

Widows' and Orphans' Benevolent Society  
By Betsy Johnson (2022)

On 19 October 1859 a group of women founded the Sherborn Widows' and Orphans' Benevolent Society. Eighty-eight women attended and joined at that organizational meeting, electing officers and a board of directors (two directors from each school district). Five men became honorary members: the three ministers (Theodore Dorr, Amos Clarke, and Edmund Dowse), plus Calvin P. Sanger and his brother-in-law William H. Mellen. (Five of the women were from Calvin Sanger's family.)

The purpose of the organization was "to aid such indigent widows and orphans as may from time to time be residents of Sherborn; and such other persons, whether males or females, who, though reduced to necessitous circumstances, would shrink from a resort to the town for support...." It was intended to be a private charity, giving additional aid, "not intended... in any way or manner [to] relieve the town of its duty to its poor."<sup>a</sup>

Dues were fifty cents per year (five dollars for a life membership) and ten dollars for male honorary membership. The Society was allowed to distribute the amount of annual interest received from its funds. After Calvin Phipps Sanger's initial capital bequest of \$2,500 he added to it several times and invested it such that by 1867 the amount had reached \$4,000, allowing the group to distribute \$400 per year.<sup>b</sup>

During later periods several others also made substantial bequests, namely Aaron Greenwood (1890), Ellen Morse (ca. 1914), and Leonard B. Ranlett (1915).

The Widows' and Orphans' Benevolent Society (now shortened to "Sherborn Benevolent Society") has continued to help Sherborn residents into the present time and is the oldest on-going town organization.

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<sup>a</sup> "Article 2," *Constitution of the Sherborn Widows' & Orphans' Benevolent Society*, 3, 4.

<sup>b</sup> Cora (Sanger) Leland, "The Widows' and Orphans' Benevolent Society," citing 1879 report by Mrs. William Chamberlain Dowse.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Constitution of the Sherborn Widows' & Orphans' Benevolent Society.*

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