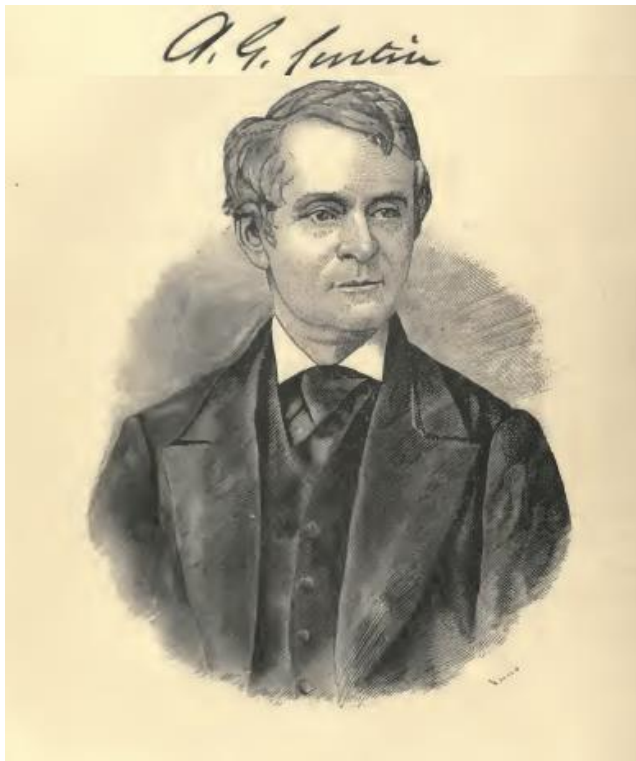


**Pennsylvania Soldiers Orphans Schools  
1864 – 2009**

## PENNSYLVANIA'S SOLDIERS' ORPHAN SCHOOLS,

***"I pledged to the brave men, that if they were to go into the field of battle, we would take care of their orphan children ... This beneficence is the result. Pennsylvania has something to be proud of! She has taken the lead in the matter. Other great states have followed her! What a thing to be proud of! All over the Commonwealth, after the greatest war the world has ever seen, we have been able to take care of our soldiers' orphans! No charity of the age or of the past can compare with this!"***  
Governor Andrew Gregg Curtin, 1881<sup>1</sup>



From the beginning in 1864 to the end in 2009, the purpose of the Pennsylvania Soldiers' Orphan Schools, with Governor Andrew Curtin as its original champion, remained unchanged.

July 1863 was the turning point for the Civil War. Three months later Abraham Lincoln proclaimed Thanksgiving as a national holiday. And on that first official Thanksgiving, as the legend goes, two orphans showed up at Governor Curtin's house. He was moved to help these orphans and the families of

the Pennsylvania soldiers who had given their lives for the Union. This heart-tugging episode started the wheels turning for him to advocate for the state to provide schools for the veterans' children.<sup>2</sup>



**Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Curtin at the Pennsylvania Monument, Gettysburg**

In 1864, the legislature gave approval to aid the children as long as no state funds were used. Initially, a \$50,000 grant was received from the Pennsylvania Railroad to establish a soldiers' orphan home. Governor Curtin then continued to fight for funds to honor the troops and their families, and in subsequent years, was able to raise close to \$400,000 through the Legislature.<sup>3</sup>

In 1867, he won the final approval to set up a state agency to oversee private schools where the orphans were placed.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately this program, through many Acts of the Legislature, continued without interruption for 145 years when the last remaining school, Scotland School for Veterans Children, closed.



By 1889, forty-four private boarding schools were opened throughout the state to educate and care for the children. The significance of this program was that it began something new for the care of a particular type of orphan – the soldier's orphan. No

state had previously set up this kind of child welfare service.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the first two decades, the schools were a source of pride for Pennsylvania. This story was promulgated in a flowery, impressive looking 1876 book with an angelic overview of the program and the 40+ schools, often in bucolic settings. But the book was mostly propaganda, to hide the maltreatment of the schools, written by the Chief Clerk of the Soldier's Orphan Schools, (Honorary) Col. James Laughery Paul. He was part of a syndicate that favored certain schools over others and shamelessly profited from the arrangements with the private schools.<sup>6</sup>

Although the original intentions were noble, reform became obvious on Feb 22, 1886, when the façade was lifted and headlines in the Philadelphia Record screamed –

**SOLDIERS' ORPHANS  
A SYNDICATE'S  
TRAFFIC  
UPON HUMANITY  
OFFICIAL CORRUPTION  
NEGLECT**

*The Philadelphia Record, Feb 22, 1886*

The “grand purpose” of Pennsylvania was “prostituted for the sake of human greed and callous neglect”. The children tragically received little schooling and spent most of their time “scrubbing floors and peeling potatoes.”<sup>7</sup>



The system was painted as heartless and corrupt due to the greed of the owners of the private schools, with claims that Dickens' fictional but infamous

"Dotheyboys Hall" had come to life. Just as vehement was the anger of the 35,000 members of the state Grand Army of the Republic.<sup>8</sup>

Because the schools were privately owned, Governor Robert Pattison claimed he could do nothing about them due to the Legislature's control of the program.<sup>9</sup>

A year after the scandal, a committee of veterans organizations suggested that the best solution would be a single school under the direction of the state. That school would become the “Soldiers Orphans Industrial School” at Scotland, just north of Chambersburg.<sup>10</sup>

Eventually, in 1893, the program moved from a state-wide Superintendent to a 10-person Commission which included five members of the GAR who had strongly advocated for the construction of a single school with vocational training. The GAR remained involved until the Commission was abandoned in 1923 in favor of a Board of Trustees.<sup>11</sup>

For 114 years, spanning three centuries (1895-2009), Scotland graduated productive and patriotic citizens. Scotland School was a state jewel that fulfilled the original vision of Governor Curtin to bring humanitarian aid to the fallen soldiers.

When Scotland opened in 1895 with 240 students, three schools remained: Harford (Susquehanna), Uniontown (also known as Jumonville, Fayette), and Chester Springs (Chester). As the schools closed, the students were transferred to Scotland School, with Chester Springs being the last to close in 1912.

Two schools that are still operating today but with roots in the original program are Bethany Children's Home in Womelsdorf (originally in Bridesburg, Philadelphia) and Children's Home of York.

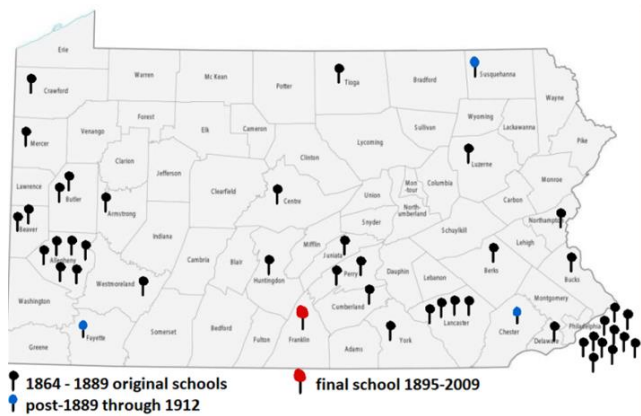
The lack of industrial training and the issues with privately run schools were the two primary reasons for the end of the original program.<sup>12</sup> And the Industrial training at Scotland School was one of the main reasons for its success.

One can still see today the engraving on the trade building at Scotland:

**“Dedicated to the Dignity of Labor”**

Scotland was chosen as the location for the single school due to its central location and proximity to a rail line, which is still operational today. Originally, the school was named “Soldiers’ Orphan Industrial School” as a testament to the importance of learning a trade.

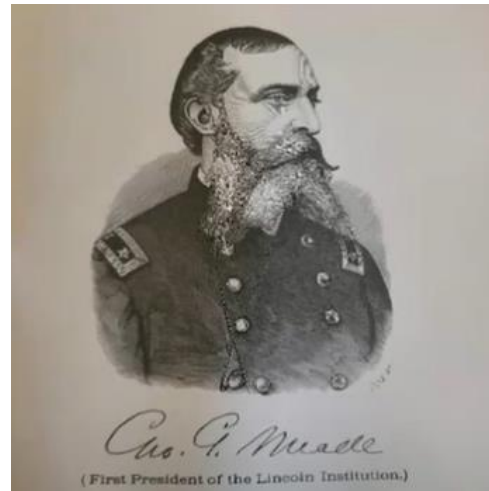
This map denotes the original schools that dotted the Pennsylvania landscape as well as Scotland School that opened in 1895.



Each of the original schools outlined in the 1876 James Paul book provides a historical reference and heartwarming background information, but the actual conditions were much worse, though not at all schools. Nevertheless, the book (and corresponding Annual Reports for many years) accurately contain the names of the students, including their birth dates, school attended, date of admission, town of the child, parents, and father’s unit. This can be used to good effect for genealogy purposes.

The 1876 book is illustrative although it shamelessly concealed the true story at many schools – serious maltreatment of the orphans. Paul was fired for the condition of the schools and for profiteering from the arrangements with the private owners.

But the historical references in the book shed an important light on the schools. For example, General George Meade was the first President of Lincoln Institution in 1867 (308 S. Eleventh St., Philadelphia)



The program at White Hall School, Camp Hill, was described as “the best method of managing schools” from which come educated and morally obedient young men and women. They had reunions until the 1930’s.



Andrew Gregg Curtin must be given most of the credit for the establishment of the schools. In 1881, at a reunion of the alumni of the schools, a journalist reported that tears coursed down the cheeks of the former governor as he looked upon the “faces of those he had found in cellar and garret.”<sup>13</sup>

**The Cresswell brothers  
Chester Springs, circa 1883**





The Commission also wanted a more home-like environment through a cottage housing environment. The cottage system did not come into use until 1931 when the first cottages opened (as well as the Superintendent's residence). Along with the important industrial training was a cherished home-like environment that the Alumni still recount today, with the older students acting as helpers for the elementary age students.



At Scotland, religious and moral upbringing was a mainstay of the program, and this was clearly one of the key components of the original SOS schools from the Civil War era. Even at Reunion dinners today they say the Scotland prayer before the meal.



Also in line with the original program, Scotland emphasized discipline and military service, and there were many veterans who served both in peacetime and in war, from the Spanish American War to two World Wars and all conflicts since.

**JROTC American Legion Gold Medal for Military Excellence, circa 2001**

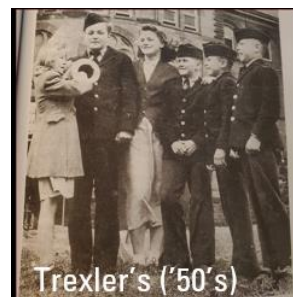


1938



Success can be measured in part by the many families who sent multiple children there. From the earliest days until its closure, families trusted Scotland to raise their children. And throughout the years, dedicated faculty and staff taught important industrial skills and coached, loved, and disciplined the children.

For example the Trexler's sent 6 (Altoona), the Colbert's 7 (York), the Bruce's 6 (Philadelphia), and the Hayden's sent 10 of 14 siblings (Pittsburgh). This is but a small sample.



Like many of the former schools, the Scotland Alumni is a close-knit bond of shared experiences, all coming from vulnerable families but trained for life by dedicated staff.

The Scotland Alumni's stories are inspiring, as are the stories of thousands of graduates from the original schools. The common scenario is a school that breathed life into the students and set them on a trajectory for success in life – which they in turn passed on to their children.

**TYLETTA SPITTLER, 1964,  
CHAMBERSBURG  
BUSINESS EDUCATION;  
RETAIL DEPARTMENT MANAGER**

**"We children will always be grateful."**



**TYLETTA L. SPITTLER**  
Chambersburg

**ROBB AVERY, 1992 (PHILADELPHIA)  
US AIR FORCE MASTER SERGEANT  
(E-8, 24 YEARS)**

**"Scotland played a transformative role in my life, helping me defy the odds, overcome socioeconomic challenges, and reshape my future. As one of eight**

**children raised in the East Falls Housing Projects in Philadelphia by a mother with limited education, I faced significant hurdles."**



**"However, Scotland equipped me with the academic skills I needed and instilled the discipline required to attend college with both academic and football scholarships. The discipline and values I learned there became the foundation of my success, guiding me through a fulfilling 24-year career in the United States Armed Forces"**

Scotland lost the budget battle in 2009, and it was a sad day for staff, faculty, and students when the state announced the closing, thus ending 145 years of the "Pennsylvania Soldiers' Orphan Schools".



**I think Governor Curtin would be proud.**

<sup>1</sup> Gold, Dr. O. David, The Civil War Soldiers' Orphan Schools of Pennsylvania 1864 – 1889, 2016: 187	
<sup>2</sup> Ibid: 8	<sup>8</sup> Ibid: 105
<sup>3</sup> Ibid: 10-11	<sup>9</sup> Ibid: 124
<sup>4</sup> Ibid: 13	<sup>10</sup> Ibid: 126
<sup>5</sup> Ibid: 178	<sup>11</sup> Ibid: 150
<sup>6</sup> Ibid: 24	<sup>12</sup> Ibid: 150
<sup>7</sup> Ibid: 102-103	<sup>13</sup> Ibid: 13

# Cover notes

The top ½ is from the title page of "Pennsylvania's Soldiers' Orphan Schools" by (Honorary) Colonel James Laughery Paul, 1876

The bottom ½ is an artist's depiction of the administration building at Scotland School for Veterans Children, 1895-2009, with three timeless men contemplating the lives of the children entrusted to their care.

by William Peck

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