

## Clare Gomnes and Caroline DiOrio

*[Archive]: Letters from a Woman Working at the Sophia Little House Home for Unwed Mothers*

Providence, Rhode Island: 1947-1954

\$1400



A collection of 130 letters between two women, one of whom works at a home for unwed mothers, between 1947 and 1952. About near fine with tears from opening.

A collection of letters between two New England women, Clare Gomnes and Caroline DiOrio, written between 1947 and 1954. It seems the two women are high school or college friends and write easily to each other about their lives and jobs. Gomnes lives in Providence, Rhode Island and works for the Sophie Little House, a home for unwed mothers, and DiOrio is in Boston and manages a counter at Jordan Marsh. Caroline is a consummate shopper and finds things for Clare in Boston that are hard to find or expensive in Providence. When Clare decides to collect antique buttons Caroline gleefully offers to help her in her pursuit. They also talk about pets, family, politics, and day to day life. In one letter Clare writes, the candidates are at it on the radio...Korean news is frightful isn't it?"

Dearest Caroline.

Your letter today - Thank you. You are so good in your kind thoughts for me - a little early to say much about the job or the home. I shall do the best I can and can do no more. At the present it is all a bit confusing and looks like a big responsibility. I have had a niggled two days of it and when you get this I will be more or less on my own.

There are now 15 girls in the home - 9 have had their babies and 6 to come. one born Sunday morning. one due next Sunday and 2 the following Sunday. So you see there is plenty to think about. I shall be able to tell you more when I see you which won't be for a while, I guess.

Did you enjoy your reunion & what did the Sister say to you? Was she disappointed that there weren't more of you?

Believe it or not, it is actually cool today - Hard to believe we were drifting with heat a few days back.

I think Madeline will bring Ben down on

Although some of the talk is casual and friendly, many of the letters discuss Clare's work at the Sophia Little House. Here she tells of the trials and tribulations that arise when working with teenage girls, some as young as 14, including long hours, runaways, the high turnover rates, and incidents at the home. In one letter she writes, "there are three girls full term again! Where did they come from all of a sudden? The low grade (mentally) girl has had her baby and was no worry at all at the end - Now the three full terms! They are all 2nd pregnancies which makes it more hazardous. So I didn't get home this week either. Fine thing." Another reads, "there are now 15 girls in the home. 9 have had their babies and 6 to come. One born Sunday morning. One due next Sunday and 2 the following Sunday. So you see there is plenty to think about." She often pontificates on the quality of life the babies will have. In one letter she writes, "I really pray they may get the best out of life - but wonder." Another letter she reads, "the two little colored girls will leave us so we will be 15 but there are two more ready to come. So it looks as if we will be busy again. A pity, isn't it?"

The Sophia Little House began as a half-way house for released female prisoners in 1881 run by the Woman's Society for Aiding Released Female Prisoners and the Prisoners' Aid Society. By 1915 it had been converted to a home for unwed mothers. The home was used as a facility for the girls, usually between 14 and 20, to have the child and then as a place to house children during their first six months before an adoption could be arranged. Most recently the historic property has been purchased by Johnson and Wales University.

An interesting collection of letters documenting a woman's work with a home for unwed mothers in the late 1940s. A selection of images follows. [BTC#434535]

Dearest Caroline!

Two Boxes  
of Buttons! Wonderful  
and some lovely ones  
too. The little one with  
out a shank is a perfect  
Jenny Lind - I have  
another just like it. I  
mean no shank. I am  
going to try to get it repaired  
in fact I am going to get  
a miniature soldering  
outfit & see if I can repair  
some of them myself.

I thank you dear  
Caroline for all  
the running around for  
them. I do get such  
fun out of those miserable  
little buttons.

The two little colored girls will leave us today - so we will be 15 - but there are two more ready to come - so it looks as if we will be busy again - a pity, isn't it.

It is now 7 A.M. The water was off so I arose at 5:45 to take care of it - no point in going back to bed. Mrs Jennip made me a pot of coffee of which I had two cups. The Sun is bright so it will be a lovely day. Wish it could have been like this on your Sunday.

But we had a nice time just the same -

I have now finally lost my patience with Mr Buzzell the jeweler who has your earrings

Well, I am going to be in Boston on Friday. Plan to come up by train to see if I can get a suit bargain in Filene's - looks as if you "struck it Rich" at Arthur's - a sure joke! I love them and know you will too. What color? I shall come in to see you on Friday - all this if no babies in the offing -

We have a full house - 17 girls. I had to take one to the S. J. Hosp. Sunday night - Miss Jesuold off - too bad - but that is bound to happen.

and - having been in his  
shop at least 10 times  
since Christmas I am  
today going to ask for  
them & bring them to  
Boston. I shall ask the  
young Italian on Tremont St  
if he can fix them. If he  
cant, maybe Jordans can?  
anyway I think we have  
waited long enough, dont you?

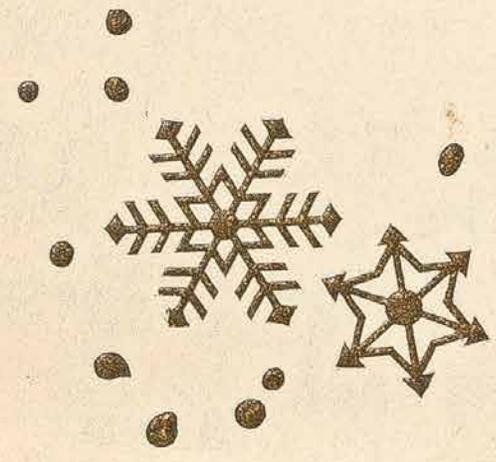
Ben is parading around.  
made him some new  
shoes on Sunday. Wasnt it  
amazing how he manages?

Poor Bennie - He must be  
bewildered too.

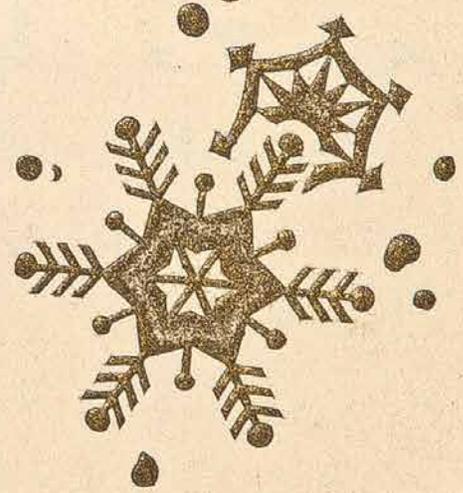
Well honey I'm glad you  
had a little holiday and  
hope the Spring flowers  
are pretty enough to hold  
your interest - You have  
an exacting job and do it  
so well.

Cherish  
I'll see you on Friday  
I hope -

Love  
Clare



*Greetings*



Dearest Caroline -

You really think the Cape is O.K. for Olga? Good. and of course I'm glad you like the gloves.

after the annual report. the monthly one seems like child's play.

So here I am with a job for you for Miss Griswold. - So wit: She sent a check to the Schuberl theater for a ticket to Romeo & Juliet for Feb. 24th. the ticket did not come. She went to Boston on the 24th. explained it

to the ticket agent by phone (He told her to speak softly as she was breaking his ear drums) she thinks he will remember that. - anyway he couldn't find check or any record of it. - So she got a ticket & went to the show (stub attached). Today, the 27 of Feb. a ticket for the 24th arrives. So this is my problem Miss Anthony - Can you get the money back? -

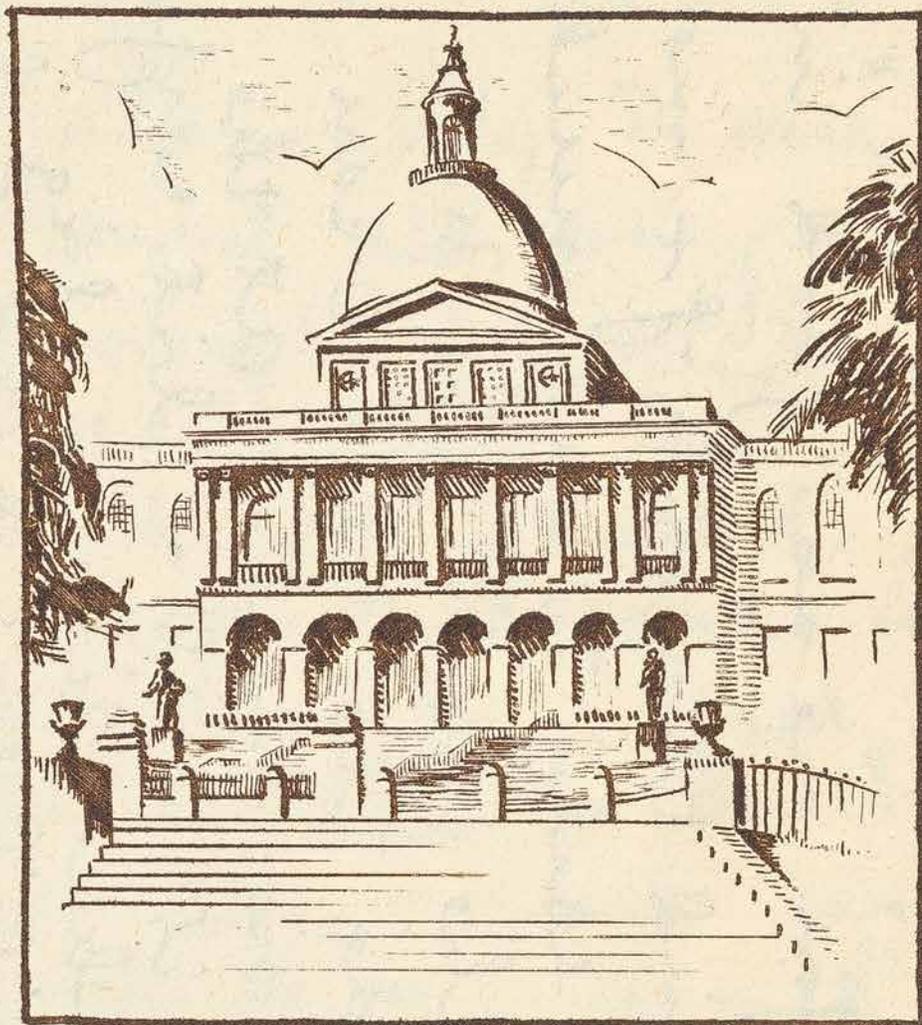
I was glad to hear about Helen. I did write to her.

We have been in a  
furore here - 3 girls  
AWOL one night!  
girl to L.Y. This AM -  
possible Caucasian - We  
have 17 girls in the Home -  
a beautiful Christening  
on Sunday.

I'm wearing the  
Wondereane Hosiery &  
like them pretty good.

A wonderful day today  
It would be nice  
to walk in the Woods

Love  
Clare



*State House*

*Boston*

Saturday and that  
will be comforting  
to say the least.

Naturally I miss  
44 and all my contacts.

Although Providence  
is near the time  
involved is not.

However, it will work  
out I know, but I  
would like to be there  
just the same and  
that's that. What did  
I get me a house for?

Say hello to all  
the family. Rocco  
and Clara will be

in school soon want  
they? That is good. Hope  
the morning glories  
will open for you. One  
little yellow flower of  
the ones you gave me  
is in bloom. Pretty too.

all for now -

Thank you for  
everything and my  
love to you

Clara