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**Just Where Do You Think You're Going?: Maternalism and Social Work of the Travelers' Aid Society of Virginia**

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Just Where Do You Think You're Going?
Maternalism and Social Work of the Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
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Master of Arts

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The reform movements of the Progressive Era laid many of the foundations for future social welfare programs in the United States. One of these movements, known as Travelers' Aid, developed in response to the increasing number of people traveling at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Travelers' Aid Societies were established in cities across the country to provide assistance to individuals who encountered difficulties or emergencies on their journeys, as well as to protect travelers - specifically, women and children - from the dangers of an unknown city. This thesis examines the case of the Travelers' Aid Society of Virginia and how it operated in Richmond, Virginia between the 1910s and the 1940s. The society employed a number of women to staff the city's train stations and monitor travelers as they passed in and out of Richmond. These women grounded their authority to assist travelers on the basis of their maternal social roles and strong sense of middle class morality. In addition to providing directions and tracking down lost luggage, Travelers' Aid agents also acted as protective barriers between travelers and the city, guiding newcomers towards respectable housing and work rather than allowing them to wander into the city to become victims of vice and crime. Over time, changes in professional standards and the effects of the Great Depression forced the society to alter its practices and focus.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rise of Travelers’ Aid</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Operations of the Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting and Protecting the Traveler</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue and Conclusion</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Lost baggage. Wrong directions. Sudden illness. Missing children. Misplaced tickets. Stolen money. Someone forgot to pick up a relative at the terminal. A driver turned left instead of right and wound up lost in a strange city. Any number of mishaps can occur while a person is traveling. Navigating one’s way around the country – even within a specific area – can lead to unexpected and difficult situations. Contemporary travelers often seek help through ticket agents, terminal personnel, police officers, fellow passengers, random strangers, maps, cell phones, and the internet. Travelers in the early 21st century can rely on a range of people and technologies to assist them with their journeys, but, these options did not always exist.

Traveling incidents and problems were not uncommon at the beginning of the 20th century. In Richmond, Virginia, for example, people new to the city failed to meet their friends at the train station, lost tickets and money, did not understand English, sought employment, and required medical attention.\textsuperscript{1} Those people who needed help, for minor or major reasons, were directed to a “brown, roll-top desk, with the letters painted large upon it, ‘Travelers Aid’ in train and bus station waiting rooms.\textsuperscript{2} Armed with directories, handbooks, a small amount of money, and a telephone, members of the Travelers’ Aid Society helped the confused, distressed, or lost traveler with whatever she or he might need.\textsuperscript{3} They gave directions, facilitated travel plans, located lost items and family

\textsuperscript{1}“1,733 Persons are helped in month,” undated article, Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia Scrapbook, [192-], p. 1, Organization records collection, Library of Virginia.
\textsuperscript{2}“House by the Side of the Road, Agency of Mercy, to Change Hands,” undated article, Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia Records, 1914-1991, Box 1, Folder 3, Organization records collection, Library of Virginia.
\textsuperscript{3}As a matter of style, there is a discrepancy concerning the apostrophe in the name “Travelers Aid Society” among authors. Some secondary sources use it, while others do not. In a footnote on the first page of her
members, watched over children and young women traveling alone, and referred people with more serious problems to the appropriate city authorities and other aid organizations.

Before the Travelers’ Aid Society, there was little, if any, infrastructure in place designed to help travelers with their problems. Throughout the 19th century, in Richmond and across the country, travelers relied on local charities to provide them with shelter and food if they were unable to afford it for themselves. They sometimes slept in jail cells for lack of other options. However, the quality and quantity of assistance varied from location to location. Most travelers had to find their way on their own, and not all were successful. Some people viewed transients as dangers to their communities while others felt morally obligated to care for them and guide them into proper social roles.

Travelers’ Aid began as a product of the social reform movement known as the Progressive Era. The Richmond chapter, along with many others across the country, was formed in 1909 as part of the Young Women’s Christian Association in order to assist and protect travelers as they entered an unfamiliar city. The society was available to all travelers who required some form of help, but its workers were particularly devoted to protecting women and children from criminal and immoral behavior and guiding them towards safe and respectable sectors of Richmond society. In 1914, the Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia became an independent organization, though it continued to function on many of its founding Progressive principles.4 The group had been helping travelers in

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4 Travelers’ Aid Handbook, undated, p. 5. TAS Records, Box 7, Folder 12, Library of Virginia.
Richmond for fifteen years when the Great Depression prompted a great migration within the United States. While citizens of some states attempted to prevent newcomers from entering, cities like Richmond attracted a wide range of transients because they were hubs of transportation and industry. A number of federal and local organizations existed throughout the country with the purpose of providing help to those individuals in need. Where chapters of the Travelers’ Aid Society operated, it was often one of the first of such groups a person would encounter upon arrival. The society’s workers evaluated travelers who requested or appeared to need help as they stepped off the bus or train to determine the type and amount of assistance required. Working with limited funds, personnel, and resources, their primary goal was to get travelers back on their way home or to another destination efficiently and safely.

The people who worked for the Travelers’ Aid Society frequently cited strong moral values as justification for their work. Analyzing the Richmond chapter’s records provides insight into how the organization was structured and operated, as well as how Progressive ideologies influenced its work. From their positions at entry points into the city, Travelers’ Aid agents used their commitment to social welfare to assist travelers and the people of Richmond. Although the Travelers’ Aid Society provided service to all travelers in need, its expressed interest in unaccompanied women and children reflected concern for vulnerable members of society. By helping them in safely reaching their destinations or finding respectable housing and employment, Travelers’ Aid agents served as a protective barrier between travelers and the dangers of the city. The group changed its practices and widened its focus to a broader range of travelers in response to the economic and social crisis of the 1930s. Circumstances changed between the
Progressive Era and the Great Depression, but Travelers’ Aid managed to adapt along with them.

Scholarship on the Progressive Era has examined a number of themes, including temperance and prohibition, economic regulation, labor, vagrancy and transiency, the rights of women and children, and the origins of the welfare state. Historians have argued that reformers often reinforced contemporary notions of class, capitalism, and gender in various quests to improve the situations of the working class. In *A Fierce Discontent*, Michael McGerr characterizes the period from the 1870s to the 1920s in terms of a radical reaction to social and economic changes brought on by industrialization. In his view, white, middle class Protestants promoted their own standards for labor, education, and moderation as solutions to the problems of poor working and living conditions and the excesses of the wealthy. By creating associations and advocating social solidarity, they believed they could transform American society, improving the quality of life across the country while closing the gap between the classes and drawing everyone to the middle. Progressives sought to reform values and beliefs and reshape society to conform to their middle class sense of morality. However, the success of these reform movements varied in scale and actual practice, failing to sweep away the system as they promised. Progressive reformers may not have quite prompted the revolution McGerr credits them with, but they did create a climate of change and greater social awareness. They also encouraged the federal government to take a more active and regulatory role in the lives of its citizens.

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6 Ibid., 66-67.
7 Ibid., 79-81.
Class divisions and gender are central features in Progressive Era historiography and relate closely with the work and people involved in Travelers’ Aid. Frank Higbie’s examination of the hobo experience in *Indispensable Outcasts* examines the differences between transient workers and white middle class Americans. He argues that Progressives used hoboes to define class divisions, treating them as a “paradox” within established American society. Transients led a nomadic existence and refused to, or were not able to, maintain steady jobs. They seemed to enjoy travel and freedom without the burden of familial and career responsibilities. Through their shabby clothes and by begging for food, hoboes drew attention to the shortcomings of an economic system willing to exploit a cheap labor supply. As outsiders, they served as targets of distrust who were unwilling to abide by the Protestant work ethic. Higbie’s research on transients and the Progressive response emphasizes the efforts of reformers to rehabilitate and protect against this perceived threat to society posed by outsiders – the same goals of Travelers’ Aid.

While most transients were men, women travelers became more common during the Progressive Era and drew the attention of female activists and philanthropists. Equipped with education and a relatively comfortable lifestyle, middle class women took jobs in social work or nursing and became advocates for the working class in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These “maternalists” sought to take the responsibilities of motherhood and apply them to public life. Theda Skocpol examines the impact of this maternalist movement from an American perspective in *Protecting Soldiers and*

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Maternalist activists often succeeded in passing workers’ legislation for women and children where similar laws for men failed. Even though women were still not allowed to vote, “social circumstances and political arrangements in the turn-of-the-century United States facilitated middle-class women’s consciousness and mobilization, and encouraged women to make collective and hegemonic demands – that is, demands not only for themselves but also on behalf of the entire society.”

Seth Koven and Sonya Michel take an international approach to maternalism in *Mothers of a New World*, examining how new female professionals used their social positions as mothers to push for women’s rights beyond the U.S. Indeed, female social workers, nurses, and activists around the world asserted their traditional maternal roles as empathetic caregivers beyond their own families. They were able to influence the direction of the Progressive movement towards women’s issues, seeking better working conditions, wages, and voting rights. While the details of maternalist causes varied in location and cause, the most common form of expression in the United States was perhaps in local philanthropic organizations.

Maternalist relief organizations manifested themselves in a variety of ways. The Travelers’ Aid Society was established in order to assist the disadvantaged members of society – specifically, women and children – as they moved around the country. Most Travelers’ Aid agents were middle class, educated, white women who took pride in their work, professionally and personally. Early society reports read as maternalism in action,

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11 Ibid., 318.
12 Koven and Michel, 2-4.
13 Ibid., 10-19.
as vigilant and responsible women protected the poor and unsuspecting travelers from the dangers of the big city. Progressive reformers frequently led anti-vice campaigns in an effort to curtail the drinking, gambling, prostitution, and crime they believed ran rampant in large cities, but had varying degrees of success. A number of authors have addressed the more disreputable elements of cities during the late 19th century and early 20th century and how they differed from mainstream social norms. George Chauncey, for example, explores how space and behavior were policed in *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World*. He asserts that the “normal world” defined itself by setting boundaries for acceptable social behaviors, effectively excluding homosexuals who failed to adhere to their standards.14 Travelers’ Aid agents also policed space and individuals in their efforts to protect women and children and shepherd them towards safe and respectable housing and employment. Although their jurisdiction was limited to the city’s entrances, these social workers were still able to influence the actions of travelers in accordance to their middle class and maternalist beliefs.

As of 1925, the Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia participated in a coalition of relief organizations in Richmond known as the Community Fund.15 Member groups collaborated to use limited resources efficiently by dividing their workload. Scholarship is available on some of these institutions, including the Salvation Army, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). Diane Winston’s *Red-Hot and Righteous: The Urban Religion of the Salvation Army* examines the ideology behind the Salvation Army’s work, emphasizing the tactics

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and morality members advocated and their impact on the people they sought to help in urban communities. Winston chronicles how the spiritual well-being of a community remained the central focus of the organization through times of war, prosperity, and poverty. The collected essays in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City* emphasize the efforts of the YMCA and YWCA to assist individuals making the transition from rural to urban life, as well as the driving moral and social forces behind such work. Notably, the YMCA was originally intended only for men who were new to the cities. Run mostly by men, YMCA chapters acted as “manhood factories” that were designed to provide respectable housing and employment assistance, as well as recreation. The maternalists who founded the YWCA applied the principles of the YMCA in order to “save” young women from urban vices. The Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia grew out of Richmond’s white YWCA chapter, internalizing many of the YWCA’s priorities as its own. In any case, as part of the Community Fund, Travelers’ Aid sought to work in tandem with the city’s other charities in order to provide the best possible assistance, a practice that would become all the more necessary during the 1930s.

The Progressive Era laid many of the foundations for the relief organizations of the Great Depression. With unemployment and poverty on the rise, social welfare was viewed as a means to alleviate Americans’ troubles. David Kennedy’s *Freedom from...*

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18 Ibid., 5.
19 Ibid., 6-7.
Fear thoroughly examines the events of both the Great Depression and World War II. As Kennedy describes, many of the key figures behind the New Deal believed they were carrying on the Progressive tradition by creating organizations that would help with the "moral and material uplift of the poor." New Deal projects covered a variety of social and economic issues, but experienced patchy success due to funding, management issues, and political fighting. Still, the goal of these new federal programs was to provide assistance and relief to communities across the nation where it was needed.

Many local charitable groups were overwhelmed with the increase of aid requests and simply did not have the resources or personnel to meet the demand. In Making a New Deal, Lizabeth Cohen studies how city, state, and federal social welfare programs affected Chicago during the 1930s. The widespread effects of the Depression strained traditional support systems of many Chicagoans to the point where local groups simply could not meet demands. State and federal programs attempted to fill in the gaps in service and funding, but had difficulty because they were unfamiliar with the specific needs of the city's individual neighborhoods. The success of New Deal programs varied across the nation as different cities and towns presented different needs. Like numerous other American cities during the Depression, Richmond was forced to adapt to changing circumstances. While New Deal projects were part of the city's relief efforts, Richmond was also able to rely on the previously established charitable infrastructure of the groups in the Community Fund for assistance.

21 Ibid., 146.
24 Ibid., 218-227.
The documents and records of the Travelers' Aid Society of Virginia provide valuable insight into the internal workings of the organization. Located in the Library of Virginia, these records include minutes from meetings of executive committees and the Board of Directors, news clippings on activities of the group, memos concerning funding, status reports on the number of individuals assisted within a given time frame, handbooks and manuals for case workers, promotional booklets for travelers, correspondence, photographs, and publications. These materials provide insight into the organizational structure and goals of the group, how it presented itself to the public, and the role it played in relief efforts in the community. Reports written by Travelers' Aid workers illustrate how they interpreted the service they provided. The language and style used to describe their successes reflect their pride in protecting Richmond from potentially dangers members of society, as well as the strain a large, unassisted transient population could place on the city. Although records range from 1914 to 1991, this paper focuses primarily on those documents produced between 1914 and the 1940s.

In addition to official records, supplementary primary sources supply further details on the Travelers' Aid Society. Two master's theses in social work from the 1930s contain detailed breakdowns of who the Community Fund of Richmond and Travelers' Aid assisted and how, as well as interviews with prominent members of the organizations. Newspaper reports and publications on the National Travelers' Aid Society provide valuable information as well, and place the organization within the greater context of the time period. Unfortunately, there are no comprehensive, recent secondary works on the Travelers' Aid Society, on a national or local level. Most written accounts of the group concern the history of individual chapters and their application of
and contribution to social work. They are only available in archives scattered across the country. It is not a complete record of the society, but the accessible sources supply useful information on the inner workings of the individuals involved and the group itself.

The social issues that led to the founding of the society at the beginning of the 20th century increased in scope and complexity in the decades leading up to and including the Great Depression. Many of the grassroots programs of the Progressive Era were overshadowed or swallowed by the beginnings of the federal social welfare system in the 1930s. Still, despite these changes, the Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia continued to act as both an organizing and protectionist force within Richmond. By providing emergency assistance to individuals as they entered the city, Travelers’ Aid worked to ensure that desperate people did not just disappear into the crowd. The population influx needed to be supervised so that limited resources were used as effectively and efficiently as possible. The women who staffed the Travelers’ Aid desks in the train stations grounded their authority on professional social work and a maternalist sense of responsibility. Distressed travelers, regardless of gender, age, and race needed someone dependable and familiar with the city to help them assimilate and reach their destinations. By making the moral and physical safety of women and children their main priorities, Travelers’ Aid agents positioned themselves as guards between the innocent and dangerous members of city. Guiding women and children into the city reduced the risk of them becoming the victims of immoral individuals and gave newcomers a greater chance of successfully integrating themselves into Richmond society. Travelers’ Aid exercised influence over travelers in need as they transitioned into the city, essentially shaping the transient population, and Richmond itself by extension.
By the 1930s, many of the society’s Progressive priorities had been altered in order to accommodate the social changes of the Great Depression. The tone of moral righteousness and obligation that had previously colored agents’ reports and committee minutes gradually became eclipsed by finances and new regulations. Members of the Travelers’ Aid Society had to simultaneously address the increase in aid requests and adapt to policy changes brought on through cooperation with city, state, and federal relief organizations. Travelers’ Aid agents had always prided themselves on being qualified social workers, but had relied heavily on maternalist notions of protection to justify their work since the society’s founding. While the Progressive ideals of Travelers’ Aid remained evident, the demands of the Depression pushed the society towards more modern forms of professional social work.
The Rise of Travelers' Aid

As Grace Kimble reminds the reader in her 1935 study of the Traveler’s Aid Society (TAS), “from the beginning of time there have been men who traveled.” As cliché as that might be, it is also true. People left home in search of work, adventure, and new opportunities. Travel was expensive, arduous, and dangerous. Mobility meant encountering new and unfamiliar places and people through which travelers had to navigate themselves safely to reach their intended destination. While the majority of travelers were men, women, children, and entire families also found themselves moving from place to place. With advances in time and technology, and the promise of land to explore and settle, travel became less of a novelty.

Assisted by the increasing availability of railroads in the mid 19th century, people streamed across the continent to the West Coast. In response to these newcomers, a number of local philanthropic groups throughout the country established shelters and programs intended to provide food and a temporary place to stay for weary immigrants and travelers who had no one else to depend on for help. By helping immigrants as soon as they entered a town, local aid workers exercised the moral obligations they felt toward the less fortunate. They were also able to monitor visitors and new residents in an effort to prevent crime and tried to ensure that transients did not become a drain on the community. These initial local organizations were, in many respects, the forerunners of Progressive organizations such as Travelers’ Aid.

25 Kimble, 5.
26 Travelers’ Aid Handbook, 1.
Most records of the National Travelers’ Aid Society trace its ideological origins back to the Gold Rush in the American West in the 1850s. One TAS handbook asserts it began during the 19th century in St. Louis, Missouri when a circuit court judge left half a million dollars upon his death “to furnish relief to all poor immigrants and travelers coming to St. Louis on their way, bona fide, to settle in the West.”27 Another society history states that the Boston chapter of the YWCA officially started Travelers’ Aid work in 1866 as a “means of correspondence and widely distributed printed warnings” targeted at assisting young women traveling by themselves.28 Incarnations of Travelers’ Aid Societies appeared across the U.S. throughout the end of the 19th century and into the 20th. However, those early groups lacked cohesion in goals and practices as they were locally operated and meant to respond to the specific needs of specific communities. These varying stories complicate locating the precise origins of TAS, but they always lead to the same result: occasionally funded by wealthy philanthropists, and almost always run by religious or women’s organizations, travelers’ shelters and programs sought to ease the difficulties of increased mobility and enforce a degree of social order across the U.S. They supplied transients with the help they needed as they entered a city or town in an effort to prevent, or at least curtail, potential social problems. Organizational consistency between individual groups developed over time, leading to the establishment of the National Travelers’ Aid Society in New York City in 1917.29

With so many people on the move, it was difficult to keep track of who was coming and going and why were they traveling at all. Americans of the late 19th and

27 Travelers’ Aid Handbook, 1.
29 Kimble, 12.
early 20th centuries tolerated visitors to their established communities – up to a point. City and town officials preferred to have residents that could work and adhere to laws and social norms. Respected and well-known citizens could be trusted where strangers could not. In reality, drifters often filled a need for cheap temporary labor and were at times romanticized by authors for their independent and adventurous lifestyles. However, drifters in general suffered from negative social assumptions, further complicating their ability to integrate themselves successfully into a community.\textsuperscript{30} Transients – tramps, vagrants, and hoboes – were commonly understood to be lazy and ineffectual beggars and criminals that constituted a blight on society.\textsuperscript{31} They were viewed as sources of crime and immorality and drains on public resources. Increased travel made it difficult to police drifters and their motives, and fed suspicions of strangers. Of course, long-term residents were just as capable of crime and vice as strangers were. To further complicate matters, growing cities wanted new residents. New businesses and industries attracted a range of individuals looking for work or entertainment. By watching over the entry points of a city, where there was a “gap” in supervision, Travelers’ Aid workers could protect the city from potentially harmful transients as well as innocent travelers from the dangers of the city.\textsuperscript{32}

This growing mobility and climate of caution provided the social catalysts for what would become the National Travelers’ Aid Society. More people traveling with greater frequency and over longer distances contributed to the rise in social work and

\textsuperscript{30} Alexander Keyssar provides an in-depth study of the difficulties tramps and hoboes had with interacting in mainstream society in \textit{Out of Work: the First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Chapter 5, “Place to Place” details how different communities responded to transients, ranging from offering them work to arresting them for vagrancy, 111-142.

\textsuperscript{31} For a more thorough discussion on the various characteristics and classifications of tramps and public perceptions, see Higbie, 66-97.

\textsuperscript{32} Baker, 46-48.
charity organizations during the Progressive Era. Religious groups and women's associations in particular, including the YWCA, undertook the responsibility of providing help to transients. They cited a moral obligation to assist the innocent and less-fortunate. Organizations similar to the YWCA developed programs designed to promote "suitable" and "acceptable" behavior consistent with their conceptions of "proper roles" for women. Travelers presented near-perfect targets for relief organizations. Disoriented by their new locations and unaware of the potential hazards ahead, travelers would presumably welcome advice on the best way to integrate themselves into their new surroundings. As a result, the groups perceived by many to be the most disadvantaged people in American society – women, children, and immigrants – became the main focus of such charity work.

Many of the original Travelers' Aid Societies began as side projects run by the YWCA. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, YWCA chapters staffed a number of urban train stations with matrons to specifically look out for the safety and moral well-being of young girls traveling alone. This work was motivated by a maternalist desire to protect and "provide an environment of moral respectability for young wage-earning women." Station matrons directed young female travelers to safe lodgings and social agencies that would assist them in finding proper jobs. If young women could find shelter and work in a new city through respectable, middle class channels, there was a good chance that they would not fall victim to prostitution or other

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34 Mjahkij and Spratt, 9.
For the YWCA, protecting girls and women meant ensuring both their physical and moral well-being.

Early TAS documents fearfully describe the fate that could have befallen a young naïve girl entering a strange city for the first time. Stories circulated of young women who left home for the city and were never heard from again. Disappearances of young women were particularly high during the World’s Fairs held in Chicago in 1893, St. Louis in 1903, and Portland in 1905. In fact, the Travelers’ Aid Society of California was created specifically to prevent such disappearances of women during the San Francisco World’s Fair of 1915. World War I further heightened the dangers posed by and to young traveling women, as new Army training camps around the country created another venue in which vice and venereal disease might run rampant. As men went off to train, fight, and work in war-related industries, women also found excuses to travel— including looking for job opportunities as well as entertainment. Local civic and religious groups did their best to provide and promote wholesome behavior and activities around army camps in order to protect both the men who would soon be sent off to war and the people who stayed at home. The influence of the YWCA and similar charitable organizations—specifically, their emphasis on protecting young women and their moral justifications—would become a cornerstone of the National Travelers’ Aid Society.

In 1905, the Travelers’ Aid Society of New York City began taking measures to coordinate methods and standards of societies around the United States. The goal was to

35 Mjahkij and Spratt, 9.
36 Kimble, 10-12.
create a network of Travelers’ Aid Societies that would enable travelers to receive similar assistance in every city they passed through, making it easier to track and follow up on cases that might require more attention than others. A well-organized association became an even greater priority during WWI, as the number of troops and civilians traveling increased exponentially. In 1917 the National Travelers’ Aid Society officially established its headquarters in New York City in order to provide uniform, quality assistance throughout the country.\(^{38}\) The new organization would focus on modern social work without sectarian bias.\(^{39}\)

Later known as the National Travelers’ Aid Association, the organization coordinated Travelers’ Aid Societies located throughout the country. It built contacts between groups, collected statistics, printed and distributed information, studied transient trends and legislation, and held individual chapters accountable to professional standards of social work. Member groups adopted the national symbol of a “large white lamp in the shape of a globe, with two red-and-blue hemispheres linked by the words ‘Travelers Aid.’”\(^{40}\) Each society was required to employ full-time a member or eligible member of the American Association of Social Workers, to create and maintain individual case reports, to annually submit statistics to the national headquarters, and to make audits of expenses every year.\(^{41}\) The intent of the National Association was to improve the work of all Travelers’ Aid Societies by promoting a professional, standardized attitude towards the assistance provided in train stations, and later on, bus stations.\(^{42}\) Better organization

\(^{38}\) Kimble, 10-12.

\(^{39}\) Baker, 23.

\(^{40}\) Travelers’ Aid Handbook, 1-2.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 2.

\(^{42}\) Travelers’ Aid agents began monitoring Richmond’s bus stations in 1930 due to an increase in people traveling by bus; Minutes, Board of Directors, 12 March 1930, TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 3, Library of Virginia.
and service would illustrate to the public that Travelers’ Aid agents were capable of much more than providing directions or finding lost luggage. Members of the National Association believed it was important to shield women, children, and others in need from “error, wrong, extortion and crime.”

A TAS handbook declared that “the Society [did] not help people foolishly and unnecessarily. It [was] not organized for accommodation, nor for passive assistance. It [did] not do porter service.” Travelers’ Aid agents were expected to be more than benign, proselytizing station matrons – they were expected to be responsible and qualified social workers. Local residents remained in control of their respective chapters, but were obliged to follow the guidelines if they wished to be affiliated with the national organization.

While the National Association set policies and procedures, its constituent Travelers’ Aid Societies applied its work through daily interactions with travelers on the local level. Individual societies varied according to their personnel, the travelers they encountered, the organization’s position in the city or town, and the location itself. Different cities attracted different types of people, creating unique environments for Travelers’ Aid to operate. Therefore, in order to examine the impact of the Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia as an independent agency and part of a larger national movement, it is necessary to understand the city in which it was based.

Before the Civil War, Richmond, Virginia was one of the major transportation centers of the South. Situated along a major north-south trading route, Richmond connected Southern states with Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. Its position along the James River provided access to the Atlantic, and through a canal to Lynchburg, Virginia.

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43 Baker, 38.
44 Ibid., 38.
allowed for water transportation to the West. The city also boasted five railroad lines by 1860, making it "the most accessible city in Virginia and... an important component of the country's developing national and regional urban systems." With so many points of access, the city flourished as a hub for business and industry, and featured a number of flour mills, tobacco factories, and iron and metal works. But, by the end of the war, Richmond was a shell of its former self. In April 1865, retreating Confederate soldiers started a fire that destroyed more than 900 city buildings, including two railroad stations and three bridges over the James River. In the wake of the war and subsequent Reconstruction efforts, Richmond city planners sought to rebuild the city and regain its status as a center for manufacturing, business, and trade in the New South economy.

By the early 20th century, efforts to restore the city to its pre-Civil War significance had been largely successful. Advances in transportation and industry had encouraged new businesses and economic diversity. Tobacco, flour, and iron remained vital to Richmond's manufacturing sector, but were joined by other products such as fertilizer and paper. In fact, with so much paper available, Richmond became a center for printing and publishing. Downtown, new banks and businesses attracted a range of shoppers, employees, and investors looking to capitalize on what the city had to offer. Neighborhoods began to change as upper and middle class white families moved away from crowded areas to the outskirts of the city. Meanwhile, much of the lower class and African American populations remained in the city, making Richmond one of the

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47 Ibid., 3-7.
48 Ibid., 8-11.
most density populated urban areas in the U.S.\textsuperscript{49} The 1910 census reported a total of 127,628 people living in the city. By 1920, the number had grown to 171,667, a third of whom were black.\textsuperscript{50}

Railroads played a significant role in the rebuilding of Richmond. As railways grew in number and importance in the West, city officials and the Chamber of Commerce sought to solidify their relationship with rail companies by negotiating new operating and pricing regulations.\textsuperscript{51} It was necessary to maintain such relationships for commercial interests and for individual travelers. Improvements in transportation infrastructure in general were indeed major issues for all of Virginia from Reconstruction through the end of the Progressive Era in the 1920s. Railroad tracks spread throughout the state as cities, towns, and counties improved existing roads and paved new ones.\textsuperscript{52} Richmond’s position as the state’s capital and established economic center meant it was among the first to benefit from better roads and new railways, making it one of the most accessible cities in the state.\textsuperscript{53}

Richmond’s size and reputation as a transportation hub made it the ideal location for the first Travelers’ Aid Society in Virginia. Similar to many other cities’ Travelers’ Aid Societies, the Richmond branch began as part of the YWCA in 1909, in order “to do


\textsuperscript{50} Hoffman, 71.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 7, 32-35.


\textsuperscript{53} Travelers’ Aid Society Handbook, 5.
Miss Helen Beardsley headed the original committee that staffed desks in train station waiting rooms. Little information is available on this early committee, but records indicate that one or two women were on duty at a time, for only a few hours each. It is unknown exactly how many people Travelers' Aid assisted at first, but within five years, the workload created by travelers seeking assistance had grown too much for the committee to handle. On September 1, 1914, the Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia separated from the YWCA and became an independent agency. Employing two full-time workers, its Board of Directors contained a range of prominent city businessmen, religious leaders, and philanthropic and professional women. In 1917, the TAS of Virginia became an official member of the National Association, and began to adopt its methods and standards concerning the assistance it provided.

Richmond was certainly not alone in its creation or need of a Travelers’ Aid Society. The mobilization that necessitated its formation in Virginia inspired similar groups across the United States because it was a national issue. From New York, the National Association strove to improve the nature of Travelers’ Aid overall. Through coordination and oversight practices, the National Association promoted professional principles of social work in order to better supply transients with skilled and qualified women capable of solving a range of problems. In turn, the TAS of Virginia interpreted and applied those standards of social work on a case-by-case basis as travelers entered Richmond. From the beginning, Travelers’ Aid agents professed a moral obligation to help naïve and distressed travelers in order to protect them from the perils of a new city.

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55 General Secretary's Report, 29 October 1914, TAS Records, Box 7, Folder 8, Library of Virginia.
56 Kabler, 31; *Travelers' Aid Handbook*, 5.
By extension, the city would be protected from an influx of crime and other immoral behavior.
Early Operations of the Travelers' Aid Society of Virginia

After its establishment as an independent organization in 1914, the members of the Travelers' Aid Society of Virginia set to work gathering supplies for their desks at the station, negotiating the logistics of staffing and funding, and promoting Travelers’ Aid as a respectable charitable organization capable of managing a range of travelers' difficulties. Chapter records, case reports, and statistics from 1914 to the mid 1920s illustrate an organization defining itself, its position, and its authority within the train stations, and eventually bus stations, of Richmond. Travelers’ Aid agents exercised their own brand of maternalism through social work, as evidenced through case reports and internal society documents. The early years of operation were significant in shaping who received assistance from Travelers’ Aid and from whom, how cases were managed and recorded, and delineating the scope under which the TAS functioned in Richmond.

Travelers’ Aid Societies existed to help travelers in need, but, who exactly qualified as a “traveler,” and what types of assistance did the organization provide? Generally speaking, any person could request assistance from Travelers’ Aid provided he or she was not a current permanent resident of the city in question. National Travelers’ Aid policy defined a “transient” as “the person or family who is in a community away from, or without, normal family, job, or community connections. In other words, he lacks roots in the community.” No one who was new to the city and presented a legitimate problem was to be denied assistance. The National Association described

itself as "non-sectarian, non-commercial, non-political protective organization to safeguard travelers."58 Another society handbook stated, "this service is available to travelers, runaways, migrant individuals and families, newcomers, and residents stranded elsewhere in the country, irrespective of age, sex, race, creed, nationality or economic status."59 Anyone entering, passing through, or leaving the city, mobile and without personal connections in the area ostensibly qualified for help.

Given the prevalence of segregation in the South and the size of the black population in the city, it is important to examine how Travelers’ Aid responded to transients of different races. Though race and segregation are rarely mentioned in the society’s records, available statistics indicate that the TAS of Virginia provided more assistance to white travelers than black.60 The reasons for this are not entirely evident. There might have been some form of personal or institutional prejudice that affected who TAS helped (though there is no indication of that in the group’s records), or perhaps, in Richmond, white travelers were just more inclined to ask for aid from white agents than black travelers were. Officially, the Travelers’ Aid Society did not discriminate against race. However, if the only Travelers’ Aid desk in the station was in the white waiting room, then black travelers would have to cross into an area of the station where were not entirely welcome. Black travelers may not have been prohibited from seeking assistance, but they may not have felt or known that Travelers’ Aid was available to them because it was in another room. The segregated spaces of the train station presumably contributed to the racial imbalance of the society’s clientele and presented challenges to the group’s operations.

58 Baker, 35.
59 Travelers’ Aid Handbook, 6.
60 Monthly report, Board of Directors, November 1936, TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 4, Library of Virginia.
In the opinion of the agents and Board of Directors, Richmond’s segregated waiting rooms presented logistical and safety concerns for all travelers. The purpose of keeping the races separate was defeated if a black traveler needed access to the white waiting room to request help from the Travelers’ Aid. Furthermore, it would be difficult to monitor both rooms for distressed travelers and dangerous characters if there was only one (white) agent on duty. In 1916, the Board of Directors debated whether or not to employ an African American woman to staff black waiting rooms in train stations. Agents reported finding black men in the white women’s restroom and the white waiting room, which made it “impossible for tired or sick women to have any privacy.”  

There was some discussion as to whether the society should hire a black Travelers’ Aid agent itself or ask for assistance from the Phyllis Wheatly YWCA, the black YWCA branch in Richmond, as they had already expressed interest in helping. In 1917, General Secretary Miss Earle E. Reck described a “movement” initiated by the city’s African American community to indeed hire a black Travelers’ Aid agent. There was a “very real want” for a black agent, and the Board of Directors believed this new position would help with the agents’ growing case loads. The TAS did eventually hire an African American agent, but there is no mention of the paid position in the group’s records until 1928 with Miss Lucinda Smith.

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61 Depot Committee Report, Minutes, Board of Directors, 12 December 1916, TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 2, Library of Virginia.
62 Depot Committee Report, Minutes, Board of Directors, 20 November and 12 December 1916, TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 2, Library of Virginia.
63 Untitled report from 1917 included with Membership and Contribution Lists, 1915-1922, TAS Records, Box 7, Folder 7, Library of Virginia.
64 General Secretary Sue Ruff thought Miss Smith was an excellent agent who did exceptional work and had earned the respect of her co-workers, railroad employees, and the travelers she encountered; “Most for Prevention” 1928 article, TAS Scrapbook, p. 13, Library of Virginia; Annual Report 1937, TAS Records, Box 7, Folder 3, Library of Virginia; Ruff, 77.
The safety issues of the segregated waiting rooms are not explicitly stated in the TAS of Virginia records. The black men who were found in the white women’s restroom and waiting room were not characterized as violent or frightening in the committee report in which they were mentioned – in fact, they were barely described at all. Still, their presence in spaces normally designated for white women provoked the TAS to find a way to prevent future incidents. Some historians have argued that the rise in the popularity of rail travel in the late 19th century contributed to codified racial segregation in the South as a means to protect white female propriety from sexually aggressive black men.65 It is possible that Travelers’ Aid members kept this perceived threat in mind, especially since their main priority was to guard young women from suspicious individuals. Maintaining the physical separation between races provided another layer of protection between vulnerable travelers and the dangerous city. By placing a black Travelers’ Aid agent in the black waiting room, the society helped reaffirm the boundaries of segregation while also honoring their commitment to assist all travelers in need.

Interestingly, members of the Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia recognized that Richmond was lacking in services for African Americans seeking help. There are references in committee minutes about Travelers’ Aid agents sharing information with the city’s black YWCA chapter, the lack of shelters that accepted “colored transients,” and how difficult it was to help black girls traveling by themselves to find respectable jobs.66 Travelers’ Aid agents were aware of the difficulties facing black travelers, but

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65 Barbara Y. Welke examines the legal and social ramifications of this topic in “When All the Women Were White, and All the Blacks Were Men: Gender, Class, Race, and the Road to Plessy, 1855-1914,” Law and History Review 13 (Autumn 1995): 295-313. www.jstor.org/ (accessed November 7, 2008).
66 Undated report, Minutes, Transient Committee, 1930-1934, TAS Records, Box 6, Folder 8, Library of Virginia.
aside from hiring a black station agent and cooperating with other agencies, exactly what they did to solve these problems remains vague.

Virtually all sources concerning the TAS, in Richmond and across the country, recount how agents staffed train and bus stations by keeping a close watch on newcomers and were ready and able to assist them when needed. The majority of requests were relatively simple: workers provided directions, sent telegrams, and allowed the use of the telephone. Such services were relatively easy to accommodate, required no major paperwork, and were perhaps the most popular features of Traveler’s Aid. Positioned at desks near or in waiting rooms, agents could also supply a comfortable chair or a cot to relax on, food for those who could not afford to buy their own, and survey people waiting or passing through. Parents or railroad personnel could make arrangements in advance for Travelers’ Aid workers to accompany children traveling alone on their trip and to look after them when the train stopped until they could be picked up by a relative. Similar arrangements were also made for the elderly, disabled, and mentally and physically ill. People made an appointment with a case worker in advance or simply walked up to the desk if they needed help.

Station agents were also trained to be assertive in assisting transients. In order to dispel the notion that a typical Travelers’ Aid agent was just another “sweet-face, elderly woman, complacently knitting or reading in the station while waiting for those in need... to seek her out,” agents were instructed how to approach, assess, help, and record the various travelers passing through the stations. After all, Travelers’ Aid Societies aimed to replace station matrons with trained and qualified individuals who could do more than just babysit or proselytize. In order to look the part of a responsible social worker,

Travelers Aid agents were instructed to wear “plain dark tailor-made clothing without fancy trimming, plain hats of medium size, trimmed with moderation, waists of plain material made simply and with long sleeves,” along with a TAS badge. Agents closely monitored crowds as they departed from trains and buses to determine if anyone was in particular distress or need. Numerous internal society reports reflect the pride Travelers’ Aid workers took in using their skills and training to solve a range of problems. According to the Richmond chapter’s General Secretary Sue Ruff, good agents needed to possess education and experience in social work as well as “a protective nature, a selective instinct, and detective sense, with sincerity of purpose, dependability, kindliness, and intelligent understanding, and above all... faith in God, in man, and in one’s self. It may be added, a sense of humor [often helped] one over[come] difficult situations.”

Early Travelers’ Aid literature, reports, and agents professed a desire to assist everyone in need, but still made it clear from the outset that the organizations’ main priority was to protect young women and children. Due in large part to its original affiliations with the YWCA, the National Association and the Richmond chapter of the TAS were firmly grounded in the conviction that women and children traveling unaccompanied were more susceptible to vice and physical danger in urban areas than men. The fear of what could befall a young child or woman on his or her own during the late 19th century and early 20th persisted in forming the moral justification for Travelers’ Aid work. A newspaper clipping from the early 1920s portrayed the TAS of

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68 Proper and understated attire of workers appears to have been an important subject to the National Travelers’ Aid Association, as Baker spends several pages on the matter. Specifically, “colored veils, showy ribbons [and] conspicuous jewelry” were not to be worn while on duty; Baker, 128.
69 Ruff, 56.
70 Kabler, 30-32.
Virginia "as a barrier between the young girl traveling alone and the enemies of society."\textsuperscript{71} The TAS operated under the assumption that "agents of vice travel[ed] on trains and boats alert to secure victims," and "loiter[ed] in and about terminals ready to profit by the problems of inexperienced travelers."\textsuperscript{72} As one newspaper article described it, "the modern young country girl [possessed] an adventurous spirit coupled with dense ignorance of the city and its ways. The Travelers' Aid [watched out] for such young girls who arrive[ed] to look for work, or to have a good time and see the sights, or merely to escape from uncongenial home surroundings without money for a night's lodging in their pockets."\textsuperscript{73} In the context of early 20\textsuperscript{th} century Progressive Era America, if Travelers' Aid existed to serve those transient individuals at the greatest disadvantage in society, it followed that women and children would be their primary concerns.

The records of the Travelers' Aid Society of Virginia illustrate its commitment to protecting female and child transients, even though they represented only a fraction of travelers. For example, minutes from a Board of Directors meeting on December 12, 1916 state that of the 1,287 individuals assisted during the month of November, "632 were women, 333 girls, 141 children, 24 boys, 147 men."\textsuperscript{74} A year later, World War I made the Richmond TAS agents even busier. Along with providing refreshments for the troops, agents had to be particularly vigilant as "women and girls suddenly threw aside old conventions and restraints, with new liberty."\textsuperscript{75} Richmond attracted a range of soldiers and civilians alike due to its own merits as an urban center and its proximity to

\textsuperscript{71} "Book Will Be Sold by Travelers' Aid," undated article, TAS Scrapbook, p. 2, Library of Virginia.  
\textsuperscript{72} Baker, 39.  
\textsuperscript{73} "Travelers' Aid Workers Care for 15, 696 Persons;" undated article, TAS Scrapbook, p. 3, Library of Virginia.  
\textsuperscript{74} Minutes, Board of Directors, 12 December 1916, TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 2, Library of Virginia.  
\textsuperscript{75} Ruff, 10.
military bases and munitions plants in Hopewell, Petersburg, Newport News, and Norfolk. The city’s railroads made it an embarkation point for troops and a stop on the line for those following in their wake. This increase in travelers increased the need for TAS agents to be as alert and well-trained as possible. While employing educated social workers might have previously been a luxury for a society, they became a necessity by the end of the 1910s. The war not only presented novel challenges with female travelers, but also illustrated a new range of traveling problems in general and emphasized the importance and benefits of standardized service and record keeping. Progressives in the social sciences were avid proponents of keeping records and notes on their work. Gathered statistics were meant to be analyzed in order to scientifically and rationally approach social issues. Available monthly and annual statistical reports indicate that women and children sought assistance from the TAS more often than men throughout the 1920s, until the onset of the Great Depression. These records do not always specify the type of service individual men requested and received – whether they were simply asking for directions or needed more serious assistance and were directed elsewhere. At any rate, cases involving women and children received the majority of attention in TAS literature, reflecting the society’s original social priorities.

It was up to the leaders and staff of the TAS of Virginia to adhere to and implement the policies on which the group was founded. The Board of Directors included a number of local prominent businessmen, religious leaders, and philanthropic

76 Ruff, 10.
77 Ibid., 12.
78 Kabler, 34.
79 Higbie, 81-84.
and professional women with backgrounds in social or charitable work.80 These members used their connections in and around Richmond to secure and allocate funding and resources, coordinate with other organizations, and to make decisions concerning the priorities and functions of the society. However, there is no indication that the individuals on the Board of Directors ever assisted with travelers in the society’s daily operations. Instead, paid Travelers’ Aid agents and volunteers staffed the desks and interacted directly with travelers, effectively making them the main authority on who qualified for help.

The majority of the employed agents who monitored the railroad and bus stations from the 1920s onwards were qualified social workers. All of them appear to have been women, as were those volunteers who managed train station desks so that the paid agents had more time to follow up on the more complicated cases.81 Presumably, these women shared the middle class backgrounds and values that were common to Progressives at the time, given their educations and the maternalist nature of their work. The society also occasionally employed female social welfare students from local colleges interested in earning field experience. This was difficult at times because salaries were small, hours were long, and Travelers’ Aid agents were still thought of as “some sort of rescue workers, or station matrons,” and young professional women were interested in working for larger, higher-profile organizations.82 The Board of Directors featured a mixture of men and women, but, as with most Progressive Era welfare groups,

80 Board of Directors lists, 1915-1950, TAS Records, Box 7, Folder 6, Library of Virginia.
81 Depot Committee Report, Minutes, Board of Directors, 12 December 1916, TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 2, Library of Virginia.
82 Ruff, 57.
women were in charge of interacting with the travelers and applying the policies and procedures of the society on a daily basis.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to develop a complete picture of individual TAS agents who staffed the train stations in Richmond. Records focus on how agents helped travelers in need instead of what their backgrounds or qualifications were, or even who they were. Case reports and committee minutes usually refer to the “agent” on duty rather than a specific person.\(^{83}\) Most available details pertain to the salaries and the duties of the paid agents. For instance, Miss Helen E. Beardsley, the woman who originally began the Travelers Aid Committee as part of the Richmond branch of the YWCA, was paid $90 a month for her continued service with the society. As General Secretary, she made regular reports to Board of Directors concerning the number of people helped, the details of various cases, and the environment at the train stations. In 1916, Miss Earle L. Reck assumed the position of General Secretary and received $75 a month. Another agent, Miss Mable Grange, was paid $50 a month.\(^{84}\) These apparently unmarried women managed the daily operations of the TAS of Virginia during the group’s formative years. They coordinated volunteers, collected materials and funds, and kept notes on the society’s activities.

Most funding for Travelers’ Aid came from private donors. They typically gave anywhere between five and fifty dollars in monthly or yearly installments. While the majority of funds came from these private donors, other Richmond charitable organizations, the city, and the Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O) and the Richmond,

\(^{83}\) Names of Travelers’ Aid workers are rarely mentioned in official records, particularly during the society’s early decades. Of the few individuals that are included by name, I was unable to locate any further information about them or their work with TAS.

\(^{84}\) Minutes, Board of Directors, 24 November 1916, TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 1, Library of Virginia.
Fredericksburg and Potomac (R.F.&P.) railroads also contributed to Travelers’ Aid work. General Secretary Sue Ruff characterized the railroads as “cooperative,” and said that they recognized the value of the service the society provided and were willing to help maintain it. How this partnership developed is not documented, but it suggests that railroad employees, whether local or corporate, understood the value of the service TAS provided. The society rarely had an excess of money, and often experienced difficulty in paying its employees because operating costs were higher than expected. Later on, funding from the Richmond Community Fund, along with support from the city and state of Virginia (and briefly, the federal government), would grow and then shrink over the course of the Depression. However, private donations always remained the primary source of income for the society, allowing it to operate, for the most part, with little oversight from other Richmond institutions.

Travelers arriving in Richmond in the early 20th century benefited from the agents monitoring train station waiting rooms. From these desks, Travelers’ Aid agents provided directions, a place to stay for the night, a job, help finding a relative, and surveyed the crowds passing through. Agents evaluated each traveler’s situation and determined the appropriate course of action based on available resources. The safety of women and children was always a top priority for the society, especially in light of the social changes brought on by World War I. But, at the same time, Travelers’ Aid policy understood that transients of all classes, races, ages, gender and faiths had a right to assistance. The women who served as Travelers’ Aid agents exercised their authority as a protective force to determine who deserved and received help. Whether they were

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86 Ruff, 11.
conscious of it or not, these women effectively imposed their own sense of maternalism on the city of Richmond.
Assisting and Protecting the Traveler

The Travelers' Aid Society of Virginia was forced to alter its primary purpose in order to continue to meet the changing problems of the travelers of Richmond. By extension, the procedures by which the members of the society actually achieved this goal changed between the late 1910s and the 1930s. When the Richmond chapter began its work in 1914, its main focus was to protect young women and children from the potential dangers of the city. Travelers' Aid agents took measures to monitor and help these women and children, which they often recounted in detailed case reports that reflected their maternalist ideas and justified their work. But, over time, the society's objective and practices were amended in order to meet the changes in social work and the needs of the city during the Great Depression.

The work of the TAS of Virginia during the 1910s and early 1920s is perhaps best described through the case reports agents presented to the members of the society as well as the general public. These cases appear in a variety of literature, including promotional pamphlets, newsletters, the minutes of Board of Directors meetings, monthly and annual reports, training manuals and handbooks, and even a few plays describing the nature and benefits of the field of social work. All these early stories reiterate how dangerous unfamiliar cities could be for single women and children and how dedicated the TAS was to protecting such disadvantaged members of society. Travelers' Aid workers made little attempt to keep their personal attitudes toward their work and the people they helped a secret. Maternalist class politics are noticeable in these reports as travelers, often referred to as “poor” and in some pitiful condition, relied on professional Travelers’ Aid
agents for help. Agents seem to have held themselves socially above their clients, applying a sense of middle class superiority over the travelers they encountered. At any rate, these case studies are glowing reports of how such an organization benefitted the downtrodden traveler. Travelers’ Aid members essentially acted as a combination of security guards and surrogate mothers for transients in need, as well as Richmond itself.

Case reports from the 1910s and 1920s are somewhat formulaic in structure and tone. They almost always focus on the shabby, ignorant, naïve, and pitiable women and children who suddenly arrived in Richmond without money and friends, and in some form of distress. These people either found their way to the safety of the Travelers’ Aid desk in the station or were otherwise immediately identified by the agent on duty as being in need of help. Using her skills as a compassionate, experienced, and capable social worker, the Travelers’ Aid agent (always a woman) would quickly assess the travelers’ specific situations and locate solutions to their problems. Young women were soon on their way to respectable lodgings and gainful employment. Runaways were returned home if possible, or else placed in shelters. Children were supervised until collected by relatives or placed in the care of the train conductor who would escort them on the next stage of their journey. At any point, a dangerous individual might have been prowling around the train station, waiting to corrupt or harm unsuspecting innocents. But, the ever vigilant TAS agents always seemed to succeed in protecting the physical and moral well-being of the people believed to be most at risk. Even in internal reports, meant to be read only by chapter members or members of the Board of Directors, there is a sense of great accomplishment and moral justification.
A secretary’s report from 1914 describes an incident with a girl who “fell into the hands of a drug fiend” while waiting for a train.\textsuperscript{87} The “fiend,” a woman, convinced the girl she knew her aunt and had persuaded her to leave with her when the Travelers’ Aid agent interfered. The agent reasoned with the girl and convinced her not to leave with such an “irresponsible woman.”\textsuperscript{88} Another girl, Anna, was traveling from Illinois to Richmond to meet her father who would ride with her on the train the rest of the way home, but she was frightened when he arrived to pick her up at the station drunk. The agent on duty agreed to watch over her until he became sober enough to travel.\textsuperscript{89} In yet another case, a young woman became stranded in Richmond on her way home from work. The family that normally escorted her failed to meet her, she had no money, and it was a cold night. But, in the words of General Secretary Sue Ruff, the girl “thought of the Travelers Aid desk at Main Street Station and [as a result] her problem was solved.”\textsuperscript{90}

Danger seems to have lurked around every corner of the city once a girl stepped off a train. Indeed, travelers were “warned that in every city, and even in the smaller towns, there [were] unscrupulous men and women – agents of every form of vice – who by offers of apparent friendship and assistance, or by appealing for sympathy and help, prey[ed] upon and lure[d] away the unsuspecting.”\textsuperscript{91} Specifics on these nefarious characters and their intentions were rarely mentioned in internal TAS documents and promotional materials, which makes it difficult to determine exactly who or what the Travelers’ Aid agents of Richmond were protecting against other than “crime” and “vice.” Still, few young women seem to have considered the dangers they might

\textsuperscript{87} General Secretary’s Report, 29 October 1914, TAS Records, Box 7, Folder 8, Library of Virginia.  
\textsuperscript{88} General Secretary’s Report, 24 October 1914, TAS Records, Box 7, Folder 8, Library of Virginia.  
\textsuperscript{89} Ruff, 77.  
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 69.  
\textsuperscript{91} Baker, 138.
encounter when they agreed to accompany a stranger on an errand or arrived in a strange city without a job or contacts. Such case reports in fact reinforce the general helplessness and naïveté of women. It is interesting, however, that no case reports feature young women who arrived in Richmond with family to stay with or a job lined up. While these women clearly did not require the services of Travelers’ Aid, their absence in official documents is noticeable and raises questions as to how often young women did successfully travel on their own. In reality, the situation in Richmond might not have been as dire as Travelers’ Aid agents depicted in their records.

The physical and moral well-being of the traveler were the society’s top priorities, but were subject to the middle class values of its workers. In the early years of the TAS, agents often investigated “suitable” and “decent” housing conditions, provided “proper clothing” to young girls to help them “find employment of the right nature, [connected] them with the proper church and social agencies to assist them in becoming good citizens,” and visited hospitals. They introduced girls and young women to a respectable lifestyle before they descended into a world of sin. A case report from 1915 recounts the difficulties station agents had with a young woman who had come to Richmond with plans to become a writer. The girl presented a problem, as she “ignore[d] the bread and butter side of life, and [spent] her waking hours above the clouds, [made] few attempts to secure work, and [proved] incompetent in the one position which she held for a week.” Worse still, she was “tangled up in the New Thought religion.” Travelers’ Aid agents delivered money sent by the girl’s sister, put her in contact with

92 Emergency Committee Report, Minutes, Board of Directors, 12 December 1916, TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 2, Library of Virginia.
93 General Secretary’s Report, January 1915, TAS Records, Box 7, Folder 8, Library of Virginia.
94 Ibid.
twq local women who would introduce her to a more practical way of life, and found her a job at a newspaper. In this instance, the girl in question was not in any physical or criminal danger. Instead, in the eyes of the TAS agents, she was in danger of wasting her life on irresponsible daydreams and expectations. Travelers' Aid attempted to bring her back to their understanding of reality and provide her with the opportunity to be a productive member of society.

Single young women were not the only subjects in Travelers' Aid reports. Children and families also made frequent appearances. There are numerous accounts of agents looking after lost children or children traveling by themselves. In fact, children traveled alone quite frequently in the 1910s and 1920s. In the 1920s, more than 50,000 children under the age sixteen traveled across the U.S. under the care of Travelers' Aid workers. But, the majority of cases classified as “failure to meet relatives or friends” involved unattended children. Most monthly reports from the Richmond chapter feature children who arrived in the city by themselves. In most cases, Travelers' Aid agents looked after the young travelers until they could be claimed by relatives. If no one came and relatives could not be contacted by phone, agents would find safe lodgings for the children until arrangements were made to send them home.

Runaways attracted particular attention. Reports describe minors who left home to travel or work as misguided youths who would generally be better off with their families than on their own. Agents determined whether it was safe or not to return the runaways to their homes. In one case, a 16 year-old boy arrived at the train station looking “so dejected in appearance as to attract the attention of the Travelers’ Aid

95 General Secretary’s Report, January 1915, TAS Records, Box 7, Folder 8, Library of Virginia.
96 Kimble, 24-25.
The boy reluctantly explained to the agent that he had left home so as not to be a burden to his parents who were struggling to make enough to live on and keep him in school. He eventually agreed to return home because his mother might need him. An unhappy home life was a frequent justification for running away, but Travelers' Aid agents operated on the maternalist belief that if they could not stop children from traveling, perhaps they could “salvage some of them, help to put some of the broken homes together, and co-operate with all the other agencies for child care and protection.”

Families were also encouraged to return home if possible. In another instance, a mother came to the Travelers’ Aid desk with her two young children looking for help. She had come to Richmond to look for her husband who had deserted her but did not have enough funds to return home. Agents managed to find the husband and convinced him to assist his family on their way back. A Travelers’ Aid worker also convinced a man confined to a wheel chair that he and his son would do better to go back to New York rather than move to California to take up farming. His disability aside, the agent argued that it was in the son’s best interest to return home, attend school, and make “suitable friends instead of being out ‘on the road’ sleeping in ‘flop houses’ and making hap-hazard acquaintance[s].” Rather than persuade these transients to pause or settle down in the city and divert relief funds or contribute to the degradation of society, Travelers’ Aid workers encouraged these people to return to the communities from which they had come.

97 Ruff, 72.
98 Ibid., 72.
99 Kimble, 30.
100 Ruff, 72.
In general, Travelers’ Aid agents made a point to promote and maintain stable family units. Runaway children were sent back home, except in cases of abuse or complete unwillingness. Mothers traveling alone with small children were to be cared for and watched over, similar to the treatment of young single girls that arrived at the station, until they could make their way safely home. Families were to be preserved and protected whenever possible, though it was acknowledged by agents that not all family situations were healthy.102

In case reports, the care and empathy displayed in finding lost relatives and preserving family groups was often equated to the care a mother was supposed to demonstrate towards her own family. General Secretary Sue Ruff considered compassion a necessity, saying, “kindliness and understanding should be the attribute of every Travelers Aid worker, in fact, of every successful social worker.”103 The TAS of Virginia was proud of its advances in modernization and its efforts to become more professional by hiring educated social workers to replace the former stereotypical train station matrons. However, the tone and prose used in case reports and promotional TAS literature make it difficult to separate institutional social work from personal maternalist attitudes. Travelers’ Aid agents were encouraged to use their maternal compassion outside of their respective families and in the very public train stations, while simultaneously maintaining a professional manner and authority.

102 Both Michael McGerr’s A Fierce Discontent and Maureen Fitzgerald’s Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York’s Welfare System, 1830-1920 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006) discuss Progressive efforts to create organizations and reforms that would compensate for the failings of families (particularly among the laboring class), and how many prominent leaders of the movement rebelled against their parents’ standards for Victorian families.
103 Ruff, 2.
Protection was the central theme of the early Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia. Agents guarded the city from their desks in the train stations. They promoted themselves as “stand[ing] as a barrier between the young girl traveling alone and the enemies of society.” In Sue Ruff’s opinion, “the Travelers Aid badge was really a protection, as it was looked upon in the way of a police badge; yet we did not have police authority but always had recognition and cooperation from the police, as well as from other departments of the city.” As social workers, they not only watched over individuals passing through the bus or train stations, but prevented crime from taking place within the city. Train stations became safer venues for everyone because there was a “sharp-eyed woman” who looked out for young travelers and was willing to report suspicious behavior to the police or station workers. Among Richmond’s various charitable groups, Travelers’ Aid established itself by identifying and avoiding danger as soon as the would-be female and child victims stepped off the train and safely escorting them into the city.

It is worth noting that individual case reports do not reflect the majority of Travelers’ Aid work. Minor requests to use the telephone or to help locate a friend or relative did not produce the same level of in-depth story telling that more serious cases did. Friendly and efficient help, no matter how small the request, was important to maintain the society’s reputation of providing quality assistance to people in need. Brochures and news clipping on the TAS feature a number of these small-scale stories in order to illustrate the range of the group’s services and abilities. Whether helping a

104 “Book will be sold by Travelers’ Aid,” undated article, TAS Scrapbook, p. 2, Library of Virginia.
105 Ruff, 14.
106 Ibid., 64.
runaway teenager find her way back safely home or recommending a good restaurant for Virginia ham to a New Yorker, Travelers’ Aid workers were capable of handling problems of any size. However, these stories would become less frequent with the onset of Depression as the number and complexity of cases increased. Agents grew more concerned with reporting on thousands of requests for jobs and lodging rather than how often they gave out directions.

The end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s brought significant organizational changes to the TAS of Virginia. In 1928, Travelers’ Aid became part of the Community Fund, a coalition of Richmond charitable organizations. Its purpose was to promote cooperation among groups to eliminate overlapping services and use limited funds and resources more efficiently. Travelers’ Aid worked in cooperation with the American Legion, Railroad YMCA, South Side Mission, Red Cross, Phyllis Wheatley YWCA, Goodwill Industries, Evangeline Booth Home and Hospital, Bureau of Catholic Charities, YWCA, Salvation Army, and Family Service Society to better serve the transient and homeless populations of Richmond in accordance with their respective strengths. Travelers’ Aid agents were still based in train stations in order to assist travelers, but they were encouraged to recommend individuals to other agencies if they were better suited to help their needs and the situation was not an emergency.

Meanwhile, TAS still professed its commitment to helping women and children, even though monthly statistics showed that the majority of people asking for help were men.

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108 Kabler, 42.
Also, an increase in travelers by bus resulted in a Travelers’ Aid worker being stationed at the bus terminal.\footnote{Minutes, Board of Directors, 12 March 1930, TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 3, Library of Virginia.}

In order to remain active and relevant in Richmond, Travelers’ Aid was forced to adapt in response to changing circumstances. Inter-agency cooperation with the other members of the Community Fund, altering the requirements for people who received aid, more transients in need than ever, and other challenges brought on or exacerbated by the Great Depression, moved the focus of the Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia away from its original priorities. Agents retained their sense of moral obligation, but based it less on maternalist ideals of protection and more on the standards of professional social welfare.

The primary differences between the TAS of the 1910s and that of the 1930s are the people they assisted and the methods they used. As stated above, when the society began as part of the YWCA in 1909, its main goal was help all travelers in need, but in particular to protect girls and young women as they entered Richmond from physical and moral harm. The definition of a “traveler” was somewhat fluid, and the Travelers’ Aid agents used their own discretion in terms of who to help. But, by the 1930s, “travelers” had become “transients.” TAS agents continued to help travelers as they entered Richmond, but the more formal terminology reflected new regulations on how far they could extend their assistance. In 1932, members of the Community Fund agreed that a “transient” was any individual or family “en route” through Richmond.\footnote{Minutes, Transient Committee, 29 November 1932, TAS Records, Box 6, Folder 8, Library of Virginia.} Meanwhile, people who had lived in the area for less than a year but still considered themselves “established” in the city would be referred to as “non-residents,” but still assisted by
those agencies designated for residents.\textsuperscript{112} The distinction is somewhat subtle, but was the first of many policy changes the TAS would make during the Depression in their cooperation with other city, state, and federal relief agencies. For instance, by 1935, Travelers’ Aid agents were still able to assist with relatively simple aid requests and emergencies, but the society had agreed to be more selective in who received more involved assistance. Travelers’ Aid would assume responsibility over “transients under sixteen for care and case work.”\textsuperscript{113} Transients over sixteen with serious problems were to be referred to other agencies, though that remained up to agents’ discretion.\textsuperscript{114} With limited funding and a growing workload, resources and time had to be used wisely and efficiently.

Part of the premise behind the Community Fund was that each agency would adhere to specific guidelines when dealing with transient and homeless individuals in order to ensure that no one organization was overburdened or taken advantage of. Gradually, state and federal regulations and standards for residency and welfare made the assessments of these agencies all the more significant because they helped determine who could and could not receive aid and from where. In time, the expressed focus of Travelers’ Aid became less about helping protect individual young women as they arrived in the city (though they remained committed to the safety and welfare of children), and more about finding work for thousands of transient adults because they presented a more pressing need. A report from November of 1937 shows that of the 1,078 cases handled by TAS that month, most involved adults looking for lodging and

\textsuperscript{112} Minutes, Transient Committee, 29 November 1932, TAS Records, Box 6, Folder 8, Library of Virginia.
\textsuperscript{113} Minutes, Board of Directors, 16 January 1935, TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 3, Library of Virginia.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
jobs.\textsuperscript{115} In 1938 alone, the TAS assisted 11,197 people – approximately the population of Hopewell, Virginia at the time.\textsuperscript{116}

The high number of cases during the 1930s is reflected in the TAS chapter records of the time. Statistics and financial reports became more common in committee meetings, leaving fewer individual case reports that colorfully describe the interaction between station workers and travelers. Reports to the Board of Directors mention that more and more people were entering the city, but provide few details. For example, the 1937 annual report states that 2,985 people arrived by passenger train that year and requested help from TAS. The report does not provide a breakdown of this specific group’s demographics or problems, making them almost indistinguishable from the 3,118 hitchhikers who also asked for aid.\textsuperscript{117} Incidentally, records from the 1910s and 1920s do not even have a category for methods of travel – most travelers were presumed to have arrived in the city by passenger train unless otherwise noted by a TAS agent. The society expanded its focus beyond helpless women and children to meet the needs of the growing transient community, making it difficult to discern a clear image of a typical 1930s transient. It is unknown how many individuals or families entered or passed through Richmond with sufficient funds or social connections and did not seek out or require the help of Travelers’ Aid.

The people behind the Travelers’ Aid Society also changed over time. Some of the original members of the Board of Directors and social workers stayed involved with the society through the 1930s, but with the onset of the Depression, it became clear that

\textsuperscript{115} Monthly Report, Board of Directors, November 1936, TAS Records Box 3, Folder 4, Library of Virginia.
\textsuperscript{116} "Report of President, Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, Annual meeting, May 1939," TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 3, Library of Virginia.
\textsuperscript{117} Annual Report 1937, TAS Records, Box 7, Folder 3, Library of Virginia.
more trained, social work professionals were required to assist with complex cases. In 1937, the TAS hired two recent graduates of the new Richmond School of Social Work. Previously, the society had been forced to search for potential employees outside of the state. Hiring women who were already familiar with the city and its problems was considered a windfall.\footnote{\textit{TAS Appoints Executive Secretary, Case Worker," article, April 8, 1937, TAS Records, Box 1, Folder 3, Library of Virginia.}}

With new people, came new procedures for processing travelers' requests. Initially, Travelers' Aid agents received job guidelines and instructions, but these materials were somewhat vague on the exact details of how to assess and help a needy traveler. Agents were encouraged to be courteous and friendly, and to use their own judgment when making decisions on who was worthy of help and who deserved suspicion.\footnote{\textit{Appendix: Instructions to Agents," Baker, 145-157.}} However, in keeping with the National Association's proclivity for modernizing and standardizing the field of social work, the intake policy for travelers became much clearer and more concise over time. In the 1930s, a series of six steps was laid out in order to determine the extent of the problem and how Travelers' Aid could best resolve it. The steps included:

1. \textit{"Reception}, including registration and a skilled private interview. The first contact frequently determines whether the transient will move on or will stay to work out a plan for himself.
2. \textit{Clearance} of name with previous registrations within the agency and with Social Service Exchange or Index.
3. \textit{Preliminary crude classification}.
4. \textit{Transfer of Case}. Where the service requested is not the function of the agency, the agency communicates with the appropriate organizations, the case is transferred, and the agency's responsibility discharged. Where the interview indicated that it is the agency's responsibility, the worker may take the following steps:
5. \textit{Emergency relief} and assignment to receiving station, municipal shelters, or preferred lodgings, boarding house, etc., for temporary care pending inquiry,
more refined classification, and further interviews with the client on a plan for himself.

6. Medical inspection (Mandatory for public agencies dispensing Federal funds and highly desirable when any applicant is given continued aid or care within a group shelter).”

These procedures allowed the TAS of Virginia to identify and disperse needy transients among Richmond’s well-organized coalition of charitable groups. Member organizations of the Community Fund, including Travelers’ Aid, cooperated with each other in an effort to capitalize on their own strengths. In order to provide the best or most case-specific assistance, transients needed to be organized appropriately according to need.

One of the original Progressive justifications for Travelers’ Aid was that it provided protection and security for the city as well as the traveler. Preventing unsuspecting travelers from descending into vice and crime made Richmond a safer place for everyone by extension. The TAS remained protective of transients and the city through the 1930s, but placed less explicit emphasis on immoral activities and more on the impact of vagrancy and the limits of the city’s resources. Maternalism as a justification of Travelers’ Aid faded to the background as social work in general became more professional and more prevalent in American society. Still, the organization retained its protective nature. Between March and June of 1938, TAS participated in a study on the effectiveness of fingerprinting transients. Fingerprinting had only recently been deemed a useful tool in police work, but the study’s coordinators believed it could easily be implemented by other agencies since the “equipment costs under $10

120 Wilson and de la Pole, 13.
121 Minutes, Board of Directors, 16 January 1935 and 12 May 1937, TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 3, Library of Virginia.
and any intelligent person may learn to take clear, accurate prints in two hours.”\textsuperscript{123} Fingerprinting transients would provide definitive identification of individuals and make it easier to monitor them as they moved across the country. This would supply greater insight into the national transient “problem,” make it easier for social workers to keep track of who had previously received aid, and determine if a transient had a criminal background.\textsuperscript{124} Interestingly, the study showed that more than half of the men who were fingerprinted in Richmond had previously been arrested in other cities.\textsuperscript{125} TAS records do not indicate if fingerprinting became standard practice for the agents at the bus and train stations – only that the study had supplied the society with useful information that merited close examination.\textsuperscript{126} In this case, agents went beyond simply scrutinizing crowds for potential victims and dangerous elements as they had done in the past. Instead, they inspected transients’ identities for previous offenses to determine what kind of assistance they deserved and what kind of threat they posed to the city.

How did the Great Depression affect the Travelers’ Aid promise to assist and protect travelers? Overall, the society never wavered in its obligation to help travelers, but rather altered its focus and approach towards those individuals who requested assistance. TAS workers continued to provide directions, answer questions, look after unattended children, and locate lost friends and family. When the society began in 1909, there was a perceived need to actively monitor people arriving in the city so as to prevent young women from falling into corrupt hands. Utilizing their middle class sense of morality, the original agents made train stations, as well as Richmond in general, safer

\textsuperscript{123} Guild, 367.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 366-368.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 368.
\textsuperscript{126} "Report of President, Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, Annual meeting, May 1939,” TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 3, Library of Virginia.
because they were able to curtail future crime, to some degree. Within a decade, the
maternalist and moral justifications that were pivotal to the establishment of the society
had largely dropped out of professional usage. The growth and demands on social work
during the Great Depression began to overshadow the Travelers' Aid's specific
Progressive foundations. Agents still monitored crowds in train and bus stations, but the
force of numbers made it difficult to keep women and children the top priority. It was
necessary to protect travelers and Richmond a different way, by collaborating with other
agencies within the city and helping adult men find respectable work. Travelers' Aid of
the 1930s might have lost some of its more overt maternalist and middle class politics
over time, but in the process it became a modern, effective, and significant social welfare
organization.
Epilogue and Conclusion

By the end of the 1930s, Travelers' Aid Society of Virginia was the key organizing and moderating agency of the Community Fund. In addition to providing assistance to transients, the TAS also managed funding and coordinated between the coalition's various organizations.\(^{127}\) With the start of World War II, TAS opened three United Service Organization (USO) lounges in the city's train and bus stations as places for troops to relax, that were "financed by USO, manned by volunteers and supervised by a Travelers' Aid staff worker."\(^{128}\) Afterward, Travelers' Aid, for the most part, reverted back to its previous goals. With different language and less moral supremacy, the society re-committed itself to assisting travelers, providing information and protection to the public, cooperating with other area social work agencies, studying the causes and effects of transiency, and working to advance the field of social work.\(^{129}\) The TAS remained a popular and useful service in Richmond until the 1970s. Perhaps due to the increase in car and air travel, the need for the TAS gradually began to wane. By 1986, Travelers' Aid had become a much smaller organization. Funded primarily through the United Way of Greater Richmond, this incarnation of the Travelers Aid Society of Virginia provided counseling and emergency financial assistance to members of the homeless population in Richmond.\(^{130}\) At the time of this writing, the society is still in operation in Richmond, though in a much-diminished capacity.

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\(^{127}\) "Report of President, Travelers' Aid Society of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, Annual meeting, May 1939," TAS Records, Box 3, Folder 3, Library of Virginia.


\(^{129}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{130}\) Untitled media release from the Travelers' Aid Society of Virginia to the Representative of the Richmond Area-News Media, 27 November 1986, TAS Records, Box 1, Folder 7, Library of Virginia.
In its prime, the Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia exercised tremendous influence over travelers arriving in Richmond, as well as the city itself. Numerous social work organizations of the Progressive Era professed a desire to assist women and children in navigating the political and social difficulties created by living in a male-dominated society. Travelers’ Aid Societies literally helped guide women and children safely through the possibly dangerous physical spaces of unfamiliar train stations and cities, directly into the morally and materially comfortable middle class lifestyle. Late 19th and early 20th century fears about transients and hoboes, vice and crime, unfamiliar cities, and the fragility of female innocence combined to form a national climate of uncertainty in which Travelers’ Aid, the YWCA, and similar charitable or rescue organizations functioned.

As a center for government, economics, and transportation, Richmond, Virginia attracted its share of travelers during the early decades of the 20th century. The Travelers’ Aid Society of Virginia was a member of the National Travelers’ Association, and effectively implemented the policies and methods of the national organization on individuals as they passed in and out of the city’s train stations. On principle, all Travelers’ Aid Societies worked to help all travelers in need safely reach their destination. No one was to be denied assistance on the basis of gender, age, race, or religion. However, as egalitarian as this might sound, the Travelers’ Aid workers who staffed train stations were free to exercise their own judgment as to who required help. Always women, these agents patrolled platforms and waiting rooms, ever vigilant for unattended women and children who might become easy victims of the suspicious characters lurking around the stations. Travelers Aid workers were encouraged to use
their inner maternal instincts and social worker experience to form a rather unique security force capable of compassion as well as professionalism.

Richmond as a city benefited from the service of the TAS as well. For starters, the presence of agents in train and bus stations reduced the amount of crime in the vicinity. They acted as a line of defense between the traveler and the city. However, if the traveler was at risk from falling victim to the dangers of the city, then Richmond was also at risk from travelers contributing to vice and crime. Travelers’ Aid agents believed it was important to guide transients into respectable housing and employment instead of allowing them to disappear into the city unchecked. In the Progressive Era, immorality and crime posed the greatest threats to transients and the city alike. The Great Depression shifted the society’s priorities toward social and economic relief efforts, but the society remained committed to vigilance and the idea that Richmond’s resources should not be used unnecessarily. In the opinion of TAS agents, helping and protecting the traveler extended past the individual to the city itself.

Although the maternalist morality was so prevalent in the early decades of the TAS of Virginia, the society managed to retain its influence on incoming travelers without constantly referring to it. Travelers’ Aid workers wrote numerous case reports during the 1910s and 1920s concerning the individual travelers they assisted. The initial moral justifications for Travelers’ Aid feature heavily in these reports, as well as internal society documents and promotional literature. Agents frequently, whether consciously or not, referenced their own opinions towards their work, seemingly unable to distinguish political or social influences from the actual process of doing social work. In contrast, with the start of the Great Depression, many of the former moral arguments for
Travelers' Aid dropped away from official documents, as did the society's emphasis on protecting women and children. In order to meet demands on time and resources, Travelers' Aid altered its policies and focus to provide assistance to a new generation, and gender, of travelers on a much larger scale. Agents may have lost their former ethical highground of the Progressive Era, but still maintained authority over travelers entering Richmond. Travelers' Aid workers still decided who to help and how to do so, making themselves a powerful force among the city's relief organization community.

The Travelers' Aid movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries did not create the sweeping national change most Progressive activists would have hoped for. Instead, it functioned best on the local level. Individual chapters set up desks in nearby train stations, complete with a telephone and a friendly social worker, in order to assist any traveler who might need help. The women of the TAS of Virginia staked their work and reputation on the belief that travelers who were new to a city were at a greater disadvantage than its residents. Allowing them to walk into the unknown could wreak havoc on both the unsuspecting traveler as well as those people they may encounter. In this sense, Travelers' Aid protected the traveler, the city, and society.
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