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What Happened to Old Pat's Children?: Welfare and Childhood in Early America

Bowling Green State University. Institute for the Study of Culture & Society

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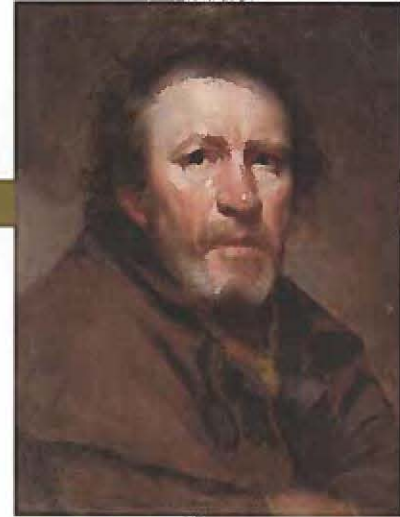
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What Happened to Old Pat's Children?: *Welfare and Childhood in Early America*



Section of Boston Almshouse Register No. 4 (1795-1817).



Samuel Lovett Waldo,
"Old Pat, The Independent Beggar," c.
1819, Cleveland Museum of Art.

Dr. Ruth Herndon
Tuesday, November 1, 2:30 p.m.
207 BTSU



Thomas Sully,
"Torn Hat," 1820, Boston MFA

"What Happened to Old Pat's Children?" is a collective biography of poor children in early New England. Before 1820, Boston magistrates had taken over 2,000 children from their birth families and placed them in more "proper" families to live and labor to adulthood. While on the surface, this "pauper apprenticeship" solved obvious social problems, at a deeper level, it caused conflict between the parents of poor children (the "Old Pats" and their wives) and the local magistrates who dictated what a "proper" household should look like. In her talk, Professor Herndon will explain how she reconstructs the lives of these children from existing documentary records, and she will relate several completed narratives to illustrate poor children's misfortunes, educational and work experiences, and options upon reaching adulthood. Her study asks: What distortions in our early American narrative might we correct if we include the stories of children such as these?

About the presenter:

Ruth Wallis Herndon is an Associate Professor in the History Department specializes in the social history of early America, emphasizing the marginalized people who seldom appear in our national narrative: children, the poor, servants, and slaves. She is the author of *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margins in Early New England* (Pennsylvania, 2001), the co-author of *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprentice System in Early America* (Cornell, 2009), as well as numerous book chapters and journal articles.