

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE NINETEENTH
ANNUAL MEETING OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF TRUSTEES,
SUPERINTENDENTS AND MATRONS OF
COUNTY ASYLUMS FOR CHRONIC
INSANE OF WISCONSIN**

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Proceedings of the nineteenth annual meeting of the Association of Trustees, Superintendents and Matrons of County Asylums for Chronic Insane of Wisconsin by Various

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VARIOUS

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PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

NINETEENTH ANNUAL MEETING

OF THE

Association of Trustees, Superintendents and Matrons of County Asylums for Chronic Insane of Wisconsin

Convention Hall, Republican House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
June 9, 10, and 11, 1920

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1921

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for 1919-20

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ADDRESS OF WELCOME

By DAVID H. DAVIES.

I am indeed glad to have you come to Milwaukee and to be in a position to welcome you here. I notice by your program that it is full of good things. There is no question but what these gatherings are of great value to us. I notice one particular thing here, and I hope you will all attend at that session which will deal with occupational therapy.

We are very much interested in that. You will find that you will derive a great deal of benefit. I also see that you have been invited by Doctors Beutler and Young to visit our institutions tomorrow. The Board of Administration, as well as the County Board, joins with the Doctors in inviting you out there and sincerely hope that you will all come. We want you to take advantage of everything we have. We have an asylum with a population of about 800, and a hospital for mental diseases with a population of between 550 and 600. Besides that we have the tuberculosis sanatorium, home for children, and the infirmary. We have a farm of approximately 1000 acres, 600 of which are under cultivation; and we have gone in for pure bred cattle. We have not all pure bred, but we have, I should judge, 75 to 100 head. I want you to take all of this in and we will do everything we can to make this gathering a success.

Call on us at any and all times and you will find us ready and willing to work with you. There is no question but what these gatherings are well worth the time and trouble. We are all in a great work, and to the end that the Board of Trustees, the Superintendents, and the Matrons get a better understanding, and thereby be enabled to do better work.

The Chairman: It affords me great pleasure to thank you, Mr. Davies, in behalf of this Association, for the cordial welcome you have extended to us while in your city. I wish in return to extend an invitation not only to the Board of Administration, but to the general public, to come to our meetings and hear the discussions. I am sure that they will be of interest to any who may attend.

A year ago when we held our convention at the city of Wausau, we did not dream that we were going to hold our convention in the city of Milwaukee this year, because an invitation had been tendered to us from the Superintendent and Matron at Rock County, also from the Secretary of the Board of Commerce, inviting us to hold our convention in the city of Janesville, but owing to a great boom that is in progress in that city at this time, when thousands upon thousands of people are flocking to that city, taking all the available hotel accommodations, Mr. Cullen deemed it advisable to hold our convention at some city other than Janesville. The thought immediately struck me, why not go to Milwaukee, Milwaukee being the largest city in the State of Wisconsin. It has fine, large institutions, beautiful parks and pleasure drives, and other places of amusement, with the exception of that stuff that made Milwaukee famous. That is cut out, of course, but outside of that Milwaukee is here.

Now, my friends, we are here at this meeting and this convention is what we make it. Let us all get together and try to make this convention one of the greatest and best conventions that this association has ever held.

We have a gentleman with us here this evening that needs no introduction. His face is familiar to all of us, and I have the honor of introducing to you Mr. Harris, President of the State Board of Control, who will now address us.

ADDRESS

GEORGE B. HARRIS.

Mr. Chairman, and ladies and gentlemen of the Association, I wish that it were true, as was intimated in the presentation of the Chairman, that my face was familiar to you all. I have not visited the county institutions as much as I have desired to in my present position. I will further say that undoubtedly one who is a member of the Board of Control should always be willing to respond to a call to address his co-workers, such as you are here tonight. You are in a charitable work, one that calls for the care and comfort of the unfortunate; and it is most wonderful; in fact, it is a high calling to respond to.

The Board of Control unfortunately is busy and unable to make the visitations to your institutions as much as they would desire to, but fortunately we have two very competent inspectors who are

making visits and are keeping the Board fully informed in regard to your institutions; and the work that you are accomplishing is very gratifying to the Board of Control. Only recently the Board had the pleasure of a visit from a Dr. Solomon from the Rockefeller Foundation. He had visited nearly every state in the Union, looking into the social conditions and matters pertaining to the care of the insane, and he paid this high compliment to you, each of you as superintendents and matrons of the county asylums; he made the statement to the Board of Control—and you can imagine it was very gratifying to the Board—that without exception the insane in Wisconsin were better cared for in the county institutions, and throughout the state in the state institutions as well, than in any other state in the Union, according to his observation. It was very gratifying to us and it is a fact, Wisconsin having the only county system of all the states in the Union, we are subdivided so that we are not compelled to take care of such a large number as they are in other states, and they come more under the personal supervision of superintendents and matrons. I agree very fully with my friend, Mr. Davies, in saying here that these gatherings are certainly very creditable and very much to the advantage of your institutions, in meeting here as you have and as you have met before, and I think the Secretary informed me that the organization has been in existence for twenty years.

I have had the pleasure of attending one or two meetings previous to this, and I have always enjoyed them, and I have noticed that all those who attended also enjoyed them, and I have no doubt they are productive of much good to each of you. It is very warm here tonight and I don't care to continue or take up your time, but I wish to say that I would very much like to personally meet each of you and become, as your chairman has stated, well acquainted with each of you. I thank you.

(Music). Navy club orchestra.

The Chairman: The next number on the program is a paper by Mrs. Nora Livingston of Dodgeville.

EXPERIENCES OF A NEW MATRON

MRS. NORA LIVINGSTON.

My first year as matron of an Insane Asylum and Home has like all other disagreeable events become dimmed to a considerable extent by time and I have some difficulty in summoning at my call the feelings of utter incompetency which filled me during those first few months at the County Farm.

I, like many of you, entered upon my new duties during the month of March and found gardening, farming, spring house cleaning, and

the season's sewing all to be met and handled at once. We have since succeeded in persuading our board of advisors that March was a poor time for a new administration to take over the work and they have changed the date so that our official year begins January 1st, which leaves one several months to get their bearings and plan the usual rush of the spring work.

We were singularly fortunate in that hardest of all hard problems "Institutional employes." Every position was filled and filled efficiently but one. I was without a seamstress. Our employes were some of them on the verge of leaving but after some weeks of uncertainty, we adjusted all difficulties amicably and with a few exceptions the same employes are still with us.

I believe, now in looking back over my first year as matron of the asylum that my greatest difficulty was in taking my responsibility too seriously. To be sure it is a vast responsibility to house, feed, clothe and provide spiritually and as far as possible to encourage whatever of mentality there is left in these unfortunate and often misunderstood people. However, if the thought is always in our minds that these lives which are entrusted to us and to whom we are to minister are already considered discards by the world and for the most part by their families and if we can make them reasonably contented and most of them a little useful, we are then accomplishing what many others have already given up as an impossible job. I don't know whether any of you had the trouble I had during my initiation to keep myself cheerful. I had never come in contact with this kind of work and my lines had been laid among a group of happy hearted primary children, and when I looked at the misery surrounding me, I found myself becoming gloomy and pessimistic. I felt as if I were in a cemetery and walked quietly and felt guilty when I found myself laughing heartily or having a cheerful time. Well, it took me some time to get over that feeling and surely, if anything is sorely needed in asylum work, it is the cheerful, happy optimistic disposition. It seems to me that an important item when entering this work is to win the employes into a humanitarian attitude toward the patients. We found it necessary from the beginning to emphasize the fact that we were all there for the welfare of the insane not that the insane were there for our convenience. We did not escape the usual difficulty of some of our people both rational and otherwise who endeavored to instruct us and those who explained why they were exempt from rules and should have special privileges, but we met those cases as they came up and dealt with them as the occasion demanded. I think the almshouse is the straw that almost breaks the back of the novice. The whining, complaining paupers, not all unfortunate unless we can call improvidence and indulgence in bad habits misfortune, and usually the cause of their dissatisfaction is that they can not continue in the unsanitary habits and often evil way of living to which they have become used.

Of course there are some clean-minded, thrifty people who through sickness, age or the delinquencies of some relative were compelled to become charges of the county. I had one very intelligent woman who through sickness had become a resident of our county home, although bed fast and helpless, she knew everything that went on in the home and was prepared to lecture long and fluently to me of the faults of employees and other inmates every time I visited her room. I wonder if you all had as many amusing things happen as we had. I was looking about our kitchen preparatory to varnishing it and I thoughtlessly said to a patient who was the only other person in the room, "This room needs painting, too, don't you think so, Porter," and quickly she retorted, "I am not hired here to think, matron, you are."

One of our men who was helping me in my flower garden said when I asked him if in his opinion a certain shrub was appropriately placed, "Well, yes, I think so, but you must pay no attention to what I think as I am crazy, you know." I found it hard to accustom myself to this utter refusal of the responsibility of even thinking.

Another one of our trials was the fact that three years ago when we took up this work it was about the time that prices commenced to soar and we worried a trifle over our inability to keep expenses anywhere near to their former size, but we soon gave up trying to make comparisons and simply got along as best we could and kept prices down as much as was possible and still be fair to our patients.

We have quite a number of epileptics in our institution and I must not neglect to mention the impression made upon me the first time I witnessed a convulsion. I was standing near an open door that leads into a single room when I heard an unearthly shriek, and a girl fell forward striking her head upon the door. My first desire and involuntary action was to get as far away as possible from that repulsive, writhing figure, but I managed to conquer my feelings and never did another fit inspire me with any desire except to save and aid the unfortunate victim, though I always feel sorry that these poor people must be taken care of with our chronic insane.

I must also confess that when I came to the institution first, I was afraid, afraid mentally and physically, and it took time and determination to conquer this fear. The first time I went through the wards alone my hair stood on end and I was bathed in a cold perspiration, and when I try now to think of that first feeling, it seems stupid and hysterical but at that time it was very real.

I shall always think with pleasure of the first convention I attended at Eau Claire, and the splendid women who did so much to make me feel that the work was something to be enjoyed, that they were still meeting the same problems that seemed so momentous to me and conquering them with a light heart. It made me feel that I too could go back to my institution and feel that I was doing my work there as it should be done, that there was nothing that could not be accomplished if one met it with a brave heart and a determination to look on the bright side. I thank you.