namely Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Julius Rosenwald, each took a very different approach to determine the course of their philanthropy after their deaths.

John D. Rockefeller had been a prolific, if an uninvolved, donor throughout the course of his life. He had too much money and too many people asking him for it, and his solution came in the form of his personal philanthropy advisor, Reverend Fredrick T.
Gates. Rockefeller often chose to allow his organizations to function completely independently while still providing them with funding. Gates, who worked with John Rockefeller and his son John Jr. for many years before Rockefeller Sr.’s death, organized donations and endowments into what eventually became the Rockefeller Fund. This fund, which was heavily endowed, continued to function long after Rockefeller died as an overarching philanthropic organization, providing support for a variety of causes. At the end of his life Rockefeller chose to continue his legacy of uninvolved support for his charitable causes by allowing the Foundation to make all executive philanthropic decisions.  

Andrew Carnegie’s approach to philanthropy often sharply contrasted with Rockefeller’s. Carnegie was personally involved with all of the causes he patronized, and created very specific foundations such as the Dunfermline Trust in Scotland, which built cultural and recreational facilities around his hometown. These organizations, many of which remained after his death, continued his legacy after he had passed away. He also created a trust, the Carnegie Corporation, that had a function very similar to that of the Rockefeller Foundation. However, most of his legacy was in specific causes, and especially in his libraries, which he constructed all over the world. Andrew Carnegie’s philanthropic legacy was equally far reaching but much more controlled by his personal whims than Rockefeller’s.

Specified giving has the potential to create conflicts, as in the case of early Philadelphia philanthropist Stephen Girard. Girard left a great portion of his estate to the Mayor, Alderman and Citizens of Philadelphia for the education of such a number of

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“poor, white, male orphan children as can be trained in one institution.”81 These funds established Girard College, which obeyed his will to the letter until 1968 when it was amended by order of the United States Supreme Court to include children of all races and both genders.82 Thus, specificity can generate as much confusion as general funds do.

Julius Rosenwald, of Sears, Roebuck & Company fame, is the prolific philanthropist whose record Robert Ryerss most closely matched. Rosenwald, unlike the other two men, did not believe in leaving money in funds in perpetuity. He disagreed with the very idea that philanthropic foundations should exist forever because he saw that their drive and effectiveness declined with age, and especially with the passing of the primary donor. Rosenwald, who did not want to leave a gigantic foundation to be run by strangers or to be quibbled over by his heirs, set up a philanthropic trust, which was set to expire in 25 years, and lasted only 14.83 Rosenwald passed away nearly 20 years after Robert, but perhaps Ryerss and Rosenwald shared similar ideas about the posthumous prolonging of philanthropy because Robert too set his trust to last only 20 years. It is inevitable that the direction and purpose of an individual’s philanthropy will change after their death.

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In general, studies of philanthropy in the Gilded Age tend to take a cynical tone in regards to donor motivation when discussions of scientific philanthropy and methods of

81 McMaster, 276.
83 Nielsen, 251.
social control arise. No denial is made of personal generosity, but insinuating undertones are always present; the rich white families seek to mold poor white families into miniature models of themselves through culture and education, newly-constructed museums make obvious to the masses appropriate tastes in art and suitable types of behavior. All too often, simple good will is left out entirely.

Robert W. Ryerss was undeniably a member of the upper class. His family connections, education, career, and lifestyle all placed him firmly among the elite in nineteenth-century Philadelphia society. If not as well off as the Carnegies or Rockefellers, his family was wealthy, and its few members demonstrated a considerable interest in several varieties of philanthropy. From Anne assistance with the foundation of the Philadelphia SPCA to Robert donating his house to the city as a public domain to Mary continuing to travel and collect for the museum, each Ryerss has exhibited concern for the betterment of human (and animal) kind. There is no doubt that Robert, moving as he did in exclusive social circles such as the University of Pennsylvania and the Rittenhouse Club, was influenced by the charitable patterns of his day. Carnegie’s *Gospel of Wealth*, the burgeoning scientific philanthropy movement, the popularity of museum foundation, and the widespread interest in animal welfare among the upper class were currents that he and his family were surely affected by if not caught up in. However, in their donations remains a spirit of true philanthropy, without selfish underlying motives.

The Ryerss’ donations were liberal and their involvement with the organizations based on more than simply monetary contributions. Anne adored animals, so she aided the SPCA and provided the funding for the Home for Aged Equines, which Robert, as
President of the SPCA, brought into fruition. According to Anne’s will, Robert acted as Treasurer of the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, to which each of them gave generously. The family’s final gift to the city was met with great enthusiasm. Several newspaper articles hailed the museum and library: “Never before has Philadelphia received such a splendid gift,” and “Ready for a city park, beautiful estate of Burholme has excellent location, fine mansion goes with it.”84 Mary invested a great deal of time and money into improving her favored half of the Ryerss Museum and Library venture. Supposedly, she once “wept bitterly,” upon returning from a visit with the Commissioners in which they requested that she box up her new acquisitions until an unspecified future date in which more room could be made for them in the house.85 Her heirs, especially Reverend Bawn, put in no small amount of effort convincing the city to construct the fireproof addition to the building in order to house the collection.86 While the “toil in foreign lands” could not have been as trying as it is described in the letter, it is true that all of the proceeds from those trips were donated directly to the museum. The funds and effort expended for that trip were all strictly for the benefit of Burholme.

Cultural control or no, Mary and Reverend Bawn purchased many of the items in the collection strictly because they thought that they would be interesting additions to the collection, “the cream of the Orient.”87

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84 “Burholme Park and $60,000 Come to City by Bequest of...,” Burholme Park File, Temple University Urban Archives.
85 Letter, Mary Ryerson Bawn’s Heirs to the Fairmount Park Commissioners, see footnote 67.
86 Mary and Reverend Bawn’s goal for an addition was finally realized in 1921 when a two-story addition was constructed at the back of the house using money from the residuary fund. These galleries now contain cases that display the collection. The remainder of the second floor is taken by the library, and the first floor parlor and dining room are displayed as they would have looked when the house was occupied. The third floor and attic are used for storage.
87 Ibid., 8.
After close analysis, it can be concluded that Robert Ryerss's intentions in donating the museum were positive. Anne's passion for animals led her to leave the bulk of her money towards that cause, and Robert's upper class education motivated him to provide a library and reading room in his home for the public, while Mary's slightly less sophisticated interest in display and exotic items inspired her to continue improving the museum. The challenge of remaining true to Robert's original bequest was met, if not from the precise angle he would have preferred. The methods of giving employed by the family were on a mostly personal level, retaining a high level of involvement with the organizations such as Robert and Mary's interaction with the Church of the Holy Nativity in Rockledge. Robert deeded the land and provided the capital for the construction of the church, but it was subject to Mary's approval.

The Ryerss family provides a satisfactory example of the influences on and activities of upper class nineteenth century philanthropists. Their wealth, which was ample enough to share, was put to good use and benefited a large variety of humans and animals. While this class of donors has been largely neglected in literature and research regarding American philanthropy, this small case study will assist the historian undertaking the task of compiling a more complete evaluation of well-to-do philanthropy in Gilded Age America. Further research will ensure that the legacy of philanthropists such as Robert W. Ryerss and his family is not forgotten.
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