

The Eighteenth-Century Records
of the Boston
Overseers of the Poor



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Appendices

Appendix 1

The Massachusetts Township Act, 1692

The following is a selection from the 1692 Act establishing the office of Overseers of the Poor.

From *The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of Massachusetts*, 21 vols. (Boston, 1869–1922), 1:64–68. Province Laws, 2d session, 1692–93, chapter 28, “An Act for Regulating of Townships, Choice of Town Officers and Setting Forth their Power.”

[Sect. 4.] That the freeholders and other inhabitants of each town, ratable at twenty pounds estate, ... shall choose three, five, seven or nine persons, able and discreet, of good conversation, inhabiting within [said] town, to be selectmen or townsmen and overseers of the poor, where other persons shall not be particularly chosen to that office (which any town may do as they shall find it necessary and convenient)....

[Sect. 7.] That the Selectmen or overseers of the poor of each town (where there are such chosen and specially appointed for that service) are hereby impowered and ordered to take effectual care that all children, youth, and other persons of able body living within the same town or precincts thereof (not having estates otherwise to maintain themselves) do not live idly or mispend their time in loitering, but that they be brought up in some honest calling, which may be profitable unto themselves and the publick. And if any person or persons fit and able to work shall refuse so to do, but loiter [or] mispend his or her time, wander from place to place, or otherwise disorder themselves, and thereof be convicted... such person or persons shall... be sent to the house of correction and at their entrance be whipped on the naked back, by the master of such house or other such as he shall procure, not exceeding ten lashes; and be there kept to hard labour until he or she be discharged by such justice or justices or quarter sessions of the peace for the same county. And it shall and may be lawful for the overseers of the poor or selectmen in each town where there are no other persons specially chosen and appointed to be overseers of the poor, [that] they are hereby ordered with the assent of two justices of the peace, to bind any poor children belonging to such town to be apprentices where they shall see convenient, a manchild until he shall come to the age of twenty-one years, and a woman-child to the age of eighteen years, or time of marriage; which shall be as effectual to all intents and purposes as if any such child were of full age and by indenture of covenant had bound him or her self.

[Sect. 9.] [Persons entertained in any town by the space of three months and not warned out to be reputed inhabitants]... and the proper charge of the same in case through sickness, lameness, or otherwise they come to stand in need of relief, to be born by such town, unless the relations of such poor impotent person in the line or degree of father or grandfather, mother or grandmother, children or grandchildren be of sufficient ability; then such relations respectively shall relieve such poor persons in such manner as the justices of the peace in that county where such sufficient persons dwell shall assess.