Indiana's Feeble-Minded.

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The first recorded attempt to educate a feeble-minded person was made in the year of 1800 by Dr. Itard, a French physician, connected with one of the Institutions near Paris. In 1836 an attempt was made to educate ten idiots at the School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. The first public institution in the United States was established at Massachusetts in 1848 in connection with the Perkin's Institute for the Blind in South Boston. Gradually this work was taken up by state after state until in 1879 Indiana established its first institution for the care of the feeble-minded as an adjunct to the Sailors' and Soldiers' Orphans' Home at Knightown, Indiana, under the name of The Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children. In 1887 the Legislature gave the institution an independent existence and changed its name to that of Indiana School for Feeble-Minded Youth. It appropriated $10,000.00 to buy land at or near Fort Wayne, and gave the Board of Trustees $40,000.00 for buildings thereon, and authorized the Board to rent temporary premises and take charge of the feeble-minded children then in the Knightstown Home.

Until 1887 there were received only feeble-minded who could be improved. The law of 1887 broadened the scope of the institution to care for feeble-minded, epileptic, and paralytic. The Trustees tried to find temporary quarters in Fort Wayne without success. The buildings of the new Eastern Hospital for the Insane at Richmond, Indiana, were almost completed, and upon recommendation of the Governor permission was obtained to occupy the uncompleted buildings by the school.

May 1st, 1887, the sixty children at Knightstown were removed to Richmond. In the beginning of the year 1888 plans were made and completed for the Institution to accommodate about four hundred inmates on the present site at Fort Wayne. That same year appropriations amounting to $187,300.00 were made to build the main building, and on the 8th of July, 1890, about three hundred inmates were moved from Richmond to their new home in Fort Wayne. This institution has gradually grown until there are present today 1,388.

Children are admitted to the institution under two acts. An act allowing children from six to sixteen to be sent to the institution for the purpose of training, and an act allowing adult women from sixteen to forty-five to be sent there as a protection to themselves and the community.

This, however, is only a very small part of the number of feeble-minded in Indiana that should today have State care. The most conservative estimate that can be made is that there are at least six or seven thousand in Indiana today requiring State care. This leaves between four and five thousand at large in the State now needing institutional care but receiving nothing.

Feeble-mindedness is a condition and not a disease. It is not susceptible of cure; it is susceptible of immense improvement in many cases under proper care and training. I believe, however, that the training should be of such a nature as to fit the individual for a useful life in the institution or under supervision elsewhere. He should be given some work in the school of letters because, if he can be taught to count, to read, and to write, his services may be more easily used in the industrial pursuits with which he should be occupied. The chief value of training lies, however, along industrial lines, and I believe, that our present institutions for the feeble-minded generally give too much attention to the school of letters and too little attention to the industrial training of their inmates. While it is true, that because of his lack of judgment and application the feeble-minded individual can not be taught a trade, strictly speaking, yet he may be taught to do good work in some of the trades under proper supervision. The robust out-of-door life on the farm is particularly suited to the adult male feeble-minded; and could, I believe, be very readily extended to the adult female feeble-minded in the cultivation of small fruits, raising of poultry and chickens, and work of that character. At the institution at Fort Wayne, we make very largely with the help of the inmates all the brick that are used in the institution; we successfully conduct a farm of 500 acres furnishing employment for the able-bodied boys and men; we make all of our own shoes, our own mattresses, all the clothing worn by the inmates including the tailored suits for the boys, dresses for the girls, and underwear; also do the necessary sewing for the institution in the manufacture of bed and table linen. Besides these industries, we find employment for our boys in the carpenter shop, in our green house, helping to handle our coal, and care for the lawns and grounds of the institution. With the help of a few employes our girls do all the laundry work, the work in our kitchens and dining rooms, and the general house work of the institution. We believe and put in practice the theory that occupation is the salvation of the feeble-minded as well as the normal individual.

These people furnish the material for a very large part of our charitable work in this State. They constitute fifty per cent of our paupers; they number, at least, twenty-five per cent of the people in our correctional and penal institutions; they are incompetents that exist in every community; lazy, shiftless, worthless members of society; perhaps able to eek out a precarious living under the most favorable conditions when health is good and wages are plenty, but becoming quickly submerged under any stress or strain of social existence. They like the drunkard are the first men turned off from jobs and the last men hired. Every last one of these people should be segregated from society; should be put somewhere, where it would be impossible for them to reproduce their kind, and my personal belief is that these people, both men and women, should be put into farm colonies with inexpensive buildings and under such conditions that many of them can earn their own support. Our present institution at Fort Wayne is crowded to its doors.

We have a great many applications on the waiting list, and were it possible for us to receive all of these on the waiting list our waiting list would be immediately doubled. Inasmuch as many social workers throughout the State feel that the long waiting list makes it impossible for them to get many of their cases in there, I sincerely hope the coming Legislature will make more provision for this class of people. If each member of this body will take it upon himself to see the representative from his district and show him the needs that you have in your own communities for the care of these people, I feel sure you can help this matter to a great extent.